

# God is Holy

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[0:00] O Lord, we do ask you to open our hearts and our minds to your glorious holiness.! Do help the speaker and help hear us. May your Holy Spirit descend upon us as we meditate! We ask it for the glory and renown and through the merits of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

Amen. So, who is God? And you might say, well, you hardly need to spend a long time telling us about this because everybody knows who God is. What's the point of spelling it all out? And I'd say, actually, that's completely wrong. Because our human condition is that although in some sense we do know who God is, it's built into us, it's wired into us by being made as his creatures. Yet human beings inevitably suppress that and have an inbuilt compulsion to twist the idea of God and to form it into something that's more acceptable to us. It's a deep insult to the real God and it's built into our human nature to twist God into a God who is suitable for us, a man-made God. The theologian Calvin talked about this idolatry and said the human heart is a factory of idols, just churning them out time after time. That's the human condition. And if you're sitting thinking, well, come on, I like to think of God in my own way. This is what I like to think of. I like to think of God who is kind, a God who loves everything about me, a God who's always going to protect me, somebody with a similar moral framework to myself, a God who would never send anybody to hell. That's the sort of God, as far as I'm concerned, well, you've just done this thing, haven't you? You've just made an idol. Because the one thing you've described is a God who is not holy. And God is holy. So let's look at this together. Now, it'd be interesting to know what we're talking about. What is God's holiness? And the words for holy will help us a bit, but not an awful lot. Anybody know where that is? It'd be anywhere, couldn't it? It is, so all you young clubbing people will have been here. This is Ayah Napa. It's a, yeah, of course, now you remember. It's a resort in Cyprus. It's a famous or infamous holiday resort. I just put it there because the word is Ayah and Napa. And Ayah is the Greek word for holy. And Napa is the saint who is being described at it. Holy, holy Napa or Saint Napa. And the New Testament word is *hos*, which I put up there. I don't know if I'm pronouncing it right. *Hagios*. From which we get English words, we get hagiography. I don't know whether you ever use that as an English word. It means writing about somebody as if they're a saint. And this word in the New Testament gets translated in various different ways. And you wouldn't realise it was the same word underneath.

[3:23] So the word holy. When we read, when we prayed, may the name of the heavenly father be hallowed. We prayed that together earlier. That word hallowed is this *haios* word. Saint, which sounds completely different in English, is the *haios* word. Sanctify is a word very closely related to make holy.

sanctification, which you might think is a different thing altogether, is actually the same thing again, to make holy, to position as holy, to become holy. The Hebrew word, I think the vowels can change, *kadash*, *kadosh*. So the seraphim say, *kadosh*, *kadosh*, *kadosh*. Holy, holy, holy. Lord God Almighty. It sounds impressive in Hebrew, doesn't it? So let's delve into this. Those are the words. I don't know that help us an awful lot, but we need to find out what holiness is. And I have to say, I'll let you into a secret, it's not so easy to define. But let's go on a journey and see if we can work out about holiness. And I want to do it in these words. First of all, I'd like to persuade you that it's relevant. You might be thinking, do you know, I've never heard anybody talk about God's holiness. Isn't that something we can do without? I'm getting along fine with that. We're thinking about that. And what does that have to do with me? I mean, this is just one of those words, isn't it? So first of all, I'd like to deal with the relevance. Then I'd like to look at the roots. So let's try and look into the Bible and see how God takes his people through a course of training to understand holiness, help

us get a basic understanding, see what we can do to pin down the meaning.

And then the rollout of holiness, when the rubber hits the road in the Christian life. You can see I was struggling for the third R, but I have got three R's there, so it might help you to remember it this afternoon. It was the relevance, the roots, and the rollout. Okay, so let's try, first of all, the relevance. Let me try and give you six, I think it's six reasons why it is relevant, God's holiness. So in the Old Testament, it says in Leviticus 11, 44, could somebody invite the young lady to come in? Because she's welcome to come in, she doesn't have to stay outside. 11, verse 44, in the Old Testament, it says, be holy for I am holy. Old Testament teaching. And you think, well, at least that's Old Testament. Well, I've got news for you, the New Testament says exactly the same for New Testament Christians. Be holy for I am holy. 1 Peter, chapter 1, 15 and 16, just as he who called you is holy, so you guys be holy in all you do, for it is written, be holy for I am holy. Wow. That's a command for us, to be holy. In the Lord's Prayer, we pray about holiness. Hallowed be thy name. You could translate it otherwise. May God's name be dealt with and accepted as holy. We prayed it. Here's another reason for relevance. You, in New Testament language, are a saint. Now, in Catholicism, saints are only a few isolated people who are particularly excellent at being Christians. But in the New Testament, every believer is a saint, and a saint is a holy person. It's the same word. So, whether you like it or not, you are called holy in the Bible.

