

CHAPTER II

THE HOLINESS OF GOD

A. INTRODUCTION

A number of years ago when pastoring a church in Oregon, this author was preaching a series of messages on I Peter 1. In focusing on vs. 13-16 over several weeks, especially God's exhortation to his people, "You shall be holy, for I am holy," a lady subsequently raised a complaint concerning his ministry with the explanation, "I am not leaving the church on Sunday as happy as I have in the past." To the preacher, this seemed evidence of progress in this lady's life, namely a confrontation with the holiness of God that was having a sobering effect. Unfortunately, some of the elders did not see it this way, with the result that, a different tone in pastoral presentation was requested. By way of extension, it would not be extreme to suggest that, in thousands of evangelical churches today, where happy relationships and good feelings are the order of the day, the faithful, applicatory preaching of the holiness of God would bring forth similar vocal discomfort. In anticipation of this prospective response, doubtless many preachers would adjust their proclamation so that it would be less disturbing and more conducive to comfort.

1. Where shall we start?

To reverently yet basically describe God, according to His self-revelation in the Bible, a person must refer to His most pervasive characteristics, in which case it could be said that He is the, "Only Holy, Infinite, Good, Eternal, Spiritual, Living, Sovereign Person and LORD," named Jehovah/Yahweh, יהוה. While this declaration may seem very incomplete, yet it is proposed that it is comprised of those qualities of God that are used most frequently in Scripture to distinguish Him in the midst of a world of religious pluralism. Certainly each element here is essentially important, yet it is proposed that the moral quality of the God of the Bible is that which is most distinctive of all, indeed the most foundational even if not necessarily the most important. This transcendently ethical characteristic is usually referred to in the Word of God as His holiness or righteousness, though these two terms will subsequently be distinguished. Granted that there are different aspects of God's holiness, nevertheless at this point we first consider Him according to His moral excellence.

2. What meaning do we readily associate with the term "holiness"?

- a. A religious individual who has pronounced negative habits, such as not smoking, not swearing, not drinking, not living promiscuously, etc. Such a

person may live in a Spartan, isolated environment apart from the acquisitive, indulgent secular world, such as a recluse, an ascetic, or a monk in a monastery. This lifestyle may involve plain dress, regimented living and a restrictive diet. But of itself, this is merely living differently from multitudes in this world. It may involve a degree of sincere commitment and even result in certain health benefits. However by itself this lifestyle could not be identified with the basic idea of biblical holiness.

- b. A doctrinal emphasis within conservative Christianity that has spawned “holiness churches” and “holiness conventions” and “holiness lifestyles.” The distinctives have included sinless perfection of various modes, often defined as the absence of known sin,¹ perfect love as coined by John Wesley, full sanctification, total yieldedness to Christ, spiritual living on a more exalted level,² etc. The means to these ends for the Christian have involved complete as opposed to mere limited surrender to Christ at conversion, sanctification through faith even as justification is through faith, a baptism by the Holy Spirit that grants His fullness, the laying on of hands, agonizing with God for the Spirit’s outpouring, acts of self-denial, etc. Here truth and error are deceptively entwined.

- c. The fundamental characteristic of God Himself, that so impressed Isaiah the prophet that on thirty occasions he addressed his LORD as, “the Holy one of Israel.” In other words, our principal thought concerning God is of His constant, impeccable moral purity, blending with His life and power, that results in glory of an immeasurable magnitude, that sets Him apart from that which is unholy. For this reason the holiness of God is that attribute which brings forth, in the heart of the genuine believer, awe, reverence, prostration of heart, humble submission, conviction of unholiness, and a yearning to be holy even as He is holy. Such was Moses’ experience when God appeared before him in the burning bush beneath Horeb, the mountain of God. Here he was instructed: “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Exod. 3:5). Close proximity to God was no place for anything soiled, even sandals associated with Moses’ body; He must approach God as a clean, holy person.

¹ The “absence of known sin” easily becomes a deceptive retreat for the man who all too well appreciates the worldly aphorism of the English poet, Thomas Gray: “Where ignorance is bliss, ’tis folly to be wise!”

² Refer to Hannah Whitall Smith, *The Christian’s Secret Of A Happy Life*, and Ruth Paxson, *Life On The Highest Plane*.

3. What would be our response if God was visibly manifest, incorporated before us?

That is, while no man can see God in His unveiled essence and live (Ex. 33:20; John 1:18; I Tim. 6:16), yet if a theophany or personal representation of God appeared before us, even the glorified Lord Jesus Christ, what would be our immediate reaction?

- a. Would we not first be struck by God's mouth-stopping, sin-exposing, overwhelming holiness, His absolute moral purity? Surely our response would be no less than that of Moses (Ex. 3:5), Joshua (Josh. 5:13-15), or Isaiah (Is. 6:1-5), that is humiliation and submission, both of the body and soul, born of our sense of personal unholiness and human frailty. Yes, we would quickly stop talking light-heartedly about the theology of such an event. When all is said and done, the best instruction in God's attribute of belittling holiness is confrontation with it, the result being utter deflation and the resultant cry of Isaiah, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5).
- b. Surely there would be little attempted brash familiarity and easygoing rapport if God was perceived as did Job: "the heavens are not pure in His sight" (Job 15:15); "the moon has no brightness and the stars are not pure in His sight" (Job 25:5-6). Similarly with Habakkuk: "O LORD, my God, my Holy One, . . . Your eyes are too pure to approve evil" (Hab. 1:12-13). So in Hebrews we are told that, "Our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:28-29). Before this dazzling, glorious radiance the Apostle John "fell at his [the glorified Christ's, vs. 12-18] feet like a dead man" (Rev. 1:17; cf. Deut. 4:24; 9:3; Isa. 33:14).
- c. Why then today is there such a diminished regard for God's personal holiness within the environment of God's people? Surely it is because God's people have lost sight of such a vision, indeed willfully avoided it, and the reason for this is that the pulpit has not proclaimed such a vision? "The prophets are prophesying falsehood in My name. I have neither sent them nor commanded them nor spoken to them; they are prophesying to you a false vision, divination, futility and the deception of their own minds" (Jer. 14:14). To address God as "Holy Father" and "Righteous Father" by His children is uncommon today; yet why should this be so when the Son of God so intimately addressed his Father as such (John 17:11, 25)?
- d. If heaven is God's holy dwelling place (Deut. 26:15; II Chron. 30:27), where he is surrounded by holy angels (Mark 8:38) who ceaselessly proclaim His Holiness (Isa. 6:1-3; Rev. 4:8), and there the saints "worship the Lord in the beauty [majesty] of holiness" (Ps. 29:2; 96:9; Hab. 2:20), then it will only be a comfortable, suitable haven for holy citizens. If the professing Christian has little interest in the holiness of the triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit, in this earthly

life, it is contradictory to expect that he will enjoy the greater holiness of heaven, and supremely the holy God in that heaven (Heb. 12:14). It is time for many professing Christians to stop deceiving themselves. Recommended reading here, at both a biblical and practical level, is *Holiness* by J. C. Ryle.

