



# GOOD NEWS

for the unsaved WORLD!


(#165)  
Attempting to define holiness.

**A WHILE BACK, WE SUGGESTED THAT WE MIGHT WE NOT GET A 100% EXACT DEFINITION OF "HOLINESS."**

**Because of what WE are:** We, by nature, were born the opposite of holy. It is only to the extent that we are controlled by the Holy Spirit, that we can begin to understand it.

**Because of what GOD is:** There are some things about God's holiness that we will *never* fully understand – because he is the infinite God, the one who created us.

Holiness is so much unlike our natural condition, that trying to understand it is probably like a fish trying to understand what it's like to breathe air!



I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT AIR-BREATHING IS ALL ABOUT!

NOT REALLY!

**WE ALSO SAID THAT THERE WAS NO REASON TO PANIC, IF WE DON'T HAVE 100% SUCCESS!**

# DON'T PANIC

**WE CAN TRUST GOD TO GET US WHERE WE NEED TO BE!**

Part of "growing in salvation" involves growing in our understanding of salvation and the things related to it... *and learning how to apply those things to life.*

If we are "in Christ," we are moving toward that goal of 100%. *But none of us have reached it yet!* (That won't happen until we see Jesus... and he finishes the process.)

## BASIC PRINCIPLES

that can help us along the way.

- ① "Becoming holy" is a growing process.
  - ⇒ It's an ongoing pursuit – not only to get the "definition" of holiness, but even more important, to get the "life" of holiness.
- ② People may have disagreements on some technical details related to the definition of "holiness."
 

**EXAMPLE:** ⇒ Is "purity" a part of holiness, or is it a separate (but related) issue?

⇒ *If we pursue both purity and holiness, it won't matter which view we have!*

- ③ Like all words, there will be a *range* of meanings, depending on the context.
  - ⇒ When the Bible describes the *furnishings* of the temple as "holy," it may have a somewhat different significance than when it describes *people* as being "holy."
  - ⇒ Depending on the context, the *opposite* of "holy" may be something sinful (such as sinful conduct); or it may refer to something that is just "ordinary" (such as the bread in the temple vs. the bread that people would normally eat).
- ④ The difference between holiness in the Old and New Testaments is one of *focus*, not differences in *definition*.
  - ⇒ The Greek word didn't have much significance until the Old Testament was translated into Greek. The Old Testament word for "holiness" gave the Greek word its significance!

④ continued... →

[④ differences in focus – continued]

**The Old Covenant Law of Moses** had a greater focus on the *physical symbolism* that represented spiritual realities. The spiritual realities were necessary (and available), but were *not* a part of the covenant itself.

**The New Covenant** focuses mainly on the *spiritual realities*. They are embedded within the covenant. Like under the Old Covenant, physical symbolism (when mentioned) is meant to teach about those spiritual realities.

The Old Covenant included *unsaved* people who did not have changed *hearts*. Those who paid attention to the *meaning* of the physical symbolism, would have known what they needed to do.

**Example:** God used the "cutting off" of circumcision to teach the need for us to be "cut off" from our sinful natures.

Therefore, **circumcise your hearts** and don't be stiff-necked any longer.  
Deuteronomy 10:16 (CSB)

⑤ How should we proceed?

- ⇒ We should use the "Basic Bible Study" method – which we explained in detail in the past (= summarized on the next page).
- ⇒ We can find out what other people have said about holiness... but remember that they are *secondary* sources. (We still need to refer back to the Bible – as Acts 17:11 teaches.)

When considering what others say, we need to compare it to what the Bible says:

- Look for passages that agree with what they say.
- Look for passages that disagree with them.
- Look for passages that say something different (= what they may have omitted).
- Take note of things they say that *cannot* be supported by Scripture (= what they may have added).

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A BASIC METHOD FOR UNDERSTANDING SCRIPTURE.

⇒ This is a basic and valuable starting point for studying the Bible.

We need to pay attention to:

- ① The words and their meanings.
- ② How those words connect.
- ③ The context of the passage.
- ④ What other passages say.



⇒ We are going to summarize our observations about what holiness is, since the actual study would take much longer.

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① SEPARATION FROM SOMETHING ELSE.

- The Hebrew word is part of a word group that refers to "separation" or "being set apart." In many passages, this seems to be connected with "moral purity."

HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES

– people or things that are (or should be) "separate" in some way. Many of them *do* have a connection to moral purity or perfection.

✓ God, as Creator, is separate from all creation.

This is what the Lord says—the **Holy** One of Israel, and its Maker: ...  
It is I who made the earth and created mankind on it. My own hands stretched out the heavens; I marshaled their starry hosts.  
Isaiah 45:11a, 12 (NIV)

This is obviously an aspect of holiness that we do not (and cannot) have!

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✓ God's people are to be separate from the world's influences.

