

Holy Ground

The Sabbath is Holy Ground

Ted E. Bowling

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What does it mean to be holy? The vast majority of those who claim Christianity as their faith have little or no concept of what it means. I Peter 1:16 says He has called you to be holy. We are chosen by God to be holy so it is very important that we understand what holy means.

Now we live in Satan's world and the people willfully take God's name in vain. And they also take words that are important to God in vain as well, or make them common. For example, holy cow, holy smoke, and a lot worse.

There are still many Christians in the world that are baffled by what it means, even though the words holy and holiness appear at least 900 times in the Scriptures. I came across an article by the Barna Group called "The Concept of Holiness Baffles Most Americans." This was written back in 2006. And it is asking the question, it is from Leviticus 19:2, in which God says, "Be holy because I am holy."

The survey indicates that most adults were confused, daunted by the concept of holiness. And when pressed to describe what it means to be holy, most of them gave a wide range of answers. The most common reply was, "I don't know." And this was offered by about 21% of the people. 19% said, "Well, it's like being like Christ." 18% said, "Well, it's making faith your top priority in your life." 12% said, "It is living a pure and simple lifestyle." 10% said, "It's like having a good attitude about people in life," and then less than that said being completely focused on God, or being born again, or living a moral life, or living according to the practical biblical principles. So barely 35% had any idea what the word holy meant.

These findings by George Barna suggest that we need to consider this subject. It says realize that results portray a body of Christians who attend

church and read the Bible but have no understanding of the concept or significance of holiness. They do not personally desire to be holy and therefore little, if anything, pursue it.

Please turn to Exodus chapter 3 (this is where Richard was a few weeks ago) and we are going to look at the word holy here. Now we have all heard the law of first mention and it is important because the first appearance of the word, concept, or doctrine in the Bible sets a pattern for how it should be understood throughout the rest of the Scriptures.

Exodus 3:1-6 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn." So when the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here am I." Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground." Moreover He said, "I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.

Here, Moses is just going about his regular duties. He had been tending flocks for 40 years, and he sees this burning bush. And it is amazing! We should know that it was God that was drawing him to Him. That is why it was burning. And the reason why, because He was preparing to introduce Himself to Moses, because He had a great duty for him to do. And as Moses came closer, God warned him, "Moses Moses!" I believe it was a warning to stop for his own safety, not to draw near. And then He said, "Remove your sandals because this is holy ground."

Why was the ground holy? It is because God's presence was in that place. Why remove his shoes? Well, many scholars consider that the shoe represented sin, and removing his shoes signified putting off that which is profane and absolutely necessary upon approaching that which is holy. In

fact, here the word holy is *Strong's* #6944. It is a noun and it means hallowed, sacred, special, a place set apart for God. When the word holy is used it is of God. It is clear whenever we see holy, it is of God—it is sacred, it is special. And here we see this burning bush and the ground around it was also holy. The dirt, the rocks, the vegetation, the wood, the metal, everything around it was made sacred because God's presence was there.

Another interesting point is that Moses could not discern that he was standing on holy ground. The ground, when he looked at it, looked like it did any other time. And I am sure that he had been in that part of the desert many, many times with his flocks. But it was only because God's presence was there—God's essence, His holiness—that it was holy. And God demonstrated His Spirit and His power in the burning bush. And there is no doubt that Moses hid his face and probably also knelt to acknowledge his unworthiness to be before God. And it is true, His holiness demands that we have proper reverence and humility. At that moment, Moses recognized God's power and His holiness. Again, he hid his face.

Richard had said that God Himself came down from heaven to personally deliver a message, a commission for Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. And so I believe it was important that God established who He was and He did it in a very powerful way. He did it by burning the bush without it being consumed. It was a way of showing Moses His perfection.

And I do find it interesting that it was a burning bush because fire is used for purifying. I believe this moment marked the beginning of Moses' transformation into the leader that he would become to lead his people out of Egypt. And right then, at that moment, I believe God started preparing Moses to lead them out. The first thing God addressed with Moses was He is holy and that He had to be held up and respected because He was sacred. And when we approach God, it requires us to have an internal humility and an external expression of respect as well. Wherever the presence of God is, it is holy and not to be taken lightly.

Psalm 34:11 Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.

The fear of the Lord is not something that comes to us naturally. It can only be learned by God opening up our minds and our hearts. For us to know God, we need to take off our shoes. To know God demands humility and respect for God. And we can be very hardheaded sometimes and it gets in the way of our growth. We must remember that God must be honored and respected at all times.

Again, so many have difficulty relinquishing control and having a hard time accepting that they do not have the power. But it is interesting that we must learn it and be taught it by God. It does not come naturally.

You know, back then, oftentimes when prisoners were taken they would take their shoes and make them vulnerable by walking barefoot. It made it much easier for them to control. In fact, in Joshua 24, he tells his men to stand on the neck with their foot of the enemy.

