

Well, good morning; how are we? Good, good! I want to give a quick shout-out to my people joining us in our online community! I'm so glad you're joining us in worship and studying God's Word from wherever and whenever you're at. I'm appreciative of your heart's posture to join us in our online community though you can't be here physically. So, praise God we have this ability. Well, if I haven't been able to meet you yet, my name is Doug; I'm one of the Pastors here, and I would love to connect with you on the patio after we worship together. So, be sure to come and say hi.

We're continuing in our current series, "What's God like?" Where we are going through some of the attributes of God. In this process, we're not only marveling at and responding in worship to His attributes, but we're also looking at how the characteristics of God impact you and me and how we live out the life of a follower of Jesus. Today, we're going to dive into the "Holiness and Righteousness of God."

Let's start by taking a look at the holiness of God and really see if we can grasp the significance of this. In our current culture, when we think of the word "holy" we tend to think, "morally right." We'll use language like, "to be holy is to be set apart," and when we say this we're typically speaking in a moral sense. And when we refer to God as "holy" we tend to use it in the same way, in the moral view. God is so perfect, so pure, He is set apart from evil, so He is morally right. And there definitely is an aspect of that. But there's actually a little more to the holiness of God that I don't want us to lose sight of.

So, we can really think of holiness in two aspects. First, Holiness refers to the uniqueness of God. That is, God is completely and totally separate from all of creation. This is the "set a part" piece. Not just morally, but uniquely as Creator of the created. God is the One who created all that

exists in the universe. He is the only Being *capable* of creating all that exists, the only Being that can create a world full of wonder and life. So, His divine nature, His uniqueness from all that exists, is what makes Him separate or set apart from all that is created. And so, in this way, God is totally unique, separate from all creation. His uniqueness = holiness.

We see this in Exodus 15:11, with Moses singing a song declaring of God, "Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders."

A great way to look at this holiness or this set-apartness of God is to use the sun as a metaphor. Now, the sun is unique in our solar system, and it's really powerful, and it's the source of life on this beautiful planet. So, you could say that the sun is set apart. You could say that it is unique in our solar system, and you could say that it is holy. You could even take the metaphor a little bit further and say that the area around the sun is holy or set apart. As you get closer to the Sun, the more intense it becomes. That very power and goodness that generates life is also very dangerous. If you get too close to the sun, it will annihilate you. You are not unique in the same way that the sun is. In the same way, there's this reality that if you're impure, God's presence is dangerous to you. And this is like the sun; it's not that the sun is bad, no, it's really good, just as God's presence, His holiness isn't bad, it's really good.

The first time we see this is with Moses and the burning bush in Exodus 3:5 where God tells Moses, "'Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' ⁶ And he said, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God." God says, "Don't come any closer; it's intense!"

Again, it's not that the sun is bad, no it's good...it's just that the closer you get to the sun the more intense it is and forces you to turn your head...so you stop and don't get any closer. Are you with me?

Likewise, it's the same with the temple. If you remember, God commanded the people to build Him "a sanctuary, that He may dwell in their midst." This starts as the Tabernacle in Exodus 25, but eventually, as history unfolds, it becomes a large temple. This temple was the main spot where God's presence was located. Inside this temple was the "most holy place." So as the people of God, His uniqueness and His holiness were present around you. Just as we experience the radiation of the sun, so the people of God would experience His presence, but we're not talking about physical heat. We're talking about a perfect Being who, by His very nature of unique perfection, annihilates what is not pure. So, there's a problem. How do impure people access a pure, holy God?

Now, this is interesting. Because we're not only talking now about moral purity. We're talking about what would be ritualistic purity. Here's what I mean by that. When I say ritualistically pure, it doesn't necessarily equate to sinfulness, remember, we're not talking "morality" in this sense of "holiness." Instead, with ritualistic purity we ask, "what has that person come in contact with or done that could cause them to be impure, or unclean?" We see this throughout the Old Testament, where a person touches a dead body or blood or has a disease, and they are no longer "clean," but instead, they're called unclean. This would be ritualistically impure. An impure or unclean person cannot enter the presence of a pure, holy God who is set apart from all that is unclean. When the person touches, or does something that causes them to be unclean that impurity of that thing is transferred onto the person which is what causes their impurity, or their "unholiness."

