

## The Holiness of Love

By Ginny Larsen

**Holiness** - 1. Applied to human beings, holiness is purity of heart or dispositions; sanctified affections; piety; moral goodness, but not perfect. (Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language)

*“Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with **love incorruptible.**”*  
(Ephesians 6:24 ESV)

*“And it is my prayer that **your love may abound more and more**, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and **so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.**”*  
(Philippians 1:9-11)

*“So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; **but the greatest of these is love.**”*  
(1 Corinthians 13:13)

### Sanctified Flesh?

What is it that makes us "holy"? I used to think holiness was following a list of very strict rules that denied anything of pleasure and that was very strict in self-discipline, in order to be more "god-like." Along with that, there was an expected code other Christians followed and things you just did if you were to be "holy." As Believers, we can do many "good" things and appear "consecrated to the Lord," but what is true holiness? What does it mean to be holy? The Lord showed me I wasn't holy at all in this but that I was actually walking in a form of self-righteousness that was as filthy rags in His sight. *"These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh"* (Colossians 2:23). Anybody else would have said, "What a good Christian!" But why was I practicing all this? It was to *make myself* holy – or so I thought. After all, everyone's eyes were always on me and how I was doing, and my eyes were on this and that "law," instead of on God.

When we live by the principle of law, we are still living in the flesh, trying in the flesh to be approved by God. But the flesh can never please God, regardless of whether we are living in sins of the flesh or in *"righteousness of the flesh."*

*“For those who live according to the flesh **set their minds on the things of the flesh**, but those who live according to the Spirit **set their minds on the things of the Spirit.** For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God”* (Romans 8:5-8).

Even as I was trying to be holy, my mind was not filled with love for God but rather a sense that I must live according to His Law. My mind was set on *myself* and what *I* was doing, how *well* I was doing, *my* failures to measure up, always looking inward. All that this worked in me, however, was a spiritual distance from God - a sense of condemnation because I knew I could never measure up. I was unable to love others, and I could only judge others. The cycle of sin

and death was ever present in me, just as Paul described in Romans 7. If we try to be holy by living according to the law, our minds are set on the flesh and how it's doing, always trying to improve itself. This can NEVER please God. A *sanctified* flesh is NOT acceptable to God. Only a **crucified** flesh (flesh put to death) is acceptable to God. Only His righteousness in us through His indwelling Spirit is acceptable to Him, and only that brings life.

*“You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live”* (Romans 8:9-13).

## What Is Holiness?

So often when holiness is preached, you hear the preacher trying to bring guilt and condemnation onto Believers to condemn them into living better lives and giving up sin, trying, in a sense, to do the work of the Holy Spirit. Acts of sin are preached against, but too often the **principle** of sin itself and our victory in Christ is not understood. In my own life, I was under this for years, and it never once enabled me to live a holier life, though, with tears, I would "surrender" again and again to the Lord. What it did was crush me under a heavy yolk of law and condemnation that I could never ever live up to until I felt completely defeated and hopeless. It was not until I was free from condemnation, understanding the finished work of Christ, that I was able to learn to truly know my Savior and His love and what truly pleased Him. I was able to finally trust in the righteousness He gave me and learn to walk by faith, receiving His righteousness as my own. It was only then that my love for Him grew and abounded. It is through **grace** that our **hearts are to be "established"** in the Lord, not through condemnation or law (Hebrews 13:9).

What really is Holiness? How can we truly be holy? Only as the Spirit of God gives us life to live unto Him, raising us up from the dead, even while in these mortal bodies. How do we live unto Him? *“So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him”* (1 John 4:16). *“And He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself’”* (Matthew 22:37-39). *“For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,’ and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law”* (Romans 13:9-10).

