



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

The LORD Almighty--Holy pt. 1 (Isaiah 6:1-4)

MARCH 20, 2012

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Weekly Bible Study Schedule

- **Tuesday, March 20, 7 AM in HHR #5**
-Breakfast Provided
- **Tuesday, March 20, 8:30 PM in Room #301**
(Speaker Pro-Tem's office)

"Neither the writer nor the reader of these words is qualified to appreciate the holiness of God."¹

Although A.W. Tozer's words could not be truer, God has revealed to us in His Word that He is holy. Therefore, as His creation, it is imperative that we investigate this aspect of His character. Even though we will never plumb its depths, what we can comprehend is enough for us to proclaim with the angels that He is Holy, Holy, Holy.

Therefore we plan to spend four weeks grappling with this attribute of God. In doing so, I pray that we will not only have a better understanding, but will also see how the great characteristic may be the most practical thing we can know about God.

INTRODUCTION

Exodus 15:11 Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises, working wonders?²

1 Chronicles 16:10 Glory in His holy name; Let the heart of those who seek the LORD be glad.

Psalms 98:1 O sing to the LORD a new song, For He has done wonderful things, His right hand and His holy arm have gained the victory for Him.

Psalms 99:3-5 Let them praise Your great and awesome name; Holy is He. The strength of the King loves justice; You have established equity; You have executed justice and

righteousness in Jacob. Exalt the LORD our God And worship at His footstool; Holy is He.

Of all the misused and misunderstood words in our society, "holy" may be tops on the list. Batman's sidekick, Robin, misused it in exclaiming holiness on anything that baffled him. We think of "holy men" as those who sit on mountains ready to disperse great wisdom to seekers of truth. We really have no idea, as a culture (and even as a church) of what it means to say that something is "holy."

I. HOLY--A DEFINITION

To gain an understanding of the biblical concept of God as "holy", let us look at an incredible moment in the life of the prophet, Isaiah.

Isaiah 6:1-4 In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. ² Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory." ⁴ And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke.

After the earthly king died, the eternal King revealed Himself to Isaiah. And Isaiah saw *Adonai*, the Lord as...

- ...sovereign and authoritative as He was "seated on the throne." Even though the King of Judah was gone, the King of Universe was still on His throne sovereignly conducting His work as He had declared it and purposed it.
- ...majestic and transcendent as He was "high and exalted." Nothing could come close to Him in splendor. No earthly king or magistrate in all his "pomp and circumstance" compares to the majestic glory of the King Eternal.
- ...immense as His "train filled the temple." Isaiah saw only the hem or fringe of His royal robe, but it was enough to fill the temple or palace.
- ...being worshipped by the creatures around Him. The *seraphim* were created angelic beings that showed their humility in God's presence by covering their face for He is too glorious to look at and by covering their feet which exposed their creaturely status. They served the King with the set of wings by which they flew.

CAPITOL COMMISSION BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS & STAFF: TUESDAYS @ 7AM, HEARING ROOM #5

LEGISLATORS @ 8:30PM, ROOM #301

TRUMAN BUILDING: THURSDAYS @ 7AM, 4THFLOOR CAFETERIA

PROCLAIMING THE GREATNESS AND GLORY OF GOD IN THE MISSOURI STATE CAPITOL

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And Isaiah heard their song of praise, “HOLY, HOLY, HOLY IS THE LORD ALMIGHTY; THE WHOLE EARTH IS FULL OF HIS GLORY.”

The holiness that Isaiah witnessed encompasses two aspects. The first is what John Feinberg describes as *majestic holiness* in that God “is distinct or separate from everything else.”³ Nothing on this earth or in the universe is anything like God. He is not simply the greatest of great things or the highest order of beings. It is not appropriate to think of Him as the one on the top of the cosmic totem pole which starts at the bottom with amoebas, then frogs, the monkeys, then man, and then angels with God perched at the top. God is not even on the totem pole--He is the creator and master of the pole. He is unlike and separate from the creation.

This separateness is expressed in 1 Samuel 2:2, *There is no one holy like the LORD, Indeed, there is no one besides You, Nor is there any rock like our God;* and brought up in Moses’ rhetorical question, *Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness...?* (Exodus 15:11a; cf. Psalm 99; 2 Chronicles 20:21; Ezekiel 39:25).

“GOD IS GREAT, GOD IS GOOD”—THAT MAY BE THE EASIEST WAY OF GRASPING THE VAST CONCEPT OF GOD’S HOLINESS.

This gulf of separateness is seen in God’s power in doing marvelous things (Psalm 98:1), doing the impossible (Luke 1:49) and power in salvation (Isaiah 52:10). It is seen in God’s brilliant glory and brightness (Hebrews 3:3-4; cf. Revelation 22:5). It is lifted up because of God’s many excellencies (1 Chronicles 16:10, 35; 29:16; Psa. 68:5; Prov. 9:10).