Because of this, God gave the people very detailed instructions about what is clean and unclean and how to become pure after being defiled. We find this in the book of Leviticus.

Now, I'd like to pause for a moment. Because this is one of those moments for me when we ought to marvel at the attributes of God, because we recognize something "more." Something under the surface.

Here's what I mean. As we talk about the purity of God, the holiness of God, and we talk about the impurity or the uncleanness of man, and we talk about the Levitical law that was in place to make the people aware of what causes them to be unclean and what they can do to become clean and pure through rituals. It is so important for us to see that these are not punishments for the people. These are not burdens. These are not meant to "take" from their lives. I think people see it that way. "Ugh, all these rules."

No! These are birthed out of the reality of the greatness of God and His loving desire to want to be in a relationship with us. So, God, in His kindness and in His mercy, has instructed the people of Israel how to draw near to Him without being annihilated. Is this not gentle and compassionate and kind of Him? Shouldn't we be in awe of the fact that God did not abandon His creation to go off to some far-away place in the universe, but instead, said I want to be with you, so build Me a sanctuary, and though you are an impure, unholy, unrighteous people, I will create a way for you to be in my presence! Ahhh! That is an awesome God worthy of our devotion and worship just from a posture of gratitude!

So, we see that the holiness of God is not merely about morality but also His divine uniqueness that puts Him on a whole other level, set apart, separated from us not by His desire but by the reality of His majestic, wondrous greatness!

While He is set apart because of His uniqueness, God is also set apart because of His perfection. God is untouched or unstained by evil. Habakkuk declares, "¹³Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing (Habakkuk 1:13)." Or in James, we read, **13** "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no one (James 1:13)." Again, God is completely unique, He is completely perfect. He is completely Holy in every sense of the meaning. Job says it this way, ¹² "It

is unthinkable that God would do wrong, that the Almighty would pervert justice (Job 34:12)."

And so His holiness, perfection, and His moral purity results in another one of His attributes, His righteousness. God's moral purity is His righteousness. Theologian Wayne Grudem says this: "God's righteousness means that God always acts in accordance with what is right and is Himself the final standard of what is right (Grudem, 204)." Because of this, Theologian Millard Erickson explains that "the righteousness of God means that the law of God, being a true expression of His nature, is as perfect as He is (Erickson, 313)."

The Psalmist describes the righteousness of God this way when he declares,

"⁷ The law of the LORD is perfect,
refreshing the soul.
The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.
⁸ The precepts of the LORD are right,
giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the LORD are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.
⁹ The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever.
The decrees of the LORD are firm,
and all of them are righteous.
¹⁰ They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the honeycomb."

AH! Do you see it? These decrees, precepts, the law of the Lord is not burdensome but life giving! In other words, God commands only what is

right, and what will have a positive effect on the believer who obeys. Because God is righteous, His actions align with the law that He has established. This is significant because we know that God is perfect, He is set apart, He only acts righteously and according to the law that He Himself has established so you and I can fully and confidently trust Him. We can trust His plans. We can trust that His way and how He calls us to live, though it may be counter-cultural, is the right and only good way to live. Because God is righteous, we can trust Him. The Lord Himself says, "I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for in these I delight (Jeremiah 9:24)."

Now, here's the problem that we find ourselves in. We are not right. We are not good. In fact, in Isaiah, we see that "all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind, our sins sweep us away (Isaiah 64:6)." Paul has much to say on this as well when he quotes the Old Testament in Romans 3 saying, There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. ¹²All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. ¹³Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit (Romans 3:10-13)."

You see, we have a very significant problem. We are completely and totally depraved. We are wicked and evil to the core and are incapable of being righteous on our own. Once more, we are faced with the reality that God is set apart because He *is* righteous.

So, suffice it to say that God is holy and righteous, which is why there is an unending chorus of angels crying out at His throne, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY, IS THE LORD ALMIGHTY WHO WAS AND IS AND IS TO COME! They are so overwhelmed with this reality that they can only cry out in response to His perfect, His uniqueness.