If holiness is to be "God-like" than there is no greater God-likeness than loving as God loves and walking in that love. There is no greater evidence of a life that is completely His than the love of God filling that person and flowing through them as His representative in this world. There is no power greater to conquer the flesh than the love of His Spirit in us, filling us and motivating us in our walk with Him day by day. It is not the condemnation of the law that should be the motivation of the Christian, or fear of condemnation or judgment. Rather, it is the love of Christ that should compel us and cause us to actually cringe at the thought of not pleasing

Him, just as Jesus Himself always pleased the Father when He walked in the flesh on this earth. Think of someone that you love and who trusts you and that you trust. You would not want anything to come between you, and you would in no way want to dishonor that person's trust. You would suffer to keep from hurting that person or grieving them in any way. How much more the love of God keeps our hearts and minds in that which pleases Him and compels us to live accordingly!

*“So, since Christ suffered in the flesh for us, for you, arm yourselves with the same thought and purpose [patiently to suffer rather than fail to please God]. For whoever has suffered in the flesh [having the mind of Christ] is done with [intentional] sin [has stopped pleasing himself and the world, and pleases God], So that he can no longer spend the rest of his natural life living by [his] human appetites and desires, but [he lives] for what God wills” (1 Peter 4:1-2 Amplified Bible). Only this love and holiness will keep us from sin and keep us when we are under severe testing of our faith and persecution!*

The only kind of holiness that could please God is born of love. It is love that gives oneself up to God truly. It is love that drove Christ to the cross. It is His love in us that causes us to love Him (1 John 4:19). And it is that love that grows more and more abundantly in our hearts as we learn to know Him and walk with Him. It is that love that causes us to desire to please Him more and more and to love one another. It is that love that causes us to not just yield to but **desire** His will in our lives even to the point of suffering. It is that love that would drive us to suffer for the sake of another.

When His love grows and abounds in our hearts, there is no place for anything in our lives that would be displeasing to God. It is His love in us that produces His righteousness through us as we "mortify" those **deeds** of our flesh by yielding to Him alone. The flesh is always there until our body is redeemed, but as we become more and more acquainted with Him in His love and knowing Him more and more in His Word, we see what we are to yield to the Spirit and are enabled by the power of His Spirit to mortify the "deeds" of that flesh and let His love act in and through us. It is because we **have been** "crucified with Christ" and are "dead to the law," as we are "in Christ," that the flesh no longer has dominion over us. It is because we are no longer under condemnation of the law that we are able to live according to the Spirit in love. Holiness is only possible through His Spirit. We are now living under "the law of life in the Spirit" rather than the "law of sin and death" (See Romans 8:1-4). We are made holy in Him as soon as we are born of His Spirit; yet, we are learning *now* to walk according to that holiness that was worked for us and in us through the work of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:10-14).

## Love is Holiness

The closer, then, we are to the love of Christ (knowing that love, abiding in that love, loving others) the more holy we are in His sight. Being "wholly His" in our affections, we are more holy *as* His children in our walk. No introspection (which is flesh trying to improve flesh), no fleshly acts that we do, can cause us to be one iota holier than we ever were. It is only accomplished as we trust in the holiness He has given to us by Jesus Christ's death and resurrection and our union with Him in faith. Just as we received His salvation, so we receive His righteousness - by faith - and are enabled by His Spirit not to live by the law but to live by His love. This is why John tells us the mark of a true Believer is love. There is no way a non-believer can walk in the pure, undefiled love of Christ. It is all by grace, as it is given of Him because it is only HIS. We only receive and know and walk in that love by faith.

*“So we have come to **know** and to **believe** the love **that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as He is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because He first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him: whoever loves God must also love his brother”*** (1 John 4:16-21).

We have no confidence, nor do we have love for God or others, when we are under fear of judgment. It is only as we are perfected in the love of Christ, knowing and trusting completely in His justification and His perfect love for us through the cross, that we are ourselves made complete in that same love and enabled to walk in it. In this we're enabled to love our brethren in Christ as well, as our eyes are on Him in faith and no longer on ourselves. Love is holiness. Love is **freedom from self** to live **unto God**. Love bears all things and overcomes all things. Lord Jesus, cause us to grow and abound in Your love that is incorruptible!