

UNIT 1: The Attributes of God

Section 4: God's Holiness

Assigned Reading:

A. W. Pink – *The Attributes of God*
The Holiness of God

Introduction:

There seems to be in man an inherent desire to view one of God's attributes as "primary." By this we mean, to discover some principle whereby all the other attributes are interpreted. There is a desire to attempt to define God by, or boil His essence down to, one of His attributes... Today among many Christians that quintessential attribute is normally considered God's love. Surely, the scriptures tell us that **God is Love: 1 Jn 4:8** The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. & **1 Jn 4:16** We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

But this is not the only statement in the bible speaking of Who/What God is...

- **Deut 4:24** God is a consuming fire, a jealous God [**Heb 12:29**]
- **Deut 10:17** God is the God of gods & the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, & the awesome God
- **Deut 33:27** The eternal God is a dwelling place
- **Psalms 7:11** God is a righteous judge
- **Ps 75:7** But God is the Judge; He puts down one and exalts another
- **Ps 84:11** For the LORD God is a sun and shield
- **Daniel 9:14** for the LORD our God is righteous
- **Nahum 1:2** A jealous and avenging God is the LORD; The LORD is avenging and wrathful
- **John 4:24** God is spirit
- **1 Cor 1:9** God is faithful
- **1 John 1:5** God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.

So is there an attribute that can be held up as "primary?"

- **Donald Bloesch** claims that "holiness together with love is the quintessential attribute of God. It includes his majesty, glory, and power." The point that he attempts to make is that God's "prime attribute" is "holiness" and all other attributes should be seen either as an aspect of holiness or as qualified by holiness.
- **John Gill** explains, holiness "gives a luster to all [God's] perfections, and is the glory of them."
- **John Howe** declares, "[Holiness] may be said to be a transcendental attribute, that, as it were, runs through the rest, and casts luster upon them. It is an attribute of attributes."
- **A.H. Strong** argues for and persuasively defends the position *Holiness is the fundamental attribute of God*. God's person is holy (Ps 99:9), God's spirit is holy (Ps 51:11), God's name is holy (Is 57:15), God's word of promise is holy (Ps 105:42), God's oath is holy (Ps 89:35), God's dwelling is holy (Deut 26:15, Ps 47:8, Hab 2:20, Lev 27:28, Zech 14:20-21). Strong explains that if holiness is defined as a demonstration of love then we lose a proper understanding that: (1) God's mercy is optional with God while holiness is "invariable," (2) Punishment is many times traced to God's holiness, but never to God's love, (3) that God is not simply love but light – moral light – and therefore is a "consuming fire" to all iniquity. Understanding God's holiness explains why God is intolerant of any competing object of worship (idols).

- **Stephen Charnock** explains, “As it seems to challenge an excellency above all His other perfections, so it is the glory of all the rest: as it is the glory of the Godhead, so it is the glory of every perfection in the Godhead; as His power is the strength of them, so His holiness is the beauty of them; as all would be weak without almightiness to back them, so all would be uncomely without holiness to adorn them.”
- **Tozer** says, “Holy is the way God is. To be holy He does not conform to a standard. He is absolutely holy with an infinite, incomprehensible fullness of purity that is incapable of being other than it is. Because He is holy, His attributes are holy; that is, whatever we think of belonging to God must be thought of as holy.”
- **Roy Beacham**, “Holiness is that self-affirmed quality of God which embodies the totality of His unique ‘Godness’ and sets Him apart from all that is created and mundane both in being and character. God’s holiness in being is demonstrated by His ineffable majesty. God’s holiness in character finds expression in His inviolable purity.”
- “Taking the divine holiness in this form, we can easily perceive that it is not really an attribute to be coordinated with the other attributes distinguished in the divine nature. It is something co-extensive with and applicable to everything that characterizes Him and reveals Him, holy in His goodness and grace, no less than in His righteousness and wrath” (G. Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 267).

Holiness has come to be associated with goodness and moral purity, but this does not really capture its meaning. The term originally was reserved for use in reference to Yahweh (or things associated with Yahweh). Holiness seems to be the *distinguishing characteristic* of Yahweh. It is basic to every aspect of God’s goodness. If this is true, then holiness is a function of something being associated with God. Something is holy because God says it is holy, and no created thing is holy in itself. God alone is Holy in Himself! To be Holy is to be Godly...

Q1: When we say that God is Holy, what do we mean?

Q2: How should a right understanding of God’s Holiness affect humans?

