

Summary of Lessons 1-7 (Chapters 1-9)

What is holiness?

God has called every Christian to a holy life. To be holy is to be morally blameless. The word signifies a “separation to God, and the conduct befitting those so separated”. In other words, to live a holy life is to live a life in conformity to the moral precepts of the Bible and in contrast to the sinful ways of the world. Let’s take a look at a few verses:

- I Thessalonians 4:3-7
- I Peter 1:14-16
- Ephesians 4:22-24
- Romans 12:1-2

Holiness is not an option

Hebrews 12:14 tells us that *“without holiness, no one will see the Lord.”* Does our salvation depend to some degree on our attaining some level of personal holiness? The answer to that is no. The best Christians can never in themselves merit salvation through personal holiness (Isaiah 64:6, Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 5:19, I Peter 3:18). Our holiness before God depends entirely on the work of Christ. However, there is a holiness which we have in Christ (our standing before God) and a holiness which we are to strive after, to which we are called to in our daily lives (I Corinthians 1:2, I Thessalonians 4:7).

True salvation brings with it a desire to be made holy. Ephesians 1:4 tells us that the purpose of our salvation is to be “holy and blameless in His sight”. To continue to live in sin as a Christian is to go contrary to God’s very purpose for our salvation. So, therefore, holiness is not necessary as a *condition for* salvation – but as an *essential part of* salvation that is received by faith in Christ. The Holy Spirit who creates within us a saving faith also creates within us the desire for holiness. He does not create one without the other (Titus 2:11-12).

The Holiness of God

Because God is holy, He can never overlook any sin that we commit. We may try and justify to God some action which our own conscience calls into question, but we can never truly justify before Him even the slightest deviation from His perfect will. Because God is holy, He can never tempt us to sin (James 1:13). Probably none of us ever imagine that God is actively soliciting us to do evil, but we may feel that He has put us in a situation where we have no choice (King Saul – I Samuel 13).

We often say “God hates sin, but loves the sinner”. This is wonderfully and mercifully true! But we are quick to gloss over the first part to get to the second part. We cannot escape the fact that God hates our sins. Therefore, every time we sin, we are doing something God hates. We must cultivate that same attitude toward sin – we need to hate sin as something displeasing to God, not something that is defeating to ourselves. When we sin, we sin against God (Genesis 39:9, 2 Samuel 12:13).

If we do not develop a holy hatred of sin, the deceitfulness of our hearts will allow us to play with temptation by entertaining the thought that we can always sin and then confess later and ask forgiveness. Contemplating continuously on the holiness of God and His hatred of sin is a strong deterrent against treating sin lightly or superficially.

The Holiness of Christ

We need to consider the holiness of Christ because His life is meant to be an example of holiness for us. Paul encouraged the Corinthians to follow his example as he (Paul) followed the example of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). Christ came into this world to do the will of God. We must strive to do no less. There is biblical truth in the slogan that became popular several years ago – **WWJD** “*What would Jesus do?*” Are we willing, as followers of Christ and believers in a holy God, to examine our activities, goals, plans, thoughts and actions in the context of *am I doing this to please God?* Is the guiding principle in our lives the desire to follow Christ in doing the will of God?

A Change of Kingdoms

Many Christians have a basic desire to live a holy life, but have come to believe that they simply cannot do it. To begin with, we need to realize that God has indeed made provision for us to live a holy life, and He has also given us responsibilities as well. **Romans 6:12** tells us, “*Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its evil desires*”. It is clearly our responsibility to establish as part of our *will* to not let sin have control in our lives. But **Romans 6:1-11** gives us the reason why. In this preceding passage, Paul establishes the fact that since we have died to the sinful nature (through Christ), we are no longer a slave of it....“Therefore...” we have the responsibility and the ability to keep sin from reigning in our lives.

If we view sin as a realm or sphere or world then we, as believers, no longer live there. And so, what holds true here in the material world we live in, applies in this case as well. When we die here on earth, we are no longer subject to its laws, rules or influences. We are dead! We don’t have to pay taxes, we cannot be arrested, there are no laws we must obey, we do not experience sickness or pain, hunger or thirst. We are beyond the influence of this world. As **verse 11** tells us, we must *reckon* (count, determine, decide) ourselves dead to the world of sin.

The Battle for Holiness

We may not like the fact that we have this lifelong struggle with sin, but the more we realize and accept it, the better equipped we will be to deal with it. And even though sin has been overthrown and weakened, its nature has not changed. So, if we are to wage a successful war against this enemy within, it is important that we know something of its nature and tactics.

