

Holiness (Part 2)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 February 2013

Preacher: Don Coleman

[0:00] We were looking last week, we started looking at positional holiness versus practical holiness.

! Not elevating one above the other. The idea of holiness or spiritual level, spiritual maturity. And there's a positional side and a practical side. So we got started on that. And I think, if I made a notation correctly, that we are there looking at...

Let's see, let me look at the title there. Number six is holiness, a future state of sinless perfection. Did we get all the way through that? I'm not sure what page. That would be in your notes. Number six. Did we cover all of that, as far as you know? Did I mention A.W. Tozer's quote there or not? It's in your notes.

[1:17] Are they ended with that? And even if I overlap a little bit, let me just have you notice there these three things about the holiness of God or the nature of God that helps us understand holiness.

It lays the foundation for us to understand positional holiness and then ultimately practical holiness as well. I've got three there.

Because God is infinite... Do you see that in your notes or did I include that in your notes? All right. I did. All right. Because God is infinite, His holiness is limitless.

Now, that just stands to reason, doesn't it? If God is infinite, and He is, isn't He? He's infinite. As opposed to finite.

Now, we're finite. But God is infinite. No beginning, no end. We can even use the word eternal. But since He's infinite, God is holiness.

[2:27] I hesitate to say part of His nature as if you somehow separate various parts of His nature. God is all total holiness. But maybe that aspect of who God is is limitless.

It's limitless. And, you know, with that in mind, every aspect of His nature and His character is infinite. We speak a lot and like to speak of God in terms of love, that God is love.

And He is. He's infinite love. He's not just like man. He's certainly not like man where we can turn things on or off.

And we can love and then not love. That our love is, if we would admit it, is always conditional. And you say, well, no, it's not.

Not with my kids. Yes, it is. To some measure. To some degree. And maybe you've not plumbed the depths of it or reached the limit of it.

[3:30] But all of our love is conditional to some degree or another. But God's love is infinite. It's limitless. And so, we could just name, go through all of the various aspects or features of the very nature and character of God.

And all of them are limitless. But since we're on the subject of holiness, God is not only perfect holy. He's unlimited holiness. Because God is immutable.

Unchangeable. And that's just, you know, the theologians' fancy words for unchangeable. He doesn't change. Never changes. Since God is immutable, His holiness is always the same.

It doesn't vary. He's not becoming more holy. Now, we are. Hopefully. But God is not becoming more holy. His holiness is, it does not vary.

Because of the nature of God. He's immutable. Unchangeable. Nothing ever changes. God is not growing. He's not improving. He's not learning.

[4:41] He's not adding anything to Himself. You know, through experience. He's absolutely perfect. Now, I know these are, you know, kind of philosophical concepts. But, you know, they're taught in Scripture.

This is the nature of God. He is immutable. Unchangeable. And that not only intersects with our life in regard to this truth, that He's the same yesterday, today, and forever.

We know that from Scripture. But I'm talking about not just in His connection or intersection with us, which He's gracious to do. But I mean in His nature as God.

He's immutable. And so, therefore, His holiness is always the same. It never changes. And because He is transcendent. I guess that's another one of those, you know, \$50 words.

That means He's up here. I mean, He's far removed from us. His holiness is beyond the realm of our minds. Now, we can, based upon what we have in Scripture, we can discuss holiness.

[5 : 52] And we can, to some degree, define it because we have Scripture. But we cannot, in our minds, even capture a fraction of what it means for God to be holy.

It's beyond us. Because God is transcendent. All right? All we see or experience in regard to holiness. It's all right.

Probably your husband. No. Okay. I sneezed and I turned it on. Okay. There. Sorry. That's all right.

All that we see that's somehow, in a sense, tangible, though it's still kind of abstract.

All that we can see, all that we can experience in regard to holiness, all that we can be in terms of holiness, is but a reflection of the holiness of God.

[6 : 55] It's just a reflection of it. Because His holiness is transcendent. It's beyond us. That's why it's closely akin to the idea of glory.

God is all glorious. But what we experience of the glory of God is but a reflection of His glory. We cannot look fully into His glory, not and live.