Outline:

I. The Holiness of God

A. Etymology

1. **Heb.** “vodq” – “marked off, withdrawn from common use” – verb from which it comes suggests “to cut off” or “to separate” – otherness or purity
2. **Gr.** “a[*g*io,j” – worthy of veneration, on account of incomparable majesty (God)
 - a. On account of some connection with God
 - b. Set apart to God, to be exclusively His
 - c. Of sacrifices and offerings, prepared for God with solemn rite, pure, clean
 - d. In a moral sense: pure, sinless, upright, holy
3. **Eng.** “holy” – related in origin to hal & whole, meaning “in one piece, well, sound, healthy.” Common meanings: (1) belonging to or coming from God, (2) untainted by evil or sin, and (3) deserving of reverence.

4. **Biblically**, “holy” is used to describe (1) things dedicated unto the Lord, (2) things set apart from common use and devoted entirely to God (persons, places, things), and (3) moral purity – separation from evil, unclean, corrupt, defiled things

B. The Otherness of God (Relational Quality – Separation)

1. **God is the high and exalted one, far above all others, existing on an entirely different plane from all else! He is utterly other than everything else!**
2. **Roy Beacham**, “Holiness is that in God which is self-asserting and self-differentiating. The term came to be used as an appellative of Deity itself (Is. 5:16, cf. 19, 24). Therefore, to speak of God’s holiness is to speak of His ‘Godness.’ God’s holiness distinguishes Him from His creation (Is. 40:25, 26). It marks off from men (1 Sam. 2:2), angels (Job 15:15), and other supposed deities (Ex. 15:11). God is entirely unique.”
3. “Possibly its primitive meaning was to be separated, or to be elevated, or to be lofty, or something of the kind. . . . It is certain that this was not a moral idea first, but rather a physical one; at least we may say this is probable, because Phoenician gods are not moral beings, and yet in Phoenicia (Eshmunazar’s inscription) the gods are called the holy gods” (Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament*, 145).
4. “Holiness, in short, expresses a relation, which consists negatively in separation from common use, and positively in dedication to the service of J [Jehovah]” (J. Skinner, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 395).
5. **Psalm 99:1-5** The LORD reigns, let the peoples tremble; He is enthroned *above* the cherubim, let the earth shake! ² The LORD is great in Zion, And He is exalted above all the peoples. ³ Let them praise Your great and awesome name; Holy is He. ⁴ The strength of the King loves justice; You have established equity; You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. ⁵ Exalt the LORD our God And worship at His footstool; Holy is He.
6. **Isaiah 57:15** For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, "I dwell *on* a high and holy place, And *also* with the contrite and lowly of spirit In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the heart of the contrite.
7. **Ex 15:11** “Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises, working wonders?”
8. **1 Sam 2:2** "There is no one holy like the LORD, Indeed, there is no one besides You, Nor is there any rock like our God.”
9. This sense of “God’s holiness” is akin to His “transcendence” or “separateness” or “uniqueness” – this is sometimes referred to as the “**movement of withdrawal**”
10. Simultaneously there is an opposite “**movement of inclusion**” whereby “holiness” is extended toward creatures: holy ground, holy place, holy Sabbath, holy nation, holy oil, holy water, holy garments, etc... Things set apart by God and for God!
11. God alone is the fount of holiness, and He alone can confer this to others! By God’s sovereign choice He set things apart for Himself!
 - a. **Israel: Deut 7:6** "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.
 - b. **The Church: 1 Pet 2:9** But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *God's* OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His

marvelous light; ¹⁰ for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.

C. *The Purity of God (Moral Quality – Devotion to God’s Glory)*

1. The concept of God’s **purity** is inherent in “holiness” as well... This is emphasized in the OT along with God’s “otherness,” and becomes the main feature of “holiness” in the NT.
2. **Ryrie**, “In respect to God, holiness means not only that He is separate from all that is unclean and evil but also that He is positively pure and thus distinct from all others.”
3. **Pink** explains God is frequently called “Holy One” because “the sum of all moral excellency is found in Him.”
4. *God is absolutely pure and good.* He is untouched and unstained by the evil in the world!
 - a. **Habakkuk 1:13a** *Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You can not look on wickedness with favor.*
 - b. **James 1:13** Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.
 - c. **Job 34:12** "Surely, God will not act wickedly, and the Almighty will not pervert justice.
5. **After Ps 99:1-5 (above)** which stressed God’s transcendence we see the following verses relating to His purity: **v6-9** Moses and Aaron were among His priests, And Samuel was among those who called on His name; They called upon the LORD and He answered them. ⁷ He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud; They kept His testimonies And the statute that He gave them. ⁸ O LORD our God, You answered them; You were a forgiving God to them, And *yet* an avenger of their *evil* deeds. ⁹ Exalt the LORD our God And worship at His holy hill, For holy is the LORD our God.
6. **Read Isaiah 6:1-7**
 - a. **v1-4** “The Lord high and lifted up... holy, holy, holy...”
 - b. **v5-7** Isaiah is more aware of his “sinfulness” than his “creatureliness”
 - c. **see also 57:15-17** “For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, "I dwell *on* a high and holy place, And *also* with the contrite and lowly of spirit In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the heart of the contrite. ¹⁶ "For I will not contend forever, Nor will I always be angry; For the spirit would grow faint before Me, And the breath *of those whom* I have made. ¹⁷ "Because of the iniquity of his unjust gain I was angry and struck him; I hid *My face* and was angry, And he went on turning away, in the way of his heart.”
7. Teaching regarding worship:
 - a. **Psalms 24:3-4** Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? ⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood And has not sworn deceitfully.
 - b. **Ps 99:9** “Exalt the Lord our God and worship at his holy mountain, for the Lord our God is holy.”
 - c. **Rev 15:4** “Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to Your name?”

