

COURSE OVERVIEW

From Sinner to Saint is a series of five studies on the topic of holiness. The ‘Introduction to the studies’ on page 5 of this workbook tells you more about the studies and how to use them. This overview section is designed to explain briefly the logical connections between the five studies so that the study leader has a better understanding of the flow of the course.

Study 1: God is holy—we are not

To understand holiness, we first need to understand God: he is the holy one, the one who is powerful and pure. In this respect, God is quite unlike us. God is in control of all things, and has the power to do whatever he wishes. By a simple word he created all things, and likewise he controls and upholds his world. Not only is God powerful, he is pure: his use of power is always for good.

This picture of God stands in stark contrast to human nature and behaviour. Our power and control over the world is very limited, and what power we have we invariably use for evil. The result is that we are alienated from God and unable to stand in his presence. In the Bible, whenever people are confronted by God’s holiness, their first reaction is to draw back, fearfully recognizing that they are unworthy and unable to stand before God. This is the starting point for our study of holiness: God is holy. We are not. Having acknowledged this, we can begin to explore what the gospel has to say about how holiness is possible.

Study 2: How holiness is possible

Holiness is only possible because of Jesus. Jesus was different from the rest of humanity in one important respect: he was holy like his Father. The good news for humanity is that the Lord Jesus' mission was to save people from the judgement we deserve as sinners, and draw to himself a people who are devoted to holiness. Significantly, Jesus achieved his mission as the Christ by dying on a cross. Our holiness is only possible because of Jesus' death on our behalf, and the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. The Christian turns away from wrongdoing and looks to Jesus to provide him with a new status before God as one of his holy children, and then begins a new life devoted to what is good, not evil.

Study 3: God's plan to make us holy

Even though because of Christ we have the status of God's holy people, we still need to put away sin and put on good works in our daily lives. Study 3 explores God's plan to make us holy—in other words, to make us like Christ. The Lord Jesus has rescued us *from* sin and condemnation, *for* godliness and good works. In undertaking this task, we have not been left to our own resources; the God who has rescued us is presently working by his word and Spirit to transform us into the image of his son. In this work, God does not bypass our minds and wills, nor does he instantly change us. God has woken and regenerated our inner beings so that we can understand what is good and choose to do what is good. We must do the hard work of putting off old sinful habits and putting on good works.

Study 4: Striving for holiness

Study 4 continues where Study 3 left off. We have a role to play in cultivating holiness in our lives. We need to strive for holiness. It will take effort, discipline and endurance. The Lord Jesus Christ is a great

role model who exemplifies these characteristics, so we ought to look to him not only as the one who provides salvation, but as the one who has 'been there and done that'. In the face of intense temptation and persecution, Jesus always resisted sin and did the right thing. In our own lives, we ought to display the same stubborn determination to be holy before our heavenly Father.

However, there is no such thing as instant and effortless holiness. We are like those who are recovering from an illness: the core disease of sin and judgement has been dealt with, but we are still weak and plagued by symptoms. But in Jesus we have an advocate with the Father. God is faithful, and he will forgive us our sins if we abide in him.

Study 5: The fulfilment of holiness

Study 5 examines the fulfilment of holiness. Our struggle to be holy has an end. On the last day God will do away with evil and establish his new creation where righteousness will dwell. The judgement and new creation are an incentive for holy living now because we know that there is no future in sin, only in holiness. The judgement and new creation are a comfort, for we know that on that last day God will fully and finally transform us into the holy people he wants us to be. In the meantime, we must not be distracted from the hope we have; rather, we ought to encourage one another to persevere in holiness. By continually returning to and exploring the message of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, we can remain focused on the race set before us.