And so, think of it. God is transcendent. Now, you know, I include this in our study because, I don't know, I just think we need to get a sense of the greatness of God.

If we're going to come to a place where we learn something and understand something about our holiness.

Because that is what we're looking at here. Because, remember, we started with that scripture, be ye holy, for I am holy.

[7 : 59] And so, there's a command. And if we're going to understand that command and obey that command, then the foundation is to understand the absolute holiness of God.

And based upon His nature. Alright, so holiness. The holiness of God is a huge subject. I think you'd agree. Much larger than anything I've attempted to describe in this, what, five or ten minutes. It's a huge subject. And I might add, and I'm not sure if I put this in your notes. Holiness, in terms of the attributes of God, the nature of God, holiness, is above all other attributes.

Attributes of God. You can think of it, and this is how our finite minds have to kind of conceptualize this.

That holiness is kind of the overarching nature or feature of God. He's holy. And though I say that, yet holiness is just an attribute.

[9 : 12] It's an attribute of God. Holiness does not stand above God. It's not something above Him that He fits under. As though it's some kind of category that we could put God in.

We don't want to elevate any of these concepts. Holiness and love and goodness and righteousness. We could go on, but various characteristics of God.

We don't put them as categories. We put God under them. In holiness, we can't do that. Holiness does not define God. Now think about this.

Holiness does not define God. God defines holiness. God is who defines holiness. What's the difference between those two?

If I were to say that holiness defines God, then that's subjective. And so every one of us have a different understanding, knowledge of what holiness is.

[10 : 20] And so each of us would define God in terms of our understanding of what holiness is. Holiness does not define God. God defines holiness, and we are just simply discovering that holiness.

Now just how much of that we'll completely understand when we get to glory. I don't know. We're not going to, by the way, go to heaven and then suddenly know everything like God knows everything.

I think we'll still be learning some things there. The Bible says we'll know as we are known, but we're not to suppose that Scripture anywhere tells us that we're going to be then omniscient when we get to heaven, that we'll know all things, as God knows all things.

We're still going to be learning. But God will be defining what holiness is, and we'll know it better than we could ever know it here when we get there.

Holiness belongs to God. Belongs to Him alone. I'm kind of setting this up here because this seems to contradict this command that we're to be holy.

[11 : 38] So if holiness belongs to God alone, and it does. The Scriptures say that. Revelation 15.4 says you alone are holy. That's very clear.

God is holy. All right. So then I kind of set that up, and that kind of, I think, serves as a pretty good segue, transition into the subject of man's holiness.

Because that's where we're going. That's what we want to understand. And the reality is that man has no holiness in himself. We don't have any holiness in ourselves.

None whatsoever. I've got a quote here. Did I put Clyde Cranford's quote in there? Clyde Cranford, I may have mentioned him before.

He's with Jesus now. He knows about holiness now than he ever wrote about when he was here on this planet. But Clyde Cranford was a student at Mid-America years ago.

[12 : 43] And he had a ministry. I may have mentioned this too. He had a ministry, a very vital ministry of discipleship. He had one-on-one discipleship. And throughout his life, I don't know how many men he disciplined, personally disciplined.

And he wrote his own discipleship materials. Much of it designed to lead a man to spiritual formation, spiritual maturity in the Lord.

Very rich. Very doctrinal. And there's a book. The book that he wrote, I think, actually was published posthumously.

That is, this was after Clyde Cranford died. And they took his discipleship notes. And by the way, when he would disciple a man, and when he was finished, he would give that man a copy of the discipleship notes, leather bound.

You could put that together just for them to keep. Well, those notes became a book entitled, Because We Love Him, Embracing a Life of Holiness.

[13 : 49] You might just write down that title. I recommend that. And it's still in print. You can still buy it. Because We Love Him is the title, subtitled, Embracing a Life of Holiness.

Tremendous book. But I inserted this quote. So, Clyde Cranford wrote, and this comes out of this book, In and of ourselves, we are but wretched sinners who must shrink under the dazzling brilliance of holy God.

