

THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE

The Holiness of God

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Defining Holy

- What does holy mean?
- Holy is a difficult word to understand
- Many will define “holy” with the word “pure”
- Purity is definitely involved in holiness, but it is not the definition of it
- Holy things are pure or used in a pure way, but to be holy is something else
- The primary meaning of the word is “set apart” or something that is “other”
- You can think about it being “a cut above rest”
- Another way say that God is other than us is to say that God is transcendent

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God's holiness is more than just separateness. His holiness is also transcendent. The word transcendence means literally 'to climb across.' It is defined as 'exceeding usual limits.' To transcend is to rise above something, to go above and beyond a certain limit. When we speak of the transcendence of God, we are talking about that sense in which God is above and beyond us. Transcendence describes His supreme and absolute greatness. The word is used to describe God's relationship to the world. He is higher than the world. He has absolute power over the world. The world has no power over Him. Transcendence describes God in His consuming majesty, His exalted loftiness. It points to the infinite distance that separates Him from every creature. He is an infinite cut above everything else.

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The Holiness of God, R.C. Sproul, p. 36.

Defining Holy

- Although we say that God is other than us and that He is transcendent, that really doesn't describe what it means that God is holy
- When we are talking about items and people that are holy, it is easy to define the word “holy” because those are things that have been set apart for a specific purpose
- They are not holy in of themselves, but are only made holy by God
- When the word “holy” is used in the Bible to describe God, it is used in a general sense

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When we use the word holy to describe God, we face another problem. We often describe God by compiling a list of qualities or characteristics that we call attributes. We say that God is a spirit, that He knows everything, that He is loving, just, merciful, gracious, and so on. The tendency is to add the idea of the holy to this long list of attributes as one among many. But when the word holy is applied to God, it does not signify one single attribute. On the contrary, God is called holy in a general sense. The word is used as a synonym for His deity. That is, the word holy calls attention to all that God is. It reminds us that His love is holy love, His justice is holy justice, His mercy is holy mercy, His knowledge is holy knowledge, His spirit is holy Spirit.

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The Holiness of God, R.C. Sproul, p. 38.



Defining Holy

- We do not have the words to describe it
- We can only give pieces of the whole or describe what God's holiness is not, but we cannot say what it is

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[Holiness] is God's whole, entire, absolute, inconceivable and, therefore, unexpressible completeness and perfection of separation from and opposition to and ineffable revulsion from all that is in any sense or degree, however small, evil. We fall back at last on this negative description of it just because language has no positive word which can reach up to the unscaleable heights of this one highest word, holiness. It is the crown of God as mercy is His treasure; as grace is His riches, this is His glory. Who is like unto God, glorious in holiness?

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Faith and Life, Benjamin B. Warfield, p. 444.



Defining Holiness

- In the end, it is really impossible to describe this word holy in reference to the Holiness of God
- Finite creatures cannot comprehend the fullness of the infinite God
- However, when we see and experience the Holy God, we recognize it

Experiencing the Holy God

- Read Isaiah 6:1-13
- How many sets of wings did God give the seraphim?
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- What were the purposes of these wings?
To fly and to cover their face and feet
- Why did God give them a set to cover their faces?
To keep them from looking upon God's face
- Why did God give them a set to cover their feet?
RC Sproul says that they are a sign of our creatureliness

Experiencing the Holy God

- The seraphim cried out, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"
- We also see this in John's vision in Revelation as the creatures around the throne cry out, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" (Rev. 4:8)
- In Hebrew, the repetition of words was done so for emphasis
- An example is when Jesus says, "Truly, truly, I say to you"

Experiencing the Holy God

- When something is repeated three times, this level of emphasis is what we call the *superlative degree* because it is super important
- “Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth” (Rev. 8:13)
- “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. Do not trust in these deceptive words: ‘This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.’” (Jer. 7:4)
- The only time we see an attribute of God in the superlative degree is God’s holiness

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Only once in sacred Scripture is an attribute of God elevated to the third degree. Only once is a characteristic of God mentioned three times in succession. The Bible says that God is holy, holy, holy. Not that He is merely holy, or even holy, holy. He is holy, holy, holy. The Bible never says that God is love, love, love; or mercy, mercy, mercy; or wrath, wrath, wrath; or justice, justice, justice. It does say that He is holy, holy, holy. That the whole earth is full of His glory.