B. WHAT ESSENTIALLY IS THE HOLINESS OF GOD?

1. The biblical definition of "holiness."

The basic Old Testament Hebrew word for "holy", as an adjective, is, קָדוֹשׁ, qadōs. The noun form describes "holiness" while the verb form means "to sanctify." The root meaning in the Old Testament is that of "purity which is set apart from impurity," hence "separation from defilement," "otherness" in relation to that which is common. The aspect of *negative* "apartness from," when applied to God declares Him, in all of His being, to be above and beyond all creation, matter, darkness, and especially in the earthly moral sphere. However it is the *positive* encounter and identification with the pure that is of greatest importance, rather than separation from the impure. Of course, in the case of God, His holiness concerns being set apart unto Himself since there is no higher standard. So, in confirming the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 22:17), "since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself" (Heb. 6:13). Thus Charnock declares:

The holiness of God *negatively* is a perfect and unpolluted freedom from all evil. As we call gold pure that is not imbedded by any dross, and that garment clean that is free from any spot, so the nature of God is estranged from all shadow of evil, all imaginable contagion. *Positively*, it is the rectitude or integrity of the divine nature, or that conformity of it in affection and action to the divine will as to his eternal law, whereby he works with a becomingness to his own excellency, and whereby he hath a delight and complacency [tranquility] in everything agreeable to his will.³

In the New Testament, the parallel word is ἅγιος, hagios, which, via the Greek language, heavily draws upon the Hebrew concept, and thus has the closely related meaning of "moral purity, sanctity, consecration, veneration" in both the negative and positive senses. So, "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'" (I Pet. 1:15-16).

- a. Nevertheless in the Bible the word "holy" is not *essentially* a moral term but rather one originally employed to make various distinctions. In broad religion it focuses upon the sacred in contrast with the secular. But in Scripture it most frequently takes on moral meaning that is rooted in the holy character of God.

³ Stephen Charnock, *Works*, II, p. 194.

- (1) Early Canaanite pagan priestesses were considered “holy” because they were devoted to, or set apart unto, temple prostitution. Thus in Genesis, the “temple prostitute” who Judah sought (Gen. 38:21-22), has the root meaning of “holy/consecrated.”⁴
 - (2) The various utensils used in Solomon’s temple were designated as “holy” because they were set apart from association with other common vessels unto a particular area of sacred service (I Chron. 22:19). In a similar way the golden plate on Aaron’s high-priestly turban was designated as “the holy crown” (Lev. 8:9). So in the eschatological Messianic kingdom, such common items as “cooking pots” will become “holy to the Lord of hosts” (Zech. 4:21).
- b. By way of illustration, a desk in a pastor’s study was once associated with a common array of desks in an office furniture salesroom. Then it was purchased from that ordinary setting and set apart unto the distinctive ministry of the Word of God. However, the true measure of this desk’s “holiness” is what it was consecrated to rather than what it was separated from. In a non-moral sense, a dedicated surgeon or housewife or thief could be described as “holy” to the degree that each is devoted to their customary employment.
2. The two basic categories of God’s holiness.
 - a. The *majestic* holiness of God.

God is distinct and transcendent with regard to creation in *all* of His attributes. His “apartness” involves *all* of His being. “Who is like You among the gods. O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?” (Ex. 15:11); “There is no one holy like the LORD, indeed there is no one besides You, nor is there any rock like your God” (I Sam. 2:2); “For thus says the high and exalted One who lives forever, whose name is Holy, ‘I dwell on a high and holy place’” (Is. 57:15). Berkhof describes this as the “majesty-holiness” of God,⁵ that is His comprehensive, all-inclusive holiness. In this sense God’s moral holiness coalesces with His exalted spirituality, righteousness, sovereignty, wisdom, wrath, grace, etc., so that man as a mere creature is

⁴ Keil and Delitzsch comment that this person was, “a woman sacred to Astarte, a goddess of the Canannites, the deification of the generative and productive principle of nature; one who served this goddess by prostitution (*vid.* Deut. 23:18). This was no doubt regarded as the most respectable designation for public prostitutes in Canaan” “The Pentateuch,” *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, I, p. 341.

⁵ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 73.

overwhelmed with His awesome, unique overwhelming presence, His absolute unapproachability resulting in personal creature sensitivity and abasement.⁶

b. The *moral* holiness of God.

Though related to God's majestic holiness, this moral aspect predominates in the Bible and our study will focus attention upon this particular truth. It could be claimed that God's moral holiness is at the heart of His majestic holiness since it permeates every aspect of His being.

(1) With regard to its essential components.

There are three fundamental elements in biblical holiness, though they can equally be applied to the earlier mentioned secular examples.

- (a) A *moral standard*, the essential righteousness of God, that governs the separation, both negatively and positively, that is intrinsic to holiness, the right, a measure of oughtness, an ethical code or compass that is determinative of righteous behavior.
- (b) A *separation from* that which violates this moral standard, designated as negative holiness. It is separation or alienation from and aversion to unholiness. It is a reaction that the righteousness of God arouses and not simply a legal response according to dogmatic preaching.
- (c) A *separation unto* that which is in agreement with this moral standard, designated as positive holiness. It is an inclination, a partiality, a spontaneous soul passion for the righteousness of God. It is ethical conformity born of the Holy Spirit's constraint, not legal mandate.

(2) With regard to God Himself.

At the heart of the being of God is His righteousness, His infinite positive moral essence since He "dwells in light unapproachable" (I Tim. 6:16). Further, "God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all" (I John 1:5). In this regard He is negatively alienated from unrighteousness.

- (a) He is His own, consistent, unchanging, morally pure standard, and never has any need to be compared with another standard outside of

⁶ Berkhof acknowledges his reliance here, to some degree, upon Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*. However, while this work has received wide acclaim, yet the fact of it being based upon liberal presuppositions and especially the author's infatuation with eastern mysticism should engender caution.

Himself since there is none (Ex. 15:11; Is. 6:3; Heb. 6:13). God is independently sufficient in His own moral being. This aspect declares who God essentially is, in the core of His being.

- (b) He is set apart from all that is alien to His purity. There is not a speck of defilement, not the faintest stain of impurity in His person, “no darkness at all” (I John 1:5). In this respect He stands out in sharp contrast with the gods of human derivation and likeness. This aspect declares who God distinctively, actively is not.
 - (c) He is set apart unto all that is in harmony with His moral excellence, His utterly righteous being (Ps. 145:17; Hab. 1:13; Rev. 4:8), even as is harmoniously manifested within the three Persons of the Trinity. In Him there is unalloyed moral purity, and He is utterly consecrated to this, His own impeccable standard. Thus God is morally content, self-satisfied. This aspect declares who God distinctively, actively is.
- (3) With regard to the Christian.

It may surprise the modern Christian that God’s plan of salvation is designed to convert the soul of the unrighteous so that it becomes righteous in the sight of God, and that the converted Christian will give evidence of this authentic transformation. He will indicate both his being repulsed by unrighteousness and affection for righteousness. Further he will reflect the holy character of this righteousness, even as it is embodied in the Son of God (II Tim. 4:8; I John 2:1, 29).

- (a) God’s standard of righteousness (positive holiness) is the believer’s standard, namely that which the Bible reveals. “Be holy, for I [the LORD your God] am holy.” (Lev. 11:44; cf. I Pet. 1:15-16). “You shall be blameless before the Lord your God” (Deut. 18:13). So negatively it may be said of the Christian: “How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers” (Ps. 1:1). Yet positively it will be said of him: “But his delight is in the law [instruction] of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night” (Ps. 1:2). This standard is supremely evident in the incarnate, righteous Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:9; Col. 2:9; Rev. 3:7). As a consequence, we reject:

- 1) *Subjective righteousness*, humanistic morality born of vaunted, secular human autonomy. Such standards arise from what I or community consensus reckon to be right. By this means

democratic morality is established. It is wholly man-centered and rejects any external, objective righteousness of a holy God.

