

Introduction:

“Be holy, for I am holy.” Understood properly, that is perhaps the most frightening statement in Scripture. We serve a holy God. If we want Him to be our God, we must be holy as He is. This statement is non-negotiable. It is repeated in both covenants: **Leviticus 19:2; I Peter 1:15-16**. I’d like to unpack this statement by noting three truths this statement conveys.

Discussion:

I. God is holy.

- A. In a previous lesson, we considered this point. But we obviously can’t talk about **I Peter 1:15-16** without reminding ourselves of the holiness of God.
- B. First, remember that holiness at its root means to be distinct and separate. **Leviticus 10:10** demonstrates this concept. Holiness is distinction and separation from what is common. God is separate and distinct. He is distinct in two ways. Fundamentally, there is His majestic holiness (see **Exodus 15:11**). This is demonstrated by the very first verse of the Bible. God is Creator; we are creation. It is harder to have more of a distinction than that. Secondly, there is God’s ethical holiness which proceeds from His transcendent and majestic holiness (see **I John 1:5; James 1:13**). God is pure and sinless. He is distinct from us because we have all sinned and fallen short of His glory (cf. **Romans 3:23**).
- C. God is holy and we must not forget it.
 1. “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” (**Isaiah 6:3**, ESV).
 2. “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” (**Revelation 4:8**, ESV).
 3. “Exalt the LORD our God; worship at his footstool! Holy is he!...Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his holy mountain; for the LORD our God is holy” (**Psalms 99:5, 9**, ESV).

II. God: The standard of holiness.

- A. **Romans 3:23** explains what this fact of God’s holiness means for us. God’s glory is the standard of holiness. If we are to be holy because God is holy, we are not allowed to define our own holiness and claim that suffices. We don’t get to pick and choose the parts of holiness we like, dismiss the parts that are too hard for us and then act like we are responding to this oft repeated statement. We are to be holy because our God is holy. We are to be holy as our God is holy.
- B. Throughout Leviticus, as God described holiness for the Israelites, he repeatedly based His holiness code on this basis: “I am the Lord your God” (**Leviticus 11:44, 45; 18:2, 4, 5, 6, 21, 30; 19:3, 4, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 25, 28, 30, 31, 32, 34, 36, 37, et al**). Why would He repeat this over and over and over again? The point God was making was simply this. He is God. He gets to make the rules. Not only does He get to make the rules, His very nature is the standard for the rules. As God teaches us to be holy, He is teaching us to be more like Him.
- C. This means two things for us.
 1. *We must get to know God:* We need to learn how He acts and reacts. We need to discern what He longs for and what He hates. How can we do that? By considering God’s revelation of Himself through His Holy Spirit found in the Word (see **I Corinthians 2:10-13**).
 2. *We must get to know God’s will:* If He is holy, it stands to reason His will for us is holy. We can see this in **I Thessalonians 4:7**. God’s will, His rules and regulations, are not arbitrary requirements just to see if we can jump through hoops. Rather, they are markers for having a relationship with Him, being holy as He is holy. As **Psalms 119:9-12** explains, if I long to be holy, I must learn His Word and will.
- D. We must recognize that holiness is not determined by my think-sos. It is not determined by what seems right to me (cf. **Proverbs 14:12; 16:25**). Holiness is not determined by the crowd or the culture. Holiness is not determined by popular vote of all the preachers, professors, or priests. It is not determined by what all the churches agree on. It is not determined by celebrities or politicians. It is not determined by sticking our finger in the cultural wind to see which way it is blowing. Holiness is determined by the unchanging God. Let us get to know Him and His revelation so we may be holy like Him.

