PURSUIT OF HOLINESS

POH1: Holiness is for You

Offered by Ron Lively, M.Div., M.A. – BiblicalMentoring.org (Studies)

Step 1: Opening prayer

Step 2: Each person quotes the memory verse: **Romans 6:14**
For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

Step 3: Read and discuss the Bible Chapter: **Romans 6**

Step 4: Comments or questions to consider and ponder:

1. Do you have someone in your life who delights in testing God's Grace in you and your patience as you seek to "be holy as Christ is holy"?

2. What is presently affecting your desire and resolve to live a holy life?

3. How do you define holiness?

4. How can a Chistian reconcile how holiness is "separation from sin" yet we are and remain a sinner? Does this mean we can never be holy?

5. If we truly confess our sins, what guarantees we can be declared "holy"? Whose holiness really counts? Ours or Christ's? What difference does this make?

Step 5: *Read and discuss the content from the book:*

Foreword -

Jerry Bridges has given the world one of the most incisive, appealing, and conscience-stirring treatises on scriptural holiness ever written. Without doubt, the Lord has enabled His servant to prepare a volume that will have a far-reaching impact upon the lives of countless numbers who read it.

The dominant theme of this heart-moving study is the need for increasing pursuit by believers for the holiness of life which God, whose holiness is ever gratefully remembered, can alone make possible. *Pursuit* is the key word which the author, whose personal pursuit has been long and strong, constantly repeats.

In the *Declaration of Independence*, Thomas Jefferson declared that one of the inherent and unalienable rights of men is "the pursuit of happiness." Professing Christians must be brought to realize that the preeminent desire and demand of God for us is that of the continual pursuit of holiness of life, and the reflection of His own holiness. "Be ye holy, for I am holy."

Well over 100 years ago, William Blake urged his readers to "put off holiness, and put on intellect." But divorced from divine holiness, intellect is like a ship without a captain, and doomed to disaster. In our quest for holiness the prayer must ever rise from the heart,

"Take my intellect and use Every power as Thou shalt choose."

This is why we must warmly commend this compelling coverage of practical holiness, in which the author fully shows that the whole of life must be permeated with the holiness a thrice-holy God can impart.

Dr. Herbert Lockyer, Sr.

Preface -

A farmer plows his field, sows the seed, and fertilizes and cultivates—all the while knowing that in the final analysis, he is utterly dependent on forces outside of himself. He knows he cannot cause the seed to germinate, nor can he produce the rain and sunshine for growing and harvesting the crop. For a successful harvest, he is dependent on these things from God.

Yet the farmer knows that unless he diligently pursues his responsibilities to plow, plant, fertilize, and cultivate, he cannot expect a harvest at the end of the season. In a sense he is in a partnership with God, and he will reap its benefits only when he has fulfilled his own responsibilities.

Farming is a joint venture between God and the farmer. The farmer cannot do what God must do, and God will not do what the farmer should do.

We can say just as accurately that the pursuit of holiness is a joint venture between God and the Christian. No one can attain any degree of holiness without God working in his life, but just as surely no one will attain it without effort on his own part. God has made it possible for us to walk in holiness. But He has given to us the responsibility of doing the walking; He does not do that for us.

We Christians greatly enjoy talking about the provision of God, how Christ defeated sin on the cross and gave us His Holy Spirit to empower us to victory over sin. But we do not as readily talk about our own responsibility to walk in holiness.

Two primary reasons can be given for this.

First, we are simply reluctant to face up to our responsibility. We prefer to leave that to God. We pray for victory when we know we should be acting in obedience.

The second reason is that we do not understand the proper distinction between God's provision and our own responsibility for holiness. I struggled for a number of years with the question, "What am I to do myself, and what am I to rely on God to do?" Only as I came to see what the Bible teaches on this question, and then faced up to my own responsibility, did I see any progress in the "pursuit of holiness."

The title for this book comes from the biblical command, "Pursue holiness, for without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14, author's paraphrase). The word *pursue* suggests two thoughts: first, that diligence and effort are required; and second, that it is a lifelong task. These two thoughts form a dual theme throughout this book. While seeking to set forth clearly and accurately God's provision for our holiness, I have deliberately stressed our responsibility, feeling that this is an emphasis sorely needed among Christians today. At the same time, I have sought to emphasize that holiness is a process, something we never completely attain in this life. Rather, as we begin to conform to the will of God in one area of life, He reveals to us our need in another area. That is why we will always be pursuing—as opposed to attaining—holiness in this life.

