

The Holiness of God

The Attribute of Attributes — What God Is in the Depths of His Being

A Teaching Lesson · Seminary-level content, high-school-level clarity

LESSON AT A GLANCE

Big Idea: Holiness is not just one attribute among many — it is the very “God-ness” of God. It means He is utterly set apart, infinitely above all creation, and perfectly pure. Holiness is the attribute Scripture repeats most intensely, and it is the lens through which every other attribute is rightly understood: God’s love is holy love, His power is holy power, His mercy is holy mercy.

Memory Verse: *“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” — Isaiah 6:3 (ESV)*

Contents

PART ONE

Teaching Outline (Leader Notes)

This is the central lesson in our study of God's attributes, and it deserves special weight. Holiness is the one attribute Scripture lifts up above all others — the only one repeated three times in a row, and the attribute the angels never stop crying out in heaven. Holiness is not simply something God has; in a real sense, holiness is what God IS. It is the sum of His perfection, His "otherness," His absolute purity. Because of this, holiness is not just one item on a list of attributes; it is the key that unlocks all the others. In this lesson we will define holiness carefully, trace it through the whole Bible, and then — most importantly — see how every other attribute of God must be understood through His holiness. Part One is your full teaching material; Part Two is a handout to copy for students.

A note to the teacher: This lesson is longer and richer than the others on purpose. Do not rush it. If needed, teach it over two sessions — Sections I–VI in the first, and Sections VII–X (holiness interpreting every attribute, and application) in the second. Holiness is the heartbeat of biblical religion; give students time to feel its weight, not just learn its definition.

I. Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

1. Define the two dimensions of God's holiness (transcendent majesty and moral purity).
2. Explain why holiness is called "the attribute of attributes."
3. Trace the theme of holiness across the whole storyline of Scripture.
4. Show how holiness shapes and controls every other attribute of God.
5. Explain how a sinner can approach a holy God — and describe the right response to His holiness.

II. What Does "Holy" Mean?

The core idea of the biblical words for holy (Hebrew *qadosh*, Greek *hagios*) is "set apart" or "cut off from the common." When applied to God, holiness has two dimensions that must be held together:

1. Set-apartness (majesty)	God is utterly distinct from and above all creation — in a class entirely by Himself. This is His "otherness," His infinite greatness and transcendence. "There is none holy like the LORD" (1 Samuel 2:2).
2. Moral purity	God is absolutely pure, without any sin, stain, or shadow. He is "of purer eyes than to see evil" (Habakkuk 1:13); "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5).

The deepest meaning: When Scripture calls God "holy," it is not naming one quality alongside others. It is pointing to His very Godhood — the sum total of everything that makes God to be God, and infinitely unlike us. Holiness is the "God-ness" of God.

III. Why Holiness Is “The Attribute of Attributes”

Theologians have long said holiness holds a unique place among God’s perfections. Here is why:

- **It is the only attribute raised to the third degree.** Scripture never says God is “love, love, love” or “power, power, power.” But twice — in Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8 — heaven cries, “Holy, holy, holy.” In Hebrew, repeating a word three times raises it to the highest possible degree. Holiness is God’s superlative perfection.
- **It is the attribute of His name.** God’s name — which stands for all that He is — is repeatedly called “holy” (Psalm 111:9; Luke 1:49). To hallow His name is to treat all of Him as holy.
- **It describes God more than any other word.** From Genesis to Revelation, holiness is the pervasive theme of God’s character — the atmosphere of heaven itself.
- **It is the crown of His glory.** When God shows Moses His glory, and when Israel sings after the exodus, the summit of praise is: “Who is like you, majestic in holiness?” (Exodus 15:11).

The key claim of this lesson: Holiness is not one attribute in a row of equals. It is the attribute that describes the character of all the other attributes. It is less like one color on a palette and more like the brightness that shines through every color.

IV. Holiness Across the Whole Bible

Holiness is not a New Testament idea or an Old Testament idea — it runs through the entire storyline of Scripture. Trace it for students:

- **At the burning bush** — God tells Moses, “The place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Exodus 3:5). Even the dirt near God becomes holy.
- **At Sinai** — the people cannot even touch the mountain; God’s holiness is dangerous to sinners (Exodus 19:12–23).
- **In the tabernacle and temple** — layers of separation, the “Most Holy Place,” and a veil all teach that a holy God cannot be casually approached.
- **In Isaiah’s vision** — the angels cry “Holy, holy, holy,” and Isaiah, a good man, cries “Woe is me! I am undone” (Isaiah 6:1–5). Holiness exposes sin.
- **At the cross** — the veil is torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51). Through Christ’s blood, the way into the Holy Place is finally opened (Hebrews 10:19–22).
- **In the new creation** — heaven never stops singing “Holy, holy, holy” (Revelation 4:8), and nothing unclean can ever enter (Revelation 21:27).

