

[The Attributes of God - Part 1a | Precept Austin](#)**Holy, Holy, Holy**

by Reginald Heber

[\(Play Hymn\)](#)

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!  
 Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;  
 Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty!  
 God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore Thee,  
 Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;  
 Cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee,  
 Who was, and is, and evermore shall be.

Holy, holy, holy! though the darkness hide Thee,  
 Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see;  
 Only Thou art holy; there is none beside Thee,  
 Perfect in power, in love, and purity.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!  
 All Thy works shall praise Thy Name, in earth, and sky, and sea;  
 Holy, holy, holy; merciful and mighty!  
 God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

**Pastor Ray Pritchard** writes that...

Before we can understand what it means to be holy, we must understand what it means to say that God is holy. In many ways holiness is God's central attribute. One writer actually defines it this way. "Holiness is that which makes God God." Dr. Reginald Showers calls it "the foundational truth of revelation."

**How important is it?** Holiness is the only attribute of God mentioned in triplicate. Two times the Bible tells us that God is holy, holy, holy ([Is 6:3](#), [Rev 4:8](#)). Think about that for a moment. If God says something about his character once, that's enough to settle it. When he says it twice, that's emphasis. But when he says it three times, that means it's of supreme importance. The Bible never says that God is love, love, love or mercy, mercy, mercy, or justice, justice, justice. But it does say that he is holy, holy, holy.

**A Definition-** Let's begin by working toward a definition. I agree with those writers who say that holiness is the most difficult attribute to define because it deals with the essence of God's character. Defining holiness is like defining God! It can't be done completely. We can describe holiness and find ample illustrations of it, but we can't define it entirely. This is what makes God God!

The word itself means "to be set apart." A thing is holy if it is set apart for a special use. Other words you might use are words like distinctive or different. Applied to God, holiness is that characteristic that sets him apart from his creation. There are many verses that speak of God being "on high," "reigning," "in his holy temple," "sitting on the throne." These verses all picture God as separate from creation and reigning over it.

**Holy Bible, Holy Land, Holy Angels** - We can go a step farther and say that anything is "holy" that is "set apart" for God. That's why we call the Bible the Holy Bible-it contains the Word of God. We call Israel the Holy Land because it is the land he chose for his own people. The angels are holy angels because they belong to God. The sabbath is holy because he set it apart for himself. And when Moses stood before the burning bush, he was told to take off his shoes because he was standing on "holy ground"-ground that God had set apart for himself.

There is a second important meaning of the word holy: "Utterly pure, separated from sin." The Bible tells us that God hates sin, that he cannot sin nor will he tempt others to sin. God is so pure that he cannot tolerate sin in any form in his presence. One day he will destroy sin forever.

That leads to an important implication: holiness and sin cannot coexist. If you want to be holy as God is holy, you must adopt his attitude toward sin. You must abhor it as he does. If you coddle sin or excuse it or dabble in it, you cannot be holy as he is holy.

**Three Case Studies-** In the remainder of this message, I want us to consider what God's holiness means for you and me. Let's look together at three episodes where mortal men encountered a holy God. From these three stories we will glean crucial spiritual truth for ourselves. ([Read the rest of Dr Pritchard's practical message Holy, Holy, Holy](#))

### **Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology**

One does not define God. Similarly, the idea of holiness is at once understandable and elusive. Nevertheless, there is no term equal to the fullness inherent in holiness. All of heaven's hosts, Israel, and the church ascribe praise to a holy God because that idea sets him apart from everything else ([Ex 15:11](#); [Isa 6:3](#); [Rev 4:8](#)). Holiness is what God is. Holiness also comprises his plan for his people...

The God who revealed Himself to Israel and the church does so in an instructive manner. Progressive revelation is evident in the methodical way in which God shows himself to be both Holy and Love. Those ideas, though never exhausted by the human mind, become the essential terms for biblical faith. All else about God is comprised in and issues from his holiness. The believer is invited to live in his holy presence but only if that includes living with others who desire nothing less than God's holiness ([Heb 10:19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26](#)). Once a person begins to comprehend the heart of holy love, then there is no response other than an outward orientation, in worship and service ([Heb 12:10,14](#)). Both Testaments attest that nothing less than holiness will fully satisfy the nature of God. Thus, redemption is not complete in deliverance alone. The believer is set free in order to become like the One who redeems. It is his will that his own would be like him in every respect. ([Holy, holiness](#))

