

THE HOLINESS OF GOD

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“Who shall not fear thee, O LORD, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy”
—Rev 15:4

He only is independently, infinitely, immutably holy. In Scripture He is frequently styled “The Holy One”: He is so because the sum of all moral excellency is found in Him. He is absolute Purity, unsullied even by the shadow of sin. “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all” (I John 1:5). Holiness is the very excellency of the Divine nature: the great God is “glorious in holiness” (Exo 15:11). Therefore do we read, “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity” (Hab 1:13). As God's power is the opposite of the native weakness of the creature, as His wisdom is in complete contrast from the least defect of understanding or folly, so His holiness is the very antithesis of all moral blemish or defilement. Of old God appointed singers in Israel “that should praise the beauty of holiness” (II Chron 20:21). “Power is God's hand or arm, omniscience His eye, mercy His bowels, eternity His duration, but holiness is His beauty” (S. Charnock). It is this, supremely, which renders Him lovely to those who are delivered from sin's dominion.

A chief emphasis is placed upon this perfection of God:

God is oftener styled Holy than Almighty, and set forth by this part of His dignity more than by any other. This is more fixed on as an epithet to His name than any other. You never find it expressed “His mighty name” or “His wise name,” but His *great* name, and most of all, His *holy* name. This is the greatest title of honour; in this latter doth the majesty and venerableness of His name appear (S. Charnock).

This perfection, as none other, is solemnly celebrated before the Throne of Heaven, the seraphim crying, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts” (Isa 6:3). God Himself singles out this perfection, “Once have I sworn by My holiness” (Psa 89:35). God swears by His “holiness” because that is a *fuller* expression of Himself than any thing else. Therefore we are exhorted, “Sing unto the LORD, O ye saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness” (Psa 30:4). “This may be said to be a transcendental attribute, that, as it were, runs through the rest, and casts lustre upon them. It is an attribute of attributes” (J. Howe, 1670). Thus we read of “the *beauty* of the LORD” (Psa 27:4), which is none other than “the beauty of holiness” (Psa 110:3).

As it seems to challenge an excellency above all His other perfections, so it is the glory of all the rest: as it is the glory of the Godhead, so it is the glory of every perfection in the Godhead; as His power is the strength of them, so His holiness is the beauty of them; as all would be weak without almightiness to back them, so all would be uncomely without holiness to adorn them. Should this be sullied, all the rest would lose their honour; as at the same instant the sun should lose its light, it would lose its heat, its strength, its generative and quickening virtue. As sincerity is the lustre of every grace in a Christian, so is purity the splendour of every attribute in the Godhead. His justice is a holy justice, His wisdom a holy wisdom, His power a “holy arm” (Psa 98:1). His truth or promise a “holy promise” (Psa 105:42). His name, which signifies all His attributes in conjunction is “holy” (Psa 103:1) (S. Charnock).

God's holiness is manifested *in His works*. “The LORD is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works” (Psa 145:17). Nothing but that which is excellent can proceed from Him. Holiness is the rule of all His actions. At the beginning He pronounced all that He made “very good” (Gen 1:31), which He could not have done had there been anything imperfect or unholy in them. Man was made “upright” (Eccl 7:29), in the image and likeness of his Creator. The angels that fell were created holy, for we are told that they “kept not their first estate [habitation]” (Jude 6). Of Satan it is written, “Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee” (Eze 28:15).

God's holiness is manifested *in His law*. That law forbids sin in *all* of its modifications: in its most refined as well as its grossest forms, the intent of the mind as well as the pollution of the body, the secret desire as well as the overt act. Therefore do we read, “The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (Rom 7:12). Yes, “the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the

LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether” (Psa 19:8,9).

God's holiness is manifested *at the cross* . Wondrously and yet most solemnly does the Atonement display God's infinite holiness and abhorrence of sin. How hateful sin must be to God for Him to punish it to its utmost deserts when it was imputed to His Son!

Not all the vials of judgment that have or shall be poured out upon the wicked world, nor the flaming furnace of a sinner's conscience, nor the irreversible sentence pronounced against the rebellious demons, nor the groans of the damned creatures, give such a demonstration of God's hatred of sin, as the wrath of God let loose upon His Son. Never did Divine holiness appear more beautiful and lovely than at the time our Saviour's countenance was most marred in the midst of His dying groans. This He Himself acknowledges in Psalm 22. When God had turned His smiling face from Him, and thrust His sharp knife into His heart, which forced that terrible cry from Him, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” He adores this perfection — “Thou art holy” (v.3) (S. Charnock).