- 2) *Relative righteousness*, situational morality, namely that which is suitable as right in a given setting for a determined period of time. It is a consequence of *subjective righteousness*, the result being elective “morality” in one region and differing “morality” in a neighboring region, all according to human whim.
- (b) The Christian is set apart from that which is alien to the moral character of God, this being negative holiness. “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (II Cor. 7:1). “Now flee from youthful lusts” (II Tim. 2:22a).
- 1) Hence the believer shuns that which is ungodly, unholy, uncharacteristic of God, unlike Jesus Christ. “A stranger [phoney, godless shepherd] they [true sheep of Christ] simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers” (John 10:5).
 - 2) However, on its own this negative holiness proves little more than a change of behavior that may be simply acknowledged as more civil and socially conservative. It certainly does not indicate that such a person is a regenerate child of God. In Jonathan Edwards classic work on *Religious Affections* he explain:

[P]ersons being disposed to abound and to be zealously engaged in the external exercises of religion, and to spend much time in them, is no sure evidence of grace. . . . Experience shows, that persons, from false religion, may be abundant in the external exercises of religion; yea, to give themselves up to them, and devote almost their whole time to them. Formerly, a sort of people were very numerous in the Romish church, calles *recluses*, who forsook the world, and utterly abandoned the society of mankind. They shut themselves up close in a narrow cell, with a vow never to stir out of it, nor to see the face of any, (unless that they might be visited in case of sickness,) but to spend all their days in the exercises of devotion and converse with God. There were also in old time, great multitudes called Hermites and Anchorites, who left the world in order to spend all their days in lonesome deserts, and to give themselves up to religious contemplations and exercises of devotion.⁷

⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *Works*, I, p. 255.

(c) The Christian is set apart unto that which is in harmony with the moral character of God, this being positive holiness. Having been saved by “the righteousness of God” (Rom. 1:16-17; 3:21-26), the Christian will have an inclination to live “sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age” (Tit. 2:13). “Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy; and I have set you [Israel] apart from the peoples to be mine” (Lev. 20:26); “Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness” (I Tim 6:11; cf. II Tim. 2:22b).

- 1) He is inclined toward the nature of God in his affections.⁸ His desire is to model the very character of God. He thirsts after godliness. The great commandment (Matt. 22:36-38) is more than a formal mandate; rather the Christian is motivated in his heart in that He admires and adores God’s holiness, and especially as he observes it in Jesus Christ, and “labors until Christ is formed [μορφόω, morphoō] in him” (Gal. 4:19; cf. 5:22-23).
- 2) Here is the chief ground for accepting a person is holy according to Scripture. Attraction to the righteousness of God best indicates regeneration. In spite of Peter’s sinful bungling, yet he had a heart for the Lord Jesus Christ. “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life” (John 6:68). “Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head” (John 13:9). Probably with tears of guilt rolling down his cheeks, Peter confessed, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You” John 21:15-17). It was this heart affection of Peter that Jesus appreciated so much, notwithstanding much foolishness. In Jonathan Edwards’ classic work on *Religious Affections* he explains:

So the holiness of God, in the more extensive sense of the word—the sense in which the word is commonly, if not universally, used concerning God in Scripture—is the same with the moral excellency of the divine nature; comprehending all his moral perfections, his righteousness, faithfulness, and goodness. . . . *Holy persons*, in the exercise of *holy affections*, love divine things primarily for their *holiness*; they love God, in the first place, for the beauty of his *holiness*, or *moral* perfection, as being supremely amiable *in itself*. Not that the saints, in the exercise of gracious affections, love God *only* for his holiness; all his attributes are amiable and glorious in their eyes; they delight in every divine perfection; the contemplation of the infinite greatness, power,

⁸ Refer to the whole of Edwards’ significant work, “A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections,” *Works*, I, pp. 234-343.

knowledge, and terrible majesty of God, is pleasant to them. But their love to God for his holiness is what is most *fundamental* and *essential* in their love.⁹

C. THE HOLINESS OF GOD EVIDENT IN HIMSELF

1. Holiness as God's fundamental attribute.

The holiness of God is of primary or basic moral importance in relation to the other attributes, not love as is popularly believed. This is not meant to suggest that holiness is of greater importance. However, an understanding of this primacy is vital to a correct appreciation of the biblical gospel and Christian ethics. This truth needs special emphasis in these days of doctrinal confusion and ignorance.

a. The primacy of the holiness of God according to Scripture.

According to Robert Dabney, "[God's majestic] holiness is the collective and consummate glory of His nature as an infinite, morally pure, active, and intelligent Spirit."¹⁰ J. Oliver Buswell writes that, "holiness is the center and essence of His moral character."¹¹

(1) The Bible as a whole.

Even a cursory study of a concordance will quickly lead one to the conclusion that the triune God of the Bible is more often described as "holy," using various cognate forms such as "holiness," "sacred," "sanctify," "sanctification," than any other attribute, such as "love" or "mercy" or "lovingkindness." Unfortunately the ministry of most modern evangelical churches would not lead their congregations to conclude that this is true.

(2) The activity of God.

Not only is God directly named as "holy" (Lev. 19:2; 21:8; I Sam. 2:2; Ps. 99:5), including the triune persons of the Godhead, the Father (John 17:11), the Son (Acts 4:27, 30), and the Spirit (I Thess. 4:8), but, as a consequence, his works, titles, angelic persons, and things associated with His being are also designated as "holy." Consider:

⁹ Ibid., p. 279.

¹⁰ Robert L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, p. 173.

¹¹ J. Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, I, p. 64.

- (a) His *name*, that of “the high and exalted One, who lives forever, whose name is holy, [who dwells] . . . on a high and holy place” (Is. 57:15). The context of the revelation of God’s name for the first time as “LORD,” Jehovah/Yahweh, the covenant name given by God only to His redeemed people, was that of “holy ground” (Ex. 3:5, 13-16; 6:2-9). So this unique, sacred revelation to Israel established God’s personal name as holy, that is especially set apart from generic terms for deity. “He has sent redemption to His people; He has ordained His covenant forever; holy and awesome is His name.” So in the New Testament the virgin Mary declared: “For the Mighty One has done great things for me; and holy is His name” (Luke 1:49).
- (b) His *temple* is holy, chiefly because this is God’s dwelling place, whether on earth where He has met with His people Israel, or heaven from where He reigns. So David declares: “By Your abundant lovingkindness I will enter Your house, at Your holy temple I will bow in reverence to You” (Ps. 5:7). So Paul describes “God’s [New Testament] household” as “a holy temple in the Lord” (Eph. 2:21-22), while in heaven “the LORD is in His holy temple” (Ps. 11:4).
- (c) His *Old Testament priesthood* was holy. Members were set apart from secular employment unto being “holy to the Lord” through “the service of the house of the Lord,” particularly “the holy ark,” along with “His people Israel” (II Chron. 35:2-3). Furthermore, the New Testament church, “as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (I Pet. 2:5). Consequently, the church of Jesus Christ is “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies
- (d) His *appointed days* are holy, that is those times of fellowship that are devoted to the worship of God, whether the Sabbath in the Old Testament or the Lord’s Day in the New Testament. Such days are distinctive when compared with regular weekly, secular activity (Ex. 35:2; Neh. 8:9; Acts 20:7),
- (e) His *worship* is holy. Whether outward form or, more importantly, an inner attitude is considered here, there is to be acknowledgment that God is holy. This would apply to both private devotions and the various aspects of corporate worship (Ps. 29:2; 96:9; Rev. 4:8).

(f) His *covenants* are holy. When God makes unilateral promises, such as to Abraham and through Christ, there is to be the recognition of the sacred, distinguishing holiness of these agreements, particularly when compared with bilateral, human promises (Dan. 11:28-30; Luke 1:72). This holiness is especially related to the reliable, inviolate character of God as the covenant keeper.

(3) The definitive statement, Isaiah 6:1-7.