### **Tozer in The Attributes of God noted**

that when Leonardo DaVinci painted his famous Last Supper he had little difficulty with any of it except the faces. Then he painted the faces in without too much trouble except one. He did not feel himself worthy to paint the face of Jesus. He held off and kept holding off, unwilling to approach it but knowing he must. Then in the impulsive carelessness of despair, he just painted it quickly and let it go. "There is no use," he said. "I can't paint Him." I feel very much the same way about explaining the **holiness** of God. I think that same sense of despair is on my heart. There isn't any use for anybody to try to explain **holiness**. The greatest speakers on this subject can play their oratorical harps, but it sounds tinny and unreal, and when they are through you've listened to music but you haven't seen God." Realizing

then that any attempt to define "**holiness**" of God is fraught with potential for flaw and error, we note that the venerable Webster's 1828 Dictionary defines "**holy**" as "Properly, whole, entire or perfect, in a moral sense. Hence, pure in heart, temper or dispositions; free from sin and sinful affections. Applied to the Supreme Being, **holy** signifies perfectly pure, immaculate and complete in moral character; and man is more or less **holy**, as his heart is more or less sanctified, or purified from evil dispositions. We call a man **holy**, when his heart is conformed in some degree to the image of God, and his life is regulated by the divine precepts. Hence, **holy** is used as nearly synonymous with good, pious, godly."

God is so **holy** that He cannot even look on sin ([Hab 1:13](#)). **Holy** is the antithesis of wickedness.

Open the eyes of my heart, Lord  
 Open the eyes of my heart  
 I want to see You, I want to see You

To see You high and lifted up  
 Shining in the light of Your glory  
 Pour out Your power and love  
 As we sing **holy, holy, holy**  
[\(Play\)](#)

**Tozer** goes on to add that

when you talk about the **holiness** of God, you have not only the problem of an intellectual grasp, but also a sense of personal vileness, which is almost too much to bear... Each one of us is born into a tainted world, and we learn impurity from our cradles. We nurse it in with our mother's milk, we breathe it in the very air. Our education deepens it and our experience confirms it — evil impurities everywhere. Everything is dirty; even our whitest white is dingy gray... This kind of world gets into our pores, into our nerves, until we have lost the ability to conceive of the **holy**... **Holiness** means purity, but "purity" doesn't describe it well enough. Purity merely means that it is unmixed, with nothing else in it. But that isn't enough. We talk of moral excellency, but that isn't adequate. To be morally excellent is to exceed someone else in moral character. But when we say that God is morally excellent, who is it that He exceeds? The angels, the seraphim? Surely He does — but that still isn't enough. We mean rectitude; we mean honor; we mean truth and righteousness; we mean all of these — uncreated and eternal. God is not now any **holier** than He ever was. For He, being unchanging and unchangeable, can never become **holier** than He is. And He never was **holier** than He is, and He'll never be any **holier** than now. His moral excellence implies self-existence, for He did not get His **holiness** from anyone nor from anywhere. He did not go off into some vast, infinitely distant realm and there absorb His **holiness**; He is Himself the **Holiness**. He is the All-Holy, the **Holy One**; He is **holiness** itself, beyond the power of thought to grasp or of word to express, beyond the power of all praise. Language cannot express the holy, so God resorts to association and suggestion. He cannot say it outright because He would have to use words for which we know no meaning. He would have to translate it down into our unholiness. If He were to tell us how white He is, we would understand it in terms of only dingy gray. God cannot tell us by language, so He uses association and suggestion and shows how **holiness** affects the unholy. He shows Moses at the burning bush before the holy, fiery Presence, kneeling down to take his shoes from his feet, hiding his face, for he was afraid to look upon God." ([Ex 19:9](#), [10](#), [11f](#)) "All the trumpeting and the voice and the

fire and smoke and shaking of the mount — this was God saying by suggestion and association what we couldn't understand in words."

**Tozer** gives an illustration of God's unspeakable **holiness**

James Ussher, the 17th-century Irish archbishop, used to go out to the riverbank, kneel down by a log and repent of his sins all Saturday afternoon — though there probably wasn't a **holier** man in all the region. He felt how unutterably vile he was; he couldn't stand the dingy gray which was the whitest thing he had set over against the unapproachable shining whiteness that was God.

In light of the awesomeness of God's **holiness** Tozer ends his discussion with this prayer:

Oh God, time is running, flying like a frightened bird. The bird of time is on the wing and has a little way to flutter. The wine of life is oozing drop by drop, and the leaves of life are falling one by one. Soon, before the Ineffable every man must appear to give an account for the deeds done in the body. Oh, Father, keep upon us a sense of holiness that we can't sin and excuse it, but that repentance will be as deep as our lives. This we ask in Christ's name. Amen.