Because God is holy He *hates all sin*. He loves everything which is in conformity to His laws, and loathes everything which is contrary to it. His Word plainly declares, “The froward is abomination to the LORD” (Prov 3:32). And again, “The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD” (Prov 15:26). It follows, therefore, that He must necessarily punish sin. Sin can no more exist without demanding His punishment than without requiring His hatred of it. God has often forgiven sinners, but He never forgives sin; and the sinner is only forgiven on the ground of Another having borne his punishment: for “without shedding of blood is no remission” (Heb 9:22). Therefore we are told “The LORD will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserveth wrath for His enemies” (Nahum 1:2). For one sin God banished our first parents from Eden. For one sin all the posterity of Canaan, a son of Ham, fell under a curse which remains over them to this day (Gen 9:21). For one sin Moses was excluded from Canaan, Elisha's servant smitten with leprosy, Ananias and Sapphira cut off out of the land of the living.

Herein we find proof for the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures. The unregenerate do not really believe in the holiness of God. Their conception of His character is altogether one-sided. They fondly hope that His mercy will override everything else. “Thou thoughtest that I was altogether as thyself” (Psa 50:21) is God's charge against them. They think only of a “god” patterned after their own evil hearts. Hence their continuance in a course of mad folly. Such is the holiness ascribed to the Divine nature and character in Scripture that it clearly demonstrates their superhuman origin. The character attributed to the “gods” of the ancients and of modern heathendom is the very reverse of that immaculate purity which pertains to the true God. An ineffably holy God, who has the utmost abhorrence of all sin, was never invented by any of Adam's fallen descendants! The fact is that nothing makes more manifest the terrible depravity of man's heart and his enmity against the living God than to have set before him One who is infinitely and immutably holy. His own idea of sin is practically limited to what the world calls “crime.” Anything short of that, man palliates as “defects,” “mistakes,” “infirmities,” etc. And even where sin is owned at all, excuses and extenuations are made for it.

The “god” which the vast majority of professing Christians “love” is looked upon very much like an indulgent old man, who himself has no relish for folly, but leniently winks at the “indiscretions” of youth. But the Word says, “Thou hatest *all* workers of iniquity” (Psa 5:5). And again, “God is angry with the wicked every day” (Psa 7:11). But men refuse to believe in *this* God, and gnash their teeth when His hatred of sin is faithfully pressed upon their attention. No, sinful man was no more likely to devise a holy God than to create the Lake of Fire in which he will be tormented for ever and ever.

Because God is holy, acceptance with Him on the ground of creature doings is *utterly impossible* . A fallen creature could sooner create a world than produce that which would meet the approval of infinite Purity. Can darkness dwell with Light? Can the Immaculate One take pleasure in “filthy rags” (Isa 64:6)? The best that sinful man brings forth is defiled. A corrupt tree cannot bear good fruit. God would deny Himself, vilify His perfections, were He to account as righteous and holy that which is not so in itself; and nothing is so which has the least stain upon it contrary to the nature of God. But blessed be His name, that which His holiness demanded, His grace has provided in Christ Jesus our Lord. Every poor sinner who has fled to Him for refuge stands “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 1:6). Hallelujah!

Because God is holy the *utmost reverence* becomes our approaches unto Him. “God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him” (Psa 89:7). Then “Exalt ye the LORD our God, and worship at His footstool; He is holy” (Psa 99:5). Yes, “at His *footstool*,” in the lowest posture of humility, prostrate before Him. When Moses would approach unto the burning bush, God said, “put off thy shoes from off thy feet” (Exo 3:5). He is to be served “with fear” (Psa 2:11). Of Israel His demand was, “I will be sanctified in them that come nigh Me, and before all the people I will be glorified” (Lev 10:3). The more our hearts are awed by His ineffable holiness, the more acceptable will be our approaches unto Him.

Because God is holy we should desire to be *conformed to Him*. His commandment is, “Be ye holy, for I am holy” (I Peter 1:16). We are not bidden to be omnipotent or omniscient as God is, but we are to be holy, and that “in *all* manner of conversation [deportment]” (I Peter 1:15).

This is the prime way of honouring God. We do not so glorify God by elevated admirations, or eloquent expressions, or pompous services for Him as when we aspire to a conversing with Him with unstained spirits, and live *to* Him in living *like* Him (S. Charnock).

Then as God alone is the Source and Fount of holiness, let us earnestly seek holiness from Him; let our daily prayer be that He may “sanctify us *wholly*; and our whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Thess 5:23).