The second aspect of God’s holiness is His *moral holiness*. This means that God is “...free from the pollution of sin, for He cannot sin.”⁴ Habakkuk points out this aspect when he cries out, *Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You cannot look on wickedness with favor* (Habakkuk. 1:13a). Jeremiah, like Isaiah, quaked at God’s purity while the land he lived in was filled with sin (Jeremiah 23:9-10). God’s words are declared to be pure (Psalm 12:6; 19:7-9; 119:140); His works are done in truth, justice and righteousness (Psalm 111:7-10); and His promises and warnings are both backed by His holiness or moral purity (Psalm 89:34-35; Amos 4:12).

Isaiah saw a vision of God who is eternal, mighty, authoritative, and sovereign who is also pure, clean and without sin. “God is great,” the children’s dinner prayer goes, “God is good”—that may be the easiest way of grasping the vast concept of God’s holiness.

To highlight this glorious and majestic attribute of God, Isaiah notes that the angelic beings (the “seraphim”) not only sing that God is Holy, but that He is *Holy, Holy, Holy*. This song, which continues to be sung in Revelation 4:8, is known as the *Trisagion* which simply means “three times holy.”⁵ When the Hebrews wanted to emphasize something in writing they would repeat the word or phrase. It is similar to today’s writing in bold, all caps or in italics. The significance here, though, is that God’s holiness is elevated to the third degree. No other attribute is considered to be as honored. Nowhere is God declared as “love, love, love” or “mercy, mercy, mercy.” Only God’s holiness is exalted in this manner. It is God’s holiness that fills the whole earth with His glory.

II. HOLY--THE ESSENCE OF GOD

But a word of explanation is in order. “Holiness” should not be seen as a standard outside of God to which He must attain or live by. Instead, holiness is to be understood as the essence of God. Tozer noted, “Holy is the way God is. To be holy He does not conform to a standard. He is that standard.”⁶ Holiness is not an act of God’s will and determination; it is the very nature of God. God does not choose to be holy; HE IS HOLY.

Another way of putting it is this: If you want to know what “holy” is, look to God. Stephen Charnock wrote “He is not only holy, but holiness; holiness in the highest degree, is His sole prerogative.” And “he will not be unholy; it is against His nature to be so.”⁷

Therefore, the places in which God “dwells” or comes in contact with people are considered holy--holy ground (Exodus 3:5), holy hill (Psalm 15:1), holy Temple (Psalm 65:4), holy mountain (Psalm 48:1). God’s Word is considered holy (Psalm 105:42; Rom. 1:2), as is His name (Leviticus 20:3; 22:2), His mighty right arm (Isaiah 52:10), His Spirit (Matthew 1:18--among all references to the third member of the Trinity) and even His Son (Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:27; 13:35).

God’s holy nature is also that which defines His great attributes. Because God is holy then His power is holy, His sovereign rule is holy, His

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knowledge is holy, His justice is holy, and His love is holy.⁸ Everything God does, everything God is and everything associated with God is considered to be holy--it is separate from all else and is considered to be pure--for God Himself is, by nature, holy.

III. WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Even though the answer to this question will be fleshed out over the next few weeks, there are two reasons I want to address now. The first of which comes from the thought given by Dr. R.C. Sproul. He writes, "God is holy. I am convinced that it is one of the most important ideas that a Christian can ever grapple with. It is basic to the whole understanding of God and of Christianity" (underline mine).⁹

Friend, it is the holiness of God which makes God's grace so amazing. It is what makes sin (any sin) so vile and horrible. It is also what makes the cross of Jesus Christ so glorious. In a society (and in many churches) where sin is categorized, laughed at and/or actually upheld to be good and an expression of freedom, God's holiness shows sin in its true light as something contemptible and detested; something to flee from and not to be embraced. At the same time, God's holiness glorifies the cross. For on the cross, the punishment for the disgraceful sins of God's people has been taken up by the sinless Son of God. The uncrossable gulf between a holy God and a sinful person has been bridged by the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The holiness of God helps us to resist temptations to sin. It keeps us from being flippant and casual in our prayers and worship. It is what humbles us for we may think we fare well compared to others; but compared to a Holy god, we are nothing, in stature or in purity. It also properly motivates a person to live a life of holiness. Peter writes, "...but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" (1 Peter 1:15-16).

Today's second reason comes from Jonathan Edwards' comment, "Every man is as his God is."¹⁰

An example of Edwards' short statement can be found in The Ugaritic Tablets discovered by archaeologists at Ras Shamra. They have revealed much about the Canaanite god, Baal. This was a god widely and foolishly

worshipped by the Israelites which lead to much discipline from Yahweh who delivered them from Israel.