Saints means holy ones. Here's another text which pins holiness on us. 1 Thessalonians 4, 3, this is the will of God, your, you could translate it, sanctification or holiness making. But you could, authorised version, I think, say, this is the will of God, your holiness. Well, that's quite direct, isn't it? It is something for us, this. Hebrews 12, 14 is perhaps even more solemn. Follow after holiness without which no one will see the Lord. You know, not an option. Not a thing for a few isolated Christians. If we're not holy people, we won't get to heaven.

[8:09] And if you're a Pentecostal Christian, and you're saying, well, actually, I specialise in the things of the Spirit. Let me just remind you the full name of the Spirit. He is the Holy Spirit.

So, actually, there were seven reasons. I've plugged one on to the end. So, if you'd never thought about holiness, you're really missing out. If you are on the edge of Christian things, you really need to grasp this matter of God's holiness. Otherwise, you haven't understood what Christianity is about.

Those seraphim, holy, holy, holy, kadosh, kadosh, kadosh, the Lord Almighty, the whole earth is full of his glory. I mean, they thought it was pretty powerful stuff, didn't they? Just shout it out like that. Top of those creatures' agenda was the worship of the holy God. And if we're not worshipping the holy God, we are out of tune with the universe. And as Christians, holiness ought to be topping our agenda.

I know we worry about our health and our work and all sorts of things like that, quite legitimately. But I wonder how much concerned we are to be holy, without which no one will see the Lord.

[9:35] So, I was trying to say it's relevant. And it is, isn't it? It's actually powerfully relevant, this idea of holiness. And just one other thing. If we had been born in the infancy of God's teaching the human race, when he took Israel aside, remember, and coached them so that the rest of the nations could learn, we would have been taught to have spectacles by which the whole world that we look at is either unclean, clean, or holy. That would be the way to divide up the whole world that we look at in terms of unclean, clean, and holy. And we look at the animal kingdom like that.

I'm sorry, I want to say, and people and things can move from being unclean to clean, and from being clean to holy. And they can also defect and become, and go down the ladder, as it were, becoming polluted and unclean. And we would have been taught that in the book of Leviticus, which would have been one of the first things one of those children in ancient Israel would have been taught. And it would be true for animals. So, if you know things about the Bible, you know there are unclean animals, and clean animals, and sacrificial animals. And it's true about people, because there are unclean people, which would be most of us, the nations. And there would be clean people, which would be Israel. And there would be the holy people, who are the priests. So, we would be looking at the whole world in this idea of clean, unclean, and holy. So, now I'm going to say we don't live in the Old Testament. That is initial teaching. That's baby teaching. And Christians

are grown up sons and daughters of the living God. And I've tried to say a little bit about how things have changed. But there's a lot to say. I might not say a huge amount on that. So, let's try and get to grips with this matter of God's holiness. When I was in Sri Lanka, my good friend Priya Handy said, you know, in our culture, a holy person would be somebody like a guru or a holy person. And you'd know they were holy because they could go up on a mountain in the freezing cold with the snow falling on them. And they could survive out there for days. Then they could come back. And you'd know they were holy because of that weird power. And in that culture, I'm just telling you what he told me, that was the idea of holiness. It's almost like weirdness. Is that the same idea in Christianity?

Well, no, it isn't. Well, let's try and work out what it is. And the context for this is people approaching God. So, there's people approaching a holy God.

The God who, in the words of the Old Testament and New Testament, is a consuming fire. So, let's look. So, if you've got a Bible, it would be helpful for you to turn with me. And we'll look at Exodus chapter 3. So, do feel free to look in the Bible and see it for yourself. Make sure I'm not missing anything out. So, in Exodus chapter 3, Moses was tending the flock of... It's page 59, by the way. He was tending the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. Okay, we're approaching God's mountain. And there, the angel of the Lord... Now, the angel of the Lord seems very closely identified with the Lord. But the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. So, let's picture it. There's a bush in flames of fire. And I put some smoke. It doesn't say anything about smoke, but smoke does come into this a little bit later, as we will see.

[13:46] And God calls to him. Well, Moses says, I'll go over to see this strange sight, why the bush does not burn up. When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush.

