

Sovereign Grace Series

Lesson #3 – God’s Absolute Holiness ²⁰⁰³

Amplifying Attachments for Lesson #3

<u>File #</u>	<u>Title</u>
1244	The Holiness of God by A. W. Pink
1253	The Trauma of Holiness by R. C. Sproul

Applicable Sections of Confessions:

LBC 1689 Ch 2, Items #1 & 2; Ch 3, #1;

I. What is meant by God’s Absolute Holiness?

A. Of God’s many attributes: Sovereignty; Wrath; Love; Justice; Immutability; Omniscience; Omnipotence; etc. Scripture seems to suggest that “holiness” is an attribute of God which humans tend to underestimate. Sometimes pastors and theologians claim that God’s love is a preeminent attribute, which it is not. We must remember the “Simpleness” of God, namely that He has no preeminent attributes. God consists of His “essence” which consists of a fully integrated nature in which all of His attributes are fully integrated with each other.

All of His attributes are absolutely perfect and absolutely complete. These attributes of God are “existential” to His nature. Existential means “(1) Of, pertaining to, or dealing with existence.” (The American Heritage Dictionary) This means that God is Simple, not divisible in parts, fully integrated and immutable in all of His nature.

I can have a bad side (a weak or corrupt attribute) My nature is never fully integrated. My life is always struggling to be consistent, but in this life I never am fully consistent.

It is true that of all of God’s attributes, only “holiness” is emphasized by the use of the Hebrew exclamatory “Holy, Holy, Holy”. This is meant to emphasize this attribute to we humans who are by nature so completely alien to true holiness.

B. Definition of Holiness: We often err when we confuse “holiness” with “righteousness”. They have different meanings. We need to be careful here.

The **Hebrew** word for holy, “qodesh” is a common noun with adjectival force used with God and select things within the creation. It refers to that which is consecrated by being set apart or being different. It is used with regard to physical things such as the utensils used in worship in the Temple. Generally refers to that which has been set apart for God’s purpose or use. The “holy” is that which has been consecrated to Him.

The **Greek** word for holy, “hagios” is an adjective referring to God, or people, or things set apart for God’s redemptive purpose. This setting apart infers that this holy thing is entirely different than, in attribute, in purpose, and/or in function. It is not to be considered “secular”, common, or worldly.

C. Examples of things ascribed by Scripture as Holy beyond God Himself include:

Holy ground	Holy nation	Holy Sabbath	Holy house
Holy anointing oil	Holy water	Holy word	Holy bread
Holy place	Holy tithe	Holy seed	Holy convocation
Holy jubilee	Holy ark	Holy ones	Holy of Holies
Holy linen coat	Holy censors	Holy field	Holy covenant

D. God as Holy: Is 55:8-9 *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, declares the LORD. ⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.”* (NASU)

This is a classic description of God as being entirely different than us, alien to us, beyond our understanding. God is “holy” in a way that is ultimately and conceptually incomprehensible to us in this life.

Job in discussing the Greatness of God in Job 26:5-13, concludes with: (Job’s reply to Bildad.)

Job 26:14 *“Behold, these are the fringes of His ways;
and how faint a word we hear of Him!
But His mighty thunder, Who then can understand?”* (NASU)

II. The Prominence of God’s Attribute of Holiness Described in Scripture:

The ancient language practice of repetition (2x) to emphasize something is used in this regard.

e.g. “*Verily, Verily*”, used by Jesus for high emphasis as to the truth of His words.

When a word is repeated 3 times, it represents an extreme emphasis.

Of the attributes of God, **only His holiness is repeated 3 times** in this kind of extreme emphasis.

Here are the 4 expressions of prominent emphasis on God’s holiness where the 3X repetition pattern is used:

1. **Isa 6:1-5** *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. ²Seraphim 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. ³And one called out to another and said, "**Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.**" ⁴And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. ⁵Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." (NASU)*
2. **Ezek 39:7** *"**My holy name** I will make known in the midst of My people Israel; and I will not let **My holy name** be profaned anymore. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, **the Holy One in Israel.**" (NASU)*
3. **Rev 4:6-11** *- - - and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind. ⁷The first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. ⁸And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "**HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME.**" ^{Is 6:3} ⁹And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ¹¹"Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created." (NASU)*
4. **Psalm 99** In poetic form **Psalm 99** does the same repetition of three in verses 3, 5, and 9 where it refers to God as **holy** at the conclusion of each stanza of this glorious poem.

Conclusion: The claim is that God is perfectly and completely “Holy”.

All of His other attributes are to be understood in the light of His holiness.

He is altogether different than us! He is alien to us! He is eternally different from we creatures!

If your god is a god that you are comfortable with, consider that you may be committing mental idolatry.

- His “love” must be understood in the light of His HOLINESS! Altogether different from ours -
- His “wrath” must be understood in the light of His HOLINESS! Altogether different from ours -
- His “providence” must be understood in the light of His HOLINESS! Altogether different from ours -
- His “justice” must be understood in the light of His HOLINESS! Altogether different from ours -
- His “omniscience” must be understood in the light of His HOLINESS! “ “ “
- His “sovereignty” must be understood in the light of His HOLINESS! “ “ “

III. The Natural Man’s Fear of God

A. The Natural Man’s Xenophobia – Xenophobia means an unreasonable, abnormal, unfounded, illogical fear of that which is strange and different from our experience. We may be fearful of others or things if we lack experience with them such as:

People of different races	People who are handicapped	People who speak different languages
People with birth defects	People who are impoverished	People who are culturally different
People of different religions	People who are wealthy	People who are educated more than you
Ex criminals	People who use drugs	People of different political persuasions
Radiation	Medical treatments	Dentists
Sharks	Snakes	Spiders

Usually once we become knowledgeable and experienced with an area of phobia, we can overcome that extreme fear and aversion and act in a rational sense. **Discuss examples.**

B. God’s Holiness - God is an extreme example of being different in that He is entirely and completely “Holy”.

A non-phobic fear of God is a good thing. It is foolish for any man or woman, in their sinful state, to ignore God's holiness, to not fear God rationally, in the inner self!