This passage of Scripture is arguably the *locus classicus* with regard to the doctrine of the holiness of God. Here the God of Israel is principally described by the Seraphim as “holy, holy, holy,” and not “love, love, love,” or “wrath, wrath, wrath,” or “eternal, eternal, eternal.” The same trilogy of praise is offered in Revelation 4:8. Edward J. Young comments here:

It is probably safe to assume that the singing was antiphonal, for the seraphs cry out to the other seraphs, as though proclaiming to them and declaring to them that the LORD is holy. . . . As here used, *quadosh* signifies the entirety of the divine perfection which separates God from His creation. God is the Creator who exists in absolute independence of the creature. He is the Lord, and not a man. Although the creation depends upon Him, He Himself is entirely independent thereof. This is the heart and core of Isaiah’s theology. Also included in the word holy is an ethical element, the thought of complete freedom and separation from what is sinful.

However, after Isaiah is humbled and confesses his sin along with that of his fellow countrymen in vs. 1-5, he receives grace through the forgiveness and cleansing power of God, even Christ Jesus (John 12:36-41), in vs. 6-7. The order is most significant here since it is that a holy God manifests grace and mercy; it is not a gracious and merciful God who manifests holiness. As we shall see, love requires a moral standard, and it is the priority of holiness that supplies this governing standard.

b. The primacy of the holiness of God according to Stephen Charnock.

In Charnock’s classic study *The Existence and Attributes of God*, he declares that:

If any, this attribute [of holiness] hath an excellency above his other perfections. There are some attributes we prefer, because of our interest in them, and the relation they bear to us; as we esteem his goodness before his power, and his mercy, whereby he relieves us, before his justice, whereby he punisheth us. As there are some we more delight in because of the goodness we receive by them, so there are some that God delights to honor because of their excellency.¹²

¹² Stephen Charnock, “The Existence and Attributes of God,” *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, II, p. 191.

- (1) His specific reasons.
- (a) This attribute is more frequently attached to God's name than any other (Ps. 33:21; 111:9; 15:21; Is. 57:15; Luke 1:49). "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 his greatest title of honor; in this doth the majesty and venerableness of his name appear."¹³
 - (b) This attribute is more supremely celebrated in heaven than any other (Is. 6:3; Rev. 4:8). "Do you hear in any angelical song any other perfection of the divine nature thrice repeated? Where do we read of the crying out Eternal, eternal, eternal; or Faithful, faithful, faithful, Lord God of hosts!"¹⁴
 - (c) This attribute is more frequently attached to God's oaths than any other. Thus, "Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David" (Ps. 89:35); also, "The LORD God has sworn by His holiness" (Amos 4:2).

He that swears, swears by a greater than himself. God having no greater than himself, swears by himself; and swearing here by his holiness seems to equal that single to all his other attributes, as if he were more concerned in the honor of it than of all the rest. It is as if he should have said, Since I have not a more excellent perfection to swear by than that of my holiness, I lay this to pawn for your security, and bind myself by that which I will never part with, were it possible for me to be stripped of all the rest.¹⁵
 - (d) This attribute is God's glory and beauty as is no other, and is to be acknowledged as such. David desires to "dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty [holiness, cf. Ps. 29:2] of the Lord and to meditate in His temple" (Ps. 27:4; cf. 29:2). Isaiah describes God's house as "holy and beautiful" (Isa. 64:11), and this is but a reflection of his holy and beautiful Being.¹⁶
 - (e) This attribute is God's very life which, in Ephesians 4:18-20, is contrasted with the impurity or unholiness of the Gentiles. Here they are "excluded from the life of God," which vitality is the opposite to their manifold "uncleanness and profaneness," and

¹³ Ibid., p. 190.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 191-2.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 192.

¹⁶ Ibid.

thus is His holiness. "If he were stripped of this, he would be a dead God, more than by the want of any other perfection. His swearing by it intimates as much; he swears often by his own life: 'As I live, saith the Lord;' so he swears by his holiness as if it were his life, and more his life than any other."¹⁷ From this we conclude that his truth is a holy truth (Rev. 6:10), his wrath is a holy wrath (Ezek. 8:2), his love is a holy love (Rom. 3:26).

(2) His overall conclusion.

Thus this attribute has, "an excellency above all his other perfections so that 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. . . . His justice is a holy justice, his wisdom is a holy wisdom, his arm of power is a "holy arm" (Ps. 98:1), his promise is a "holy promise" (Ps. 105:42). . . . This [holiness] is the crown of all his attributes, the life of all his decrees, the brightness of all his actions. Nothing is decreed by him, nothing is acted by him, but what is worthy of the dignity, and becoming the honor, of this attribute."¹⁸

c. The primacy of the holiness of God according to Augustus H. Strong.

Dr. Strong's *Systematic Theology*, first published in 1886 and enlarged in 1907, is a classic Baptist work that is notable for its emphasis on attempting to regain lost ground previously yielded to liberalism. Specifically, the call is for a return to the priority of holiness rather than love in the character of God.

(1) His introductory assertion.

It cannot be overemphasized that the following declaration is of exceedingly great importance for this modern age in which Christianity has developed a sentimental, relational approach to the Christian gospel and Christian living.

I would lead others to avow anew, as I do now, in spite of the supercilious assumptions of modern infidelity, my firm belief, only confirmed by the experience and reflection of half a century [rife with liberalism], in the old doctrines of holiness as the fundamental attribute of God, of an original transgression and sin of the whole human race. . . . I believe that the recent merging of Holiness in Love, and the practical denial that Righteousness is fundamental in God's nature, are responsible for the utilitarian views of law

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 193-4.

and the superficial views of sin which now prevail in some systems of theology. There can be no proper doctrine of the atonement and no proper doctrine of retribution, so long as Holiness is refused its pre-eminence. Love must have a norm or standard, and this norm or standard can be found only in Holiness. The old conviction of sin and the sense of guilt that drove the convicted sinner to the cross are inseparable from a firm belief in the self-affirming attribute of God [Holiness] as logically prior to and as conditioning the self-communicating attribute [Love]. The theology of our day needs a new view of the Righteous One. Such a view will make it plain that God must be reconciled before man can be saved, and that the human conscience can be pacified only upon condition that propitiation is made to the divine Righteousness.¹⁹

(2) His response to objections.

The modern Christian may be inclined to protest that such an idea conflicts with the supremacy of God's love. If any, is not love God's fundamental attribute? Did not Paul declares in I Corinthians 13:13 that love is "the greatest"? To this Dr. Strong replies:²⁰

- (a) "Love cannot be the fundamental attribute of God, because love always requires a norm or standard, and this norm or standard is found only in holiness; Phil. 1:9 – "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more in knowledge and all discernment." . . . Holiness shows itself higher than love, in that it conditions love."
- (b) "If it be said that God is love as well as holiness, we ask: Love to what? And the only answer is: Love to the right, or to holiness. . . . We cannot study character apart from conduct, nor conduct apart from character. But this does not prevent us from recognizing that character is the fundamental thing and that conduct is only the expression of it."
- (c) With regard to I Cor. 13:13, we would simply point out that Paul here is not concerned with the pinnacle of God's character, but rather the supremacy of love in the context of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), and its regulation of the gifts of the Spirit. Of course for Paul, this love must be a holy love (Eph. 4:24-5:2).

¹⁹ Augustus Strong, *Systematic Theology*, pp. x-xi.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 296-303.

(3) His illustrations in conclusion.

“Enthusiasm, like fire, must not only burn, but must be controlled. Man invented chimneys to keep in the heat but to let out the smoke. We need the walls of discretion and self-control to guide the flaming of our love. The holiness of God is the regulating principle of his nature. The ocean of his mercy is bounded by the shores of his justice. . . . Only as God maintains himself in his holiness, can he have anything of worth to give; love indeed is nothing but the self-communication of holiness.”²¹

d. The primacy of the holiness of God in application.

- (1) The contemporary crisis concerning the spiritually anemic state of conservative evangelical Christianity is addressed at its nerve with regard to this vital matter of the primacy of holiness in the character of God. One recent writer, David Wells, has perceptively written, very much along the same path as Augustus Strong.