V. The Vision That Defines Holiness: Isaiah 6

“And one called to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!’... And I said: ‘Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips... for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!’”

— Isaiah 6:3, 5 (ESV)

This passage is the classic biblical text on holiness. Walk students through its pattern, because it is the pattern of every true encounter with a holy God:

1. **A vision of God’s holiness.** Isaiah sees the Lord high and lifted up; the angels cover their faces and cry “holy.”
2. **A true sight of self.** Isaiah does not feel proud — he collapses. In the light of holiness, even a prophet sees he is “undone.”
3. **Cleansing that comes from God.** A coal from the altar touches his lips; his guilt is taken away. He cannot cleanse himself — God provides it.
4. **A life sent out in service.** Only after being cleansed does Isaiah say, “Here I am! Send me.” Holiness humbles, cleanses, then commissions.

VI. Holiness Is the Lens for Every Other Attribute

This is the heart of the lesson. Because holiness is the “God-ness” of God, it does not sit beside the other attributes — it runs through and governs every one of them. Each attribute we have studied is a *holy* version of that perfection. Work through this table slowly; it ties the whole series together.

Holy love	God’s love is not soft sentiment; it is pure, set-apart, self-giving love that never approves of sin. Holy love is what sent Christ to die rather than ignore evil.
Holy power	God’s omnipotence is never raw force; it is always used in perfect purity. He can do all His HOLY will — He never uses His power to do wrong.
Holy knowledge	God’s omniscience is pure sight. He sees all things with unstained eyes, hating sin even as He knows it perfectly.
Holy justice	God’s justice flows from His holiness. Because He is pure, He cannot overlook sin; His judgments are the holiness of God in action.
Holy mercy	God’s mercy is not a looking-the-other-way. It is holy mercy — mercy that satisfies justice at the cross, so grace never cheapens sin.
Holy sovereignty	God’s rule over all things is a HOLY rule. His control is never arbitrary; it is always exercised by a perfectly pure King for pure ends.

Teach this as the master key: Whenever you think about any attribute of God, put the word “holy” in front of it. That single word protects you from every distortion — a love that excuses sin, a power that could be cruel, a mercy that ignores justice. In God, every perfection is a holy perfection.

VII. The Great Problem — and the Gospel Answer

God's holiness creates the deepest problem in the universe, and only the gospel solves it:

- **The problem:** A holy God cannot simply ignore sin — to do so would deny His own nature. Yet every human being is a sinner. “The wicked will not stand in [His] sight” (Psalm 5:5). How can unholy people ever come near a holy God?
- **The wrong answers:** We cannot make ourselves holy enough (Isaiah 64:6), and God cannot lower His standard, because He cannot deny Himself.
- **The gospel answer:** At the cross, God's holiness and love meet perfectly. Jesus, the Holy One, takes our sin and gives us His righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). God stays perfectly holy AND welcomes sinners — “just and the justifier” (Romans 3:26). The torn veil says the way is now open.

The crucial point: Only when we feel the weight of God's holiness do we understand the wonder of the cross. Cheap grace comes from a small view of holiness. A high view of holiness makes grace amazing.

VIII. Common Confusions (and How to Answer Them)

“Isn't God's love His main attribute, not His holiness?”

God's love is gloriously real — but Scripture never chants “love, love, love.” It chants “holy, holy, holy.” The two are not in competition: God's love IS a holy love. Holiness is what makes His love pure, faithful, and costly rather than mere sentiment. We do not choose between them; we let holiness define what His love is like.

“If God is so holy and I am so sinful, how can I not be terrified of Him?”

Apart from Christ, the fear would be right — holiness is dangerous to sinners. But in Christ, the very holiness that once threatened you now protects you, because Jesus has satisfied it on your behalf. Believers come to the holy God “with confidence” (Hebrews 10:19), not because God's holiness shrank, but because Christ absorbed its judgment.

“Does God calling us to ‘be holy’ mean we can become as holy as He is?”

No. Our holiness is derived and creaturely — a real reflection, never an equal. “Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16) is a call to be set apart for God and to grow in purity, empowered by His Spirit. We share in His holiness (Hebrews 12:10) as the moon shares the sun's light — truly, but by reflection.

IX. What the Church Has Taught

- **The ancient church** sang the “Trisagion” — “Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us” — echoing Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4 in worship.
- **Stephen Charnock** called holiness “the glory of all the rest” of God's perfections — the beauty that makes every other attribute lovely.