So to know God is to fear God. We must see and acknowledge just how vulnerable we are before God and so we must humble ourselves that we might be able to see God. Only then can we see the things from God's perspective and recognize His plans.

Then if we were to jump 40 years later we see the same situation with Joshua. This is after the Israelites had been led out of Egypt, and they were preparing to go into the Promised Land. Moses had died, and God had chosen Joshua to lead the Israelites. So please turn to Joshua 5, verse 13. (Again, Richard was here. Thank you and I appreciate.) I will not go into any details at all, just going to go through here.

Joshua 5:13-15 And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, "Are You for us or for our adversaries?" And He said, "No, but as Commander of the army of the Lord, I have now come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, "What does my Lord say to His servant?" Then the Commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, "Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so.

So you can see that this verse parallels exactly the verses with Moses. And like Moses, he easily understood that he was in the presence of God and that he was standing on holy ground. And I think it is important that we notice the repetition here, because the wording is the same. And so, I think it is important that it was not just a one-time situation and that we need to constantly be caring and considering how to be respectful and how we honor God.

Then if we look at the priests that did their duties, completed their duties in the Tabernacle. In Exodus 26, God gave Moses instructions on how to construct the Tabernacle, and God gave Moses precise details of the construction. The outer court, and then the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, even down to the type of curtains, how many sockets, everything. And so in the front of the Holy Place, a laver was placed, and the laver was to provide the priests with the means of washing their feet and hands before entering the Holy Place.

Now, there would be no reason for them to wash their feet and then put their soiled and maybe even bloodied shoes back on their feet. They were stepping onto holy ground and they had a proper understanding and humility and reverence to enter into that place. They knew how serious it was.

We see in Exodus 28 more evidence that they entered the Holy Place without any shoes.

Exodus 28:24 And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty. So you shall speak to all who are gifted artisans, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron's garments, to consecrate him, that he may minister to Me as priest. And these are the garments which they shall make: a breastplate, an ephod, a robe, a skillfully woven tunic, a turban, and a sash. So they shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons, that he may minister to Me as priest.

Nowhere here does it mention footwear. In fact, in verse 22, it even gives the details of the undergarments that he was to wear. God was the inventor of the

boxer shorts. Yes. Verse 42 says, "Make for them linen trousers [undergarments] to cover their nakedness; they must reach from the waist to the thighs." Again, there is nothing here about footwear. And so I think it is pretty clear that when they went into the holy Holy Place or the Holy of Holies, they were barefoot.

Brethren, today we must take off our shoes when we are on holy ground. The Sabbath is holy ground. Let us turn to Genesis 2. I am going to read verses 1 to 3.

Genesis 2:1-3 Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

In verse 3, it says the word sanctified. This is *Strong's* #6962 and it is very similar to what we see in Exodus. Here though, this is a verb describing to be set apart, to be sacred. In Exodus, it is a noun. But the main thing to understand is that, when He made the Sabbath day, when He rested, He consecrated, He made it hallowed. He sanctified it. Just as God placed His presence in a burning bush and all the ground around it was made holy and sacred, Moses had to take his shoes off. And then when Joshua was in the presence of Jesus Christ, he had to take his shoes off as they were preparing to take Jericho. And then in the Tabernacle, the priests were very careful not to wear anything on their feet in the Holy Place and then into the Holy of Holies.

God had placed His presence in the seventh day, the Sabbath day, and He set it apart, and He consecrated it. And so we must show reverence to God by keeping it holy. And we honor God also by assembling together on the Sabbath day to worship.

We saw in the Barna Report that people really do not understand what holy means. It is dismissed or ignored. How many Christians, how many Christian religions today dismiss the Sabbath as only being ceremonial and it does not matter what day you worship on? I find it interesting that out of the

Ten Commandments, there is only one that they feel they do not have to keep. All of a sudden, only one commandment has become ceremonial. They do not see the Sabbath as anything different than the other days of a week.

In fact, the Sabbath is the only day of the week that has a term in the Bible. You hear the first day, next day is the second day, the seventh day is the only day of the week that actually has a term, which is the Sabbath. And in a physical sense, you cannot see a difference. To the world, a day is a day is a day. And remember when Moses was standing on the holy ground, he could not see that it was holy as well.

You see, it is God that opens our hearts. It is God that opens our mind that we may understand Him and to obey Him. Just as the ground was made holy by His presence, the Sabbath is a holy day, not to be inertly used. It is not an average day, it is special because God set it apart from the other days.

Please turn to Exodus 20. This is where we see the Ten Commandments. And these are probably some of the best known scriptures in the Bible. I do think I should read them.

Exodus 20:8-11 "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it."

Now, in verse 8 and in verse 11, this is the same word that is used in Genesis 2, sanctified, to be set apart, to be consecrated.

Please turn to Ezekiel chapter 20.

