The Holiness of God

Leviticus 11:44

Be Holy for I am Holy

For most of us, when we hear the word "holy," we think of perfection. But holiness is much more than that. Holiness is the ultimate power of God to remain steadfast and unchanging. The traditional understanding of holiness is to be sacred and set apart. When we discuss the word, we often assume we are called to separate ourselves from the world. However, I want to introduce another understanding of what it means to be holy.

The Biblical Context

Leviticus 11 introduces the dietary instructions God gave to Israel. Because this command appears in the Book of Leviticus, we have often embraced a certain mindset without considering the essence of what God is trying to say to us.

Certainly, God is instructing Israel not to be like the other nations. Phrases like "do not be like the nations" abound throughout scripture. However, that is not the most important part of the message, and it's certainly not the ultimate direction God is leading us.

Reframing Holiness: Set Apart "To" God, Not "From" the World

In fact, it's just the opposite. At the end of these chapters of instructions, God makes this thunderous statement of ultimate existence: "Be holy, for I am holy."

God certainly does not want us to live as the rest of society lives. The dietary rules were for Israel to make them distinct, but the distinction was meant to align them with God, not merely separate them from the world. These rules were about an identity aligned with who God is, not primarily about what the world is not.

God wants us to be set apart *to Him* because we belong to Him. Our emphasis on being set apart from the world often moves our focus away from God. In our effort to move away from the world, we believe we are moving closer to God, when in fact we might not be. God's call is not merely to be different from the nations, but to be devoted to Him. Separation from the world is not the goal—union with God is.

The Consequences of Misunderstanding Holiness

When we define holiness by what we are not, we end up measuring ourselves against brokenness (the world), giving our energy to what we should avoid, rather than who we should abide in. “Be holy, for I am holy” is not a statement of separation—it is a statement calling for alignment, calling for us to set ourselves apart to Him.

When we focus on setting ourselves apart from society rather than setting ourselves apart to God, we move our energy and mindfulness in the wrong direction. God says, “Be holy, for I am holy,” reminding us of where the source of our existence comes from. It is not from society; it is from Him. When our energies are spent on avoiding the world rather than trying to be more like Christ, we miss the message of this scripture.

The Deeper Meaning of Divine Holiness

This passage invites us to reconsider our understanding of divine purity. Often, we perceive holiness as a distant, exclusionary force, a radiant perfection that keeps us at arm’s length. Yet, the text asserts that holiness is not about separation; instead, it is an invitation to be united. It’s not a barrier but a beckoning presence that calls us inward. The only true impediment to embracing holiness isn’t the intense fire of its nature, but rather our reluctance to be warmed, to be melted, to be remade by it.

Holiness as “Perfect Perfection”

Holiness is described not as mere moral perfection, but as “perfect perfection”—the complete and unblemished essence of God’s being. It is whole, radiant, full, and utterly lacking nothing. Within it, there is no shadow, no fracture, no inconsistency. It possesses an unwavering stability; it is neither fragile, reactive, nor anxious. This holiness does not recoil from our brokenness. However, if that brokenness remains unyielding, refusing surrender, it cannot coexist with the divine presence.

Conclusion: The Transformative Encounter

To encounter holiness is to be “undone.” This doesn’t imply destruction, but rather an unmaking, for nothing false can endure in the presence of absolute truth. This process is not rejection; it is simply reality. When one stands before this fire, the choice is clear: either melt or resist. One can surrender to the inevitable change or cling to what is impermanent, enduring its crumbling.

In the end, God's call to "Be holy, for I am holy" is an invitation to transformation—to align ourselves with His nature rather than defining ourselves by what we stand against in the world.

Blessings,

Pastor Gool