

What Does ‘Holy’ Mean?

Have you ever thought about what the word ‘holy’ really means?

What most of us think of when ‘holy’ is mentioned is someone who spends their day in prayer, reading the bible and focussing their thoughts on God. It can quite easily bring to mind a picture of a Catholic monk shut away in a monastery. These ideas, however, come from a religious perspective, from our religious background and not from the Kingdom.



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Religion drives us to handle the holiness of God in ways that appease our conscience. We approach his holiness our way rather than his. This actually exemplifies the factual expression:

People can be sincere, but they can be sincerely wrong.

And also:

Those in deception don’t know they are being deceived.

Let’s have a look at what ‘holy’ is from God’s perspective.

God says, “I am holy”.¹ God also says that his name is “holy”.²

We know as well that only ‘holy’ things can be in God’s presence, otherwise they would be destroyed.³ Therefore Heaven is holy⁴, his angels there are holy⁵, his mountain in Heaven is holy⁶, his Heavenly temple is holy⁷, etc.

We know from the NT that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin and we believe that this makes us holy in God’s sight.⁸ But what type of holiness is that?

This type of holiness has 2 distinctly different components:

1. We are holy just like the holy vessels in the temple because we are cleansed and set apart for use by God.⁹ This means we are sanctified.
2. We are in a fit state to be able to come into the presence of God without him destroying us due to our sinfulness.¹⁰

BTW: Holiness also means that we are in a fit state to come into God’s family and to inherit eternal life.

But, let’s take it deeper.

‘Holy’ as a word basically means ‘whole’, and so ‘holiness’ means ‘wholeness’.

This is the right perspective to think about ‘holy’ because when God says that he is holy, what is he comparing it to? This is an important question, because, when we think about ourselves and holiness we most likely compare ourselves with God. But if he says that he’s holy, and the angels and saints around his throne in the book of Revelation also say he’s holy, then ‘holy’ as far as God is concerned is that he is who he says he is. **He is wholly who he has determined to be and he doesn’t change from that**¹¹.

1 – Isaiah 5:16; Leviticus 11:44-45

2 – Isaiah 57:15

3 – See Psalm 24:3-4; 37:20; 2 Thessalonians 2:8

4 – Deuteronomy 26:15

5 – Matthew 25:31

6 – Isaiah 11:9

7 – Psalm 11:4

8 – See Revelation 20:6

9 – 1 Corinthians 6:11

10 – Hebrews 4:16

11 – Malachi 3:6



So, this is an entirely different concept. He's *not* holy because of the need when we come into his presence to bow and prostrate ourselves before him, covering ourselves with the blood of Jesus. Not at all. That's an effect of his holiness, not the origin of it.

Holiness is: **He's complete in himself and he's the standard. As he said, "I am who I am!"**¹²

So, let's take it another step further.

God says, "Be holy because I am holy".¹³ What does he mean by that statement?

He actually meant, "Be holy because I am WHOLE", or in other words, "Be holy because I am myself.

Now we have the full understanding of what 'holy' means: **BE LIKE ME**.

If he's the standard, and we have to "be" this standard – not operating in his presence like he is the standard – but to actually "be" the same as his standard, then we need to become like him.

To be holy then is to be like God, nothing more.

Now, that's not just having the blood of Jesus covering us. He wants us to think, do, say, be and go in a holy manner. In other words, **we are holy when we perfectly do things and operate just like him.**

Wow! That's a bit different, isn't it.

So, if you compare everything you do, everything you think, everything you say, everything that's in your heart, and every desire, with God as the standard, how holy are you operating?

Scary, isn't it?

We've become very complacent in the 21st Century because we have the blood of Jesus covering us, but we don't realize that we're still miles from where we're supposed to be in being holy.

Now it makes more sense when he asks us to love. Why? Because he is love¹⁴. It makes more sense now when he asks us to be in unity.¹⁵ Why? Because as a triune being he's in perfect unity – this is what oneness¹⁶ is about.

So let's take this a little bit further and see where it takes us.

We find in scripture injunctions to "be holy". For example:

1 Peter 1:16 (NKJV) – "*Be holy, for I am holy.*"¹⁷

This process of walking holy is not the OC method of being holy just because you keep the rules – the Law in this case. And it's definitely not doing whatever we like because we're covered by the sacrificial blood of the Messiah. Walking in holiness is constantly doing what is righteous (i.e. what's God-approved).

This knowledge has caused most Christians to try their hardest to be good enough for God. From my

12 – Exodus 3:14

13 – 1 Peter 1:16

14 – 1 John 4:8

15 – Psalm 133:1; Ephesians 4:3

16 – John 17:21-23; Isaiah 57:15

17 – Quoting from Leviticus 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7

personal experience, this makes you legalistic and hard-hearted so that people don't want to be around you. The reason for this outcome is that it's the wrong technique.

To help us through the mire that's attached to our concept of holiness, let's take a look at a very interesting verse.

Genesis 17:1 (NKJV) – *“I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.*

The only people who are blameless in the sight of the Lord are those who are holy. This is why he said to all of Israel, “You shall therefore be holy, for I *am* holy”. He was addressing the entire race of his special people in this instance, not just the Jewish priesthood.

The CJB translates the Hebrew in this verse slightly differently, showing that it's about being in his presence, not walking away from him, which is what “walk before me” hints at.

*“I am El Shaddai [God Almighty]. Walk in my presence and be pure-hearted.”*¹⁸

The most accurate rendering comes from Darby's translation where he translates the Hebrew faithfully as “face” rather than paraphrasing it as “before me”.

*“I [am] the Almighty God: walk before my face, and be perfect.”*¹⁹

Ian Clayton mentions many times in his conference sessions that the ancient Hebrew for this verse is most accurately translated like this: **“Turn towards my face, walk towards me and I will make you blameless”**. This is fantastic!

That means that instead of running away from God because of our sin, we should run to him so he can deal with it. How radical is that!

This is what I've proved: **face the Lord, surrender to him, and he will change you from the inside out.**

Holiness comes from Almighty God when we mimic him, when we accurately represent him, just as Jesus of Nazareth did for Father.

This is very liberating, but you'll have to work at maintaining it as your personal approach to holiness. The religious spirit will use FEAR to take you away from it and back into striving to be holy. He'll convince you that the fear of the Lord is a type of fearsomeness rather than a reverence of him. This regression can happen very slowly or it can come as a frontal confrontation of dread. Focus on your sonship and intimacy, and keep your holiness in Father's hands. That's the best way.

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18 – Genesis 17:1 (CJB)

19 – Genesis 17:1 (DARBY)