Moses, Moses. The famous American preacher, Tim Keller, says there's something quite special happening when a name is repeated. It's a very personal piece of communication. And it doesn't just Moses. Moses, Moses. So, there's a personal communication to him. And God calls him. So, that's a call from God to approach. And Moses says, here I am. And then God says, oh, don't come any closer. It's interesting, isn't it? He's called and then told to stop. And the reason that he's not to come any closer, in verse 5, is take off your sandals, for the place you are standing is holy ground. So, don't come any closer, because this is holy. It's not holy because there's a bush planted on it. It's holy because God is present there in some specific and particular way. And the fact that God is present there affects the ground around it. It's a little bit like radioactivity, actually. You have a radioactive substance. It sort of affects the area around it. And God, in his holiness, says, oh, stop, stop, stop. You can't come any closer. It's dangerous to approach a holy God. Take off your sandals. You mustn't come irreverently. And then he describes who he is.

And you get this fascinating mixture of God's distance and grandeur and his interest in people.

I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. So, I'm interested in people. But Moses hides his face because he was afraid to look at God. So, there's fear. There's a come close, there's stop. There's an involvement, a fellowship, but there's a fear. And this is a wonderful combination of things, very typical of the Lord God. And he hid his face in fear. And we have a personal inviting God, but a God who is holy. And this is what we find in that little incident. Let's go a little bit further on in the Moses experience, as it were.

And go to the temple. Now, then I should have, I'm going to do a little bit about the temple and the tabernacle. So, if you're not familiar with the Bible, in the Old Testament, God would meet with his people in a tent called the tabernacle, funny name, isn't it? Or in a building, the temple.

[16:54] And it's different from churches. In Europe, you have churches all over the place in different towns and cities, cathedrals. You have many of them. But in ancient Israel, there was only one tabernacle and one temple. There was one place where you could go to meet God. And it has lots of symbolic significance. And what I want to draw to our attention this morning is the barriers.

So, there were fences and rooms and doors like this. So, it's a place to meet God. So, there is a sort of come. And then there is a don't come. The foreigners can only go into the outer courts. I'm doing this in a fairly approximate way. The people of Israel could come into the inner courts. But there was a tent.

And only the priests could go into the tent. And inside the tent, there was one cubicle space, which was the holiest, the holy of holies, where God's presence was particularly there. And the priests could only enter that once a year. And they had to come through sacrifice. It's interesting, isn't it? There's a sort of lethal quality to the holiness of God. As people approach, they can only do so, you know, the lethal meaning they would die if they came unprotected. They can only approach if somebody else dies instead. And the ancient sacrificial system, there were just cartloads of animals being slaughtered. Sheep, goats, oxen, all the animals that would be clean and associated with Israel. Family friends, as it were. The presence of sacrifice, blood, burnt up, the animal being burnt up on the altar turned into ash and smoke. So, I'll put some smoke there. [19:02] And here is another teaching thing. We learned something in the Moses and the burning bush. And here is something in the temple and in the tabernacle. The lethal reality of God's holiness and the fact that God reacts against the sin and uncleanness and contamination of his people. And it makes it dangerous to approach God without shed blood. So, we're learning a little bit about how God's holiness works.

Let's go to Isaiah chapter 6 and see something, another classic incident about God's holiness. holiness. I'll tell you the page number in one moment. It is 691, at least it's 691 in my Bible. So, we're trying to learn what holiness is about from the things that God has shown in the Bible. We've seen one of the first incidents of holiness, which is Moses and the burning bush. And we've seen something about holiness in the life of ancient Israel, the tabernacle and the temple, the holy place. And here is Isaiah in the temple. It is Isaiah chapter 6. In the year that King Isaiah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne. And the train of his robe, meaning the edges of his robe, filled the temple. So, it's not his robe fills the temple. It's the edges of his robe fill the temple. Above him were the seraphim. Seraphim is a word which sort of means burning ones. Each with six wings. With two they covered their faces. With two they covered their feet. With two they were flying. And they called to each other, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord. That's God's personal name, Yahweh. Almighty, the Lord of hosts.

[21:11] The whole earth is full of his glory. Tremendous statements. There are the seraphim. I haven't drawn all the wings and I don't really look like that, but that's a sort of indication. And they are shouting out, Holy, holy, holy.