For we are the temple of the living God. As God said:

"I will live in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

Therefore, come out from among unbelievers, and **separate** yourselves from them, says the LORD.

Don't touch their filthy things, and I will welcome you. And I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty."

**PROMISES** {

**OBLIGATION** {

**PROMISES** {

**HOW WE DO IT:** { *Because we have these promises*, dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that can defile our body or spirit. And let us **work toward complete holiness** because we fear God.  
2 Corinthians 6:16b-7:1 (NLT) [Quotes from: Leviticus 26:12; 2 Samuel 7:14; Isaiah 52:11; Ezekiel 20:34 (Greek version); 37:27.]

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✓ God's people are to be holy because God is holy.

I am the Lord your God; **consecrate** yourselves and be **holy**, because I am **holy**.  
Leviticus 11:44a (NIV)

"Consecrate" is the verb form: "set yourselves apart" or "be holy."

This includes avoiding sin (= "separating" from it).

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is **holy**, so be **holy** in all you do; for it is written: "Be **holy**, because I am **holy**."  
1 Peter 1:14-16 (NIV)

✓ At creation, God made one day "separate" from the rest. (Separate in a special way.)

God blessed the seventh day and declared it **holy**, for on it he rested from all his work of creation.  
Genesis 2:3 (CSB)

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✓ Under the Old Covenant, this included making a distinction/separation between ...

- **Holy vs. common things** (sacred vs. ordinary) → You must distinguish between the **holy** and the common, and the clean and the unclean, ...  
Leviticus 10:10 (CSB)
- **Ceremonially clean vs. unclean.** → I have set these [various animals] apart as unclean for you. You are to be **holy** to me because I, the LORD, am **holy**, and I have set you apart from the nations to be mine.  
Leviticus 20:25b-26 (CSB)

✓ Priests were selected to work with "most holy" things, and to make sure they were kept for holy use.

Aaron, along with his descendants, was set apart forever to **consecrate** the **most holy** things, ...  
1 Chronicles 23:13b (CSB)

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**IS THIS DEFINITION ADEQUATE?**

- Historically, this is probably the most common definition. But it doesn't necessarily fit every use of the word.
- Also, there are other words that can be translated as "set apart," which do not imply holiness. (This may suggest there is *more* to the definition than merely the idea of being "set apart.")
- As far as holiness and purity are concerned, it is more likely that are *separate* (though closely related) concepts.

We know that *both* holiness and purity are necessary parts of godliness.

So if we pursue *both*, it won't matter if we consider them to be *two* separate issues, or two parts of *one* issue!

**WE WILL LOOK AT SOME SUGGESTIONS THAT HAVE BEEN MADE TO IMPROVE THIS DEFINITION... →**

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**② A DEFINITION INFLUENCED BY A FOCUS ON GOD, WHO IS TOTALLY DIFFERENT FROM CREATION.**

(Here, we are focusing on God as *Creator*, not on his self-revelation as Jesus Christ.)

- The uncreated God is totally unlike creation. He cannot be fully comprehended. There is mystery and awe...
- Everything about him is holy... and we are not. There is *danger* in approaching him – *if we can*, without instantly dying.

✓ **As Creator, God is "beyond" creation.**

The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you.  
1 Kings 8:27b (NIV)

[When referring to this issue, people often describe God as being "transcendent" or "wholly other" – emphasizing the difference.]

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✓ **We cannot comprehend this Creator God.**

"Can you fathom the mysteries of God?  
Can you probe the limits of the Almighty?  
They are higher than the heavens above—what can you do?  
They are deeper than the depths below—what can you know?  
Their measure is longer than the earth  
and wider than the sea."  
Job 11:7-9 (NIV)

"Tell us what we should say to him;  
we cannot draw up our case because of our darkness.  
Should he be told that I want to speak?  
Would anyone ask to be swallowed up?  
Job 37:19-20 (NIV)

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✓ **Any attempt to approach God, except on his terms, will be fatal.**

**People downplay the seriousness of their sin and their sinful nature.**


We *cannot* approach the holy God, unless we follow his *precise* instructions. We might not understand the reasons for them (because of our spiritual darkness), but his instructions are the *only* way we can survive.

- Nadab and Abihu compromised God's instructions, and inadvertently showed us this.

**SCENE 1:**

Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu each took his own firepan, put fire in it, placed incense on it, and presented unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them to do.  
Leviticus 10:1 (CSB)

**IT WON'T HURT ANYONE IF WE CHANGE THINGS A LITTLE! IT'S "JUST A RITUAL"!**



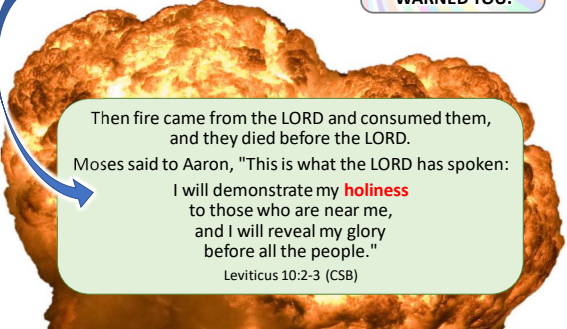
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**SCENE 2:**

Note that the issue involved *God's holiness*. It wasn't "just a ritual."