In addition to my own personal Bible study on the subject of holiness, I have profited greatly from the writings of the Puritans—and those who followed in their school of thought— on the subject of holiness. On numerous occasions I have quoted directly from them and have so indicated in the appropriate footnotes. In other instances, their phraseology has crept into my own manner of expression. This is particularly true of the writings of John Owen and of Dr. D. Martyn LloydJones of London, both of whose writings on this subject have been of invaluable personal blessing.

I do not profess to know all about this subject, nor can I claim all that much personal progress. Many times, while writing this book I have had to first make application to my own life. But what I have discovered has been of invaluable help to

me in my own pursuit of holiness, and I trust will be of help to all who read it.

To explore more fully the scriptural principles of holiness, which I studied in writing this book, I encourage the reader to work through *A Bible Study on the Pursuit of Holiness*, which is published by NavPress as a companion to this book.

Finally, I want to express my thanks to Mrs. Peggy Sharp and Miss Linda Dicks, who patiently typed and retyped the various drafts of the manuscript.

CHAPTER ONE - Holiness Is for You

The shrill ring of the telephone shattered the stillness of the beautiful, crisp Colorado morning. On the other end was one of those utterly impossible individuals God seems to have sprinkled around here on earth to test the grace and patience of His children.

He was in top form that morning—arrogant, impatient, demanding. I hung up the phone seething inside with anger, resentment, and perhaps even hatred. Grabbing my jacket, I walked out into the cold air to try to regain my composure. The quietness of my soul, so carefully cultivated in my "quiet time" with God that morning, had been ripped into shreds and replaced with a volatile, steaming emotional volcano.

As my emotions subsided, my anger turned to utter discouragement. It was only 8:30 in the morning and my day was ruined. Not only was I discouraged, I was confused. Only two hours before, I had read Paul's emphatic declaration, "For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace." But despite this nice-sounding promise of victory over sin, there I was locked in the vise-like grip of anger and resentment.

"Does the Bible really have any answers for real life?" I asked myself that morning. With all my heart I desired to live an obedient, holy life; yet there I was utterly defeated by one phone call.

Perhaps this incident has a familiar ring to you. The circumstances probably differed, but your reaction was similar. Perhaps your problem was anger with your children, or a temper at work, or an immoral habit you can't overcome, or maybe several "besetting sins" that dog you day in and day out.

Whatever your particular sin problem (or problems), the Bible does have the answer for you. There is hope. You and I can walk in obedience to God's Word and live a life of holiness. In fact, as we will see in the next chapter, God expects every Christian to live a holy life. But holiness is not only expected; it is the promised birthright of every Christian. Paul's statement is true. Sin shall not be our master.

The concept of holiness may seem a bit archaic to our current generation. To some minds the very word *holiness* brings images of bunned hair, long skirts, and black stockings. To others the idea is associated with a repugnant "holier than thou" attitude. Yet holiness is very much a scriptural idea. The word *holy* in various forms occurs more than 600 times in the Bible. One entire book, Leviticus, is devoted to the subject, and the idea of holiness is woven elsewhere throughout the fabric of Scripture. More important, God specifically commands us to be holy (see Leviticus 11:44).

The idea of exactly how to be holy has suffered from many false concepts. In some circles, holiness is equated with a series of specific prohibitions—usually in such areas as smoking, drinking, and dancing. The list of prohibitions varies depending on the group.

When we follow this approach to holiness, we are in danger of becoming like the Pharisees with their endless lists of trivial dos and don'ts, and their self-righteous attitude. For others, holiness means a particular style of dress and mannerisms. And for still others, it means unattainable perfection, an idea that fosters either delusion or discouragement about one's sin.

All of these ideas, while accurate to some degree, miss the true concept. To be holy is to be morally blameless.[1] It is to be separated from sin and, therefore, consecrated to God. The word signifies "separation to God, and the conduct befitting those so separated."[2]

Perhaps the best way of understanding the concept of holiness is to note how writers of the New Testament used the word. In 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7, Paul used the term in contrast to a life of immorality and impurity. Peter used it in contrast to living according to the evil desires we had when we lived outside of Christ (1 Peter 1:14-16). John contrasted one who is holy with those who do wrong and are vile (Revelation 22:11). To live a holy life, then, is to live a life in conformity to the moral precepts of the Bible and in contrast to the sinful ways of the world. It is to live a life characterized by the "[putting] off of your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires … and [putting] on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22,24).
(pp. 17-20)

Step 6: *Share personal prayer request(s) and each person praying for the other's request(s).*

Source: The Pursuit of Holiness by Jerry Bridges. Published by NavPress, 1978. ISBN 0-89109-430-X.

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