Christians in Our Time sometimes act as though they were the first to recognize that God is a God of love. Of course the Bible tells us that God is love, but Christians of modernity seem to think that this constitutes an adequate theology in itself, that God is fundamentally if not exclusively love – and hence the talk of divine holiness is distractive or intrusive. Protestant liberalism pioneered this displacement of God’s holiness in the nineteenth century [citing Harnack], but in this century evangelicals have taken up with distressing carelessness the wholesale reordering of the Christian faith that it introduced, from the meaning of Christ’s atonement to the meaning of Christian sanctification.

Today there is resistance to the tenet that has been most characteristic of Protestant thought since the earliest days of the Reformation – namely, that holiness fundamentally defines the character of God and that love is not an alternative to it but, rather, an expression of it. *This must be so* [emphasis added]. If God’s holiness is his utter purity, his incomparable goodness, the measure of all that is true and right, the final line of resistance to all that is wrong, dark, and malignant, then love must be a part of this. If love is virtuous and right, it must be an expression of divine holiness, the essence of which is truth and right. God’s love is inescapably a manifestation of his holiness, as are his goodness, righteousness, mercy, and compassion. Holiness is what defines God’s character most fundamentally, and a vision of this holiness should inspire his people and evoke their worship, sustain their character, fuel their passion for truth, and encourage persistence in efforts to do his will and call on his name in petitionary prayer. . . . Robbed of such a

²¹ Ibid., p. 297.

God, worship loses its awe, the truth of his Word loses its ability to compel, obedience loses its virtue, and the church loses its moral authority.²²

- (2) By way of illustration, imagine that someone purposely stamps on your toes, and while you are crying out in pain that same person also exclaims, "I certainly *love* jumping on your toes and causing you such anguish." However you immediately protest, "But what you are doing is not *right*!" That is exactly correct, for what is *right* establishes what is *loving*, and not to the contrary. Hence holiness is a state of moral being that establishes right and loving activity. God's love *always* has integrity, and that integrity is His holiness.
- (3) By way of illustration, if homosexuals and lesbians principally justify their relationships on the basis of "love," and at the same time we claim that love is the supreme attribute of God, then their stance cannot be refuted. But the primacy of holiness, such as is expressed as primary in Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26-27 completely invalidates any claims to love in this matter, as it would with a thief protesting that he loves his work! In terms of the holiness of God, homosexuality and lesbianism are grossly unholy. The term "love" must not be allowed to justify unholiness; rather holiness must justify love.
- (4) Hence, this principle concerning God's being has the most profound ramifications for human existence. With regard to government and good relationships in a civil society, the righteousness of God must have primacy (Prov. 14:34). This priority equally applies to family life and the raising of children. But further, as holiness is the fundamental attribute of God, so holiness is the supreme good communicated to man through the Holy Father, the Holy Son, and the Holy Spirit. Further, we should also conclude that the communication of this fundamental attribute through Christian conversion should lead the child of God to appreciate that holiness is to be fundamental in his being and doing (I Thess. 3:12-13).

2. The triune manifestation of God's holiness.

- a. God the Father is holy. Jesus prayed, on the eve of His crucifixion: "I come You. Holy Father, keep them [the disciples given to Jesus by His Father] in Your name. . . . O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You." (John 17:11, 25).

²² David Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, pp. 135-6.

- b. God the Son is holy. (Ps. 16:10, cf. Acts 2:27; Mark 1:23-24; Acts 3:14; 4:27, 30; Heb. 7:26).
- (1) The Son is as holy as the Holy Father and the Holy Spirit. This holiness is with regard to the hypostatic union of the divine and the human.
 - (2) If the Father regards the Son as holy, then the children of God ought to have the same regard, notwithstanding His humanity and humiliation.
 - (3) If the Son, who is holy, has redeemed unholy sinners unto holiness, how intently should they regard their Redeemer as holy?
- c. God the Spirit is holy (Ps. 51:11; Is. 63:10; John 14:26; Rom. 5:5).
- (1) The Spirit is as holy as the Holy Father and the Holy Son.

The Spirit רִיחַ, ruach, πνεῦμα, pneuma, is holy (Ps. 51:12; Isa. 63:10-11; Luke 11:13; Eph. 1:13) in contrast with numerous unholy spirits, רִיחַ, ruach, πνεῦμα, pneuma, in the world. These can include the spirit of a man (Ps. 32:2; Isa. 26:9; Ezek. 13:3), spirit beings and influences (I Kings 22:21; Eph. 6:12).

- (a) *The spirit of jealousy* (Num. 5:14). In the dark spiritual realm, an inclination toward jealousy is aroused within a man.
- (b) *The spirit of distortion* (Is. 19:14). In the spiritual realm of God's dealing with Egypt, this nation is aroused to distortion.
- (c) *The spirit of harlotry* (Hos. 4:12). In the dark spiritual realm, an inclination toward harlotry is aroused.
- (d) *The spirit of uncleanness* (Matt. 12:43-45). In the dark spiritual realm, an inclination toward uncleanness is aroused.
- (e) *The spirit of divination* (Acts 16:16-18). In the dark spiritual realm, an inclination toward divination is aroused.
- (f) *The spirit of the antichrist* (I John 4:3). In the dark spiritual realm, antichrist spirits oppose Jesus in the flesh as the Christ.
- (g) *The spirit of error* (I John 4:6). In the dark spiritual realm, "the spirit of the error" sharply contrasts with "the spirit of the truth."

- (2) By way of application, we are not to attribute to the Holy Spirit any work that is not in keeping with his holiness, or that of the Father and the Son. He is literally, “the Spirit, the holy One” (John 14:26), hence utterly distinct from other unholy forces in the world. Any authentic movement of the Holy Spirit will be productive of an inclination toward personal holiness. In this regard refer to Jonathan Edwards’ works, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*,²³ and *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*.²⁴
- d. Hence holiness being God’s fundamental attribute, it must be that holiness is fundamental to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit with regard to both their persons and works.
3. Two biblical descriptions of the holiness of God.
- a. The thrice holy God according to Isaiah 6:1-8.

In conjunction with Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7, this is the most descriptive passage concerning the holiness of God in the Bible, especially since it contrasts with unholiness that finds its remedy in redeeming, cleansing grace.

- (1) Introductory context, Isaiah 1-5.
- (a) God’s controversy with unholy Judah, 730 BC.
- 1) Alienation from God. The rebellion of His people contrasts with the loyalty of domestic animals. 1:1-3.
 - 2) Corruption in all their ways. The people of God, being so iniquitous, have despised “the Holy One of Israel,” 1:4.
 - 3) Pollution in their whole being. Thorough depravity is likened to pervasive human, infection, void of possible remedy, 1:5-6.
 - 4) Degeneration through formalistic religion. External ritual is no cover for bloody guilt, 1:11-15.
 - 5) Reversion by both men and women.

²³ Jonathan Edwards, *Works*, I, pp. 265, 278-281.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 257-277.

- a) The women are proud, worldly. Their devotion is to cosmetic, fashion, jewelry, perfume, hair style, 3:16-24.
 - b) The men are indulgent, oppressive, wicked. They exalt in much drink while also promoting injustice for gain, 5:22-23.
- 6) But the God of Israel will maintain His justice by means of judgment for the materialistic godless. In this, "the holy God will show Himself holy in righteousness," 5:15-16.
- (b) God's holy constancy with Judah (cf. Mic. 4:1-4), 2:1-4.

In the face of such rebellion and disobedience, is Judah's covenanted future nullified? No, for this same "Holy One of Israel" will maintain His promise in righteousness because "the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel . . . has chosen You [His Messiah]" (49:5-7).

