

The Holy God (alt., The Holy God of Holiness)

Def'n. (understanding the term)

- holy** = separated; set apart – possessing a distinctive ‘otherness’; in a separated category
holy = transcendent; exalted – above and beyond the ordinary; in a unique & exalted category
- transcendent – excelling in quality or essence
 - devoted – set apart in regard to position, or to moral excellence, or for sacred use

The first reference to “**holy**” in Scripture occurs in *Ex. 3:5* where the LORD meets Moses at the burning bush and informs Moses that he is standing on “**holy ground**” – on ‘*set apart ground*’ ... a particular earthly location set apart by the special presence of Yahweh, the Holy One.

The second reference in Scripture to “**holy**” appears in *Ex. 12:16* where the Israelite peoples are commanded to ‘*set apart*’ for sacred purposes the first and seventh days for a “**holy assembly**.” These were ‘*separated*’ days in which no work was to be done; days dedicated for remembering (celebrating) Yahweh’s mighty deliverance.

Defining God in His holiness

- God is holy – transcendentally separated in perfection

“There is no one holy like the LORD, indeed, there is no one besides Thee, nor is there any rock like our God.” *1 Sam. 2:2*

“‘To whom then will you liken Me that I should be his equal’ says the Holy One.” *Isa. 40:25*

“Who is like Thee among the gods, O LORD? Who is like Thee, majestic [glorious] in holiness, awesome [fearful] in praises, working wonders?” *Ex. 15:11*

- God is holy – fearfully transcendent in moral excellence
- God is holy – mysteriously transcendent in wisdom & power
- God is holy – infinitely separated from evil
- God is holy – gloriously exalted and awesomely ‘other’

“Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? For Thou alone art holy.” *Rev. 15:4*

God’s holiness is the attribute that corresponds most prominently to His great and ineffable name. Although His holiness is unsearchable, we are nevertheless called to pursue a true knowledge of Him in His transcendent fullness and His awe-inspiring essence.

“God’s holiness and His nature are not two things, they are but one. God’s holiness is His nature, and God’s nature is His holiness.” *Thomas Brooks*

“The holiness of God is not to be conceived of as one attribute among others; it is, rather, a general term representing the conception of His consummate perfection and total glory. It is His infinite moral perfection crowning His infinite intelligence and power.” *A.A. Hodge*

Defining the holiness of God

- God’s holiness is His perfect and intrinsic moral ‘wholeness’.
- God’s holiness is His transcendentally-other and traumatically-dreadful moral Presence.
- God’s holiness is the beauty and splendor of all perfections united in Himself alone.
- God’s holiness is the perfect balance of all His attributes manifested in all His works.
- God’s holiness is the peculiar glory of His being – He is glorious in holiness.

Holiness is the essence of His beauty in His infinite perfection. Holiness adorns all His perfections – it is that attribute which renders all His perfections perfectly perfect, fearfully awesome, and gloriously excellent.

“Power is God’s hand or arm, omniscience His eye, mercy His bowels, eternity His duration, but holiness is His beauty.”

“He is magnified or honorable in holiness; ... The holiness of God is His glory, as His grace is His riches: holiness is His crown, and His mercy is His treasure.”

Stephen Charnock

“Ascribe to the LORD the glory due His name; bring an offering, and come before Him; worship the LORD in the splendor (the majesty, the beauty) of holiness. Tremble before Him, all the earth.”

I Chron. 16:29-30a; Ps. 29:1-2; Ps. 96:8-9

“My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD; and all flesh will bless His holy name forever and ever.” *Ps. 145:21*

God is the Holy, Holy, Holy King of glory.

“Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.”

Isa. 6:3

“And the four living creatures ... do not cease to say, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.’” *Rev. 4:8*

The Lord (Adonai), the LORD of hosts (Yahweh Sabaoth), God Almighty (El Shaddai) is holy in the super-superlative degree, and He is the King of glory. (see *Ps. 24:10*)

❖ Holiness is the preeminent and defining attribute of God’s glorious character.

Comment.