That's quite a statement. I remember Isaiah 6.5. Well, Isaiah chapter 6, famous chapter in the book of Isaiah. Much preached on.

I've preached on it. I think I have since I've been here. Where Isaiah, of course, goes into the temple. Whether it was a vision or whether this actually happened before his eyes.

I can't tend to believe this actually happened. But Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up. And a tremendous chapter. But after that was all done, when he saw the Lord, Isaiah said, Woe is me, for I am ruined.

[15 : 01] Ruined. That word means destroyed. He was destroyed. Because of what God allowed him to see. Because I am a man of unclean lips.

And I live among a people of unclean lips. For my eyes have seen the King. The Lord of hosts. Yahweh of hosts. Isaiah came in contact with the holiness of God.

And it dramatically traumatized him. And so, that gives credence to this reality that man has no holiness in himself.

We don't have any holiness. And we are sinners. You might also remember Peter in Luke chapter 5 verse 8. And you will remember the story where Peter had been fishing all night.

And he caught nothing. And so, Jesus got in the boat with Peter. And he instructed him to launch out into the deep. And to cast out the net. So, one side of the boat. And, you know, I remember how the text says that Peter said, He would have been fishing all night.

[16 : 14] I haven't caught anything. But, alright, whatever you say. Let's go ahead. That's a very rough paraphrase. And so, they go out there. And Peter, of course, caught so many fish.

The nets were breaking. Remember that story. And how did Peter respond? You see, this was a... What happened there was a miracle. But it was more than that. It was a manifestation of the holiness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

His glory. Part of that was... Of the veil, you know. His humanness was pulled aside. And Peter saw that. And he said to Jesus, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

And I think we would discover, if you've not already discovered it. Maybe not in a grand way like Isaiah and Peter. These kind of experiences they had.

Maybe you and I will never have those kinds of experiences. But we do have encounters with the greatness and the holiness of God. And when we do, we're always dramatically affected.

[17 : 22] And it brings, you know, into bold relief our own sinfulness. And unholiness. And we respond that way, David.

I was just thinking while you were saying that, isn't that what we also see with Moses? When God presented himself in the bush, the burning bush, and said to take off your sandals?

Yeah. Yeah. Well, I think that's still the same idea. The utter unholiness of man. And the absolute holiness of God. You know, in America, and I remember I was teaching this subject to, first to the students in Ukraine.

And I was sharing with them, and I think you would agree with me, that in America today, especially, and I mean the church today, has become really, in becoming more and more opposed to the whole notion of holiness.

The whole subject of it. Whether there is, you know, especially within Baptist churches, whether there is this kind of association that we have with Pentecostalism and the holiness movement, which I don't think is the case, though there is a problem there.

[18 : 50] Why there's an opposition to this whole notion of becoming holy as God is holy. And that working itself out in some very, very practical things in the way we live our lives.

The reason we're opposed to it is because we become very passive concerning sin. We're very passive about that. We're very tolerant of it. We almost have succumbed to the idea that, well, you know, we're just sinners, you know.

Just sinners saved by grace. And, you know, God understands that. And nobody's perfect. And we just kind of slip into that notion. And then we don't have a view of sin that is anywhere near God's view of it.

And so we tolerate it. We accept it. We succumb to temptation because we know, well, God's going to forgive me. But whatever the thought process is, it's wrong.

And it all comes together to this conclusion that we are passive about sin. We're passive about it. And so, therefore, we have an opposition to holiness.

[20 : 04] When I say passive to sin, I mean that we don't see that our sin is an offense to God. It's an utter offense to Him.

And this is true of unbelievers, certainly. And it can be and should be a part of our gospel presentation.

When we present the gospel, we ought to let those people know that because they've broken God's laws, that's a very serious thing with God.

You see, in America, we don't tend to have that kind of thinking. That this is very serious. Now, we may have regrets about sin. Maybe we are sorry that our sin has hurt somebody else.

Or maybe we have some feelings of guilt or whatever, but we don't necessarily have this thought that our sin is an offense against God.