- 1) Future kingdom blessings concerning Judah. There will be obedience, in Jerusalem, to the "word of the LORD," 2:1-3.
 - 2) Future kingdom blessings concerning the nations. There will be inclusion of the Gentiles into God's millennial kingdom, 2:4.
- (2) Isaiah's vision of God's holiness and its effect on his life, Isaiah 6:1-8.

It is likely that, as a believer, yet having yielded to the godless influences of "a people of unclean lips," v. 5, Isaiah is now called to repentance and grace after which he is commissioned as a prophet.

- (a) Isaiah's vision described, vs. 1-4.
- 1) The LORD, v. 1.
- "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."
- a) He is Adonai, sovereign potentate over the nation of Israel, who identifies with specific human history, that is "the year of King Uzziah's death" in 730 BC.
 - b) He is Jesus Christ, "His glory" being beheld by Isaiah as a Christophany (John 12:36b-41; cf. Is. 6:10).

- c) He is regally seated and exalted very, very, very high above the temple perspective of Isaiah.
- d) He is fully glorious, majestic; His train or the skirts of his lavish robes fill the temple (John 17:5).

2) The seraphim, vs. 2-3.

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.'"

- a) They are heavenly attendants mentioned only here and v. 6 in the Bible. They have feet, faces, wings; they speak and appreciate morality, that is holiness.
- b) They are reverential beings each with three pairs of wings to cover their feet, faces, and fly; yet they are standing ready to serve. In v. 6 they are messengers of grace, though we are not told how many there are here. However in Revelation 4:6 this parallel scene describes "four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind."
- c) They are worshipful beings, constantly proclaiming to one another the exquisite moral brilliance and holy glory of Jehovah and Jesus Christ, v. 3.
- d) This repeated theme of holiness is at the very core of Isaiah's vision of God. Not surprisingly, this prince of the prophet's usual title for Jehovah is, "the Holy One of Israel" (1:4; 10:20; 43:3).
- e) By way of application, if then this angelic activity is foremost amongst the company of heaven, how then shall we react toward such eternal preoccupation? Would we be bored, bothered, or blessed in such an environment?

3) The temple, v. 4.

"And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke."

- a) The glory of the only living God, especially His voice, *shakes* the temple since His effecting majesty is far greater than even His residence. So the same glory should *shake* a local church and its members (Eph. 2:21-22).
 - b) The glory of God is met with smoke that increases in volume to the *filling* of the temple, being most acceptable. It is probably related to the coal burning altar, v. 6. So a local church should be *full* of God's holy savor (Eph. 2:21-22).
- (b) Isaiah's reaction to his vision, vs. 5-8.

- 1) The holiness of God produces an awareness of sin, v. 5.

"Then 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."

- a) Most likely this account refers to Isaiah's initial prophetic call rather than his conversion. Perhaps he had previously and personally identified with Israel's gross wickedness described in Isaiah 1-5.
 - b) To begin with, Isaiah's own sin is confessed having been confronted with the Holy Lord (cf. Mal. 3:1-3). Then Judah's sin is likewise confessed in terms of also having been confronted with the Holy Lord.
 - c) The authentic evidence of a true work of the Holy Spirit in a person's life is not an outcry against the sin of others that surrounds us, like apostate Talkative in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, but rather sin that indwells us individually (Gen. 38:24-26; 39:14-18; Ps. 51:1-4). So David writes, "Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart" (Ps. 24:3-4). Holiness can only fellowship with holiness of the same character.
- 2) The holiness of God produces forgiveness, mercy, and grace, yet without any diminution of this same holiness, vs. 6-7.

"⁶Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. ⁷ He touched

my mouth with it and said, 'Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven.'"

- a) Note the relationship here between the primacy of holiness in relation to subsequent grace. In other words, holiness here is followed by grace, and not vice versa. Grace is regulated by holiness; the grace of God is always holy grace. Thus character produces conduct.
- b) Clearly, God is the source of Isaiah's cleansing which is procured through the atoning action of the burning coal that is taken from the altar of necessary sacrifice. It is significant that Isaiah needed clean lips, hence a clean heart, before he could minister God's Word as required, in v. 8. So for John Bunyan it was said at his death:

He in the pulpit preached truth first, and then
He in his practice preached it o'er again.

- 3) The holiness of God is productive of proper activity in Isaiah, specifically dedicated service as a prophet of God, v. 8.

"Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'"

- a) Now for the first time in this vision, as if because of the prior necessity of cleansing and reconciliation, God speaks. Then, for the first time, Isaiah truly hears and understands.
 - b) Isaiah's response is spontaneous rather than contrived, eager rather than grudging, for he has savingly been confronted with the Holy One of Israel (cf. Ps. 51:10, 13-15).
- b. The thrice holy God according to Revelation 4:2-11.

"² Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. ³ And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance. ⁴ Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads. ⁵ Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; ⁶ 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. ⁷ The 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. ⁸ And 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.' ⁹ And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰ the 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.'"

Whereas Revelation 2-3 plainly deals with the earthly reign of the glorified Jesus Christ over his churches, it is equally plain that Revelation 4 transports us to the heavenly abode of that same Sovereign. In visionary terms, John the Apostle is transported heavenward concerning which he declares: "I was in the Spirit; and behold a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne," v. 2.

- (1) There is an obvious parallel with this passage and Isaiah 6:1-8.
 - (a) In Isaiah 6:1-8, Jehovah sits on His throne while receiving reverent, angelic worship. Yet Jesus Christ is also present (John 12:36b-41). The focus here is upon God's holiness.
 - (b) In Revelation 4:2-11, Jehovah, "like a jasper stone and a sardius," v. 3, sits on His throne while receiving reverent worship from twenty-four elders and four living creatures.
 - 1) In Revelation 4:8 it is "the LORD God, the Almighty," who sits on the throne of heaven; in 3:21 Jesus Christ speaks of "My Father on His throne."
 - 2) Yet in 3:21 it is Jesus Christ who sits with the Father on His throne. Likewise in 5:5-6, "the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David," is in fact "between the throne," being "a Lamb." Further, in 5:11-14 this Lamb receives the same honor and glory as the Father from the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures, as well as that of angels, a numberless host, and all of creation. Such acknowledged glory and honor incorporates the same triune chorus of, "Holy, holy, holy," 4:8.

- (2) The creaturely worship of “the Lord God, the Almighty,” vs. 2-11.
- (a) The four and twenty elders are in the presence of God, and likely represent the Church, that is all the saints, their chief activity being worship, vs. 4, 10-11, (cf. Rev. 21:12-14).
 - (b) There are four distinctive “living creatures,” not “beasts” KJV, before God’s throne, instead of the “seraphim” of Isaiah 6:2-3; vs. 6-7. Concerning them we note:
 - 1) These living creatures are identical with the seraphim, since they are the same in position, complement of wings, and activity.
 - 2) The eyes in front and behind speak of God’s omniscience and omnipresence, v. 6.
 - 3) The lion-like creature speaks of God’s majestic sovereignty, v. 7a.
 - 4) The calf-like creature speaks of God’s toiling benevolence, v. 7b.
 - 5) The man-like creature speaks of God’s personality, intellect, will, emotions, v. 7c.
 - 6) The eagle-like creature speaks of God’s transcendent dominion, v. 7d.
 - (c) But in spite of this display of God’s perfections, yet the chief activity of the living creatures is the ceaseless triune proclamation of God’s holiness, v. 8.
 - 1) Note that this holiness is immutable, for God is described as He, “who was and who is and who is to come” (cf. 1:8).
 - 2) Since this declaration is described as giving “glory and honor,” v. 9, and the elders do likewise, vs. 10-11, we conclude that one of the chief occupations of the Church in heaven, as it will be upon earth, is intense delight in God’s holiness.
- (3) By way of application, again all people who contemplate going to heaven ought to ponder if this activity, the praise of God’s glorious holiness, is their present great interest. If God’s holiness is not their earthly concern, then how is it possible for them to have such a concern and reverent

enjoyment in heaven? Why would they ever want to go to heaven if they are unhappy with holiness and its praise on earth?