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The Holiness of God, R.C. Sproul, p. 25.



Experiencing the Holy God

- When Christians speak of God today, what attributes do they speak about?
- Why do you think we never start with God's holiness in modern Christianity?

Experiencing the Holy God

- What happened in Isaiah 6 as God spoke?
 - The foundations and thresholds shook at His voice and the whole house was filled with smoke
- How did Isaiah respond?
 - "Then said I, Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." (verse 5, KJV)
 - To be undone is to come apart, or to be disintegrated, destroyed

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If ever there was a man of integrity, it was Isaiah ben Amoz. He was a whole man, a together type of a fellow. He was considered by his contemporaries as a paragon of virtue. Then he caught one sudden glimpse of a holy God. In that single moment, all of his self-esteem was shattered. In a brief second he was exposed, made naked beneath the gaze of the absolute standard of holiness. As long as Isaiah could compare himself to other mortals, he was able to sustain a lofty opinion of his own character. The instant he measured himself by the ultimate standard, he was destroyed – morally and spiritually annihilated. He was undone. He came apart. His sense of integrity collapsed.

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The Holiness of God, R.C. Sproul, p. 28.



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¹⁷ And the LORD said to Moses, “This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.”

¹⁸ Moses said, “Please show me your glory.” ¹⁹ And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The LORD.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

²⁰ But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.” ²¹ And the LORD said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, ²² and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³ Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.”

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Exodus 33:17-23



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When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, 'Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.'

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Revelation 1:17-18, ESV



Experiencing the Holy God

- Isaiah realized the fullness of his sinfulness all at once
- He pointed out the sinfulness of his mouth
- The tongue is that dreaded dragon that seems impossible to tame

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⁵ So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! ⁶ And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. ⁷ For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, ⁸ but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰ From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. ¹¹ Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? ¹² Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

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James 3:5-12



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We are fortunate in one respect: God does not appear to us in the way He appeared to Isaiah. Who could stand it? God normally reveals our sinfulness to us a bit at a time. We experience a gradual recognition of our own corruption. God showed Isaiah his corruption all at once. No wonder he was ruined.

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The Holiness of God, R.C. Sproul, p. 29.



Experiencing the Holy God

- Think about your own failings and sins
- Do you get embarrassed and feel shame?
- Imagine appearing before our God and being plunged into the reality of who you are all at once

Experiencing the Holy God

- God did not let Isaiah remain in that state
- The seraphim flew to him and touched his mouth with a burning coal
- He burned away the impurities of Isaiah with holy fire and took away the guilt, atoning for his sins
- But notice that God did not belittle Isaiah or humiliate him
- Also, not only did God atone for his sins, he took the undone man and put him back together
- Isaiah was able to respond to the Lord's question, "Whom shall I send?" with a "Here I am! Send me." (verse 8)

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He was not Humpty-Dumpty. In the nursery rhyme the fall of Mr. Dumpty is tragic because no one in the entire kingdom had the power to put him together again. Yet he was no more fragile than Isaiah. Isaiah was shattered into as many pieces as any fallen egg. But God put him together again. God was able to take a shattered man and send him into the ministry. He took a sinful man and made him a prophet. He took a man with a dirty mouth and made him God's spokesmen.

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The Holiness of God, R.C. Sproul, p. 32.



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God's work of grace on Isaiah's soul did not annihilate his personal identity. Isaiah said, "Here am I." Isaiah could still speak in terms of "I." He still had an identity. He still had a personality. Far from God seeking to destroy the "self," as many distortions of Christianity would claim, God redeems the self. He heals the self so that it may be useful and fulfilled in the mission to which the person is called. Isaiah's personality was overhauled but not annihilated. He was still Isaiah ben Amoz when he left the temple. He was the same person, but his mouth was clean.

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The Holiness of God, R.C. Sproul, p. 32.

