

## The Holiness of God

**Intro:** As we continue to discuss the nature of God it is clear that no feature of God is more frequently proclaimed in His revelation than the holiness of God. It is the predominant attribute of God in the OT and serves as a foundation for the NT teaching about God and His relationship with mankind.

### Biblical affirmations of God's holiness abound in Scripture

*Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at His footstool; Holy is He. (Psalm 99:5)*

### What does it mean to say "God is holy"?

*The basis idea conveyed by the holiness of God is His separateness, His uniqueness, His distinction as the Wholly Other, the One who can not be confused with the gods devised by men, the one who stands apart from and above the creation (ISBE).*

*"Who is like Thee among the gods, O Lord? Who is like Thee, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders? (Exodus 15:11)*

*Holiness conveys also His moral perfection, the ethical spotlessness of His character*

*'For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy; for I am holy. (Leviticus 11:44)*

The holiness of God is *active*. As a primary motive, it incites all that He does; therefore He is righteous in His ways. Though infinitely holy, He, nevertheless, maintains a relation to fallen creatures; not a quiescent aloofness from them, but a vital, pulsating nearness. His is not a holiness which is engendered by a sustained effort nor preserved by segregation from other beings. The holiness of God is intrinsic, uncreated, and untarnishable; it is observable in every divine attitude and action. It embraces not only His devotion to that which is good, but is also the very basis and force of His hatred of that which is evil. Thus there is in divine holiness the capacity for reaction toward others which is both positive and negative.

### Implications of God's holiness for mankind

*God's holiness should cause us to approach Him with reverence and a sense of unworthiness!*

It is interesting to note the first occurrence of the word "holy" in Scripture. It was used to describe not God, but the ground upon which Moses stood.

*Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." (Exodus 3:5)*

*Two things stand out in God's exhortation. First is the preservation of distance ("do not come near"). The second is the need to express respect ("take off your shoes").*

**Consider also the impact of Isaiah's vision of God upon him.**

*And one called out to another and said, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.” (Isaiah 6:3) Isaiah’s response was to reflect upon his own unworthiness to be near God.*

**The whole structure of Israelite society was framed by God with emphasis upon His holiness and the imperfection of man to approach him. That is seen in two ways:**

*The increasing designation of things close to God as holy. Israel was called a holy nation or people living in a holy land; Jerusalem was called the “holy city”. God manifested his presence in the holy temple. One section was called “the holy place” and the innermost sanctuary was called “holy of holies” (the holiest place of all!).*

*The symbolism thus represented is clear—that is, of an innermost sanctuary protected by what in effect was a sequence of concentric circles to ensure maximum protection from defilement. The Temple mount and Jerusalem itself constituted further circles, and the land of Israel a still further circle.<sup>30</sup>*

*The demand that nothing imperfect be brought near to God. We may at times be puzzled by the host of laws that concern what seem to be minute aspects of Israelite life and proscribe various things that made people and their belongings unclean or defiled in some way. Various ideas have been proposed for why the laws were given; but the best explanation is the moral lesson God intended to teach. That He is a holy and perfect God and He cannot be approached by imperfection.*

*Ritual cleanness and uncleanness represents a major theme of the Pentateuch. Purity rules describe the rituals, varying according to the “severity” of the impurity contracted, for ceremonial uncleanness due to skin disease, bodily discharges, touching unclean things, and eating unclean foods. The rationale for these laws is never clearly spelled out, but several explanations probably have some validity, including hygiene, the need to dissociate oneself from disgusting or pagan things, various other ethical lessons, the association of Yahweh with life and wholeness rather than death or disorder, the separation of worship from expressions of sexuality, and the need for Israel to be separated from the Gentiles. However, this paper argues that the most important message conveyed by these laws is that God is holy, and man, conversely, is contaminated and unfit, in and of himself, to*

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30 30. Ibid., 39. Dunn refers to *m. Kelim* 1:6–9, which embodies the developed rabbinic theology of ten degrees of holiness, ranging from the boundaries of Palestine to the Holy of Holies. See further *ibid.*, 40–44; W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974) 58–60, 152–54.

*approach a holy God. All this, in turn, served to inculcate in the mind of the ancient Israelite the sacredness of the tabernacle/temple space within the conceptual "cultic topography" produced by the clean and unclean system.*

**Now we know that such distinctions were given as temporary object lessons in holiness and were intended to prepare the way for a spiritual reformation that God would provide through Jesus Christ! What God has provided is a way for sinful men to approach a holy God. The Hebrew writer describes it in this way: "Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:19-22)**

**Yet even so, the principle of God's holiness and man's unworthiness remains in the NT affirmation that we are saved by grace (unmerited favor) and in the recognition that when we do all that we have been asked by God we should say "we are unworthy servants; we have only done what is our duty to do" (Lk. 17:10).**

**If this spirit does not characterize our worship and service to God then we have lost sight of the holiness of God!**

*God's moral perfection should cause us to live in distinctive purity.*

**If the holiness of God should cause us to think of our unworthiness in approaching him, it should also cause us to seek distinctive purity so that we do not offend Him!**

**God has provided us two avenues of obtaining this holiness.**

*Instruction in holiness by way of the truth*

*"Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth. (John 17:17)*

*Cleansing of moral imperfection by Jesus' sacrifice*

*The question confronting all who know God's holiness is how can I a sinful man have fellowship with a God who is perfect?*

*And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:5-7)*

**We must seriously apply these principles in our lives.**

*As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." (1 Peter 1:14-16)*

*Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2 Corinthians 7:1)*

*The challenge we have in inculcating personal holiness is the sharp difference between Christian values and the world's values. Our values will cause us to talk differently, to entertain ourselves differently, to dress differently, to conduct business differently, and to approach people differently!*

*“Be not conformed to the world; but be transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you may prove what is that good, and perfect, and acceptable will of God” (Rom. 12:2).*

*We have been made holy by calling; but we must also be holy in conduct. To fail to do so is to ignore the holiness of God.*

**Conclusion: If there is any principle that the world has lost in its view of God, it is His holiness. Churches today seem head set on offering a God to the world that is happy, friendly, welcoming, but never holy! Accordingly there is little emphasis upon reverence for God or upon distinctive living, on cultivating moral purity and excellence. Instead the message is not only “come as you are” but for all practical purposes “stay as you are!” The holy God of heaven deserves more of us. He is a holy God! And He seeks a holy people!**