III. Where He is is holy.

- A. Please understand that everything the Bible tells us about, every plan the Bible shows is for this purpose, to make us holy as God is holy. In the very beginning, God made man to be in fellowship with Him, by making man in His image (**Genesis 1:27**). But man messed that up by bringing sin into the world (**Genesis 2; Romans 5:12**). Sin entered and the fellowship was severed as man was kicked out of the garden. The world got worse and worse (**Genesis 6:5**). Sin abounded. Here we are thousands of years later. God judged the world through flood. Called out His nation. Sent them into captivity, brought them home. Sent His Son into the world as the sacrifice for sin. Yet, the world hasn't changed too much. Evil and sin abound.
- B. What God's holiness means is He is separate from that. He is so separate He cannot even look on evil (**Habakkuk 1:13**). We need to grasp that God's holiness means He has strong and certain boundaries. Sadly, relationships in our society are governed by dysfunction. So much so that we hardly even know what healthy functional relationships should look like. In most people we know, boundaries are weak and often crossable. Too often, in our relationships, we are trying to compensate for some weakness, fear, or insecurity, therefore, we will often cross our boundaries to try to maintain a relationship that we think will complete us or fix us. But remember God is not weak, fearful, or insecure. He is not incomplete. Despite the proponents of the Lonely God picture, God is not seeking a relationship with us because we will somehow fill a gap that He has in His existence. Remember His majestic holiness? He is Creator. He isn't one of us or like us. He doesn't have those needs, those shortcomings, those dysfunctions. Therefore, He won't cross His boundaries in order to have a relationship with us.
- C. With all of this in mind, remember what holiness is. It is separation. Try to picture it geographically. The world is in one location, but God is separate from the world. If we want to dwell with Him, we have to go where He is. **Psalm 5:4** says evil may not dwell with God. We cannot take the world's evil with us to where God is. Rather, we must leave the world behind to be where God is. Picture it like this. God is saying, "I see you over there. I'm over here. I long to have a relationship with you. Come over here so we can have a relationship." Thus, **Isaiah 52:11-12** tells God's people to come out from the people around them and Paul adopts that statement to encourage Christians to do the same thing (**II Corinthians 6:16-18**). In that passage, Paul goes on to say, "Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God" (**II Corinthians 7:1**, ESV).
- D. Keep this in mind. God called Israel out of Egypt and brought them to their own land. He separated them out from the nations so they could be holy. Then He gave them a law that would distinguish them from the nations around them so they could be holy. We need to understand that being holy as God is holy means we cannot dwell with God and with the world at the same time. If we want to be where God is, we can't stay where the world is. We must draw closer to Him.

Conclusion:

"You shall be holy, for I am holy." It is a frightening statement. However, the difference between the Old Covenant and the New is the power to be holy. Under the Old Covenant, there was simply the command to be holy. There was the holiness code to measure up to and either you made the cut or you didn't. The difference between **Leviticus 19:2** and **I Peter 1:15-16** is the verses that follow. **I Peter 1:17-25** goes on to tell us how we can be holy as God is holy. While God has healthy boundaries and won't cross them in order to have some kind of unhealthy relationship with us, He is the one that reaches out so we can have a relationship. He saw us in our unholiness and rather than leave us there, He sent Jesus and shed His blood that we could have life and holiness through Him. Jesus is in fact the way (cf. **John 14:6**). If through Jesus you believe in God, putting your hope and trust in Him, then your soul will be purified. And this is the good news. The good news is not that we have to be holy as God is holy to get to go to heaven. The good news is that through Jesus Christ, we can be holy as God is holy just like we want to. If all you want is to go to the pleasurable rewards of heaven, then there is no good news for you. But if what you want is to be holy enjoying the pleasures of a relationship with the holy God, then the death of Jesus Christ can empower you to be the dwelling place of God. You can be holy. Just as God delivered Israel from Egypt so they could be a holy nation, God will separate you in Jesus Christ from the world so that you might be holy as He is. So the question is are you ready to be holy? Are you ready to overcome and grow in victory? In **I Peter 3:21**, Peter goes on to say, this faith and hope in God begins by surrendering to Him in baptism that He may save you by the blood and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Are you ready for that holiness?