

God has called every Christian to a holy life.

According to Ephesians 1:4, we are told that He saved us for this purpose.

Ephesians 1:4 says that God “chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.”

This describes both a purpose and a result of God’s choosing those who are to be saved.<sup>1</sup>

And since this is His purpose, this is how we are to live.

God’s call for holiness is based on His own character.

The Bible describes God’s character as “Holy.”

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<sup>1</sup> John Jr MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Word Pub., 1997). Eph 1:4.

As we consider the holiness of God, we need to first understand that “Holiness is arguably the most significant of all of God’s attributes” (John MacArthur, *Our Awesome God*, 38).

It is “the very excellency of the divine nature” (A.W. Pink, *Gleanings in the Godhead*, 39).

“It is the sparkling jewel of the regal crown on His head” (John MacArthur, *God, Satan, and Angels*, 57).

It is “the harmony of all the virtues...the crown of His honor and the honor of His crown” (Spurgeon on the Psalms, 414).

This is “His choicest jewel” (Ibid.).

When the angels worship in heaven, they do not say, “Eternal, eternal, eternal,” or “Faithful,

faithful, faithful,” or “Wise, wise, wise,” or “Mighty, mighty, mighty.” They say, “Holy, Holy, Holy.”

In Revelation 4:8, we are told that the “four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!’”

God is “the Holy One of Israel” (Isa.47:4).

He is “Holy God” (1 Sam.6:20), “Holy Father” (Jn.17:11).

1 Chronicles 16:10 says to “Glory in His holy name.”

Before we look at the definition of holiness, we need to understand “that any attempt to define

[the] ‘holiness’ of God is, as A.W. Tozer states, “fraught with potential flaw and error” (The Attributes of God).

The reason is because no one can adequately explain it.

All we can do is compare it to ourselves and that causes major “flaw and error.”

We are unholy and He is holy but what does that mean?

Before the fall, Ecclesiastes 7:29 says, “that God made men upright.”

But his being “upright” is not comparable to God being upright or holy because Solomon went on to say that man “sought out many devices.”

In other words, when man was created in the image of God, he was not given the same uprightness that God possesses. He was created with the potential for sin.

In describing God, James says in James 1:13 that God “cannot be tempted by evil.”

That literally means He is “untemptable.”

Psalm 5:4 says, “For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness, Nor shall evil dwell with You.”

So we must understand first that fundamental difference between man and God.

Next we need to understand the difficulty that is involved in defining the holiness of God.

R.C. Sproul says, “The difficulties involved in defining holiness are vast. There is so much to holiness and it is so foreign to us that the task seems almost impossible. There is a very real sense in which the word holy is a foreign word. But even when we run up against foreign words there is always the hope that a foreign language dictionary can rescue us by providing a clear translation. The problem we face, however, is that the word holy is foreign to all languages. No dictionary is adequate to the task.

Our problem with definition is made more difficult by the fact that in the Bible the word holy is used in more than one way. There is a sense in which the Bible uses holy in a way that is very closely related to God's goodness. It has been customary to define holy as 'purity, free from every stain, wholly perfect and immaculate in every detail.'

Purity is the first word most of us think of when we hear the word holy. To be sure, the Bible does use the word this way. But the idea of purity or of moral perfection is at best the secondary meaning of the term in the Bible” (The holiness of God).

What then is the meaning of the term?

## **Holiness Defined**

The root meaning of the Hebrew noun ‘holiness’ (qodes) and the adjective ‘holy’ (qados) comes from a word that means *‘to cut’ or ‘to separate,’ and thus to be distinct from and set apart.*

That the term did not originally refer to ethical purity is seen from its use in describing prostitutes who were ‘set apart’ or ‘devoted’ to pagan deities such as Baal and Asherah (see Gen. 38:21; Hosea 4:14).

Donald Bloesch points out that ‘in Israel’s history holiness could be applied to nonpersonal things, places and even pagan gods (cf. Dan. 4:8,9; 5:11). The ground around the burning bush is holy (Ex. 3:5) as are the temple (Is. 64:11; Jon. 2:4; Hab. 2:20), days (Ex. 20:8; Deut. 5:12; Is. 58:13), utensils (1 Chron. 9:29), garments (Ex. 29:21; Lev. 16:4), food (1 Sam. 21:4; Neh. 7:65), oil (Ex. 30:25,31; Num. 35:25; Ps. 89:20) and offerings (2 Chron. 35:13; Ezek. 42:13)’ (God the Almighty, 138).