I said that when names are repeated twice, that means something special. To emphasize something in Hebrew, you say it twice. So, when there was the eating of the fruit in the garden, surely you will die. It's dying you will die. So, that's repeated twice. Dying you will die meaning surely you will die. And it isn't just twice here, is it? It's not holy, holy. It's three times. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. Holiness cubed, if you like. Holiness to the largest possible extent is the Lord Almighty. and they talk about his glory and his splendor. At the sound of their voices, the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

[22:27] So, here is something of creation. There is a shaking of the doorposts and the thresholds shaking as creation comes into contact with the holy, holy God.

And the temple fills with smoke. So, I was right to put the smoke. Let's put some smoke in. The smoke sort of denotes God's presence but it also prevents people seeing, doesn't it? It sort of shows God's glory and gets in the way of God's glory if you can put it in those rather crude terms. So, here is the scene in the temple and Isaiah, look at the reaction on Isaiah. He doesn't just quake. He says, I'm ruined. Woe to me. I'm ruined. Now, why is he ruined? It isn't just because he's small and it isn't just because, I don't know, of his age or of his profession. He's ruined because of his moral consciousness in the presence of God. He suddenly realises with great intensity that he's a sinner.

[23:44] Woe is me. I am ruined. And he's a sinner at the particular point that he ought to excel because it's his job to speak. He's a prophet.

And he says, actually, I'm rubbish. I'm a man of unclean lips and my whole people are a people of unclean lips. And look, I've come so close to see the King, the Lord Almighty.

Do you get that point? That when people come close to a holy God, they realise their sinfulness in the light of God's holiness.

and woe is me. I'm going to get zapped, thinks Isaiah. But God provides something.

It isn't blood in this case. It's fire. But it does come from the altar where animals are killed and blood is shed. So there's some connection with the altar and this touches Isaiah and marvellously, there's the fire from the altar, he's told, your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for.

[25:06] That's pretty good news, isn't it? Wouldn't you say so? Wouldn't you find that as a Christian person, the best news of all, as you become conscious of your sin is to know that it can be taken away, your guilt can be taken away and your sin atoned for.

I mean, hallelujah. That is just brilliant, isn't it? Totally taken away. My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought, my sin, not in part but the whole, is nailed to his cross and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, oh my soul. So the Christian take on this is not that God put coals on our lips but that Jesus Christ died on the cross and that is the factor that touches us.

But I'm sort of getting ahead of myself. Here is displayed the awesomeness of God's holiness and the fact that if a holy God comes into contact with sinners unprotected without any redemptive or rescuing or intervening quality, it's ruin.

You know, on the last day when we come before his judgment throne, if we're unprotected by the blood of Jesus, it will be ruin.

[26:33] It will be ruin. But thank God for our saviour who intervenes and touches our lives with the power of his cross. Amen. This is from the Old Testament but this is the Christian God, isn't it?

This is the God whom we worship. I trust this is the God we worship. Now then, we've looked at three actually quite important incidents in the Old Testament.

So do we, have we seen enough to say what God's holiness is? Because I still haven't really said what his holiness is. We could put it this way. I think there's a yes and no but here's a yes part.

God's holiness is the quality in which he intensely and perfectly reacts powerfully in contrast with creatures. They are limited.

God is holy. They are dependent. God is independent. They are subservient. God is authoritative. The angels bow down before him. Creation shudders and trembles before him because of his holiness.

[27:46] So that sort of implies that his unlimitedness, his independence, his total authority, his supremacy is sort of wrapped up with his holiness. And it isn't just creation that reacts in terms of God's holiness.

Sinful people, God's holiness reacts out against irreverence, ingratitude. That should not have a space with it.

Injustice, God's holiness reacts against injustice. Moral failure, God's holiness reacts against moral failure. Human self-centeredness, God says, I should be center and his holiness reacts against human self-centeredness.

Uncleanness, he reacts against. unfaithfulness, untruth, cheating, stealing, cruelty, oppressing the poor, dishonesty, covetousness, all of these things of human sin which cling to us and in the presence of God we realize, woe is me, I'm undone because God is holy and I'm like this, I need a saviour.

And his holiness I think is wrapped up in the superlatively right and perfect way that he reacts in his holiness. And there's nothing to be embarrassed about in the way God does this but rather to be praised.

[29:11] Nothing to sort of say oh I wish God wasn't like that but to say it's marvellous that God is this way. So I think we can deduce that from the scriptures that we've looked at and I say have we pinned it down?

Have we got it now? Okay. And I think we haven't because I think we get to a point that you can't really pin it all down.

Here is I think this is this is going to be the theologian B.B. Warfield. Jerome kindly looked in his theological books and I looked in my theological books.

