

Closer to God (17) Holiness (1)

Today, we continue our theme for 2022, “Closer to God”. Thus far, we have addressed several themes: 1) Relationship with God – what it means to know and trust Him; 2) Sin and how it separates us from God; and 3) The grace of God. Today, we want to examine another crucial theme to drawing closer to God – holiness. This is a subject that we have mentioned several times in previous lessons, both in this theme and other studies. Today, I want to begin a more detailed look at the subject of holiness. We want to address the following topics:

- Today we will define and introduce the importance of holiness
- The holiness of God
- The holiness of Jesus and the Spirit
- Examples of holiness in scripture
- What does it mean to be holy? Attitudes and actions demonstrated in holiness.

Today, we begin by introducing this subject.

I. **Holiness defined**

a. The term

- i. The English word “holy” is used about 650 times in the Bible (474 Hebrew, 190 Greek- of which ~100 is associated with the Holy Spirit, NKJV). And it is an important word in both understanding God and our relationship to Him (both Hebrew and Greek).
- ii. The primary meaning – to be set apart or sanctified. It is about separation.
 1. Holiness is described as “the quality of God that sets him utterly apart from his world, especially in terms of his purity and sanctity...”¹
 2. It is also descriptive of a person or thing that is dedicated or consecrated to the service of God (BDAG).
 3. BDAG also describes the word noting that it was also associated with cultic practices with the meaning, “of the quality possessed by things or persons that could approach a divinity”² When properly applied to God, this is a good description.
 4. Also associated with this word is: veneration, reverence, that which is sacred.
- iii. Other words associated with the Greek root ἅγιος (hagios):
 1. *Sanctify* (John 17:17, 19; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 6:11; Ephesians 5:26; 1 Peter 3:15),
 2. *Saint* (Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 14:33, are derived from the same root word in the Greek language. A
 3. *Sanctuary* - or “holy place” (4x in Hebrews – 9:1 & 2, etc.),
 4. *Holy of holies* – lit. “the holy holy” (Hebrews 9:3),
 5. Even *hallowed* (Matthew 6:9 – in the model prayer) is a derivative of this word.
 6. The Old Testament includes the word, “consecrate” (which is basically the same as sanctify) sometimes is in the family of these words.
- iv. The word is also associated with moral and ritual purity.

- b. The Old Testament gives us a good understanding of what is involved in holiness.

¹ Manser, Martin H. *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies*. London: Martin Manser, 2009. Print. *Holiness*.

² Arndt, William et al. *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* 2000: n. pag. Print. ἅγιος (hagios)

- i. First usage – Exodus 3:5 – Moses at the burning bush. This concept was repeated with Joshua (Joshua 5:15 as they were about to receive Jericho). This within itself is a powerful scene. Moses sees a burning bush that is not consumed. As he investigates the LORD speaks to him commissioning him to deliver Israel from Egypt. But first, this is a holy place.
- ii. Israel was described as a “holy nation” – Exodus 19:6 – we know that Israel would be God’s chosen people, through whom He would fulfill His promise. They were certainly set apart, which will become evident as you read through the books of the LOM. And their purpose was to bring the Savior into the world.
- iii. We see the greatness of holiness at Mt. Sinai, as YHWH speaks to the people, they are warned to not approach the mountain, there is a thick cloud, thundering and lightening so that the people are fearful (Ex. 19:15-20, 20:18-20, etc.). We here are introduced to the holiness of God – something we will explore in another lesson.
- iv. The book of Leviticus – 10:3, 19:1
 - 1. The book of Leviticus is a challenging book that is technical. Many in their daily readings gloss over or pass over this book because of its ritualistic content. Some might reason, this clearly was about the Jews and how they were to live, so what does it mean to us.
 - 2. But understand, to the Jews this book was extremely important. It was foundational to their lives and worship to God. It is said that this book was the first book Hebrew children would learn – how are we to live and serve our God?
 - 3. It deals with numerous topics related to Israel when they inherited and lived in the Promised Land.
 - a. This book begins with details as to how to offer various types of sacrifices (5 types) – chapters 1-7 describe what these sacrifices involved. Among the things we learn from these sacrifices is how terrible sin is – considering what they had to do to deal with their sins – blood HAD to be shed!
 - b. Chs. 8-10 - The ordination of the priesthood – consecrating Aaron and his sons. This includes the garments they are to wear and their conduct as priests. We read in the midst of this, how Nadab and Abihu are burned to death for offering “strange fire” (Leviticus 10:1-3). Whatever their error, God said to them, “I must be regarded as Holy to those who come near Me.” (10:3)
NOTE: The very concept of priesthood is separation – both in lifestyle and from the rest (cf. 1 Peter 2:4-5, esp. vs. 9).
 - c. Ch. 11 deals with animals they could and could not eat. And while most of them are understandable (they were not to eat scavengers, etc.), some of them are open to question.
 - d. Chs. 12–15 deal with bodily skin diseases and molds, as well as other ailments. This would also include times of impurity in the lives of men and women. Such made the involved unclean and rituals were necessary to cleanse them. NOTE: Not all impurities were sin.
 - e. Ch. 16 addresses the day of atonement – the 7th month, 10th day where a sacrifice was offered for the sins of the people.
 - f. Ch. 17 – the eating of blood was prohibited as were certain sacrifices.
 - g. Ch. 18 – there are laws of sexual and moral purity announced. Again note they were to be different from the world.
 - h. Ch. 19 – various miscellaneous laws. IN this text, the LORD declares, “Be holy because, I the LORD your God am holy.” (Lev. 19:2). This will be quoted in 1 Peter 1:16. This is the chapter where we read about leaving

the edges of fields for the poor (mercy), not crossbreeding livestock, not sowing 2 types of seed in a field, or even putting on garments of 2 different types of materials, as well as laws about honesty (just scales) and respect for the elderly, etc.