Ezekiel 20:10-12 "Therefore I made them go out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. And I gave them My statutes and showed them My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them. Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a

sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctified them."

There are two important things here that we see. First, the Sabbath is a special sign, a special sign of the covenant between God and His people. A sign is something that indicates or represents something. It can be a physical object, a gesture, even a natural event that provides information or warning. Signs can be used to convey meanings, show a condition, or indicate a future event for you and me. The Sabbath is a sign that conveys the message that we have been made special by our covenant that He has made with us.

How often when we were first called that the first thing that our mind was opened to was the Sabbath, and that we really worked hard when we were first converted to keep it. It is because the Sabbath is so important. And, you know, it is interesting when we were first converted, when we first came to the church, we really worked hard at keeping the Sabbath. But you know, sometimes, as the years go by, we become a little more lax. We allow a few more things to be done on the Sabbath. We do not think about it.

It is important that we continually renew our faith in God. Remember that He is opening our hearts and our minds to the truth. And it is He that sanctifies us and gives us this special opportunity. And so the second thing that I see in this verse is that the Sabbath also facilitates our relationship and our understanding of our Creator. If we are going to know God, the Sabbath must be kept. Without knowing God, there is no eternal life. The Sabbath, then, is necessary to have eternal life.

Please turn to Isaiah 58.

Isaiah 58:13-14 "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the Lord; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken."

I want to read this now from the International Standard Version,

Isaiah 58:13 (ISV) "If you keep your feet from trampling the Sabbath, from pursuing your own interest on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a a delight in the Lord's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not doing your own ways and seeking your own pleasures or speaking merely idle words, . . .

God is telling us, Take your foot off of My Sabbath. Keep it sacred. Quit trampling that which is holy and sacred to Me. Take off your shoes because you are on holy ground.

One more time I want to read this from the NET Bible because I really like the words.

Isaiah 58:13 (NET) You must observe the Sabbath rather than doing anything you please on my holy day. You must look forward to the Sabbath and treat the Lord's holy day with respect. You must treat it with respect by refraining from your normal activities, and refraining from your selfish pursuits and from making business deals.

God commanded Moses to take off his shoes because he was on holy ground. And likewise for us today, the same command is for us. We must be careful not to trample God's holy time—God's holy ground—but instead treat it with respect and honor. And also remember that the Sabbath is a sign between Him and His people.

Make no mistake, the Sabbath is a *test commandment* for us. It is interesting how the world worships on Sunday, the Muslims worship on Friday, when the Bible, the Holy Scriptures, call for a Saturday or Sabbath observance. God in His wisdom made the Sabbath a test commandment for us. God tested ancient Israel out in the wilderness. Back in Exodus 16:4, God said He would test them to see if they would follow His instructions, to know if they would walk in His law.

For us today, the Sabbath is still a crucial test commandment to see if we are willing to voluntarily obey that which God has made sacred. Because the

Sabbath identifies those who have truly surrendered to the will of God. You see, the Sabbath is not a time for our normal weekly work, the kind of activities that you can do on the other six days. It is the time that you should not be thinking about your job. And you know, in this day and age, it is really easy to do. In my job I have inspectors call me, texting me, and sometimes actually it is work to avoid doing my job on the Sabbath. That is my test. Some may want to pay bills or do ordinary work around the house, like work on their cars or doing yard work. That is not honoring God.

It is important on the Sabbath for us to slow down. Take a step away from the busy world that we live in, the hustle and the bustle. God has given us this. He has given us a time for physical rest. Now, I am not talking about sleeping in bed all day long. But it *is* a time for a physical rest. Rest means to change our overall approach to that day versus the other six days, where it is go, go, go. We have to stop and enjoy the Sabbath, make it a delight.

Leviticus 23:3 "Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation."

I read that because of the word convocation. It means a calling together, a sacred assembly. The word implies that we are officially summoned to be here. So a part of keeping God's law is that He wants us to have interaction and involvement with the brethren, with God's people on a regular basis. That is why He gave it to us every seven days. He knew how much we need this day.

And it is very important, not just for the learning that we get through the sermonettes and the sermons. It is also very important to be here so we can help and encourage our brethren, or they can encourage you. God knew what He was doing. Mark 2:27 says the Sabbath was designed to serve mankind. And that is what it does. If we are keeping it properly, it is a delight. The Sabbath is a time of rest, reflection, and spiritual growth.

So when we look back at the command to Moses to remove his shoes, and we see the command to Joshua to remove his shoes because he was on holy ground, and the priests completing their duties within the tabernacle

barefoot, I believe this is a profound lesson that we must learn to have a proper attitude, a proper respect, a proper reverence for God and for what He has made holy, because you were made holy.

I will finish with I Peter 1, verse 13.

I Peter 1:13-16 Therefore gird up your loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ, as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to your former lusts, as in your ignorance, but as He called you is holy, you also be holy in all of your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."