

## 5. The Holiness of God (1Q 2012—Glimpses of Our God)

**Biblical material:** Matt. 11:10; Mark 1:2; Gen. 2:3; Job 42:5, 6; Luke 5:1–11; Luke 4:31–36; Isa. 6:1–3; Rev. 4:8, 9; Ps. 99:9.

### Quotes

- Give God the margin of eternity to justify himself. *H. R. Haweis*
- A true love of God must begin with a delight in his holiness. *Jonathan Edwards*
- God’s holiness and his nature are not two things, but one. God’s holiness is his nature, and God’s nature is his holiness. *Thomas Brooks*
- We only learn to behave ourselves in the presence of God, and if the sense of that presence weakens, humanity tends to lark about. *C.S. Lewis*
- Holiness is the habit of being of one mind with God. *Anon*
- Holiness in man is the image of God’s. *E.G. Robinson*

### Questions

How would you define holiness? Can some ideas of holiness suggest that God is distant or separated from us? While we are in awe of God, how does God speak to us? How does the example of Jesus help in our understanding of holiness? What of holiness when it is applied to people? How are we to become holy—what does this mean?

### Bible summary

Matt. 11:10 and Mark 1:2 are referenced to show the connection between the Old and New Testaments. Gen. 2:3 speaks of the creation of the Sabbath as a holy day. In reaction to God, the human response is like Job’s (Job 42:5, 6). The story of the catch of fish in Luke 5:1-11 brought Peter’s response that he was a sinful man, in contrast to the divinity of Jesus. Even the demons recognized Jesus as the Holy One of God (Luke 4:31). In Isaiah’s vision (Isa. 6:1-3) he saw seraphs calling, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty,” while the four living creatures of Rev. 4:8, 9 say the same. Ps. 99:9 concludes that: “Our God is holy.”

### Comment

So much for declarations—what about definitions? What does holiness really mean? How would you explain this term today? Holiness is a vital quality of God, but often misunderstood.

“It’s all too easy to develop ideas about God and then to worship these ideas instead of God Himself.” (Sunday’s lesson). So how do we develop correct ideas about God—and his holiness?

Take the example of Isaiah and his view of God and his holiness. In his vision, Isaiah is overwhelmed by the glory and holiness of God. Inevitably he believes he is doomed since he has “seen” God. While it may have reassured him of the all-powerful nature of God, his immediate response is terror. So God gives Isaiah a message—a message he is to take to his people.

What is the essence of God’s message? The people hear but don’t understand, see but don’t perceive—and in the sense that this is deliberate. It’s not that the people would like to understand. They prefer ignorance of God, and don’t want his explanations. So in

an effort to shock, God tells Isaiah that the people should have calloused hearts, dull ears, and closed eyes, for otherwise they might even respond and turn and be healed. As if God doesn't want to do that...

Puzzled, shocked, disturbed, Isaiah asks, "How long?" Until everything is destroyed, God replies. In other words, until the physical situation becomes so desperate that people realize there is no hope other than God and finally come back to him.

The tragedy of Isaiah's Israel is that though they think they know God, he is just a "God in the box" in the Temple. He is to be placated with offerings and dealt with mechanically. When God asks for a real relationship with his people, they refuse, because they prefer the system. They truly don't want to know God, and prefer to be left in "blissful ignorance." Why don't they want God, except as some ally to be used and manipulated? They prefer to trust in themselves, in their own power, in their human leaders. It's all a question of trust—confidence based on evidence...

Jesus was holy but he had no time for mock holiness. Jesus did not hesitate to use a direct approach and was not a stranger to controversy. He called the religious leaders of his time "whitened sepulchers, full of dead men's bones." He called the respected pious men of his day hypocrites. He called the king a fox. He identified the establishment as a "brood of vipers." He associated with publicans and sinners and was accused as a glutton and a wine-bibber (Matthew 11:19). He accused the religious leaders of turning the Temple into a den of thieves. In his public addresses he did not mince his words but clearly showed what he thought of the narrow-mindedness of religious tradition

### **Ellen White Comments**

The Saviour's entire life was characterized by disinterested benevolence and the beauty of holiness. He is our pattern of goodness. From the beginning of His ministry, men began to comprehend more clearly the character of God. He carried out His teachings in His own life. He showed consistency without obstinacy, benevolence without weakness, tenderness and sympathy without sentimentalism. He was highly social, yet He possessed a reserve that discouraged any familiarity. His temperance never led to bigotry or austerity. He was not conformed to the world, yet He was attentive to the wants of the least among men. {CT 262}

The crowning glory of Christ's attributes is His holiness. The angels bow before Him in adoration, exclaiming, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty." Revelation 4:8. He is declared to be glorious in His holiness. Study the character of God. By beholding Christ, by seeking Him in faith and prayer, you may become like Him. {CT 402}

The sanctification now gaining prominence in the religious world carries with it a spirit of self-exaltation and a disregard for the law of God that mark it as foreign to the religion of the Bible. Its advocates teach that sanctification is an instantaneous work, by which, through faith alone, they attain to perfect holiness. "Only believe," say they, "and the blessing is yours." No further effort on the part of the receiver is supposed to be required. At the same time they deny the authority of the law of God, urging that they are released from obligation to keep the commandments. But is it possible for men to be holy, in accord with the will and character of God, without coming into harmony with the principles which are an expression of His nature and will . . . ? {Mar 232}