Baal was the god of the rain and storm. His father was "El" the king of the gods and mother was "Ashert-of-the-Sea", the counselor of the gods (she may be the Old Testament goddess "Asherah"--Judges 3:7; 1 Kings 15:13; 18:19; 2 Kings 23:4, 6-7--who had the "Asherah poles"--Exodus 34:13, et. al.). Baal's sister and wife was "Anat", known as the goddess of love, fertility and war. The "Canaanites thought of her as both a prostitute and virgin."¹¹

Throughout the literary discoveries, though, no real instructions on how to worship these gods have been found. In a real sense, the rites of worship were the same as the myths themselves--made up by the imaginations of mankind. Their belief was that Baal was "the mythical generative power that fructifies the earth by means of the sperm of the rain."¹² Therefore, the Canaanites to participate in this work with Baal and to secure his favor shared "...in his fertilizing power by entering this mystery and imitating it. Cultic prostitution was therefore an essential characteristic of this worship; sacred prostitutes lived at the sanctuaries (1 Kings 15:12 2 Kings 23:7 Deuteronomy 16:21)."¹³

It should also be noted that "there is no indication that the Canaanite gods handed down a moral code for their people to follow." "Indeed", Alfred Hoerth writes, "the Canaanites were apparently much more moral than were their gods, an observation that is not especially flattering to the gods."¹⁴

Even if one is not intrigued by the finds of a people's historical records, all he or she needs to do is look around today's world. Numerous examples can be cited from cultures whose lives follow the examples set by their conceptions of their gods. Even the lives of those who say there is no god (which in essence makes themselves out to be "god" since they determine what is right and wrong in their own eyes) reflect what they believe.

Some claim to follow after the God of the Bible, but their understanding is wrong and thus reflected in their lives. Therefore, for those who follow after God and His Son, Jesus Christ, having a knowledge of God's holiness can give proper direction and motive for living life.

Leviticus 19:2 Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.'

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CONCLUSION

While everything discussed in this study will be further developed over the next several weeks, I pray that this introduction to this important aspect of God will be as encouraging as it is sobering. I agree with Dr. Sproul's statement that the holiness of God being basic to the whole understanding of God and Christianity.

I remember listening to Dr. Sproul preach one evening and he was discussing a poll taken on why people have left church and are no longer attending. The two top answers were that church was boring and church was not relevant.

While there are many contributing causes in the reasoning behind these people's comments, the foundational factor is the low view of God portrayed in many of these churches. We are no longer holding up the high view that our God is holy, holy, holy. For the more one would grow in this understanding, the more one will realize that a holy God is neither boring nor irrelevant.

Again, my prayer for those who read and for those who attend one of our two Bible studies on Tuesdays is that our idea of God may be challenged. Challenged by the examination of what He has revealed about Himself to us. Challenged by the fact that He is not anything like us (and for this we should be thankful) and challenged by the fact that He is pure. If you want something that will wake you out of a spiritual slumber, understand the sentence "God is holy." Nothing is more important to your life.

***Psalm 29:2 Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name;
Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.***

"The holiness of God is His glory, as His grace is His riches: holiness is His crown, and His mercy is His treasure. This is the blessedness and nobleness of His nature; it renders Him glorious in Himself, and glorious to His creatures that understand anything of this lovely perfection. Holiness is a glorious perfection belonging to the nature of God." --Stephen Charnock

This holy God can forgive your sins; are you interested?

¹ A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1961), 104.

² All passages unless otherwise indicated are taken from the New American Standard Bible Updated version.

³ John Feinberg, *No One Like Him* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2001), 340.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 342.

⁵ R.C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God* (Wheaton, Ill. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1998), 24.

⁶ Tozer, 105.

⁷ Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1996), vol. 2, 116.

⁸ Qualifying God's love as "holy" keeps us from thinking that the love of God is like the love of man. People "love" each other for a whole host of reasons--many of which are self serving and whimsical. And some think God "loves" in the same way. But this is far from the truth. God's love is absolutely different and thus cannot be defined by the love of men. It is also a love which cannot tolerate sin in the relationship. Thus, the theory of "universalism" where everyone will go to heaven after death because God loves everyone is not biblical.

God's holy love, though, does illustrate why Christ had to die. Because of His love (John 3:16; Rom. 5:5-8), He desired to save. Because of His holiness, sin had to be dealt with--and it was; with the perfect sacrifice being offered by His Son on the cross.

⁹ Sproul, 12.

¹⁰ Jonathan Edwards, *Altogether Lovely: Jonathan Edwards on the Glory and Excellency of Christ* (Morgan, Penn.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1997), 9.

¹¹ Alfred Hoerth, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2001), 221.

¹² Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* Vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962), 22.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Hoerth, 222.