

Behold Our God
Session 3: The Holiness of God
(Isaiah 6:1-8; Hebrews 12:14)

Introduction:

There are certain Bible verses that have made a profound impact on my life over the years. Hebrews 12:14 is one such verse.

It is a verse of Scripture that has always caught my attention and quite frankly, prior to my salvation, it terrified me.

What does Hebrews 12:14 say?

Hebrews 12:14: “14 Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.”

It's the second part of the verse that really terrified me: strive for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

In other words, no holiness means no eternal life.

As a college freshman who was enslaved to sin, this was a troubling truth; the truth that holiness is necessary to see the Lord. It certainly led me to question if I was saved.

God makes clear in His Word that He expects His People to be holy. From the Old Testament to the New, God's standard remained constant for His Covenant People: He expects and demands their holiness. His expectation for you and for me hasn't changed.

Why is this the case?

1 Peter 1:14-16: 14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, 15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

“You shall be holy, for I am holy.” (Peter quotes Lev. 11:44)

God gives Himself and His own holiness as the reason why His people are to be holy.

In other words, the reason why you and I should strive for holiness is because God is holy.

By the way, what does this teach us about God's holiness? Is it a communicable or an incommunicable attribute?

It appears to be a communicable attribute, one that is shared by God and His people, though once again, He is infinite in it, while we are finite.

So it appears that the key to our own holiness is the holiness of God. If we're going to be holy, we need to behold our holy God. This is exactly what we're going to do tonight.

Here's our roadmap for the evening.

First, we're going to define holiness and explain what it means for God to be holy.

Then, we'll see where this is taught in Scripture. Unlike last week, when we read a multitude of passages that teach that God is infinite, we will only study one passage tonight. I want you to experience the tsunami wave of Isaiah 6.

After we do this, we'll finish up our time together by answering the "so what" question. What difference does God's attribute of holiness make in our lives? I believe Isaiah 6 will help us answer this question as well.

Take Home Truth: God is holy.

I. What does it mean for God to be holy?

A. The Meaning of Holy

1. Dictionary Definition of "Holy"

a) Holy: "related to a religion or a god: very religious or pure"¹

(i) I think this definition is representative of what most people think the word "holy" means.

(a) They equate "holiness" with "religious"

(ii) I don't think this captures the meaning of the word "holy" as used in the Bible.

2. Bible Definition of "Holy"

a) RC Sproul, in his classic book, *The Holiness of God*, defines the word "holy" simply as "separate".²

(i) Or as Chip Ingram suggests, holy means "to be different, distinct, or unique".³

(ii) I think these simple definitions do a better job of capturing the meaning of the word "holy" as used in the Bible.

b) There are two primary words that are used in the original languages of the Bible for "holy".

¹ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/holy>

² RC Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, 36.

³ Chip Ingram, *The Real God*, 121.

- (i) In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word “qodesh” (קֹדֶשׁ)⁴
- (ii) In the New Testament, the Greek word “hagios” (ἅγιος)⁵
 - (a) Both of these words carry the idea of being “separate” or “set apart”.

B. God is Holy

1. So when the Bible says that God is holy, it means that He is separate or set apart.
2. As Chip Ingram writes, “When applied to God, holiness is that which divides him from everyone and everything else. It is the quality of ‘awesome mystery’ in God’s being, his essential nature and character that make him different, distinct, and unique from any other thing or person in the universe.”⁶
3. Or as RC Sproul puts it, God’s holiness “points to the infinite distance that separates Him from every creature.”⁷
4. This is a profound, foundational attribute, just like the infinitude of God.
 - a) Listen to what Tozer has to say about God’s holiness:
 - (i) “Holy is the way God is. To be holy He does not conform to a standard. He is that standard. He is absolutely holy with an infinite, incomprehensible fullness of purity that is incapable of being other than it is. Because He is holy, His attributes are holy; that is, whatever we think of as belonging to God must be thought of as holy.”⁸
 - (a) So not only is God infinite in all of his attributes; all of His attributes are holy as well.
 - (i) Remember, God’s infinitude taught us that in all that He is, God is without limit.
 - (ii) What we’ll see tonight as we study God’s holiness is that in all that He is, that is, in all of His attributes, God is perfect.

Application:

So what is the holiness of God? It is a communicable attribute that teaches us that God is set apart from all others. He is set apart from all others because He is perfect in all that He is and in all that He does. There is no one like Him, and there’s none besides Him.

⁴ <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/6944.htm>

⁵ <https://biblehub.com/greek/40.htm>

⁶ Chip Ingram, *The Real God*, 121-122.

⁷ RC Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, 36.

⁸ AW Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 105-106.

Does this make sense? Any questions so far?

Now that we have established the meaning of the word “holy” and we have explained what it means for God to be holy, we will address the most important question: “Where is this taught in the Bible?”

I could, just like last week, hit you with another tsunami wave of a multitude of passages that teach this truth. However, tonight, we’ll dive into just one passage: Isaiah 6:1-8. We’ll use this passage to answer our two final questions:

- 1) Where does the Bible teach that God is holy? (vv. 1-4)**
- 2) What difference does God’s holiness make in our lives? (vv. 5-8)**

II. Where does the Bible teach that God is holy? (Isaiah 6:1-4)

“In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called to another and said:

**“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!”**

⁴ And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.

