

Be Holy for I am Holy - What is Holiness and how do we become Holy

Introduction: The Divine Mandate

The call to holiness is the ultimate heartbeat of God's revelation to mankind. Throughout the history of God's covenantal dealings with humanity, the demand for absolute moral purity, complete spiritual separation, and devotional excellence has remained absolute. When God speaks to His chosen people, He does not offer holiness as an optional recommendation for the spiritually elite, but establishes it as the baseline requirement for fellowship with Him. The foundation of this extended narrative rests upon a command that spans across both testaments, revealing the absolute perfection of the Creator and the high calling of the creature.

1 Peter 1:15-16 - "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy."

To modern ears, the word 'conversation' implies merely verbal speech, but in the Authorized King James Version, it encompasses one's entire manner of living, conduct, behavior, and citizenship. The Apostle Peter, writing to scattered and persecuted believers, anchors his exhortation in the ancient law given to Israel through Moses. By doing so, he demonstrates that the standard of God has never fluctuated. The foundation of holiness is not found within human capability, but within the very character of God Himself. We are not called to define holiness according to cultural norms or human philosophies; we are called to look upon the immutable character of God and mirror His perfection in our daily existence.

Leviticus 11:44 - "For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth."

In this narrative exploration, we will meticulously dissect the multi-faceted concept of scriptural holiness. We will examine what holiness truly is in its essence—both as an absolute attribute of God and as a state of separation for the believer. Furthermore, we will journey through the structural framework provided by the scriptures to understand the practical and spiritual means by which an imperfect, fallen human being can enter into, walk in, and maintain a state of genuine holiness. This journey requires an honest look at our spiritual condition, a

profound appreciation for the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, and a continuous submission to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

Part I: The Definition and Core Essence of Holiness

Before we can understand how to become holy, we must establish a rigorous, textually sound definition of holiness. In the original languages of the Holy Scriptures, the primary words translated as 'holy' carry the foundational meaning of being 'set apart,' cut off from common use, or dedicated completely to a sacred purpose. The Hebrew word Qadosh and the Greek word Hagios both denote a profound separation from the ordinary, the profane, and the defiled. When applied to things—such as the utensils of the tabernacle, the Sabbath day, or the garments of the high priest—holiness indicates that these items are no longer available for secular use. They belong exclusively to the Sovereign LORD.

When applied to God, holiness means infinitely more than mere separation from sin. It denotes His absolute transcendence, His unmatched purity, and His complete distinctness from everything else in creation. God is not merely a better version of man; He is entirely other, existing in an unapproachable light of moral and spiritual perfection. The heavenly hosts surrounding the throne of the Almighty do not ceaselessly declare His power, His wisdom, or even His love, though He possesses all these in infinite measure. Instead, their eternal cry focuses entirely on His holiness.

***Isaiah 6:3** - "And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory."*

The repetition of 'holy' three times—the trihagion—is the ultimate linguistic expression in Hebrew to convey the absolute superlative. It emphasizes that God is holy in the highest possible degree, perfectly clean, utterly without stain, error, or darkness. The prophet Isaiah, upon witnessing this vision, was instantly crushed by the weight of his own undone condition, realizing that his own lips and the lips of the society around him were completely unclean. This illustrates that true holiness, when confronted by fallen humanity, exposes our utter need for cleansing. God's holiness is a blazing fire that cannot tolerate the presence of iniquity.

***Habakkuk 1:13** - "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?"*

Part II: The Structural Barrier—The Unholiness of Man

To understand the mechanism of becoming holy, we must first confront the stark reality of human unholiness. The scriptures leave no room for self-righteous delusion or humanistic

optimism regarding our natural spiritual state. Since the fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden, the human race has been thoroughly infected by the disease of sin. This corruption is not superficial; it affects the mind, the will, the affections, and the physical members of the body. In our natural state, we are entirely incapable of producing the holiness that God requires.

Isaiah 64:6 - "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."

The text explicitly declares that even our best efforts—our 'righteousnesses'—apart from the transforming grace of God, are viewed in the courts of heaven as polluted garments. Man cannot pull himself up by his own moral bootstraps. The standard of God is perfection, and any deviation from that standard constitutes a violation of His holy law. The Apostle Paul, systematically laying out the spiritual state of humanity in his epistle to the Romans, quotes the Old Testament to seal the indictment against all flesh.

