

Understanding Holiness

Part 1

Our interest in this two part message is firstly assessing our current reality, followed by a deeper revelation of God's Holiness and thirdly figuring out our response to it.

1 Peter 1:15-17

But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." [a] 17 Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.

True holiness cannot be our own fabrication.

Lev. 11:44-45

I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves along the ground. 45 I am the Lord, who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.

Leviticus 19:2

2 "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.

Its not "Be holy to look good" or "Be holy to be self-righteous and puffed up". It's saying "be holy because I am holy."

This is a scripture that we cannot ignore. We cannot separate our holiness from God's holiness. That's why a study on holiness must begin with a revelation of God's holiness, which we will go into.

***Hagios* – Greek word for holy**

- **Set apart by God or for God**
- **Other**
- **Different**
- **Unlike the world**
- **In the likeness of the nature of God**

Holy is foreign to the English language and many other languages. Purity is only a secondary definition of Holy. The angels were not singing purity, purity, purity in Revelation and when Isaiah had his encounter. The word for purity is hagnos whilst holy is hagios. So whilst the root is the same, purity is a secondary definition.

So the ancient meaning of holy is to cut or separate. However, God is transcendent so He is set apart but higher and exceeding usual limits. When we meditate on this it is natural for us to go to Him as our source.

When used in scripture, holy is not a single attribute in a list with characteristics like mercy, kindness etc. Why is the Holy Spirit so named? He is not called the Intelligent Spirit or the Kind Spirit.

“Holy” is reserved for Him. Are you calling things holy that are not? Are you setting apart something and giving it a place higher than God? This is idolatry. When you have a revelation of God’s holiness you don’t place anyone else there. You don’t place them on a pedestal. Those you respect and admire are only in the context of gratitude for God’s goodness in their lives. Everything returns us to a place of adoration for God. When you are in this place there is freedom from fear of intimidation by them or changing when they are in your presence. There is no room for the fear of man because you are wholly consumed by God.

Avoid saying “Oh that was divine!” Holy speaks of Awe inspiring. The name Augustus means awe inspiring. When this name was used for Caesar as a title, Christians had a problem with calling Caesar this.

So meeting God in this way may be a great trauma. Look at these other examples:

Luke 9:28-36 – The Transfiguration

About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. 29 As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. 30 Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendour, talking with Jesus. 31 They spoke about his departure,[a] which he was about to bring to fulfilment at Jerusalem. 32 Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. 33 As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, “Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what he was saying.) 34 While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. 35 A voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.” 36 When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen.

You can see a vision and feel good, but God’s glory comes you are undone. Peter didn’t even know what he was saying. This is the paradox, you are drawn to it yet you tremble.

Revelation 1:17-18

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. 18 I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

Hence that dread amazement with which, as scripture uniformly relates, holy men were struck and overwhelmed whenever they beheld the presence of God.....Men are never duly touched and impressed with a conviction of their insignificance until they have contrasted themselves with the majesty of God.

John Calvin

Why is there so much pride and self-reliance today? Men are not contrasting themselves with the splendour of God’s holiness. The fear of the Lord is not before their eyes.

When you are set apart you live as a foreigner as stated in Peter’s exhortation.

John 17:6

I am not asking that You take them out of the world, but that You keep them from the evil one. 16They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 17Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth....

As Jesus is praying to the Father He emphasizes our foreignness even further. This is the tension we live in. How are we to be holy whilst living in the world and reaching people effectively?

Legalism is counterfeit holiness. If I try to be holy in my own strength then my flesh will manifest and glory in its works. I will struggle with self-righteousness and be resisted by God, even if I maintain the guise of holiness. The holiness of God starts in your heart and has brokenness as its foundation. You are undone and then healed and rebuilt by Him. Undone speaks of being dis-integrated. This is necessary for God to then remould you in His likeness. This is a journey that few have gone today.

What's your response to the Holiness of God? We cannot afford to be indifferent.

Isaiah 6:1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. 3 And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." 4 At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. 5 "Woe to me!" I cried. "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." 6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." 8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

Some people move into ministry based on selfish ambition. God's true ministry is birthed in brokenness and brokenness is our response to a revelation of His Holiness. You see this brokenness and revelation of holiness in John's epistles.

