

**King’s Online Bible School**  
**Doctrine 101: Learning about God**

**God is Holy** (adapted from Wayne Grudem’s *Bible Doctrines*, 92-93)

Definition: God's holiness means that He is separated from sin and devoted to seeking His Own honor.

**1. God is Holy.**

There is good reason to regard God’s holiness as one of the most important and significant acts about Him. God is called the "Holy One of Israel" (Ps 71:22; 78:41; Isa 1:4; 5:19, 24). This attribute is the special focus of the worship that is given to God.

Heaven and earth proclaim God's holiness.

Yahweh reigns, let the peoples tremble;  
He is enthroned above the cherubim, let the earth shake!  
Yahweh is great in Zion,  
And He is exalted above all the peoples.  
Let them praise Thy great and awesome name;  
Holy is He.

.....  
Exalt Yahweh our God,  
And worship at His footstool;  
Holy is He.

.....  
Exalt Yahweh our God,  
And worship at His holy hill;  
For the Yahweh our God is holy (Ps 99).

I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood before Him, each having six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is Yahweh of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory." And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke (Isa 6:1-4).

When a word is repeated in Hebrew it brings an intensity to the meaning. So "Holy, Holy, Holy" is a way of saying, "Holy, Holier, Holiest."

**2. The primary meanings of "holiness"**

The word "holy" has two distinct meanings. The primary meaning is apartness or otherness. When we say that God is holy we refer to the fact that there is a profound difference or separation between Him and all creatures. He is infinite; all other beings and existence are finite. He is the Creator. All other beings and existence are created. It is because He is utterly different and absolutely superior that He is worthy of honor and worship. This is why holiness is the theme of the angels' worship.

We already studied the reality that God is Self-existent. No one else is. Everyone else depends on Him.

God is not only separate by the nature of His Being. He is separate in maintaining His integrity and the perfection of His character and will. He is absolute goodness. He is not implicated in anything that is contrary to His will and does not participate in it. This is why the idea of God's moral righteousness is a second important meaning of holiness. God is holy in a moral sense because He is totally separate from all sin and evil and corruption.

In this particular sense, then, God's holiness describes the distinctness of His nature and actions in that they are altogether pure and righteous. Everything God ever does, speaks, or thinks, is pure and right, because His nature is holy and pure. His "external righteousness" is the consistent expression of His "internal righteousness" (His holiness).

### **3. God is "Separate from."**

Holiness speaks of separation from all that is not holy, not only from sin and evil, but also from that which is common and ordinary. When God instructed Israel to build the tabernacle, it was to be a "holy place"; it was constructed with clear boundaries that emphasized and guarded its separateness from the people and from the rest of the world.

First, there was the fence around the outer courtyard that formed a barrier between the inside and the outside world. An ordinary person could enter the outer court if he was ceremonially clean. But no common man could enter inside the tent. This was the Holy Place, and only those who were appointed and selected by lot were allowed to enter into it briefly each day. This was the second barrier and buffer zone between the outside world and the things of God. But at the far end of the interior of the tent hung the veil that formed a third barrier. It blocked off the Holy of Holies (the Holiest place). Only the high priest was allowed to enter here on the annual Day of Atonement. He was not allowed to see what was inside. He only stepped inside into the darkness and applied blood to the mercy seat over the Ark of the Covenant.

God had called Israel itself to be a "holy nation" (Exod 19:4-6). This was demonstrated when He brought them out of Egypt. The Red Sea marked a complete separation from their former lives. To come to God means being separated from the world and from what is common.

The Lord marked Israel as separate from the world in another way as well. He required that they observe a distinction between what He designated as clean and unclean. These regulations provided the people with a manageable way of maintaining a separateness (or holiness) from the other nations.

### **4. God is "Separate to."**

When we speak of holiness, the word conveys a positive meaning. If it only referred to "separateness from" it would be an essentially negative idea (the absence of evil). But the positive side is that that which is holy is both separated from something AND consecrated to something.

Israel's tabernacle was a holy place because it was separate from the world around and dedicated and consecrated to God's service and to the things of heaven.

The same applies to holy people. We are called to be holy because God is holy (Lev 19:2; 1 Pet 1:16). Holy people are not only people who refrain from sin. They are also actively devoted to God's service. They live their lives for Him, responding to His will. They love Him.

This understanding was presented to Israel in the first and greatest commandment.

“Hear, O Israel! Yahweh is our God; Yahweh is One!  
And you shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deut 6:4-5).

To what is God devoted? He is set apart to pursue the highest imaginable goal and purpose: His Own honor and glory.

For any other person to be self-absorbed is wrong. It is proud and presumptuous. It is blindness and foolishness, denying the evidence of one’s own dependence and smallness in this world and in this universe.

But, as John Piper emphasizes, if God were preoccupied with anything other than Himself, it would be an abuse of the Truth and the reality that He is the only Eternal One, that He is absolute goodness, and that He is the only Source of life and of all that is good. He is God. To make something else more important would be idolatry. He would be lowering and denying Himself. It would be a failure in goodness and righteousness. Nothing else and no one else is as high, precious, and worthy as He. It is His faithfulness to Who He is and His faithfulness to His creatures that demands that He be the purpose and goal of all life.