Romans 3:10-12 - "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one."

Part III: The Two Dimensions of Holiness—Positional and Progressive

1. Positional Holiness: The Believer's Status in Christ

The moment a sinner repents and places their absolute faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ, a miraculous judicial transaction takes place. The righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed to the believer, and they are instantly translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. In this instant, the believer is set apart, cleansed, and declared holy in the sight of God. This status does not depend on the believer's performance; it depends entirely on the perfect, finished work of Christ on the cross.

Hebrews 10:10 - "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

Notice the past tense reality: 'we are sanctified.' The offering of Jesus Christ was so completely sufficient that it forever altered the spiritual status of those who belong to Him. The Apostle Paul writes to the church at Corinth—a church that was notoriously plagued by practical problems, divisions, and carnal behaviors—and yet addresses them as those who are already sanctified and holy in their position.

1 Corinthians 6:11 - "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

2. Progressive Holiness: The Daily Walk of Cleansing

While our position in Christ is perfect and unchanging, our daily experience must grow continually into that reality. Progressive holiness is the lifelong process whereby the Holy Spirit works within the believer to eliminate sinful habits, renew the mind, transform the character, and produce the fruits of righteousness. It is an active cooperative walk where the believer, empowered by grace, consciously chooses to obey God and mortify the deeds of the flesh.

2 Corinthians 7:1 - "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

Part IV: The Divine Instruments for Becoming Holy

1. The Blood of Jesus Christ

The primary agent of both positional and ongoing cleansing is the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins, and without the application of that blood, there is no ongoing cleansing for the believer. When we slip, stumble, or discover hidden sin within our hearts, the blood of Christ remains our constant remedy.

1 John 1:7 - "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

2. The Word of God

The second major instrument of sanctification is the written Word of God. The Bible acts as a mirror that exposes our secret faults, a fire that consumes our chaff, a hammer that breaks our hard hearts, and water that washes away the defilement of the world. Jesus, in His High Priestly prayer for His disciples, explicitly identified the Word as the primary tool for their sanctification.

John 17:17 - "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."

Psalms 119:9 - "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word."

3. The Indwelling Holy Spirit

Holiness is not a product of human willpower or strict self-discipline; it is the supernatural fruit of the Holy Spirit living within the believer. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts us of sin, grants us the power to overcome temptation, and produces holy desires within our hearts. Without the Spirit's enabling power, all our efforts toward holiness will result in frustrating failure.

Galatians 5:16 - "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh."

Part V: The Practical Blueprint—How We Live Holy

1. The Absolute Presentation of the Body

Practical holiness begins with a decisive, total surrender of our physical bodies to God. The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we must no longer permit our eyes, our tongues, our hands, or our feet to be used as tools for unrighteousness. We must present them as dynamic sacrifices to the King.

Romans 12:1 - "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

2. The Radically Renewed Mind

The battlefield of holiness is found within the human mind. Every sinful act is first conceived as a thought, nurtured as a desire, and executed as a deed. To change our behavior, we must fundamentally change the way we think. We must refuse to allow the corrupt culture around us to mold our worldview.

Romans 12:2 - "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

3. Radical Separation from Worldly Defilement

Scriptural holiness demands an explicit, courageous separation from the sinful practices, values, and intimate alliances of the ungodly world. We cannot flirt with the world's entertainment, adopt the world's deceptive philosophies, or walk in close spiritual fellowship with unbelievers while expecting to remain holy before God.

2 Corinthians 6:17 - "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,"

Conclusion: The Eternal Reward of Holiness

The pursuit of scriptural holiness is the only pathway to true, lasting, and transcendent joy. Sin promises temporary pleasure but ultimately delivers death, shame, and eternal separation from God. Holiness, though it requires discipline, sacrifice, and the mortification of the flesh, yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness and brings the believer into an intimate, unhindered fellowship with the Living Creator.

Hebrews 12:14 - "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

Revelation 22:11 - "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still."

May we be found among those who are holy still, perfecting holiness in the fear of God, until he appears and we become like him, for we shall see him as he is. To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.