II. The Implications of the Holiness of God

A. Man's Position

1. Profane: Not set apart
 - a. **Tozer**, "We know nothing like the divine holiness. It stands apart, unique, unapproachable, incomprehensible, and unattainable. The natural man is blind to it. He may fear God's power and admire His wisdom, but His holiness he cannot even imagine."
 - b. Proper response to God's holiness, his separateness, is awe, reverence, silence.
 - c. **Ps 99:3** "Let them praise your great and awesome name—He is holy"
 - d. **Pink**, "For one sin God banished our first parents from Eden. For one sin all the posterity of Canaan, a son of Ham, fell under a curse... For one sin Moses was excluded from Canaan, Elisha's servant smitten with leprosy, Ananias and Sapphira cut off out of the land of the living."
2. Polluted and Putrid: Tainted with Sin and an Affront to God's Holiness
 - a. *God is free of all sin, and is unable to tolerate its presence! It must be punished!*
 - b. Knowing God's holiness should cause a person to be sensitive to sin
 - c. **Tozer**, "Until we have seen ourselves as God sees us, we are not likely to be much disturbed over conditions around us as long as they do not get so far out of hand as to threaten our comfortable way of life. We have learned to live with unholiness and have come to look upon it as the natural and expected thing."
 - d. **Rom 7:12** "the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." (**Ps 19**)
 - e. **Is 6:5** "Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."
 - f. **Lk 5:8** "But when Simon Peter saw *that*, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"
 - g. **Erickson**, "When one measures one's holiness, not against the standard of oneself or of other humans, but against God, the need for a complete change of moral and spiritual condition becomes apparent."

B. God's Provision

1. A Satisfaction: Jesus' Sin-Bearing
 - a. **Ryrie**, "The absolute, innate holiness of God means that sinner have to be separated from Him unless a way can be found to constitute them holy. And that way has been provided in the merits of Jesus Christ."
 - b. **Pink**, "A fallen creature could sooner create a world than produce that which would meet the approval of infinite Purity." – all we have is filthy rags (**Is 64:6**)
 - c. **Culver** explains, "It was divine holiness, not love, which was basic to the *requirement* of death when the God-man became sin for us at Calvary."
 - d. **Charnock**, "Not all the vials of judgment that have or shall be poured out upon the wicked world, nor the flaming furnace of a sinner's conscience, nor the irreversible sentence pronounced against the rebellious demons, nor the groans of the damned

- creatures, gives such a demonstration of God's hatred of sin, as the wrath of God let loose upon His Son."
- e. **Eph 5:26-27** "so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless."
 - f. **Eph 2:21** "in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,"
2. A Standing: Jesus' Righteousness
- a. Having been granted Christ's righteousness, we are now to live according to the Spirit
 - b. God has called his people to separate themselves from unclean things and to be perfectly holy – **2 Cor 6:14-7:1**
 - c. God's holiness is now the standard for the believer's life and conduct...
 - d. God's perfection is the standard for our moral character and motivation for religious practice. The whole moral code follows from His holiness!
 - e. **1 Thes 3:12-13** and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also *do* for you; ¹³ so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.
 - f. **1 Thes 4:7** For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification [holiness].
 - g. **Lev 19:2, 11:44-45, 20:26, 1 Pet 1:16** "You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy."
 - h. This changes our perspective from "what can I get away with" or "how close can I get to the line" to "is this thought/attitude/action holy?"

A Future Day...

Zech 14:20-21 "In that day there will *be inscribed* on the bells of the horses, "HOLY TO THE LORD." And the cooking pots in the LORD'S house will be like the bowls before the altar. ²¹ Every cooking pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to the LORD of hosts; and all who sacrifice will come and take of them and boil in them. And there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts in that day."