- i. Ch. 20 describes the death penalty for various offenses. God is SERIOUS!
- j. Chs. 21-25 again address the priests and their need for holiness, as well as various sacrifices and days of worship. Included in these chapters are:
 - i. Dedication of the firstborn and sacrifice of the firstborn of animals and of crops. This shows gratitude toward God and appreciation for His blessings.
 - ii. Various feasts to remember and obtain forgiveness.
 - iii. Sabbath rests and Jubilee (ch. 25) – every 7 years they were to let their fields rest and every 50th year they were to do the same AND return properties to the original inheritors. NOTE: Agriculturally, we know that occasionally land needs to rest, or the nutrients replenished lest the soil lose its richness. This shows reliance (trust) in God to take care of them.

Ch. 24:10-23 even records a case where a son blasphemes the name of God and was stoned to death.

- k. The book ends with promises of blessings if they served God – Ch. 26.
 - l. Throughout the book, they are continually called upon to keep His statutes and ordinances. Consider the following found in Leviticus:
 - i. Beginning with Leviticus 11:44, we have the phrase, “*I am the LORD*” recorded 45 times throughout the rest of the book
 - ii. The word, “holy” is found some 95 times
 - iii. Consecrate – 22 times
 - iv. Separate or separated – 5 times.
4. WHY such meticulous details?
- a. While some of it was for their wellbeing and health (most of the animal, cleansing and isolation laws), some of it was simply to emphasize HOW serious God was about them being separate
 - b. As noted, it also demonstrates how terrible sin really is (which would separate them from God) – hence the bloody sacrifices, drastic measures taken to ensure purity in the camp, etc..
 - c. Furthermore, we learn that God’s standards are NOT those of the world. In an age of political correctness where God’s word is constantly scrutinized, the book of Leviticus shows us that God’s ways are NOT man’s ways. Note Isaiah 55:7-9. That is why we follow His standard when there is a difference.
 - d. Furthermore, we learn here that God is SERIOUS about purity. If you desire to stand before Him, you must strive for purity. James 4:8 – draw near to God, purify your hearts...
5. AS you read through this book, simply ask, “How does this describe holiness?” IT will make an otherwise meticulous reading into something very powerful and eye-opening about who God really is and what he expects of His people.

II. Passages that call for holiness

- a. Romans 6:19, 22 – present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness; you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.
- b. Romans 12:1- Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God...

- c. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, *Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.*
- d. 2 Corinthians 7:1, *Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*
- e. Ephesians 1:4, *just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,*
- f. Ephesians 4:24, *and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*
- g. 1 Thessalonians 3:13, *so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.*
- h. 1 Thessalonians 4:7, *For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.*
- i. 1 Peter 1:15-16, *but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."*

III. Holiness is crucial if we desire to see God –

- a. Hebrews 12:14, *Pursue holiness – without which no one will see the Lord*
- b. Matthew 5:8, *Blessed are the pure in heart... while not mentioning holiness in word, a study of purity finds it to be an essential quality OF holiness.*
- c. Habakkuk 1:13, *You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, And cannot look on wickedness.*
- d. Psalm 5:4, *For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness, Nor shall evil dwell with You.*
- e. Psalm 15 – *Who may dwell in Your holy hill?*
- f. Psalm 24:3-6 – *Who may ascend into Your holy hill?*

IV. Holiness applied

- a. Holiness is a 2-part process. It involves being:
 - b. Set apart FROM the world – Holiness is about being separated from what is unclean. It is about being different and avoiding that which is profane (taking what is supposed to be holy and making it common). We are reminded of numerous passages.
 - i. 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 – *"come out from among them..."*
 - ii. James 4:4 – *friendship with the world is enmity with God...;*
 - iii. 2 Timothy 2:19 - *Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."*
 - iv. John 17:14-16 – *they were in the world, but not of the world.*
 - v. While there is certainly much more to be said that we will develop in an upcoming lesson.
 - c. Set apart FOR God – being holy means that we belong to God. We are useful to Him because He is our God and Lord. We see Him as our master and the One to whom we will one day give an accounting. Consider these familiar passages:
 - i. Titus 2:14 – *we are His own special people, zealous for good works*
 - ii. 1 Peter 2:9 – *we are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, ... His own special people, ...*
 - iii. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, *"you are not your own". A price was paid for you, so you belong to God.*
 - iv. Romans 6:13, *And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.*

Thus, we can see what holiness is. In this lesson, we have defined and illustrated holiness by looking at a few examples. We have seen how we are called by God to be holy and briefly noted what that means (being set apart FROM the world and set apart FOR God). In our next lesson, we will look a little closer at the holiness of God. We desire to be closer to God, and that requires us to be holy. Are you pursuing holiness in your life? Think about it!