



"The Christian ministry exists for the promotion of holiness."
—Donald MacLeod

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As He Is Holy (Part One)

What comes to mind when we hear the word "holy"? What does it mean for something to be holy? What is our attitude toward holy things? How do we react to hearing that something is holy? Years ago, when I would hear the word "holy," I would dismiss it, not vehemently, but I felt that being holy was for other people and other things. Perhaps [holiness](#) applied to the deacons, elders, ministers, and widows, but not me. There was no way that I could be holy!

I have come to learn that my understanding and perspective were wrong. While the word itself is easy enough to define, to grasp what it really means that something is holy is another thing altogether. As part of God's sanctification process, it is a spiritual concept that takes a lifetime to understand fully.

The English word *holy* means "to be pure," "to be clean," "to be sacred," and "to be set apart." *The Reader's Digest Oxford Complete Wordfinder* provides a helpful definition: "morally and spiritually excellent or perfect, to be revered; belonging to, devoted to, or empowered by [God](#)." The Bible's usage of "holy" primarily deals with God separating from [the world](#) that which He chooses to devote to Himself.

Leviticus 20 lays out penalties for certain sexual sins and gives laws regarding mediums and unclean animals, among other things. God's people are instructed to stay away from those things because God has chosen us to be holy to Him, separating us from the world. If we do these things we "shall be holy." Notice [Leviticus 20:7-8](#), 26:

Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am the LORD your God. And you shall keep My statutes, and perform them: I am the LORD who sanctifies you. . . . And *you shall be holy* to Me, for I the LORD am holy, and have separated you from the peoples that you should be Mine. (emphasis ours)

The words "shall be" here adds an additional factor to our holiness. While being chosen by God and set apart for His purpose makes us holy in what might be called a legal or an initial sense, *becoming* holy as He is holy is a process that we must grow in by learning to obey Him—and it takes work!

Exodus 22 contains instruction along the same lines as Leviticus 20, listing responsibilities concerning property as well as moral and ceremonial principles. In the last verse of the chapter, God concludes with, "And you shall be holy men to Me" ([Exodus 22:31](#)). In other words, by following these instructions, we shall be holy. Again, we find the words "shall be," leading us to believe that the fulfilment of this will occur in the future, or indicating the process that God is putting us through.

God did indeed create some things holy, like the [Sabbath](#), and He instructs us on how we are to keep the weekly holy day. The annual [holy days](#), designated as holy convocations, are set apart for His purpose. I tried to explain to a client just before a recent [Feast of Tabernacles](#) about keeping God's holy days, and the response was, "Hope you have a good holiday!" But it is not a holiday; it is a *holy* day, which God commands us to keep holy.

The world has no clue about what God has made holy. The Christian world believes that they can designate something as holy just by regarding it as such. People have told me—after I have tried to explain that God made the Sabbath holy and that we are to keep it as He commands—"Well, I keep every day holy." If every day is holy, then none are truly holy!

The Tabernacle (and later the Temple) that God designed had a separate room designated as the "Holy of Holies" or the "Holiest of All," the most sacred place in the sanctuary. The Ark of the Covenant was itself holy, and God made sure to provide a set of instructions as to how it was to be handled. Sacrifices and offerings to God are holy. God's tithes are holy. Paul writes in several places that the brethren are holy (see [I Corinthians 3:17](#); [Ephesians 5:27](#); [Colossians 3:12](#); [I Thessalonians 5:27](#); [Hebrews 3:1](#); etc.)—in fact, we are called "saints," which indicates "holy ones" or "sacred ones."

So, what is our attitude toward what God has made holy? Do we regard the Sabbath as holy time? When the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness, one of them went out and picked up sticks to build a fire on the Sabbath ([Numbers 15:32-36](#)). Why did he do it? Was he cold? Was he so busy all week that he forgot to prepare for the Sabbath on the preparation day? Was the fire to do some work he had not had a chance to finish before the Sabbath started? Whatever it was, his actions showed that he had no respect for what God had made holy. He was stoned for it!

When David decided to move the Ark of the Covenant, he ignored God's instructions on how this holy object should be handled ([II Samuel 6:1-7](#); see [Exodus 25:10-22](#); [Numbers 4:4-6](#), 15). Because of his [carelessness](#), a man named Uzzah died! David learned a sobering lesson about God's holiness that day.

Next time, we will consider our attitudes toward other holy things, perhaps some of which we have allowed ourselves to treat with less respect than we should. If we want to be holy like God ([I Peter 1:15-16](#)), we need to have a deeper understanding of what holiness is all about.

- Ronny H. Graham

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