D. THE HOLINESS OF GOD EVIDENT IN THE BELIEVER

1. God's attribute of holiness is communicable.

- a. The holiness of God is to be manifest in believers. He chose us that "we would be holy and blameless before Him" (Eph. 1:4; cf. 4:24). So the believer is exhorted: "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" (I Pet. 1:13-16).
- b. The holiness of God is fundamentally to regulate a multitude of human responses.
 - (1) It is to stimulate prayer. "I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension" (I Tim. 2:8; cf. I Sam. 2:1-2).
 - (2) It is to stimulate the singing of praise. "Sing praise to the LORD, you His godly ones, and give thanks to His holy name" (Ps. 30:4; cf. 96:1-9).
 - (3) It is to stimulate understanding and deep perception. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Prov. 9:10).
 - (4) It is to stimulate rejoicing. "The afflicted also will increase their gladness in the LORD, and the needy of mankind will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel" (Is. 29:19).
 - (5) It is to stimulate daily conduct. "Since all these things [concerning the coming day of the Lord and the dissolution of the heavens and earth] are to be destroyed in this way [of judgment], what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness (II Pet. 3:10-12; cf. Rom. 12:1).
 - (6) It is to stimulate reverential fear. "Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For You alone are holy" (Rev. 15:4).

2. God's communicable holiness in I Peter 1:13-16.

¹³Therefore, gird [ἀναζώννυμι, anazōnnumi par ammp] the loins [ὄσφύς, hosphus n afp] of your mind/understanding [διάνοια, dianoa n gfs] for holy thinking and

activity, keeping sober [νήφω, nēphō par panmp] *in spirit*, fix your hope [ἐλπίζω, elpizō v aaimkp] completely [τελείως, teleiōs adv] on the grace [χάρις, charis n afs] to be brought [φέρω, pherō par pm/pafs] to you at the revelation [ἀποκάλυψις, apokalupsis n dfs] of Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ As obedient [ὕπακοή, hupakoē n gfs] children, do not be conformed [συσχηματίζω, suschēmatizō par pm/pnmp] to the former lusts [ἐπιθυμία, epithumia n dfp] *which were yours* in your ignorance [ἄγνοια, agnoia n dfs], ¹⁵ but like the Holy One calling [καλέω, kaleō par aaams] you, be/become [γίνομαι, ginomai v apimp] holy ones [ἅγιος, hagios adj nmp] yourselves also in all your behavior [ἀναστροφή, anastrophē n dfs]; ¹⁶ because it has been written [γράφω, graphō v ppis], "YOU SHALL BE [εἰμί, eimi v fmip] HOLY ONES [ἅγιος, hagios adj nmp], FOR I AM HOLY."

a. The foundation of declarative holiness in I Peter.

- (1) God's elect are, by the very nature of their having been chosen, foreknown, fully set apart, declared to be holy, sanctified in a complete sense by the Holy Spirit, to the end that they might be redeemed through faith in the sprinkled blood of Jesus Christ, 1:1-2. This then becomes the basis of ongoing, progressive sanctification.
 - (a) God's foreknowledge [πρόγνωσις, prognōsis n afs] here is His "forelove" for His elect in eternity past (cf. 1:19-20; Rom. 11:2).
 - (b) Jeremiah was definitively holy, foreknown, foreloved in eternity past. "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you" (Jer. 1:4-5).
- (2) The fact that all true believers have been redeemed, as a slave who has been ransomed from a slave market unto liberty in Christ, means that they are by definition, declaratively set apart or holy (Tit. 2:14), 1:18-19.
- (3) All true believers comprise, by declaration, a holy priesthood, 2:5, a holy nation, 2:9a. They, having been called from darkness unto light, 2:9b, are, by declaration, holy.
- (4) John Murray writes in his article on *Definitive Sanctification*:

When we speak of sanctification we generally think of it as that process by which the believer is gradually transformed in heart, mind, will, and conduct, and conformed more and more to the will of God and to the image of Christ, until at death the disembodied spirit is made perfect in holiness, and at the resurrection his body likewise will be conformed to the likeness of the body of Christ's glory. It is biblical to apply the term 'sanctification' to this process of transformation and conformation. But it is a fact too frequently over-looked that in the New Testament the most characteristic terms that refer to sanctification are used, not of a process,

but of a once-for-all definitive act. . . . We are thus compelled to take account of the fact that the language of sanctification [holiness] is used with reference to some decisive action that occurs at the inception of the Christian life, and one that characterizes the people of God in their identity as called effectually by God's grace. It would be, therefore, a dereliction from biblical patterns of language and conception to think of sanctification exclusively in terms of a progressive work.²⁵

- b. The consequence of practical holiness in I Peter 1:13-16.
- (1) The context is the believer's privileged position as a joyous participant, 1:8, in God's matchless plan of salvation, 1:10-12. There is a three-fold testimony given as proof:
 - (a) The Old Testament prophets, "were not serving themselves, but you," 1:10-12a.
 - (b) The New Testament apostles, "preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven," 1:12b.
 - (c) The angels, with rapt attention and admiration, are amazed at such a depth of grace bestowed on human sinners, especially since they, a higher created order (Heb. 2:6-7), yet are not the objects of such saving interest (Luke 2:13-14), v. 12c.
 - (2) In the light of such gracious privilege, believers are soberly exhorted to exercise their minds towards holy activity, vs. 13-14.
 - (a) "Therefore" calls us to reflect in our minds upon our responsibilities in the realm of holiness in view of our holy and merciful privileges (Rom. 12:1).
 - (b) "Gird up your minds for action," pictures an eastern person dressed in a long, loose garment who desires to run quickly without tripping. Hence, he draws the back hem of his outer gown through his legs and tucks it tightly under his belt. He is now prepared for alert, rapid mobility and action.
 - 1) One of the most serious problems facing evangelical Christianity today is that of the depreciation of the primary role of the mind, both with regard to evangelism and practical sanctification (Rom. 6:17). The cult of mindless, anti-doctrinal, pseudo pious

²⁵ John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, II, p. 277-8.

pragmatism, is delivering psyched up, carnal, religious trendies, but not holy saints!

- 2) In this regard, John Stott's timely booklet *Your Mind Matters*, subtitled "The Misery and Menace of Mindless Christianity", ought to be mandatory reading. He comments,

The modern world breeds pragmatists, whose first question about any idea is not, 'Is it true?' but 'Does it work?' . . . I am not pleading for dry, humorless, academic Christianity, but for a warm devotion set on fire by truth. . . . But one of the most neglected aspects of the quest for holiness is the place of the mind, even though Jesus Christ put the matter beyond question when he promised, 'You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free' (John 8:32). It is by his truth that Christ liberates us from the bondage of sin.²⁶

- 3) In Romans 12:1-2, the spiritual metamorphosis of the Christian results from the renewed mind that has substantially embraced God's gospel mercies.
- 4) In Ephesians 6:14, the center of physical strength insofar as mobility is concerned are the loins, which are to be "girded with truth," that is implicitly in the mind.
- 5) By way of application, a sloppy, undisciplined mind results in a slovenly, erratic Christian. But if a Christian would be holy, then he must pull his mind together for strenuous employment, stretching, and strict, devoted service.
- (c) We are to "hope" (imperative) with sobriety, in the face of fierce opposition (I Tim. 6:11-12), with our minds set upon Christ's return (Eph. 5:8, 15-16; Tit. 2:11-13), v. 13.
- (d) The mind is to generate a new obedience to holiness in contrast with the former unrestrained lusts and desires, v. 14.
- 1) But it must be a renewed mind, a spiritually taught mind in contrast with a formerly sloppy mind (Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 1:21).
- 2) It is only a holy mind that produces holy living. As a man thinks in holy categories, so is he in his living (Prov. 23:7).