The repeated use of the word ‘Holy’ by the seraphim, as recorded in *Isa. 6:3*, is a linguistic device that is used to provide emphasis. A doubly-repeated term (e.g., “truly, truly”) as used frequently by Jesus denotes a ‘super’ emphasis. A triply-repeated term raises the emphasis to the very highest degree – to the ‘super-superlative’ level of emphasis. The profound message communicated by the seraphim to the prophet Isaiah is that God is holy in the super-superlative degree – He is magnificently magnificent in holiness.

The triple repetition of a phrase appears three other times in Scripture.

- Jeremiah uses it in his temple speech: “The temple of the LORD, ...” *Jer. 7:4*, emphasizing the utter emptiness of their worship and the certain and overwhelming destruction of the temple.
- Yahweh uses it in His pronouncement of doom on Babylon: “ruin, ...” *Ezek. 21:27*, emphasizing the certain and utter defeat of Babylon.
- An angel, flying through the atmosphere during the future period of great tribulation, will announce to the whole inhabited world: “Woe, ...” *Rev. 8:13*, emphasizing the severity of the coming judgment.

- His name is holy.
 - ◆ His name encompasses all the He is in His being.
- He sits on and rules from a holy throne.
 - ◆ His sovereign governance in every respect is infused and dominated by the infinite perfections of His nature and being – *i.e.*, by His holiness.
- He swears (makes binding covenants) by His holiness.
 - ◆ To swear by Himself (appealing to Himself as surety) is to swear by His holiness – by His infinite commitment to truth & faithfulness.
- He dwells in a holy habitation.
 - ◆ He is majestic (enlarged and magnified) in holiness.
 - ◆ He is glorious (exalted and weighty) in holiness.

“Let them praise Thy great and awesome name; Holy is He. ... Exalt Yahweh our Elohim, and worship at His footstool; Holy is He. ... Exalt Yahweh our Elohim, and worship at His holy hill; for holy is Yahweh our Elohim.”

Ps. 99:3, 5, 9

(*Ps. 22:3; 33:21; 103:1; 105:3*)
(*Isa. 57:15; Ezek. 36:18-23; 39:7-8*)

“God reigns over the nations, God sits on His holy throne.”
Ps. 47:8

“Holiness befits Thy house, O Yahweh, forevermore.” *Ps. 93:5*

“One thing I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David.”
Ps. 89:35
“Adonai Yahweh has sworn by His holiness, ...” *Amos 4:2*

God reveals & magnifies His holiness in:

1. His creation of man – in creating everything “very good” ... creating every creature perfectly suited for their complementary functions ... creating man in moral innocence – and with a mind capable of knowing God and a will void of any disposition toward evil.
2. His giving of the law – in the content of the Law ... in the manner of communicating the Law to man ... in governing the affairs of men in consistency with His Law (*i.e.*, according to stated commandments, statutes, precepts, etc.), and in writing His law on man’s conscience.
3. His hatred of sin – in separating Himself from sinners ... in imposing death as the consequence for sin ... in pronouncing solemn warnings of judgment against all transgressions of His holy standards.
4. His judgment of sin – in the imposition of the Curse ... and in its all-consuming power and all-encompassing extent ... in imposing an eternal penalty for sin.
5. His wrath toward sin – in punishing sin with death ... inflicting severe and overwhelming judgments (the Flood; Sodom & Gomorrah; etc.) ... requiring the Son to endure the horrific agony of the cross in order to propitiate His just wrath.
6. His commitment to truth and His demand for truth – the fact that He cannot lie, confuse or deceive ... the fact that all His ways are ever righteous and true (*Rev. 15:3*).
7. His unwavering commitment to righteousness and justice – in His establishing a future reign characterized by absolute righteousness ... promising to make all things right through a final judgment based on omniscience and truth.
8. His exacting and unalterable requirements for forgiveness and reconciliation – in providing a salvation where His justice and holiness are not negotiated.
9. His provision of a perfect righteousness in Christ, the Holy Son of God – in His gracious provision made possible and available only through the humiliation, atoning sacrifice and glorious resurrection of His Son, the Holy One of God (*Mk. 1:24*).
10. His goal for man – His foreordained plan for man to be holy even as He is holy, a goal that rests entirely on the propitiating, atoning sacrifice of His Son, and which can be realized personally only through the regenerating and sanctifying work of His Spirit, the Holy Spirit.
11. His planned consummation of creation – in the fact that none of His holy purposes will fail, even though His word and His will were (and are!) so grievously violated via the willful defiance of creatures made in His image.