[21 : 08] We've offended Him. And why? Because He's holy. He is absolute holiness. So, any infraction of His law, His word, is an offense to Him.

And He takes that very seriously. And we can then go to the next step that because of that, if we don't repent, we're in deep trouble with God.

I know that's not a popular kind of message. And certainly, if you think of that in the context of sharing the gospel with an unbeliever, we kind of tend more toward making it a softer sell because we want them to make a decision.

And we want them to join our church. You know, we want them to come. And so, we're geared more toward some idea of the results than we are toward a true compassion for a sinner who's in deep trouble with God.

Deep trouble. And if they do not repent, they're doomed. Now, that adds a whole different dynamic to the way we share the gospel.

[22 : 24] But it is the truth of the matter. Where sin is an offense against God. David, what did he say in Psalm 51? Against you.

And you only, Lord, have I sinned. Now, we do sin against other people, too. And repentance is a remedy for that, too.

And confession and repentance and reconciliation, that's part of that. But first and foremost, all sin, even what we would call the smallest of sins, that's our way of conceptualizing it, even the smallest of sin, is an utter offense against God because he's holy.

He's holy. Absolute holy. And so, we can't be passive about sin. When we are, then there is a natural opposition, then, against any notion of moving toward holiness, living holy lives.

All right. Well, enough of that. Let me move on. All right. Now, the obvious question, then, I'm going to have to quit. Doggone it. The obvious question is, if man has no holiness in himself, and that's true, then how can we speak of man in terms of holiness?

[23 : 56] In terms of being holy? If there's no holiness in man in and of himself, then how can we even speak of it in those terms? I mean, it kind of causes a dilemma.

I mean, I've stated what I think is scriptural fact here, and it's maybe a hard line, but it's the truth.

And so then, you know, well, how then do I obey this command?

How could that even apply to me? I mean, how can the command to be holy have any reference to us? Or any relevance to us? And so, here's how we ought to think of that, and then we'll leave the first one, the position of holiness, next time.

In the first place, we have to admit that the word holy is used a number of times in the Bible in reference to man. All right, so, that may not give the whole answer, and certainly satisfy the question, doesn't satisfy the question fully, but the Bible does speak of man in terms of holiness. All right? Second place, we have to notice that the word holy in Scripture, is used in Scripture, in reference to man, in two distinct ways.

[25 : 13] We call them two aspects of holiness. And they are defined this way, or conceptualized this way, positional holiness and practical holiness.

We can understand those, maybe further define those in this way, positional holiness, who you are in Christ. Not because of your own doing, or your own goodness, or any merit in you, but who you are, by the grace of God in Christ.

That's positional holiness. You didn't work for that, take certain steps to reach that, earn that, make any decision for that.

This is the act of God, and His grace, to place you in Christ. Holiness, positional holiness, is who you are in Christ. Practical holiness, just as the word suggests, kind of points us to, the everyday life, things that go on in life, things that we're involved in, participating.

And so we can define, practical holiness, who you are becoming, everyday, throughout your life, as a believer.

[26 : 32] Who you are becoming. And I would add to that, your participation in that. That's what makes, practical holiness, a somewhat, different thing, well, majorly different thing, from positional holiness.

Though I'll go ahead, and tell you, and we'll get to these, when we get to the notes, a little bit later.

Practical holiness, does not mean, this is man's part, and positional holiness, that's God's part.

Positional holiness, is all God's part, that's all God. And believe me, you can do nothing, to be in that position, of holiness.

Absolutely nothing. Nor is there anything, that is required of you, to stay in that position. This is absolutely, the grace of God.

So it's all God. But when we get to the, practical side of holiness, that's not all man, and no God. It's both God and man. And so we'll, we'll see that, when we get to that.

[27 : 37] But the major difference, between positional holiness, and practical holiness, is that practical holiness, is something we participate in. We join God in. And that's a very important, key part, in this whole notion, of a spiritual formation.

Because when we get, to the more practical things, we understand, these are things, that you decide to do. And you're determined to do. Even though God, enables you, it is something you must do.

And so, that's where we're ultimately, going to get in our study.