A. Isaiah’s Encounter with Our Holy God (vv. 1-4)

1. Context (v. 1)

“In the year King Uzziah died”

- a. An Uncertain Time (v. 1)**
 - i. Possibly 739 B.C.**
 - ii. King Uzziah was King of Judah for 52 years. He became king at 16. (Read about Uzziah in 2 Kings 15:1-7 [Azariah]; 2 Chronicles 26)**
 - iii. He was a great king because he was a godly king. However, he didn’t finish well.**
 - iv. During his reign, Judah experienced economic prosperity and peace.**
 - v. When Uzziah died, Judah declined and Assyria grew in power.**
 - vi. This was a time of great political and economic uncertainty. Many were worried.**
- b. A Time of Moral Impurity (Isaiah 5)**
 - i. God promises judgment upon His chosen people for the following sins:**
 - a. Materialism (vv. 8-10): They love their stuff. Materialistic**

- b. Hedonism (vv. 11-12, 22): The pursuit of sinful pleasure
- c. Lack the Knowledge of God (v. 13)
- d. Pride (v. 15, 21): They are wise in their own eyes
- e. Falsehood (v. 18)
- f. Injustice (v. 23): “acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of his right!”
- g. Summary Statement (v. 20): “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!”

2. Isaiah Beholds the Holy One in His Glory (v. 1)

“I saw the Lord (Adonai) sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple.”

- a. In John 12:41, the Apostle John tells us that the Lord that Isaiah sees here is none other than Jesus Christ.
- b. The Lord’s Glorious Title: Adonai (“Sovereign One”)
 - i. “Jesus is the supreme Sovereign of heaven and earth.” (RC Sproul)
 - ii. The NT equivalent of “Adonai” is “Kurios”.
 - a. Phil. 2:10-11: “so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”
- c. The Lord’s Glorious Position: “sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up”
 - i. The King of kings is seated upon the Throne of thrones. The higher the throne, the greater the authority and superiority of the ruler.
- d. The Lord’s Glorious Clothing: “the train of his robe filled the temple.”
 - i. The robe was the clothing (garment) of a king. The longer the train of the robe, the more glorious the robe. The enormity of the train of the Lord’s robe points to His authority and superiority.

3. Isaiah Sees a Glorious Court (v. 2)

² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

- a. The Lord’s court is composed of Seraphim.
 - i. Seraphim: “Burning Ones”
 - ii. They had six wings, four of which were not used for flying.

- iii. Two wings covered the angels' faces and two wings covered the angels' feet as a sign of humility and a confession of unworthiness to be in the glorious presence of the Lord.

4. Isaiah Hears a Glorious Declaration (v. 3)

³And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

- a. Together, the angels cry out an incredible declaration of what the Lord is: He is holy, holy, holy.
 - i. Qadosh: "the entirety of divine perfection, which separates God from His creation." (Edward J. Young, 242)
 - a. So they cry out three times in a row: "He is entirely perfect! He is entirely perfect! He is entirely perfect!"
 - ii. The Seraphim repeat "Qadosh!" three times for emphasis.
 - a. They are taking this to the superlative degree
 - b. They are saying that God is the ultimate Holy One.
 - c. He is set apart in His divine perfection.
 - iii. The angels declare of God three times that in all that He is, He is perfect and in all of His ways, He is perfect.
 - a. Once again, God's holiness speaks to His perfection.
 - iv. He is entirely perfect in...
 - a. Power
 - b. Knowledge
 - c. Wisdom
 - d. Truth
 - e. Love
 - v. He is...
 - a. Perfectly sovereign
 - b. Perfectly gracious
 - c. Perfectly merciful
 - d. Perfectly kind
 - e. Perfectly patient
 - f. Perfectly just
 - g. Perfectly faithful
 - h. Perfectly good
 - i. Perfectly pure
 - vi. He is totally perfect
- b. Then the angels go on to declare, "The whole earth is full of His glory."

- i. **Glory: the public display of God’s majesty and attributes**
- ii. **The angels make clear that the earth is full of His glory.**
 - a. **Romans 1:20: “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”**
 - b. **Psalm 19:1: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.”**

5. Isaiah Witnesses a Glorious Response (v. 4)

⁴And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.

- a. **In response to the Seraphim’s praise, the temple shook and was filled with smoke.**
 - i. **In the OT, smoke was a manifestation of the glorious presence of God.**
 - a. **When God was present at Mount Sinai, the mountain was “wrapped” in smoke (Exod. 19:18).**
 - b. **When Moses would meet with God at the Tent of Meeting, a pillar of cloud would stand at the entrance of the tent (Exod. 33:10-11)**

Application:

Wow! What a privilege for Isaiah to behold our holy God. His encounter with God changed Him forever! How did it change Him? How does God’s holiness change you?

