

# Law, Gospel, and Sanctification

*Is that which is holy loved by the gods because it is holy,  
or is it holy because it is loved by the gods?*

—Plato

Even the pagan philosopher Plato was greatly concerned with the issue of holiness. In our modern society, however, *holy* has become a four-letter word in more than the literal sense. Though we are inundated with aids and advice for self-help and self-improvement, holiness, it seems, is not something to which our world aspires. To the contrary, being “holier than thou” is an accusation with which no one wants to be charged.

56. Why do you suppose many people have such an aversion to talking about holiness? With what do you think most people outside of the Christian church associate the word *holy*?

## A Faith That Works

57. Compare James 2:26 and Ephesians 2:8–10. What do these passages have to say about the relationship between Law and Gospel in the Christian’s life?

58. Read Romans 6:14–18. How does Paul’s explanation further clarify your answer to question 57?

59. Compare Matthew 15:1–9 and 1 Timothy 4:1–3. What distinction is made between works that are truly good and other forms of obedience? On what basis is this distinction made?

60. In the first session of this study two uses of the Law were discussed. Read Psalm 119:9–16 and Psalm 119:105–6. In what further manner does the psalmist say the Law is to be used?

61. Compare Colossians 3:8–10 and 1 Peter 2:5. What illustrations do the authors use? Who is at work in the continual process being illustrated?

62. Compare John 17:17–19; Philippians 1:4–6; and Philippians 2:12–13. How do these passages further clarify your answer to question 59?

63. Compare Romans 7:18–23 and Philippians 3:12–14. What does Paul’s own experience tell us about the nature of sanctification?

64. Compare Galatians 3:1–5 and Galatians 6:13–14. What strong warning does Paul give about misunderstanding sanctification?

## **Saint and Sinner**

Holiness is by no means something to be avoided, neither in conversation nor in life. It is commanded by our holy God Himself. And yet, as we must confess, we are incapable of making ourselves holy.

65. What consolation can you take in knowing that sanctification is not left to your own power?

66. As you consider your own sanctification, what comfort do you take in knowing that even the great St. Paul continually struggled with sin?

## **Christ in Action**

“Holy, holy, holy” the church sings in the Sanctus. It is a description of our God, but it also describes God’s desire for His people. He so desires our holiness that He not only declares us holy for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ, but also, through the working of His Holy Spirit, He Himself acts to make us holy.

67. How might you respond to the popular misconception that “God is responsible for our justification, but we are responsible for our sanctification”?

68. How might you respond to a friend who believes that, since Christ fulfilled the Law, Christians have no need of hearing the Law preached?

## Comparisons

**Progressive Sanctification:** Some church bodies today teach that sanctification, God’s process whereby He effectively makes us holy, is progressive. The Lutheran church teaches that sanctification may vary at different times in a person’s life (Romans 7:14–19; Galatians 2:11; 5:17; 1 John 1:8).

**Possibility of Sanctification:** Lutheran Christians, along with Presbyterians and some Evangelicals, teach that perfect sanctification in this life, due to the persistent effects of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh, is impossible, and that Christians claiming to be sinless have, under the influence of Satan, deceived themselves (1 John 1:8, 10; John 8:44). Other church bodies, particularly the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches, teach that perfect sanctification is difficult to obtain, but it can be done—the saints, for example. Still others, particularly from the Wesleyan family of church bodies, including the Methodists, Pentecostals, and Holiness groups, teach that perfect sanctification is attainable in this life by any Christian earnestly seeking it.

**Requirement of Sanctification:** Correlative with their doctrine of purgatory, the Roman Catholic Church insists that perfect sanctification is required before enjoying the beatific vision of God. Upon death, the saints, due to their achievement of perfect holiness, enter immediately into heaven. Those not achieving full sanctification in this life are “purged” (hence, “purgatory”) of their sins after death for an indeterminate time until they are able to enter God’s presence.

## Point to Remember

We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death. Romans 6:4