“The point is that God is separate from everyone and everything else. He alone is Creator. He is altogether and wholly other, both in his character and his deeds. He is transcendentally 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’” (Dr. Sam Storms, <http://>



[www.enjoyinggodministries.com/article.asp?id=237](http://www.enjoyinggodministries.com/article.asp?id=237)).

*Holiness is not primarily a reference to moral or ethical purity. It is a reference to transcendence.*

R.C. Sproul again says, “We are so accustomed to equating holiness with purity or ethical perfection that we look for the idea when the word holy appears. When things are made holy, when they are consecrated, they are set apart unto purity. They are to be used in a pure way. They are to reflect purity as well as simply apartness. Purity is not excluded from the idea of the holy; it is contained within it. But the point we must remember is that the idea of the holy is never exhausted by the idea of purity. It includes purity but is much more than that. It is purity and transcendence. It is a transcendent purity.

When we use the word holy to describe God, we face another problem. We often describe God by compiling a list of qualities or characteristics that we call attributes. We say that God is a spirit, that He knows everything, that He is loving, just, merciful, gracious, and so on. The tendency is to add the idea of the holy to this long list of attributes as one attribute among many. But when the word holy is applied to God, it does not signify one single attribute. On the contrary, God is called holy in a general sense. The word is used as a synonym for his deity. That is, the word holy calls attention to all that God is. It reminds us that His love is holy love, his justice is holy justice, his mercy is holy mercy, his knowledge is holy knowledge, his spirit is holy spirit” (The Holiness of God).

## **Holiness Declared**

*In His Name*

1 Chronicles 16:10 says God's name is "holy."  
The psalmist said in Ps.22:21 that he trusted "in  
His holy name.

In both of those verses, the term for Lord is  
Yahweh.

We said in our last study that this sacred name  
was known as the tetragrammaton ('four  
letters') and it was "not a description of God,  
but simply a declaration of His self-existence  
and His eternal changelessness" (J.I, Packer,  
Knowing God).

But it is interesting to note how it is associated  
also with the holiness of God.

In the giving of the ten commandments God  
uses this term in Exodus 20:2, 5, 7, 10, 11, 12

Notice also how the psalmist uses it in association with holiness

Ps.99 , (“the LORD” vv.1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 9)

Ps.103:1 (“the LORD” v.1)

Ps.104:1-2 (“the LORD” v.1)

Ps.105:3 (“the LORD” vv.1, 3)

Ps.106:47 (LORD” v.47)

Ps.111:9 (“the LORD” vv.1, 2, 4, 10)

John Walvoord said, “So holy was this name regarded that Jews reading the Old Testament would substitute some other name for deity rather than express vocally what the text actually said when it used the word Jehovah” (Jesus Christ Our Lord, 37).

“This is the unspeakable name, the ineffable name, the holy name that is guarded from profanity in the life of Israel” (R.C. Sproul, The Holiness of God, 33).

Notice in Isaiah 6:3 what the seraphim are crying to one another:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!”

The sacred name that God gives of Himself not only reveals His self-existence but also His set-apartness; His otherness.

A.W. Tozer said, “Holy is the way God is” (The Knowledge of the Holy, 105).

A.W. Pink adds, “Holiness is the very excellency of the divine nature” (Gleanings in the Godhead, 39).

No wonder that “Moses and the children of Israel sang...to the LORD (Yahweh): “Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who is

like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?” (Ex.15:11)

The answer to that question is given in 1 Samuel 2:2 when it says, “There is none holy like the LORD, for there is none besides You, nor is there any rock like our God.”

### *In His Presence*

The very presence of God exhibits His holiness and set-apartness.

Ex.19:1-25 (before the giving of the 10 commandments)

“God then commanded Moses to prepare the people for His appearing or speaking to them: (1) by their sanctification, through the washing of the body and clothes (see Gen. 35:2), and abstinence from conjugal intercourse (v. 15) on

account of the defilement connected therewith (Lev. 15:18); and (2) by setting bounds round the people, that they might not ascend or touch the mountain” (Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F, Commentary on the Old Testament).

Ex.20:18-26 (after the giving of the 10 comm.)  
Heb.12:29 says, “For our God is a consuming fire.”

Isa.57:15 - “For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place.’”

Revelation 4

*In His People*

God’s holiness is seen in His people; they reflect His character in their lives

Jesus said to His disciples in John 15:3, “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.”

1 John 1:9 (they are the ones confessing their sin not hiding or denying it like those seen in vv. 6, 8, 10).

Paul said in Phil.3:9 that the righteousness that he now had was not his “own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.”

Apart from this righteousness no one can enter God’s presence

The writer of Hebrews said “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb.12:14).



As a child of God we are to live holy lives

A.W. Tozer says God “does not conform to a standard. He is that standard” (The Knowledge of the Holy, 105).