III. What difference does God’s holiness make in our lives? (Isaiah 6:5-8)

A. Beholding God’s Holiness exposes our sin (v. 5)

⁵And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

1. Isaiah recognizes he has a problem

“Woe is me!”

- a) **“Woe is me!”: Isaiah is saying, “I am a man doomed to die.”**
- b) **Isaiah recognizes the consequence of his sin is death!**
- c) **Isaiah realizes his sin separates him from God.**

2. Isaiah makes a personal confession

“for I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips,”

- a) **Isaiah confesses that he is lost and it shows in the way he talks.**

- b) He says he is a man of unclean lips. How has he had unclean lips?
 - (i) Using the Lord's name in vain (Exod. 20:7 [The Third Commandment])
 - (ii) Profanity
 - (iii) Lying
 - (iv) Gossip
 - (v) Hateful Speech

3. Isaiah Makes a Confession on Behalf of His People:

“and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips;”

- a) How did Isaiah come to this realization? “for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”
- b) God's holiness exposes his sinfulness and the gravity of his sinfulness.

Illustration: Isaiah 59:1-2: “Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; 2 but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.”

After beholding God in His holiness, Isaiah realized that he had no greater problem than his own sinfulness.

When you behold God, in His perfect purity, it will lead you to recognize your impurity, and its “weightiness”. Has there ever been a time in your life when you recognized the horror of your own sinfulness and rebellion against God?

- 1) No minimizing sin
- 2) No tolerating sin
- 3) No sweeping it under the rug
- 4) No making excuses

Beholding God's holiness will reveal to you your greatest problem, which is your sin, and the need for something to be done about it.

B. Beholding God's Holiness points us to our need for forgiveness in Jesus Christ (vv. 6-7)

⁶Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”

- 1. The Means of Forgiveness: An offering has been made
 - a) The angel took one of the burning stones on which incense was burned and took it and touched Isaiah's lips.
 - b) In OT, sins were dealt with through the sacrificial system.
- 2. The Results of this Sacrifice (Two amazing things take place)
 - a) Expiation: “your guilt is taken away”

- (i) “In biblical terms, it has to do with taking away guilt through the payment of a penalty or the offering of an atonement.” (RC Sproul)⁹
- b) Propitiation: “and your sin atoned for”
 - (i) “By contrast, *propitiation* has to do with the object of the expiation. The prefix *pro* means ‘for’ so propitiation brings about a change in God’s attitude, so that He moves from being at enmity with us to being for us. Through the process of propitiation, we are restored into fellowship and favor with Him.” (R.C. Sproul)¹⁰

Application: How can this take place in your life? Trust in Jesus!

Why? Because Jesus is Our Once and for all Sacrifice

1 Peter 3:18: “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.”

Application: Has your sin been dealt with? Have you trusted in Jesus as your Savior and Lord?

C. Beholding God’s Holiness results in our personal holiness (aka obedience) (v. 8)

⁸ And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.”

- 1. A call to serve is issued: “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”**
- 2. Isaiah responds with a willing heart to serve: “Here I am! Send me.”**

Conclusion:

Now that Isaiah’s sin had been dealt with, he was able to strive for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

He committed himself to the mission of God. God’s mission for him was a hard one. Later on, read the remainder of Isaiah 6; God gives Isaiah a message to declare and it isn’t an easy message. But Isaiah was willing to do whatever the Lord asked Him because He knew that there is none like our God.

The God who is perfect in all of His ways and is perfect in all that He is, exposed Isaiah’s sin, forgave Isaiah of his sin, and now invited Isaiah to serve Him all the rest of his days.

⁹ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/two-important-words-good-friday-expiation-and-propitiation>

¹⁰ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/two-important-words-good-friday-expiation-and-propitiation>

The reality is, that for those of us who are in Christ, these things are true of us as well. God revealed to us our sin and He has forgiven us of our sin, in Jesus Christ. Now He has given us a mission, the Great Commission. We are to go and make disciples of all nations. We are to declare God's Word, which reveals that our God is holy, holy, holy.

Because He is holy, we (His People) are to be holy as well. This is what we read earlier in 1 Peter 1:14-16. We are to be obedient children, not conformed to our sinful passions, like we were when we were lost. We are to walk in holiness, not in worldliness.

How are we to do this? How are we to talk in obedience and purity?

1 Peter 1:13: "Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Let us join together in setting our hope on the grace that will be brought to us at the return of Jesus Christ. Let's cast our minds to our living hope, Jesus Christ. Look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith: the One to whom the angels cry out in heaven, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" (Rev. 4:8).

Then and only then, will we be able to strive for the holiness without which we wouldn't see the Lord.

As we head to our Connect Groups, let's discuss with one another what it looks like for us to strive together for holiness.

- What does it mean for God to be holy?
- How does God's holiness relate to all of his other attributes?
- Why should you strive for holiness?
- What do we learn about God's holiness from Isaiah's encounter with the Lord? (see Isaiah 6:1-4)
- What difference does God's holiness make in our lives? (see Isaiah 6:5-8)
- What does striving for holiness look like in your day to day life?
- What is your main takeaway from tonight's message?