



The Holiness of God

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory".

This was said by one of the seraphim which stood above the throne of God in Isaiah's vision, when he was called by God to minister to God's covenant people. It filled him with conviction of His own sinfulness *"Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."* (Isa 6:3-5).

This conviction of sin was the result of Isaiah's view of the holiness of God. The purity of God contrasted powerfully with the impurity of himself and all mankind. This view of the holiness of God was the preparation Isaiah needed to carry out his ministry. As most of our readers will know, holiness means 'separate', 'different', 'other'. God is different and separate from all mankind because He is separate from all sin and all evil. But the word 'holy' has also connotations of sacredness. There is nothing as sacred as God. God is set apart from everything. He is entirely and completely unique in sinlessness, honour, majesty and glory. There is nothing with which we can compare to God. He is holy and pure possessing all excellencies. Holiness is but one of God's glorious attributes. Holiness defines God – all His excellencies are suffused with holiness. All He is and does is holy, He exudes holiness in all His works.

If our understanding of God's holiness is defective, then the rest of our theology will also be defective. We will never be able to glorify God and fulfil our creational purpose, if we do not understand what holiness really means. As God calls His people to be holy for He is holy, it is important that we know what the characteristics of holiness are.

Holiness means perfect righteousness. Whatever God does is righteous. *"The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works"* (Ps 145:17AV). All His ways are righteous. His holiness is manifested by His works everything He made was pronounced *"very good"* (Gen 1:31). God made man *"upright"*. The proud and arrogant King Nebuchadnezzar was brought down to his knees to finally declare *"praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just"* (Dan 4:37). God does nothing wrong. Even when He destroys the wicked He has done nothing wrong. When Moses and the people of Israel sang *"Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?"* They were praising God for the destruction of the wicked Egyptians at the Red Sea (Ex 15:11). This was justice – holy justice. God manifests His holiness in His works of creation and providence.

God's holiness is also manifested by His law. God's law is perfect and right and pure and true. God's law is not a kill-joy to spoil our enjoyment of life.

Only those endowed with God's grace can truly say *"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul ... the precepts of the Lord are right ... the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes ... the rules of the Lord are true and righteous altogether..."* (Ps 19:7-9). The great Apostle Paul was brought to say *"the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good"* (Rom 7:12) and the Apostle Peter declared *"the way of righteousness"* as the *"holy commandment"* (2 Pet 2:21).

God's holiness is diametrically opposed to sin. There is no greater contrast, than holiness and sin. Sin is against God's very nature. Sin is the contradiction of God. God and sin cannot abide together – one repels the other. Sin is what separates us from God. It has been said that although God forgives sinners, He never forgives sin! The sinner is only forgiven because sin has been punished and dealt with, albeit by Another. Nowhere is God's hatred of, and opposition to sin seen

than on the cross of Christ. The cross was where sin was placed on the head of God's holy and perfect Son, but even there, on that sinless holy head, sin had to be punished severely. The dichotomy between "God is love" and "God is a consuming fire", can only be understood by God's holiness. It was God's supreme and immutable love of holiness and purity that brought about the fire of God's wrath on Jesus Christ on the cross.

God's holiness also means that He is separated and different by being devoted to seeking His own honour. Everything is to be for His glory. All creation was designed to bring glory to Him. God's chief and main desire is to be glorified. Nothing is more important to God than His own honour and glory. In human government, a secular ruler is appointed for the good of his subjects. That is the goal of his appointment. His main purpose is for the well-being of the people he rules over. But that principle does not apply to God – for God does not exist for the well-being of His creatures. He exists for His own glory! God's own glory is primary and above all things, not His creatures' well-being (although God does care and provide and bless His creatures).

God owes His creatures nothing. He does not have to reward them for their good service, although He does. We are rewarded for good deeds only because God promised to do so. Being a Sovereign, God was not obliged to make a promise. People have been created for His pleasure – nothing else – awesome and solemn, but a reality.

God is concerned for His holy name will be known, not just among His covenant people, but also among the nations of the world. He commanded Ezekiel the prophet to *"say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of My holy name ... I will vindicate the holiness of My great name ... And the nations will know that I am the Lord ... when through you I vindicate My holiness before their eyes"* (Ezek 36:22).

God's great desire is that His holiness is made known among all nations of the world through and by His people. God was to use Israel to reveal to the nations His glorious holiness. In promising Israel a full return to their own land, Israel were assured: When I gather the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered, and manifest My holiness in them in the sight of the nations, then they shall dwell in their own land that I gave to my servant Jacob (Ezek 28:25). Israel was to teach the nations around them that the God of Israel was a holy God, the God of all the earth. All nations belonged to Him, and Israel was to live so that these nations would come *"to know that I am the Lord"*.

The wonderful thing is, that although God is so holy and awesome, He is nevertheless very approachable. We sinners can approach God in real hope. In fact, this holy God invites sinners to "draw near" to Him – and He attaches a promise that if we do, He will draw near to us (Jam 4:8)! We need not fear that God will ignore us, if we are serious and genuine in seeking Him. He has provided 'means' whereby the seeking person may find help and encouragement in finding God and discovering His grace and forgiveness.

God calls us to be holy, for He is holy. Peter the Apostle writes to the saints, *"As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'"* (1 Pet 1:14). Similarly Paul calls us to *"put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness"* (Eph 4:24). We are not called to be omniscient, omnipotent or omnipresent, but we are called to be a holy people, set apart to God.

God has revealed Himself and His holiness in His Word. His Word is reliable and trustworthy. Despite the gulf between our sinfulness and God's righteousness, His Word encourages us seek Him. He is not far from anyone. God's holiness ought not to deter anyone from drawing near Him and calling on His holy name for forgiveness and grace. Each of us can be *"a vessel ... set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work"* (2Tim 2:21).

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