1 Pet.1:13-16 - “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 14 as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; 15 but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”

Lev.11:44-47 - “For I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth. 45 For I am the Lord

who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy. 46 ‘This is the law of the animals and the birds and every living creature that moves in the waters, and of every creature that creeps on the earth, 47 to distinguish between the unclean and the clean, and between the animal that may be eaten and the animal that may not be eaten.’”

1 Thessalonians 4:7 says, “For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.”

Ephesians 5:1-8

“The cause of our unholiness is a low view of God.”

This is “entertained almost universally among Christians [and] is the cause of a hundred lesser evils everywhere among us” (A.W. Tozer, Gems from Tozer, 7).

John MacArthur says, “There is much supposed worship going on today that does not genuinely regard God as holy, and thus it falls woefully short. A lot of nice songs are being sung, nice feelings are being felt, nice thoughts are being thought, and nice emotions are being expressed, without a genuine acknowledgment of the holiness of God. That kind of worship bears no relationship to the worship we see in the Bible. It may be more psychological than theological, more fleshly than spiritual” (The Ultimate Priority, 79).

God’s people are to manifest in a practical way God’s holiness by not presenting their “members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but [presenting themselves] to God as being alive from the dead, and [their] members as instruments of righteousness to God” (Rom. 6:13).

They are to understand that “now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, [they] have [their] fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life” (v.22).

A.W. Pink says, “Because God is holy, the utmost reverence becomes our approach to Him. ‘God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all about Him’ (Ps. 89:7). Then ‘Exalt ye the Lord our God, and worship at His footstool; He is holy’ (Ps. 99:5). Yes, ‘at His footstool,’ in the lowest posture of humility, prostrate before Him. When Moses would approach unto the burning bush, God said, ‘put off thy shoes from off thy feet’ (Ex. 3:5). He is to be served ‘with fear’ (Ps. 2:11). Of Israel His demand was, ‘I will be sanctified in them that come nigh Me, and before all the people I will be glorified’ (Lev. 10:3). The more our hearts are

awed by His ineffable holiness, the more acceptable will be our approaches unto Him.

Because God is holy we should desire to be conformed to Him. His command is, ‘Be ye holy, for I am holy’ (1 Pet. 1:16). We are not bidden to be omnipotent or omniscient as God is, but we are to be holy, and that "in all manner of deportment’ (1 Pet. 1:15)” (The Attributes of God).

Stephen Charnock said, “This is the prime way of honoring God. We do not so glorify God by elevated admirations, or eloquent expressions, or pompous services of Him, as when we aspire to a conversing with Him with unstained spirits, and live to Him in living like Him.”

## **Holiness Demonstrated**

Notice how God responds in the presence of sin.

*At the Fall (Gen.3)*

*At Kadesh (Num.20:1-13; 27:12-14)*

*At Nacon's Threshing Floor (2 Sam.6:1-7)*

According to Numbers 7:9 the ark was to be carried on poles supported on the shoulders of the Kohathites.

*At the Sanctuary of the Lord (Lev.10:1-11)*

## **CONCLUSION**

As we close, notice how the holiness of God is manifested at the cross.

A.W. Pink says, "Wondrously, and yet most solemnly does the atonement display God's infinite holiness and abhorrence of sin. How

hateful must sin be to God for Him to punish it to its utmost desserts when it was imputed to His Son!” (Gleanings in the Godhead, 39).

When Jesus was bearing sin on the cross, He cried out “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani” that is, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?” (Mat.27:46).

“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor.5:21).

A.W. Tozer says, “The whole purpose of God in redemption is to make us holy and to restore us to the image of God” (The Quotable Tozer II, 105).

So we need to realize that “the more we learn of God and His ways and of man and His nature we are bound to reach the conclusion that we

are all just about as holy as we want to be. We are all just about as full of the Spirit as we want to be. Thus when we tell ourselves that we want to be more holy but we are really as holy as we care to be, it is a small wonder that the dark night of the soul takes so long” (Ibid., 105-6).

What then is the “true Christian ideal?”

Is it to be happy or to be holy?

“Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Pet.1:16; Lev.11:44; 19:2).

Let’s pray!

## **LIFE APPLICATION**

Do you think of purity when you hear the word “holy”?



Before this message, have you considered that there are other meanings to the word “holy” like transcendence?

Can you site any examples in your life where God responded to your sin out of His holiness? (e.g. Moses striking the rock -- cannot enter the promised land)

How does what you heard today affect how you worship God?

Jerry Bridges said, “Because God is holy, He hates sin.” Do you agree with that statement?

How does that statement affect your attitude towards sin?