First of all, the scriptures tell us that **the seat of indwelling sin is the heart** (Mark 7:21-23). The Bible paints a picture of the heart as the whole soul of a person and all of its faculties, as they work together in doing good or evil:

- The mind – as it reasons, discerns and judges
- The emotions – as they like or dislike
- The conscience – as it determines and warns
- The will – as it chooses or refuses

Secondly, the **indwelling sin nature works primarily through our desires**. Desire is the strongest force in a person’s heart. Take a look at temptation. When we give in to temptation, it is because our *desire* has overcome our *reason* in the battle to influence our *will*.

Thirdly, **indwelling sin tends to deceive and distort our understanding or reasoning**. If the power of sin has been overcome, Satan has to resort to deceiving our very understanding of sin. We may come to believe that *we are beyond a particular temptation or sin*.

Help in the Daily Battle

Therefore, to live by the Spirit is to live both in *obedience to* and *dependence on* the Holy Spirit. There is a balance then between our wills (expressed by obedience) and our faith (expressed by our dependence). We express our dependence on the Holy Spirit for a holy life in two ways:

- **A humble and consistent intake of Scripture**. If we truly desire to live in the realm of the Spirit we must continually feed our minds with His Word and His truth. It is hypocritical to pray for victory over our sin nature and yet be careless or reluctant in our intake of the Word of God (Psalm 19:7-14).
- **Praying continually and earnestly for holiness in our lives**. The apostle Paul prayed continually for the holiness of his own walk with the Lord and for those to whom he had ministered (Ephesians 3:16, Colossians 1:9-10, I Thessalonians 3:12-13 and 5:23).

Obedience Instead of Victory

It is time for us Christians to face up to our responsibility for holiness. Too often we say we are “defeated” by this sin or that sin. The fact is we are not defeated...we are simply disobedient. When I say that I am defeated by some sin, I am unconsciously slipping out from under my responsibility. I am, in effect, saying that something *outside* of me has defeated me. But, when I say (admit) that I am disobedient, that places the responsibility on me. We may, in fact, be defeated, but the reason we are defeated is because we have chosen to disobey.

Even though we have learned that it is the Holy Spirit that gives us the power to live a holy life – and that power is accessed through prayer and the Word – it would be foolish to misconstrue dependence on the Holy Spirit to mean that we were to make no effort at all.

- We cannot lull ourselves into a mindset that the Holy Spirit will make my choices for me or will choose obedience over disobedience. He will certainly make provision for our holiness, but He gives us the responsibility for choosing to use those provisions.
- We need to realize that our reliance on the Spirit is not intended to foster an attitude of “I just can’t do it”, but rather one of “I can do it through Him who strengthens me”

(Philippians 4:13). Again, the Christian should never complain for want of ability and power.

- If we sin, it is because we choose to sin, not because we lack the ability (power, strength, resources) to say no to temptation.

Putting Sin to Death

Conviction

First, we must have **conviction**. We must be persuaded that a holy life is God’s will for every Christian. These convictions are developed through the exposure to God’s Word. Even after we become Christians, the world around us constantly seeks to conform us to its value system (Romans 12:1-2). We are bombarded on every side by temptations to indulge our sinful nature.

- Obedience is the pathway to holiness (John 14:21)
- Memorizing Scripture is one of the most effective ways to influence our minds (Psalm 119:9-11)
- The goal of memorization is the application of the Scripture to our daily lives (Psalm 119:105)

The Bible clearly tells us God’s standard in most actions and decisions in our lives. But what about issues and areas that are not specifically mentioned in Scripture?

Commitment

So it follows that the second quality we must develop, if we are to put to death the misdeeds of the body, is **commitment**. We must honestly face the question, “Am I willing to give up whatever the Holy Spirit convicts me of in order to live a life of holiness?” (Luke 14:13, Luke 9:23).

It is at this point of commitment that many of us fail. We prefer to “dally” with sin, play with it a little, without getting too deeply involved. However, we must recognize that we have developed habit patterns of sin. These habits must be broken, but they never will be until we make a basic commitment to a life of holiness *without exceptions*.

The apostle John clearly stated what the goal of everyone Christian should be – **not to sin** (1 John 2:1). If we examine our hearts, we may find out that our real aim is to *not sin very much*. Can you imagine a soldier going into battle with the goal of not getting shot very much? Ridiculous, eh? His goal is not to get hit at all! If we have not made a commitment to holiness without exception, we are just like a soldier who is hoping not to get hit very much. We can be sure that we will be hit – by temptation – over and over again. There is no point in praying for “victory” over temptation if we are not willing to make a commitment to say no to it (Titus 2:11-14). That is where personal discipline comes in.