Prov 9:10 *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."* } **To know God is to fear God!**
To fear His otherness!

We should not be surprised when studying the attributes of God from Scripture or when learning of His glory and works, that we are sometimes troubled, baffled, and confused. If He is HOLY, **and He is**, then of course we will be troubled, baffled, and confused. **He is alien to us! He is altogether different than us!**

Men would never have thought of these things apart from an objective reality **Who** revealed these Truths to us. Even set in flesh (Jesus the Christ) men could not comprehend nor tolerate this alien/holy God. That's why He (Jesus the incarnate God man) had to be put to death. Xenophobic men were terrified by Him! Consider Luke 8:23-25. What was the nature of their fear! **Discuss!**

Read Ex 34:29-35. Consider the NT commentary on this event! 2 Cor 3:7-18 Supernatural regeneration!

Apart from the diligent study of Scripture, and without the illumination of the Holy Spirit, no man can **apprehend** these things. **To have comfort with God is a form of idolatry!**

Apprehend: "is often limited to perception, and does not imply full understanding." American Heritage Dictionary

- To anticipate with anxiety, dread, or fear.
- To become aware of, to perceive.
- To recognize the meaning or implications of.
- Not necessarily to logically understand or comprehend.

When we are troubled about God and what He has revealed about Himself to us, we should:

- Pray to seek His guidance and self revelation through the illumination of the indwelling Holy Spirit, who is our **Comforter*** and Teacher. * **Discuss** Latin origin in *com forte* meaning *with strength!* (AHD)
- We should conform our minds to Scripture, not Scripture to our minds.

Rom 12:2 *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*

IV. Scriptural Basis of God's Holiness:

Ex 15:11-12 *Who is like you among the gods, O LORD? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders? You stretched out Your right hand, the earth swallowed them.*

Lev 11:44 *For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any swarming things that swarm on the earth.*

Lev 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.*

Josh 24:19 *Then Joshua said to the people, "You will not be able to serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions or your sins.*

1 Chr 16:29 *Ascribe to the LORD the glory due His name; bring an offering, and come before Him; worship the LORD in holy array.*

Ps 22:1-5 *My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning. O my God, I cry by day, but You do not answer; and by night, but I have no rest. Yet You are holy, O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel. In You our fathers trusted; they trusted and You delivered them. To You they cried out and were delivered; in You they trusted and were not disappointed.*

Is 52:10 *The LORD has bared His holy arm in the sight of all the nations, that all the ends of the earth may see the salvation of our God.*

Is 57:15a *For thus says the High and Exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy. I dwell in a high and holy place, - - -*

Ezek 36:22-23 *"Therefore 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 **My holy name**, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. ²³**I will vindicate the holiness of My great name** which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD," declares the Lord God, "when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight."*

Heb 12:10 *For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share in **His holiness**.*

1 Pet 1:13-16 *Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹⁴As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, ¹⁵but **like the Holy One who called you**, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; ¹⁶because it is written, "**YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.**"*

V. The Nature of God's Holiness:

- God is separate from His creation. He exists and acts independent of it. – God is Transcendent
- God is altogether different from all else that we experience. (Discuss – anthropomorphisms in Scripture) – God is Spirit in nature. He is not flesh.
- God does not have “creaturely” attributes. (Where He seems similar, He is actually altogether different.) – He is not created.

NOTE: As separate from, as different than, as higher than all of His creation, God cannot be understood or perceived by fallen man at all, and redeemed man in this life can only “apprehend” Him through His special revelation (Scripture), through General Revelation (Created Order), by the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit of the Word of God in enhancing man’s own reason and wisdom.

Is 55:8-9 *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.” (NASU)*

Consequences of God’s Holiness: As we mature in the faith to see the “alien” holiness of God, we become more holy: different from the world, set apart to God’s service, and chosen for His glory. Let us seek to understand and even to on occasion experience this holiness of God and of His Christ!

Important Quotes

“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 Himself acknowledges in that prophetic Psalm 22:1-21, 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 of His holiness . . . In this His purity did sparkle, and His irreversible justice manifested that all those that commit sin are worthy of death; this was the perfect index of His “righteousness” (Rom 3:25), that is, of His holiness and truth; then it was that God that is holy was “sanctified in righteousness” (Is 5:16).”

Stephen Charnock; Theologian

Without the holiness of God, then, there is no cross. Without the cross there is no gospel. Without the gospel there is no Christianity. Without Christianity there is no church. And without echoes of the holiness of God in those who are Christ's, there is no recognizable church. What is it about this chain of connections that the evangelical church today is not understanding that is leading it to soft-pedal, overlook, or ignore the holiness of God.

David F. Wells; The Courage to Be Protestant; p. 129

Neither the writer nor the reader of these words (Is 6:5) is qualified to appreciate the holiness of God. Quite literally a new channel must be cut through the desert of our minds to allow the sweet waters of truth that will heal our great sickness to flow in. We can not grasp the true meaning of the divine holiness by thinking of someone or something very pure and then raising the concept to the highest degree we are capable of. God’s holiness is not simply the best we know, infinitely better. We know nothing like divine holiness. It stands apart, unique, unapproachable, incomprehensible and unattainable. Only the Spirit of the Holy can impart to the human spirit the knowledge of the holy.

A. W. Tozer; *The Knowledge of the Holy;* p. 111