We see strong emphasis in ancient Hebrew writing, usually in poetry, when a word is used multiple times. In the same way that in English we use an exclamation mark or italics or underline a word. Here is an example of how the Prophets' oracles would sometimes do this. It was either a blessing or a woe. With Jesus in the Beatitudes it was blessing. With John in the verse below it was a woe.

Revelation 8:13

As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!"

So what is your response to God's holy presence? This was Isaiah's response below. Look at how even the inanimate objects responded; they shook. Isaiah trembled.

Isaiah 6:4-5

At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. 5 “Woe to me!” I cried. “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.”

I have seen this when the glory of God comes. I used to think I was just shaking, but there seems to be an accompanying fear of the Lord that comes upon me during those times. Perhaps I am trembling.

Isaiah was pronouncing judgment on himself by using the word woe. It reminds me of Jesus,

Luke 10:12-14

I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town. 13Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had happened in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. 14But it will be more bearable at the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you....

Some nations are ruined today. Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum form a triangle and were the areas that most of Jesus' miracles took place, yet they were largely indifferent. Chorazin has dark volcanic soil and was known for its early harvesting of grain. However in 4 AD it was destroyed, probably by an earthquake.

Matthew 11:23

And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

So what's your response to His holiness? Are you captivated by Him or do you need to be entertained by other things? It reminds me of a guy who asked me about having a commercial break during a service. A lot of people talk about a feel good glory of God in the church whilst they are just moved emotionally by pleasant music. The glory of God comes with the Fear of the Lord. Are you undone in His presence?

Preaching about holiness does make me holy. So our progressive sanctification has to be rooted in a revelation of God's holiness.

So what is the nature of God's Holiness?

God's love draws us apart.

Exodus 20:5

You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God,....

Jealousy makes sense biblically when it comes from a perfect being. God's holiness has room for jealousy because we are his chosen treasure. He wants us for Himself. If we go to another it can only be far less than what we will have in Him. If He was not jealous over us then it means He hasn't got our best interests at heart and does not love us completely. A person is jealous often when they have no revelation of abundance in their own life. Yet God is God by Himself. There is no lack in Him.

So holiness is less about trying to be holy and more about deciding daily to relinquish control. It's more about more of Jesus being manifest in and through your life. It's not legalism. Legalism boasts in the flesh. Legalism is counterfeit holiness.

God accepts us based on Christ in us. Christ is our righteousness.

2 Corinthians 5:20-21

Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ: Be reconciled to God. 21God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

Holiness makes room for God to work through all of you not just parts of you. The bible speaks of the splendour of His holiness. His holiness is beautiful and attractive.

Psalms 29:2

Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendour of his holiness.

Some translations say "the array of His holiness"

King James says "the beauty of His Holiness"

Our holiness must be like His.

When people see you they don't see self-righteousness but Christ Himself. Ask the question, what's blocking their view?

The Holiness of God is primary to Him. It's not a side act.

Revelation 14:8-11

8Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying: " 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,' who was, and is, and is to come." 9Whenever the living creatures give glory, honour and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, 10the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: 11"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

When Jesus taught the disciples to pray, the first petition was to do with God's holiness. Only after this is the petition for His kingdom to come and His will to be done. Jesus was stating it as a petition not as a way of merely addressing God.

Matthew 6:9-10

"This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, 10 your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven...."

NLT

Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. 10 May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

God's kingdom does not come unless His name is first regarded as Holy.

RC Sproul "Heaven is a place where reverence for God is total. It is foolish to look for the kingdom anywhere God is not revered."

Matthew 5:8 NLT

God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God.

When you relinquish and yield then the sanctifying takes place. To sanctify is to "holify"; to make holy. The root word is the same. Hagios = Holy and Hagiazo = Sanctify.

Only then do we really see Him clearly. Up until then we see Him as we are. We become like Him to the degree to which we see Him and that can only with a pure heart.

As long as there is bitterness and a hardened heart, you won't see God clearly. You will come up with a manufactured view of God based on your heart condition.

1 John 3:2

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears,[a] we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.