

The Holiness of God

God is unlike any other and His holiness is the essence of His “otherness.”

Hosea 11:9 - I will not execute my burning anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.

Being holy means that He is completely absent of even a trace of sin. He is pure, undefiled, and hence, whatever He does is holy and right. God's holiness pervades His entire being. A.W. Pink argues that holiness is God's “primary” attribute and it shapes or influences all of His other attributes. So, His love is a holy love, His mercy is holy mercy, and even His anger and wrath are holy anger and holy wrath.

Isaiah 6:1-10

In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD Of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.” And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.” Then one of the seraphim flew to me, with a burning coal in his hand which he had taken from the altar with tongs. And he touched my mouth [with it] and said, “Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away, and your sin is forgiven.” Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I. Send me!” And He said, “Go, and tell this people: ‘Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand.’ Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed” (Isaiah 6:1-10).

Holiness Defined

The Hebrews word is “kodesh.” The place where God dwelt in the inner chamber of the Tabernacle was called “Kodesh *Hakodashim*” or

“the holy of holies” – the most holy place. And it’s “most holy” because God’s is present.

The Greek equivalent is *hagios* and its derivatives (sanctification / saints).

(1) To be holy is to be distinct, separate, in a class by oneself.
As Sproul puts it:

“The primary meaning of holy is ‘separate.’ It comes from an ancient word that meant, ‘to cut,’ or ‘to separate.’ Perhaps even more accurate would be the phrase ‘a cut above something.’ When we find a garment or another piece of merchandise that is outstanding, that has a superior excellence, we use the expression that it is ‘a cut above the rest.’ This means that the one who is holy is uniquely holy, with no rivals or competition.”

When the Bible calls God holy it means primarily that God is transcendently separate. He is so far above and beyond us that He seems almost totally foreign to us. To be holy is to be ‘other,’ to be different in a special way. The same basic meaning is used when the word holy is applied to earthly things, like the objects in the tabernacle, sanctified people, or even the Holy Bible.

The Scriptures describe God’s otherness this way:

“Who is like Thee among the gods, O LORD? Who is like Thee, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises, working wonders? (Exodus 15:11).

“There is no one holy like the LORD, Indeed, there is no one besides Thee, Nor is there any rock like our God (1 Samuel 2:2).

There is no one like Thee among the gods, O Lord; Nor are there any works like Thine. (Psalm 86:8)

(2) To be holy is to be morally pure.

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 simple apartness. But -- 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.

“Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? and who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood, And has not sworn deceitfully. He shall receive a blessing from the LORD And righteousness from the God of his salvation.” (Psalms 24:3-5)

Remember Isaiah’s cry – “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isaiah 6:3-5).

“[Thine] eyes are too pure to approve evil, And Thou canst not look on wickedness [with favor]” (Habakkuk 1:13a)

3) God is holy in relation to every aspect of His nature and character.

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.

God’s holiness is more than merely moral rectitude or righteousness or goodness. To be holy is to be characterized by purity and blamelessness and integrity, both in terms of one's essence and

one's activity. In this sense, God's **holiness and his righteousness** are related, if not synonymous.

A. ***The Biblical evidence***

God is regularly identified in Scripture as "*the Holy One*". See Job 6:10; Isa. 40:25; 43:15; Ezek. 39:7; Hosea 11:9; Hab. 1:12; 3:3.

He is also called "*the Holy One of Israel*" in 2 Kings 19:22; Isa. 1:4; 43:3 (a total of 25x in Isaiah alone); Jer. 50:29; 51:5;

In Isa. 57:15 God is described as "*the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy.*" God's holiness is often associated with his majesty, sovereignty, and awesome power (Ex. 15:11-12; 19:10-25; Is. 6:1-4).

Holiness is so much the essence of who God is that Amos speaks of him as swearing "by his holiness" (4:2). This is simply another way of saying that "the Lord God has sworn *by himself*" (6:8).

In fact, God's name is qualified by the adjective "holy" in the OT more often than all other qualities or attributes combined!

He is transcendentally different from and greater than all his creatures in every conceivable respect.

(Some of the preceding definition drawn from: <http://www.samstorms.com>)

Pink –

A chief emphasis is placed upon this perfection of God: God is oftener styled Holy than almighty, and set forth by this part of His dignity more than by any other. This is more fixed on as an epithet to His name than any other. You never find it expressed 'His mighty name' or 'His wise name,' but His great name, and most of all, His holy name. This is the greatest title of honour; in this latter doth the majesty and venerableness of His name appear (S. Charnock). This perfection, as none other, is solemnly celebrated before the Throne of Heaven, the seraphim crying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts" (Isa. 6:3). God Himself singles out this perfection, "Once

have I sworn by Thy holiness" (Ps. 89:35). God swears by His holiness because that is a fuller expression of Himself than anything else. Therefore are we exhorted, "Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness" (Ps. 30:4). "This 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" (J. Howe, 1670). Thus we read of "the beauty of the Lord" (Ps. 27:4), which is none other than "the beauty of holiness" (Ps. 110:3).

So, if we could in some way diminish the holiness of God, we would effectively diminish God Himself. His very nature and character are defined by His holiness.

God's holiness is manifested in His works. "The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works" (Ps. 145:17).

God's holiness is manifested in His law. That law forbids sin in all of its forms. So we read that the law is holy, and "the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Rom. 7:12). Yes, "the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether" (Ps. 19:8, 9).

God's holiness is manifested at the Cross. Pink writes: 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 deserts when it was imputed to His Son! 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, give such a demonstration of God's hatred of sin, as the wrath of God let loose upon His Son. Never did Divine holiness appear more beautiful and lovely than at the time our Saviour's countenance was most marred in the midst of His dying groans. This Himself acknowledges in Psalm 22:1-3. When God had turned His smiling face from Him, and thrust His sharp knife into His heart, which forced that terrible cry from Him, "My God, My

God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" He adores this perfection—"Thou art holy," v. 3 (S. Charnock).

Because God is holy He hates all sin. He loves everything which is in conformity to His laws, and loathes everything which is contrary to it. His Word plainly declares, "The froward is an abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 3:32). And again, "The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 15:26).

Men, being sinful – and as evidence of their depraved state, hate the holiness of God. And this fact speaks, yet again, to the supernatural creation of the Bible. Sinful man was no more likely to devise a holy God than to create the Lake of fire in which he will be tormented for ever and ever.

Because God is holy, acceptance with Him on the grounds of fleshly performance is utterly impossible. You will never satisfy the standards of infinite purity.

Because God is holy, He alone deserves reverence.

"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).

"Exalt ye the Lord our God, and worship at His footstool; He is holy" (Ps. 99:5).

"I will be sanctified in them that come nigh Me, and before all the people I will be glorified" (Lev. 10:3).

Yet, His command is: "Be ye holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16).

This is how we honor the God who saved us by His grace, we reflect His "otherness" and live separately from the worldliness that pervades and mark the lives of the unsaved.

Pink writes:

Then as God alone is the Source and Fount of holiness, let us earnestly seek holiness from Him; let our daily prayer be that He may "sanctify us wholly; and our whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23).

Sproul -- "The clearest sensation that a human being has when he experiences the holy is an overpowering and overwhelming sense of creatureliness. That is, when we are in the presence of God, we are humbled and become most aware of ourselves as creatures. This is the opposite of Satan's original temptation, "You shall be as gods."
— R.C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*

Add righteousness from Ryrie.