

Caleb Collins
SESSION 2 | The Holiness of God

*Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness;
tremble before him, all the earth!*
Psalm 96:9

I. Defining the Holiness of God

Related attributes: simplicity, goodness, righteousness, love, beauty.

“When Scripture calls God, or individual persons of the Godhead, “holy” (as it often does: Lev. 11:44–45; Josh. 24:19; Isa. 2:2; Ps. 99:9; Isa. 1:4; 6:3; 41:14, 16, 20; 57:15; Ezek. 39:7; Amos 4:2; John 17:11; Acts 5:3–4, 32; Rev. 15:4), the word signifies everything about God that sets him apart from us and makes him an object of awe, adoration, and dread to us. *It covers all aspects of his **transcendent greatness and moral perfection** and thus is an attribute of all his attributes, pointing to the “Godness” of God at every point.* Every facet of God’s nature and every aspect of his character may properly be spoken of as holy, just because it is his.”¹ - J.I. Packer

“He is transcendently different from and greater than all his creatures in every conceivable respect. To put it in common terms, “God is in a class all by himself... Holiness, then, is *that in virtue of which God alone is God alone. Holiness is **moral majesty**.*”² – Sam Storms

God is majestic, glorious, beyond reproach. In a certain sense, *holiness characterizes all of God’s attributes.* In his communicable and incommunicable attributes, **God is qualitatively distinct from us.**³ – Michael Horton

*God’s holiness means that he is **separated from sin and devoted to seeking his own honor.*** This definition contains both a relational quality

¹ J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993), 43.

² Sam Storms, *Attributes of God* (Oklahoma City, OK: Sam Storms, 2006).

³ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 268.

(separation from) and a moral quality (the separation is from sin or evil, and the devotion is to the good of God's own honor or glory).⁴ – Wayne Grudem

Holiness has two qualities: (1) transcendence and (2) moral perfection

A. *The Transcendence of God:* the quality of God being supreme, incomparable, matchless, and above all things.

Exodus 3:1-6

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. ³ And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." ⁴ When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵ Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Exodus 26 - The Tabernacle

1 Samuel 2:2

"There is none holy like the LORD:
for there is none besides you;
there is no rock like our God."

Isaiah 6:1-7

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called to another and said:

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!"

⁴ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), 201.

⁴And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. ⁵And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

⁶Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”

John 2 – Jesus Cleansing the Temple

Matthew 17:1-8

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ²And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. ³And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” ⁵He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” ⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” ⁸And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

Revelation 15:3-4

“Great and amazing are your deeds,
 O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are your ways,
 O King of the nations!
⁴Who will not fear, O Lord,
 and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy.
 All nations will come
 and worship you,
 for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

A. The Moral Perfection of God: God’s eternal beauty seen in his moral distinction, distance, and opposition to sin

Genesis 3:6-13

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

⁸ And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." ¹¹ He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" ¹² The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." ¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

Genesis 4 – Cain and Abel

Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. ⁹ Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" ¹⁰ And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.'

Genesis 19 – The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah

Leviticus 19:1-2

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² "Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, *for I the LORD your God am holy.*"

Joshua 7 – The Sin of Achan

Joshua 24:19

But Joshua said to the people, "You are not able to serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins."

2 Samuel 6:5-8

And David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the Lord, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals. ⁶And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. ⁷And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God.

Isaiah 1:16-17, 20

“Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your deeds from **before my eyes**;
cease to do evil,
learn to do good;
seek justice,
correct oppression;
bring justice to the fatherless,
plead the widow’s cause...
but if you refuse and rebel,
you shall be eaten by the sword;
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

Matthew 4:17

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “*Repent*, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

The Crucifixion of Jesus

Acts 5:5 – Ananias and Sapphira

B. Holiness as God’s Distinct Character and Distinct Action

Justice and Wrath

Compassion and Goodness

II. Holiness as Core of the Gospel

A. Holiness Declares the Scariest Truth: God is Truly Good

His Character

Our Condition

B. Where Grace and Truth Meet: The Cross of Christ (His Action)

"What depth or meaning can Christian terms have except in relation to the holiness of God? Divorced from the holiness of God, sin is merely self-defeating behavior or a breach in etiquette. Divorced from the holiness of God, grace is merely empty rhetoric, pious window dressing for the modern technique by which sinners work out their own salvation. Divorced from the holiness of God, our gospel becomes indistinguishable from any host of alternative self-help doctrines....Knowing that God is holy is the key to knowing life as it truly is, knowing Christ as he truly is, knowing why he came, and knowing how life will end." - David Wells, No Place for Truth, p.300

III. The Results of Holiness

A. Fear of the Lord

The ***Fear of the Lord*** is the Christian's disposition of joyful, awe-filled awareness of the character, action, and call of God resulting in faith-filled dependence upon the Lord.

The ***Dread of the Lord*** is an unbelieving disposition of dreadful awareness of the character and action of God.

B. A Pursuit of Holiness

1 Peter 1:13-21

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, ¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” ¹⁷ And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, ¹⁸ knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. ²⁰ He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you ²¹ who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

C. Recommended Reading/Listening:

- “His Name, A Promise” – Jeff Purswell, Exodus 3:10-15
- The Holiness of God, RC Sproul
- Holiness, JC Ryle
- The Joy of Fearing God, Jerry Bridges