**YES, IT DOES HURT. THAT'S WHY I WARNED YOU.**

Then fire came from the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.  
Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD has spoken: I will demonstrate my *holiness* to those who are near me, and I will reveal my glory before all the people."  
Leviticus 10:2-3 (CSB)



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Though, today, we have access to God *through Christ*, **God has not changed**. The New Testament says:

It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. ...  
For our God is indeed a devouring fire.  
Heb 10:31; 12:29 (NET)

- The people at Corinth learned this fact, when they sinned in the way they partook of the Lord's Table.

That is why many of you are weak and sick, and quite a few are dead.  
But if we examined ourselves, we would not be judged.  
1 Corinthians 11:30-31 (NET)

**Grace does not change God's holy nature.**  
★ **Rather, it covers our sin, and leads us toward the holiness we need.** ★  
★ **And we don't deserve it.** ★

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**EVALUATION: THIS DEFINITION HAS LIMITED (BUT IMPORTANT) VALUE.**

**It's difficult to apply this to most passages about holiness.**

- It is **only one small part of the whole issue.**
  - Those passages about God being "beyond our comprehension" and "unapproachable" are real. Those passages about "fearing God" are real.
  - But so are the passages about God's mercy and his provision of a way into his presence.
- Yet it does tell us about the seriousness of approaching God.
  - The only way we can approach God without being destroyed is because Jesus experienced the "fireball" we deserve.
  - When we defy God's grace, and "should have" been destroyed (but wasn't), it's because his grace is delaying what we deserve, giving us an opportunity to repent! (It may also mean that the church has become so worldly that God's presence is hardly there.)

**③ HOLINESS, AS INCLUDING EVERYTHING ABOUT GOD?**

- Scripture often describes God's "name" as holy – and we must NOT profane or defile it by what we do or say. We are *not* to tarnish his reputation by *claiming* to be his people ... and then violating his character!

Do not profane my **holy** name, for I must be acknowledged as **holy** by the Israelites. I am the Lord, who made you **holy** ...  
Leviticus 22:32 (NIV)

- In Scripture, one's "name" often represents all that a person is. So since his *name* is "holy," does that mean we should define *all* his characteristics as merely different expressions of "holiness"?
- It's probably more accurate to say that holiness is directly related to all that God is, and is the defining context in which all his other characteristics exist – i.e., they are separate, but related.

**④ HOLINESS AS ANYTHING THAT BELONGS TO GOD, OR IS DEVOTED TO HIM.**

- In many passages, this concept may fit best. Things may "belong" to God in different ways. It could apply to both people and things that are described as being "consecrated" (given to the Lord), "sanctified," or "devoted to him."
- When it involves people and God, a covenantal relationship exists – a *belonging* of the one to the other.

"I will live in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people."  
2 Corinthians 6:16b (NLT); also v. 18.

Because we have these promises, dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that can defile our body or spirit. And let us **work toward complete holiness** because we fear God.  
2 Corinthians 7:1 (NLT)

Such a relationship with God would *result* in the pursuit of moral purity and separation from sin.

**⑤ THE INFLUENCE OF CONTEXT.**

- Because context influences a word's meaning, different passages will emphasize different aspects or dimensions of holiness. These all work together. They *complement* each other, rather than *contradicting* or *competing*.

**EXAMPLES:**

- Holiness is an obligation we must meet. At the same time, it is a desire that God's people have, and the goal that they pursue.
- In God's eyes, his people are seen as though they have *already* reached that goal. (We could say that, in Christ, our "position" is one of being holy, whereas our "practice" is one of becoming holy.)

**⑥ THE NEED FOR APPLICATION.**

An ability to "define" holiness is not enough. Holiness must characterize our lives – our values and the way we live.

**Your MISSION:**

The various concepts we've looked at can help us to understand holiness...

Being set apart, devoted to the only uncreated God, in a special covenantal relationship with him, with the goal of being like him in moral purity, ...

**BUT WE WILL NEVER REALLY UNDERSTAND IT UNTIL WE EAGERLY PURSUE IT!**

**Make this your lifelong mission!**

PERHAPS WE CAN START WITH THIS ...

AND FINE-TUNE IT AS WE BETTER UNDERSTAND IT.

**Credits**

SCRIPTURE

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Some of the definition categories are influenced by (but not copied from): The Lexham Bible Dictionary [Lyons, M.C. (2016) "Holiness," The Lexham Bible Dictionary, Edited by J.D. Barry et al. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press].

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