- **The Reformed and Baptist confessions** confess God as “most holy... most just, and terrible in his judgments,” yet also “abundant in goodness” (Westminster and Second London Baptist Confessions, ch. 2).
- **A. W. Tozer** wrote that we can never conceive of God’s holiness fully — it is “the attribute” that makes God unspeakably awesome and drives His people to their knees.

The phrase to memorize: **Holiness is the “God-ness” of God — and every attribute is a holy attribute.**

X. The One-Sentence Guardrail

God is infinitely set apart in majesty and perfectly pure in character — and this holiness is not one attribute among many but the very Godhood of God, shining through every other perfection. To know God’s holiness rightly is to fall down and worship.

XI. Why This Matters for Us

- **It gives us the fear of the Lord.** A right view of holiness produces reverent awe — the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). We stop treating God as a casual buddy.
- **It makes grace amazing.** The higher our view of God’s holiness, the more astonishing it is that He would save us. Holiness turns the gospel from nice news into breathtaking news.
- **It calls us to be holy.** “Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16). Because our God is pure, His people are to pursue purity — set apart for Him in how we live.
- **It fuels worship.** The response to holiness in the Bible is never boredom — it is always falling down in worship. Holiness is why heaven is loud with praise.

PART TWO

Student Handout

The Holiness of God — the attribute of attributes. Fill in the blanks and follow along as we work through the lesson together.

The Big Idea

Holiness is not just one thing about God — it is the very “God-ness” of God: utterly set apart, high above all, perfectly pure. It is the attribute heaven repeats most, and it is the lens for every other attribute. God’s love is HOLY love, His power HOLY power, His mercy HOLY mercy.

The Word to Know: “Holy” = “Set Apart”

Set apart (majesty)	God is completely above and unlike all creation (1 Samuel 2:2).
Morally pure	God has no sin, stain, or darkness at all (1 John 1:5).

Why Holiness Is Special

- It’s the only attribute said three times: “Holy, holy, holy” (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8). Never “love, love, love.”
- Heaven never stops singing it — it is the atmosphere of God’s throne.

Put “Holy” in Front of Every Attribute

Holy love	Pure love that never approves of sin — it sent Christ to die.
Holy power	He does all His HOLY will; He never uses power to do wrong.
Holy justice	Because He is pure, He cannot ignore sin.
Holy mercy	Mercy that satisfies justice at the cross — never cheap.

Isaiah 6: The Pattern of Meeting a Holy God

- SEE God’s holiness (“Holy, holy, holy”).
- SEE yourself truly (“Woe is me!”).
- Be CLEANSED by God (the coal from the altar).
- Be SENT out (“Here I am! Send me.”).

Key Verses

- Isaiah 6:3 — “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts.”

- **1 Peter 1:16** — “Be holy, for I am holy.”
- **1 John 1:5** — “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.”
- **Hebrews 10:19** — In Christ we enter the Holy Place “with confidence.”

Fill in the Blanks

1. “Holy, holy, _____ is the LORD of hosts.” (Isaiah 6:3)
2. “God is _____, and in him is no darkness at all.” (1 John 1:5)
3. Holiness is the “_____ -ness” of God — what makes Him God.
4. A high view of holiness makes _____ amazing.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think heaven sings “holy” and never gets bored?
2. How does putting the word “holy” in front of love, power, and mercy change how you think about them?
3. Why does a bigger view of God’s holiness make His grace more amazing, not less?
4. If you truly saw God’s holiness like Isaiah did, what would change in your life this week?

One Sentence to Remember

Holiness is what God IS — and every other perfection is a holy perfection.

This Week

Memorize Isaiah 6:3. Each day, read a few verses about God and pause to ask: “How is this a HOLY love / HOLY power / HOLY mercy?” Let His holiness lead you to worship — and end each time by simply praying, “Holy, holy, holy are You, Lord.”

Sources & Further Study

Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV). Key passages and classic sources referenced in this lesson:

- Scripture: Exodus 3:5; Exodus 15:11; Exodus 19:12–23; 1 Samuel 2:2; Psalm 5:5; Psalm 111:9; Proverbs 9:10; Isaiah 6:1–5; Isaiah 64:6; Habakkuk 1:13; Matthew 27:51; Luke 1:49; Romans 3:26; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 10:19–22; Hebrews 12:10; 1 Peter 1:16; 1 John 1:5; Revelation 4:8; Revelation 21:27.
- Stephen Charnock, The Existence and Attributes of God — “Discourse on the Holiness of God” (holiness as “the glory of all the rest”).
- A. W. Tozer, The Knowledge of the Holy — chapter on “The Holiness of God.”
- R. C. Sproul, The Holiness of God (a modern classic expounding Isaiah 6).
- Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), ch. 2; Second London Baptist Confession (1689), ch. 2; Herman Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics vol. 2.