

HOLY GOD, HOLY PEOPLE

by Mike O'Neal



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Introduction

We've been told that "*Image is everything.*" "*Take good care of what shows and don't worry about the rest.*" God's agenda for our lives, however, is much different. He wants to change us from the inside out. The "image" that has been tarnished by sin can only be restored by the power of God.

God displays His infinite holiness through Scripture. He longs to transform us into His holy people and uses His holy angels, the Holy Spirit, and sanctified Christians to accomplish His purposes. A holy God invites you into the lifelong journey to become His holy people.

About the Author

Mike O'Neal is a graduate of Harding School of Theology and has served as minister for several congregations in central Florida. He is now a retired NASA engineer after 31 years of service at the Kennedy Space Center. While there, he worked on Space Shuttle missions and investigated ways to provide spiritual support for astronauts on long-duration missions. Mike is also the author of *An Angel's View* (**21st Century Christian Publishing**). He speaks frequently about angels, spirituality, and spaceflight.



Lesson 1

Why Study About Holiness?

Daily Readings:

**Hebrews 12:14; Leviticus 11:44-45, 19:2; 1 Peter 1:15-16;
John 1:18, 14:9-11; Isaiah 6:1-5; Philippians 3:17-19; Luke 5:8**

WARM UP



About half-way through my degree program at the Harding University Graduate School of Religion, my coursework started to become a bit of a grind. With all my electives gone, only core courses remained. Most of these required classes were fairly interesting, but I typically enjoyed the electives much better. Drawn to their subject matter, they were courses of my choosing, not some mind-numbing class required by the school.

One day, while looking at my remaining classes, I noticed Restoration Church History was still on the horizon, when suddenly a great idea hit me. It was time to grovel at the feet of the Dean and ask for a waiver. Just turning forty-eight years old and chomping at the bit to do ministry, the only history I wanted to study was in the Bible, so taking an extra class on one of its books was my goal. Graciously,

though directly, the Dean explained the importance of understanding the roots of our faith-heritage and turned down my feeble attempt at a waiver. His point-of-view was dead-on, but I still dreaded taking this class. Despite my reservations, Restoration Church History turned out to be one of my all-time favorites. The incredible devotion and achievements by those who had gone before me was truly inspirational. From my new vantage point, several additional heroes of faith were added to my list of those from God's Word.

For all Christians, studying the topic of holiness should be considered a core requirement, never to be waived. As we passionately explore this important subject together, hopefully your newly-gained vantage point will bring new life and understanding to your Christian walk.

WORK OUT



You are not alone if the concept of holiness is a little gray to you. In our culture, the term is rarely used in secular settings, and when it is, the tone tends to be derogatory. You might recall such phrases as "You think you are holier than everyone else," or "They are just a bunch of holy rollers." Even in our churches, you hardly ever hear a sermon on holiness or have an in-depth class on the subject.

Scripture uses it in different ways. Sometimes holiness carries an ethical meaning, while at other times it denotes something's unique nature, and in a few cases both dimensions may be implied. So context will always need to be evaluated to determine what is appropriate. To make matters worse, the words related to holiness, such as "sanctify" and "saint," carry with them their own confusing aspects.

Consequently, we have an interesting challenge in front of us, but as we peel back this onion, things will become a lot clearer. For now, let's look at a couple of important reasons for studying this crucial topic.

Heavenly Prerequisite

Many of our desires in life necessitate completing prerequisites before proceeding on to our true objectives. This usually involves obtaining some level of proficiency in the activity being pursued. For example, our highways are scary enough. Could you imagine how dangerous they would be if no evaluation of a person's driving skills occurred prior to issuing them a license?

The author of Hebrews reveals a sobering prerequisite for the Christian – “without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14). Holiness is not some optional extra; it is standard equipment for God's people. To stand in the presence of our holy God, those who profess His name must possess holiness. Therefore, believers are told to pursue this invaluable characteristic. So what is it that we are actually pursuing? With such a weighty end-result in view, obtaining the proper understanding of the concept of holiness is crucial. As you will see, our gracious God does not make such a lofty demand and leave us to our own meager resources, but He facilitates the development of holiness within His people.