²⁶ John Stott, *Your Mind Matters*, pp. 9, 11, 32.

- (3) The standard of holiness we are called to manifest in our lives is that of the holy God of Israel, vs. 15-16.
- (a) In the Old Testament Israel was to keep clean from defilement and be like God (Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7). This holiness was moral godliness or “God-likeness.”
 - (b) Hence, it is necessary for the Christian to be like this God of Israel in all of his manner of life (II Cor. 7:1; I Thess. 4:7). A child of God ought to reflect the nature of the Father who has begotten him.
 - 1) In his soul, heart and flesh, he thirsts for spiritual food and life that is sourced in God (Ps. 84:2).
 - 2) He hates what God hates, every false way, and loves what God has revealed, His precepts (Ps. 119:128).
 - 3) He so appreciates the revealed, holy mind of God, as an infinite resource (Ps. 139:17).
 - 4) He longs to model himself after the mind and manner of his Holy Savior, Jesus Christ (Gal. 4:19; Eph. 4:13; Phil. 2:5).

3. God’s communicable holiness in Hebrews 12:14.

“Pursue [διώκω, diōkō v paimp] peace with all men, and the sanctification/holiness [ἀγιασμός, hagianismos n asm] apart from/without which no one will see [ὁράω, horaō v fmis] the Lord.”

- a. The disciplined pursuit of Christ in glory, vs. 1-11.

The language here describes a race in which the Christian participates; he is required to employ necessary and beneficial discipline, so that he may finally “win” and receive a “prize” (I Cor. 9:24).

- (1) How do we learn to run this race well? By “fixing our eyes on/looking to [ἀφοράω, aphoraō parpanmp] Jesus, the author and perfecter/finisher [τελειωτής, teleiōtēs n ams] of the faith,” v. 2.
- (2) What is the purpose of this race with its accompanying discipline? It is “that we may share [μεταλαμβάνω, metalambanō inf aa] His holiness,” v. 10, by means of the Word and Holy Spirit communication.

b. The determined pursuit of Christ in glory, vs. 12-13.

While encountering corrective discipline from God, v. 11, we are to run with strong commitment and uprightness, rather than feebly, so that we might victoriously finish the course, vs. 12-13.

- (1) Do we have various bodily ailments, reflecting ailments in our soul, that can hinder our running well? Yes, all Christians do. So we are to run wisely, employing spiritual exercise, in the light of this knowledge, v. 12.
- (2) We are to choose "straight paths" or righteous ways, in the face of crooked options, that do not cause our infirmities to restrict our progress. So this recovery comes via faithful church life, God's spiritual health spa, v. 13.

c. The holy pursuit of Christ in glory, v. 14.

Along this pathway or spiritual running track, what major priority are we to be occupied with in the face of other important goals? With what shall our mind and body primarily be occupied with as we continue fixing our eyes on Jesus?

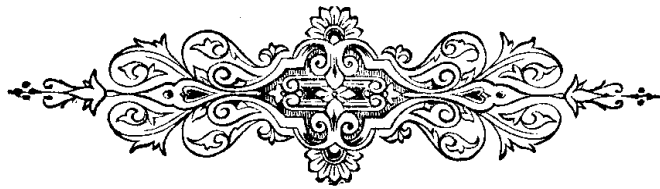
- (1) We are "to pursue peace with all men," being patient with the worst of sinners, even as our Savior "endured such hostility by sinners against Himself," v. 3, who, "while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats" (I Pet. 2:23).
- (2) We are "to pursue/run after . . . the sanctification [holiness] without which no one will see the Lord." Of course holy affections must be presupposed here, which can be aroused in the true believer; however the natural man has no such interest.
 - (a) Positional holiness is certainly assumed here, that is declarative holiness, the elective status of being set apart from darkness unto light, which condition is complete and unalterable.
 - (b) Yet the main emphasis here is upon practical holiness since the context still appears to be that of discipline while we "run with endurance the race that is set before us," v. 1. Hence the declared holy ones are to pursue progressive holiness.
 - 1) Practical holiness is the insignia or proof of declarative holiness. It is the Spirit of God's hallmark whereby the fashioned vessel of God has its recognizable stamp of authenticity.

- 2) By way of application, a labeled or declared apple tree is vindicated by its production of apples and the sweetness of their taste (Matt. 7:15-20).
 - 3) By way of application, a designated child of God who does not manifest parental birthmarks gives evidence of being illegitimate (I John 2:29; 3:9-10).
- (c) Since God is unspeakably holy, only those who possess an identical holiness will be able to stand in His holy presence. Only “the pure in heart” shall happily see God (Matt. 5:8).
- (d) Those who have holiness of heart will pursue the desire of their heart. Hence, evident lack of interest in holiness indicates an absence of holiness of heart. For further profitable reading on practical holiness, refer to the classic work of J. C. Ryle titled *Holiness*, from which the following quotation of Thomas Brooks is derived.

It is impossible that ever you should be happy, except you are holy. No holiness here, no happiness hereafter. The Scripture speaks of three bodily inhabitants of heaven – Enoch, before the law; Elijah, under the law; and Jesus Christ, under the Gospel: all three eminent in holiness, to teach us, that even in an ordinary course there is no going to heaven without holiness. There are many thousands now in heaven, but not one unholy one among them all; there is not one sinner among all those saints; not one goat among all those sheep; not one weed among all those flowers; not one thorn or prickle among all those roses; not one pebble among all those glittering diamonds. . . . Ah, sirs, holiness is a flower that grows not in Nature’s garden. Men are not born with holiness in their hearts, as they are born with tongues in their mouths: holiness is of a Divine offspring: it is a pearl of price, that is to be found in no nature but a renewed nature, in no bosom but a sanctified bosom.

There is not the least beam or spark of holiness in any natural man in the world. . . . All men would be happy, and yet they naturally loathe to be holy. By all which you may clearly see that food is not more necessary for the preservation of natural life, than holiness is necessary for the preservation and salvation of the soul. If a man had the wisdom of Solomon, the strength of Samson, the courage of Joshua, the policy of Ahithophel, the dignities of Haman, the power of Ahasuerus, and the eloquence of Apollos, yet all those without holiness would never save him. . . . I suppose there is nothing more evident than that the times and seasons wherein we live call aloud upon every one to look after holiness, and to labor for holiness. Never complain of the times, but

cease to do evil, and labor to do well, and all will be well; get but better hearts and better lives, and you will quickly see better times (Isa. 1:16-19).²⁷



²⁷ "Extracts from Old Writers," J. C. Ryle, *Holiness*, pp. 330-333.

Holy Father, great Creator,
Source of mercy, love and peace,
Look upon the Mediator,
Clothe us with His righteousness;
Heav'nly Father, heav'nly Father,
Through the Savior hear and bless!

Holy Jesus, Lord of glory,
Whom angelic hosts proclaim,
While we hear Thy wondrous story,
Meet and worship in Thy Name,
Dear Redeemer, dear Redeemer,
In our hearts Thy peace proclaim.

Holy Spirit, Sanctifier,
Come with unction from above,
Raise our hearts to raptures higher,
Fill them with the Savior's love.
Source of comfort, source of comfort,
Cheer us with the Savior's love.

God the Lord, through every nation
Let Thy wondrous mercies shine,
In the song of Thy salvation
Every tongue and race combine,
Great Jehovah, great Jehovah,
Form our hearts and make them Thine.

Alexander V. Griswold