The LORD was pleased for His righteousness’ sake to make the law great and glorious.” *Isa. 42:21*
 “So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.” *Rom. 7:12*

The creature’s proper response to God, the Holy One.

- He is to be worshipped for His holiness.
- He is to be worshipped in the beauty of holiness.
- His holy name is to be blessed forever and ever.
 - ◆ To bless His holy name is, at least,
 - to fear His holy name
 - to revere His holy name
 - to honor and praise His holy name
- His holy name is to be hallowed by all peoples.

“O LORD, who may abide in Thy tent? Who may dwell on Thy holy hill?” *Ps. 15:1*

“Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place?”
Ps. 24:3

“We will be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house, Thy holy temple.” *Ps. 65:4*

“... one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray ...’ And He said to them, ‘When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be Thy name.” ’” *Lk. 11:1-2*

Note: This is the first (in order) and primary (in importance) request that we should make in our prayer, and this is the highest priority in a life of holiness.

Some Further Perspectives

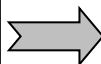
Whatever we think of in regard to God must be conceived of as holy, for He is intrinsically, absolutely, infinitely, uniquely, and immutably holy.

Holiness undergirds and pervades all of God's works, and holiness rules the operation and expression of every attribute in His work – whether of creation, revelation, providence, salvation, or consummation. His holiness is never negotiated, diminished, or relaxed in the slightest measure in all His will and purposes and working. God forgives sinners (on the just basis of the propitiatory work of His Son), but God never forgives sin – all sin must be judged with an infinite penalty because it is an infinite transgression against infinite holiness.

There is a sense in which God is the 'ultimate stranger' – He is so far removed from the creature that man is immediately traumatized by the presence of even a righteous angel, a righteous created being. Nevertheless, God is not "infinitely other", for He condescends to man, and man can "draw near" to Him. Yet, in man's drawing near, God remains distinctly and mysteriously and awe-inspiringly transcendent (*cf.*, *Isa. 57:15*). This is one reason why man can only draw near to God through a divinely-accepted and divinely-appointed High Priest.

"This may be said to be a transcendental attribute that, as it were, runs through the rest, and casts lustre upon them. It is an attribute of attributes."

John Howe (1670)



His justice is a holy justice.
His love is a holy love.
His wrath is a holy wrath.
His mercy is a holy mercy.
His truth is a holy truth.
His faithfulness is a holy faithfulness

"Hence it will follow, that the moral rectitude of the disposition, inclination, or affection of God CHIEFLY consists in a regard to HIMSELF, infinitely above His regard to all other beings; in other words, His holiness consists in this."

Jonathan Edwards

A summary re-statement of Edwards' comments.

- God's holiness is His infinite regard and love for all that defines His character.
- God's righteousness consists of His unwavering commitment to continually uphold the infinite worth and honor of His glory in all that He does.

"As God delights in His own beauty, He must necessarily delight in the creature's holiness which is a conformity to and participation of it."

Jonathan Edwards.

"This is the crown of all His attributes, the life of all His decrees, the brightness of all His actions: nothing is decreed by Him, nothing is acted by Him, but what is worthy of the dignity, and becoming the honor, of this attribute [holiness]."

"A chief emphasis is placed upon this perfection of God: God is oftener styled holy than almighty, and set forth by this part of His dignity more than by any other. This is more fixed on as an epithet to His name than any other. You never find it expressed "His mighty name" or "His wise name," but His *great* name, and most of all, His *holy* name. This is the greatest title of honor; in this latter doth the majesty and venerableness. [*i.e.*, worthiness of respect and reverence] of His name appear."

"It is less injury to Him to deny His being, than to deny the purity of it; the one makes Him no God, the other a deformed, unlovely, and a detestable God. ... He that saith God is not holy speaks much worse than he that saith there is no God at all."

Stephen Charnock