This is a good one. God's holiness. His absolute absolute and complete separation from sin and uncleanness. Not that the idea has this negative form as it lies in our minds.

There is no idea so positive as the idea of holiness. It is the very climax of positiveness. Sorry about the spelling mistakes.

[30:20] But it is hard to express this positiveness in a definite way simply because the idea is above the ideas expressed by similar words.

He is saying you know I have defined it as what God reacts against which sounds negative. That is what God doesn't like. So what doesn't God like if you put it that way?

And he says the positiveness of this idea is so strong but it is difficult to pin it down because there are words strong enough and positiveness to explain it.

He says is it sinlessness? Well it is but it is more than that. Is it righteousness? Yes it is but it is more than that. Is it God's integrity? Yes it is but it is more than that.

Is it God's purity? Yes it is but it is more than that. And now B.B. Warfield this massive brain I love his writings he says but we fall back on negatives because language has no positive word which can reach to the unscalable heights of this one highest word holiness.

[31:29] I think that's rather grand actually. Do you get that thought? Holiness is so positive that of all the things we say none of them is big enough strong enough wide enough deep enough to capture everything that holiness is.

I leave that thought with you. I think it's a tremendous thought myself. So we looked at the relevance of holiness and I've tried to get through the roots of holiness to get an idea of what God's holiness is.

And now number three the rollout of holiness where the rubber hits the road. I've got just two texts to take us to in the book of Hebrews so you can be looking for the book of Hebrews.

And so once we've got this thought of the holiness of God it makes us even more grateful and full of wonder that Jesus' ministry is to bring us not just into the outer courts of the temple and not just inside the tent of the temple inside the tabernacle but into the holy place.

And in Hebrews 10 around verse 19 this is what he says to Christian brothers and sisters listen to this Christian brothers and sisters! Therefore brothers and sisters since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain that is through his body and since we have a great priest over the house of God let us draw near to God with a sincere heart with the full assurance that faith brings having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

[33:42] He says this is the marvel of what Jesus Christ does through the sacrifice of himself or if you want to put it another way through his ministry as a priest figure or the priest figure what does he do he brings us not just near the bush the burning bush not just into the temple where Isaiah was but into the most holy place where God truly is I think that's incredible that as Christians when we pray we enter the most holy place as a congregation when we come before him and seek his presence we come into the most holy place when you say your prayers in the morning or at night in your bedroom or wherever it is that you say your prayers you are entering you are entering where the priests couldn't go entering entering the most holy place by the blood of

Jesus and you're not entering trembling and quaking and woe is me and taking your sandals off although it is a holy place we're entering with confidence that's amazing isn't it the achievement of the Lord Jesus in this we draw near to the holy God so he says let's do that let's use that privilege let's be people who are often in the presence of God we're going to sing in a little while take time to be holy speak the old version would say speak oft with thy Lord let's be people who are accessing the holy place as we pray be ashamed to let a day go by wouldn't it if we hadn't been in the holy place seeing as Jesus shed his blood so that we could be there and so that's one rubber hits the road thing and the second thing this is the picture of the which way was it unclean clean and holy and how the ancient people could go from they could be cleansed and then they could be sanctified and enter the live in the holy place as it were and so I just want to do this in brief 1 Peter 1 16 let's

look at that together 1 Peter 1 16 he's saying not just entering the holy place to commune with God and then sort of leaving it but he says live as holy people living daily in the holy place and 1 Peter 1 if you take it from verse 14 it says this is Peter speaking to

New Testament Christians as obedient children do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance but just as he who called you Moses Moses put your own name in there Roger Roger whatever your name is as he's called you he's called you just as he who called you is holy so be holy in all you do that's a huge instruction isn't it you know I think we're honest I think sometimes we don't even want to be holy prefer not to be but he says no you've been called to be holy be holy in all you do that's a fascinating thing isn't it not just some of the times be holy on Sunday be holy at work be holy in the study be holy as a son or daughter be holy as a mum or dad be holy as a husband or wife be holy all the days of the week be holy in all that you do because it is written be holy because I am holy that's what I put up on the screen I think there's a lot there isn't there I think there's a lot to take away from that so just to conclude if you're somebody who's on the edge of Christian things nothing will actually make sense until you got some sense of the holy God is at the centre of it all why not ask God to show you about his holiness and how everything fits in with that Christians we are missing out hugely if we don't see our lives as under the call to be made holy in practical in our thoughts and words and deeds to be holy in all that we say and do because I love you with this one this is the will of God your holiness amen we're going to sing this old fashioned song