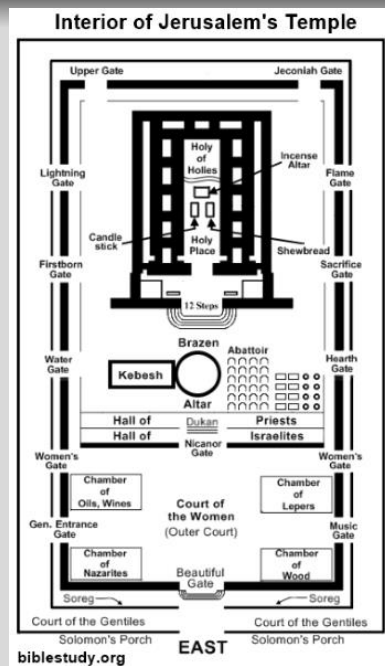


Experiencing the Holy God

- Isaiah experienced the Holy God and it was awful
- I do not mean awful in the modern sense of something very bad, but in the sense of something that is full of awe
- To stand before the Holy God is terrifying because it will kill you
- Yet, we long for His glory and to be with Him eternally
- Because Christ has saved us, one day we will see God and live with Him eternally

Why Begin with the Holiness of God?

- Why should we begin our study of salvation (soteriology) with God's Holiness?
- All Christian theology must begin with God's Holiness
- His Holiness is central to how He interacts with mankind
- Consider the Temple of God in Jerusalem



Why Begin with the Holiness of God?

- God will not allow His Holiness to be compromised in any way
- God is absolutely loving, merciful, and gracious, but none of those attributes of God are given at the cost of His Holiness
- If we want to understand God, we must begin by contemplating His Holiness
- What is the primary and first emotion that we are to feel about God which is produced from His Holiness?

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*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.*

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Proverbs 9:10, ESV

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A now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?

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Deuteronomy 10:12-13, ESV

Holiness and Our Sin

- When we sin, we are attempting to put away the Holiness of God from our lives
- In the garden, the man and woman hid themselves from God (Gen. 3:8)
- We pretend as if Holiness is not real and avoid the truth of God as a person

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¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

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Romans 1:18-23, ESV

Holiness and Our Sin

- How can we talk of salvation and not speak of the Holiness of God?
- It is the very Holiness of God that we despise and reject
- Why do you think sinful man hates the Holiness of God so much?

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For God So Loved the World

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

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John 3:16-21, ESV

Holiness and Sin

- We hate God because He is Holy
- We hate His Holiness because our works are evil
- If we turn away from Him we can avoid what happened to Isaiah and John and not face the fullness of our own wickedness
- Sinful man cannot bear the Holiness of God

Holiness and Christian Worship

- How are we as Christians to think about the Holiness of God?
- In the Church, what do most modern Christians begin with when talking about God?
- How often do people speak and act in consideration of God's Holiness?
- How much do we consider the Holiness of God in our gathered worship?

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12 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

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Romans 12:1-2

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*¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,
¹⁶ since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”*

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1 Peter 1:15-16, ESV

Holiness and Christian Worship

- Our lives are to be lived in a way which reflects the Holiness of God
- This is a standard we cannot live up to, but we are to strive for it
- What place does God's Holiness have in our gathered worship?

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²⁵ See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. ²⁶ At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” ²⁷ This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken — that is, things that have been made — in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. ²⁸ Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, ²⁹ for our God is a consuming fire.

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Hebrews 12:25-29, ESV

Holiness and Christian Worship

- God's Holiness should be at the heart of our public worship
- Today, we seek all sorts of things, but do we seek to revere our Holy God?
- We often sing and speak of entering "the presence of God"
- Have we really entered into the presence of God if we have not experience the Holiness of God as those in scripture?
- If our worship of God does not drive you to see the sin of your heart, confess that sin to the Lord, experience the grace of God, hear His Word, and be sent out as his ambassadors, then it is questionable whether we have worshiped in the presence of God

The Centrality of the Holiness of God

- As we move forward in the doctrines of grace, the Holiness of God must be at the center of your mind
- We must always remember that while God is loving, kind, merciful, good, just, and gracious, He is above all holy, holy, holy