[Is God's Holiness Essential?](#) by David F. Wells (excerpt from "No Place For Truth") -

Unless the evangelical Church can recover the knowledge of what it means to live before a holy God, unless in its worship it can relearn humility, wonder, love, and praise, unless it can find again a moral purpose in the world that resonates with the holiness of God and that is accordingly deep and unyielding—unless the evangelical Church can do all of these things, theology will have no place in its life. But the reverse is also true. If the Church can begin to find a place for theology by refocusing itself on the centrality of God, if it can rest upon his sufficiency, if it can recover its moral fiber, then it will have something to say to a world now drowning in modernity. And there lies a great irony. Those who are most relevant to the modern world are those most irrelevant to the moral purpose of God, but those who are irrelevant in the world by virtue of their relevance to God actually have the most to say to the world. They are, in fact, the only ones who having anything to say to it. That is what Jesus declared, what the Church in its best moments has known, and what we, by the grace of God, can yet again discover." [Click](#) for entire article.

[The Holiness of God](#) by A. W. Tozer

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. God is holy and He has made holiness the moral condition necessary to the health of His universe. Sin's temporary presence in the world only accents this. Whatever is holy is healthy; evil is a moral sickness that must end ultimately in death. The formation of the language itself suggests this, the English word holy deriving from the Anglo-Saxon halig, hal, meaning, "well, whole." ([From his book "Knowledge of the Holy"](#))

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**John MacDuff...**

THE HOLINESS OF GOD - "You only are holy." [Rev. 15:4](#)

What a sublime perfection is this! It would seem to form the loftiest theme for the adorations of saints and angels. They cease not day nor night to cry, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!" It evokes from the Church on earth her loudest strains- "Let them praise His great and terrible name, for it is Holy!"

Holy, Holy, Holy Three!  
 One Jehovah evermore!  
 Father! Son! and Spirit! we,  
 Dust and ashes, would adore  
 Lightly by the world esteemed,  
 From that world by You redeemed,  
 Sing we here with glad accord.  
 Holy! Holy! Holy Lord!"

Reader, seek, in some feeble measure, to apprehend the nature of God's unswerving hatred at sin! It is the deep, deliberate, innate opposition of His nature to moral evil, which requires Him to hate it, and visit it with impartial punishment. It is not so much a matter of will as of necessity.

But what pleasure can there be in meditating on so awful a theme? The contemplation of a God "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity"- in whose sight "the heavens are not clean!" Jesus! Your glorious atonement is the mirror in which we can gaze unappalled on this august attribute. Your cross is, to the wide universe, a perpetual monument and memorial of the Holiness of God. It proclaims, as nothing else could, "You love righteousness and hate wickedness!" Through that cross the Holiest of all Beings becomes the most gracious of all. "Now, we can love Him," says a saint who has entered on his rest, "not only although He is holy, but because He is holy."

Gaze, and gaze again on that monumental column, until it teaches the lesson, how vain elsewhere to look for pardon; how delusive that dream; on which multitudes peril their eternal safety, that God will be at last too merciful to punish! Surely, if any less awful vindication could have sufficed- or had it been compatible with the rectitude of the Divine nature, and the requirements of the Divine law, to dispense pardon in any other way, Gethsemane and Calvary, with all their awful exponents of agony, would have been spared. The Almighty victim would not have voluntarily submitted to a life of ignominy and a death of woe, if, by any simpler method, He could have "cleared the guilty." But this was impossible. If He was to "save others," Himself he could not save!

Believer, seek that some faint and feeble emanations from this Divine attribute of Holiness may be yours. Let "Holiness to the Lord" be the superscription on your heart and life. Abounding grace can give no sanction or encouragement to abound in sin. 'His mercy,' says Reynolds, 'is a holy mercy which knows how to pardon sin, not to protect it; it is a sanctuary for the penitent, not for the presumptuous.'

Or, are you tempted to murmur under the dealings of your God? What are the sorest of your trials in comparison with what they might have been, had this Holy God left you to know, in all the sternness of its meaning, how "Glorious He is in Holiness?" Rather marvel, considering your sins, that your trial has been so small- your cross so light. Blessed Jesus! into this sanctuary of "holy mercy" which you have opened for me, I will flee. I can now "give thanks at the remembrance of God's holiness." Deriving, even from this august attribute, one of the 'songs in the night'- "I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety." [Psalm 4:8](#) (From - [THE NIGHT WATCHES by John MacDuff](#))