Be Like Whom?

If you are like me, most of you have looked up to a role model or two throughout the years. However, you probably learned fairly quickly that living up to the standards and performance of those we admire can be a tall order. Knowing this to be the case, Scripture again appears to place the Christian in a tough predicament. When it comes to holiness, we must follow in God's footsteps. Both the Old and New

Testaments make it perfectly clear that God's people are to emulate His holy ways (Leviticus 11:44-45, 19:2; 1 Peter 1:15-16). To be like God in any particular way sounds daunting enough, but when combined with holiness's abstract nature, a white cloud may pop up above our head with the thought, "You want me to do what!?"

Perhaps now you understand why a course on holiness should be a core requirement for God's people. Since so much is at stake, we need to properly ground ourselves in this important subject. Within God's Word we will find ample information to understand the concept of holiness, so "hang in there." Scripture thoroughly attests to God's holiness, and we must always remember that Jesus is the great revealer of His Father (John 1:18, 14:9-11). Holiness radiated throughout and defined Jesus' earthly ministry.

COOL DOWN



Early in my career at NASA, I worked on the Space Shuttle Main Engine Avionics Subsystem. This consisted of the computers, electronics, and instrumentation that controlled the three Main Engines, which each delivered 375,000 pounds of thrust to the Shuttle at liftoff. Honeywell designed and built the avionics box that controlled these high-energy beasts. One of the greatest privileges of my career was working with the Honeywell designers. No doubt, when it came to electronics design, they were some of our nation's elite. I loved rubbing elbows with them at design reviews, but at times I felt intimidated due to their utter brilliance and professionalism. Not that they did anything to intentionally create such a reaction; my own inadequacies just seemed to internally come to light while in the company of these phenomenal engineers.

Isaiah would probably empathize with such feelings, though in a much more significant way. When he encountered God in his throne room vision, a horrible dread immediately swept over him (Isaiah 6:5). His sinful condition at once came into view as He stood in the presence of the All-Holy One. Peter also had a similar response to Jesus after the miraculous catch of fish (Luke 5:8).

At the early stages of your Christianity, you probably also felt a similar discomfort when spending time with individuals you deemed as holy. As you observed their impeccable lifestyle, the thought of your own weaknesses and vices most likely created feelings of inadequacy within you. Regrettably, in such circumstances, uneasiness overtakes us, and we may even tend to avoid this person. Most of us seek ways to escape discomfort and reminders of our inadequacies.

Although such reactions are inevitable, consider the following. First, we desperately need role models in our lives that exemplify holiness. Paul appealed to the Philippians to find godly examples to follow (Philippians 3:17). Holiness is not an option; it must be pursued and finding good role models places us on the right track. Second, those who consider themselves as potential role models need to go the extra mile in becoming approachable. Let your holy behavior be observed outside the “sanctity” of the church building in neutral settings. Share your hobbies, go fishing, play softball, discuss home projects, or whatever “floats your boat.” Just create some experiences in which others can relate to you as a person - take the scary out of holy.

Third, if you truly desire to pursue holiness, any discomfort you might experience from being around someone who exhibits a holy lifestyle will probably be fleeting. You will discover that they are not free of weaknesses and that they rely upon God for their holiness. Pray for courage and step into a relationship that will have eternal ramifications. Finally, Jesus invites you to view His life – the ideal holy life.

Questions

1. When you hear or read the word "holy," what typically comes to mind?
2. Do you view yourself as a holy person? Why or why not?
3. Do you think studying about holiness is important? Explain.
4. What do you think of the requirement to be holy like God? Do you think that is achievable?
5. Have you ever felt uncomfortable in the presence of someone you viewed as holy? What created your discomfort? What might help overcome this discomfort?
6. Do you believe having holy role models is important? What would you expect out of such a relationship? What might help it be successful? How might this relationship be detrimental? Is there anything you can do to prevent this?