So, what does this mean for you and me? Well, in short, God's holiness provides a pattern for His people to imitate. God commands to Moses to speak to the people and say, "Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy (Leviticus 19:2)." Friends, there is an expectation that the people of God would be a holy people. A people set apart like He is set apart. That we would be pure and right. He made this clear when He called His people out of Egypt in Exodus 19:4-6. He said, "You will be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:4-6). In other words, stay with me here, I'm removing you from Egypt, a life of evil and sin and setting you up to be a people wholly devoted to Me...separated from Egypt, separated from the other nations...you will be a nation set apart!

But we're still in a hard place because there's a reality that we are impure and unholy. God is fully aware that the Levitical law will not last and He has another plan. Are we ready. Here we go.

Let's talk about Isaiah. Isaiah was a prophet who had an incredible experience. In Isaiah 6, we see that Isaiah is in the presence of God, and He is utterly terrified. He knows the rules, and he knows he must be pure, so he's panicking because he knows he should be destroyed. But instead, a Seraphim approached him and pressed a lump of hot coal onto his lips, and seared them. Now check this out, the Seraphim says, "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for (Isaiah 6:7)."

Remember what we talked about earlier, the people of Israel, when they touch something impure, that impurity is transferred to them. But, now there's this new idea that you have this very pure holy object, the coal, that touches Isaiah's lips and transfers its purity onto Him. This is new. And this is setting up something that God will be doing in the future.

Another interesting vision happens with Ezekiel in Ezekiel 47. He's standing at the temple, and he sees water coming out from underneath the temple. It turns into a stream that eventually turns into a river that starts flowing through the desert, which leaves a trail of green trees

behind it, then it flows into the dead sea and makes everything flourish and alive. This is fascinating because before, we saw that the people became pure before they went into the temple, yet, now the holiness, the purity of God, is coming out of the temple, making things pure and giving life in a dead place and in the Dead Sea.

Friends, none of this is a coincidence. These visions are not side stories that are unrelated to the work of God. Instead, God reveals through the entirety of Scripture from the earliest pages to the last that He is at work and this work that He is doing allows you and I to be close to Him, to be in His presence.

Church, stay with me. Just as you and I are depraved, wicked, incapable of good, and totally unclean, like Isaiah who was touched by that which was pure and holy so Jesus stepped off of His throne and humbled Himself, put on flesh, and then went amongst the people into their presence. And what did He do? What did Jesus do? He went around, and by His touch he healed the blind man, and by His touch, He made the mute speak, and by His touch, He stopped a woman who was bleeding! Friends. Their impurity did not transfer to Jesus because Jesus far too great and instead, the pureness and the holiness Of Jesus transferred over to them and actually heals their body. Friends Jesus was the embodiment of God's own holiness. In Colossians 2 we read, ⁹"For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority (Colossians 2:9)."

But it only gets better. See, Jesus imputes, Jesus places on us His righteousness. His purity, He sanctifies us, He sets us apart! He makes us holy and then He flips the script and declares that we are now the temple! And we become indwelt by the Holy Spirit! Stay with me! Just as in Ezekiel's vision of the water flowing out of the temple, so now the holiness of God, through them, His presence would go out into the world and bring life and healing and hope! This is why Jesus describes His

followers in John 7:38 as having streams of living water flowing out of them.

Friends, Jesus fills the gap between this perfect, holy, righteous God and us broken, unholy, sinful people. The only way this could happen is through the sacrifice of Jesus Himself. Through His death He imparts onto us His righteousness, His holiness. Friends, Jesus paid the price of our wickedness because He knew we could never do it any other way. And so we are now able to be in relationship, to be in the presence of God because of Jesus' payment for our wickedness and because He declares that we are now righteous and holy.

So, we live our lives as living water flowing into the people around us bringing the presence of God into their lives, we do this by living set apart! We do this by living pure lives. We reject the sin of the world, we don't value what the world values, we pursue on that which God pursues.

As He is holy so we are holy!