

The Holiness of God

The most important thing about any person is what he or she thinks about God. The Lord said through the prophet Jeremiah, "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord." (Jeremiah 9:23, 24) The knowledge of God is our greatest treasure.

If we are walking with God through Bible reading and prayer, and if we are experiencing Him through union with Christ, the new birth, justification through faith, and Spirit-empowered sanctification, we then want to grow in our knowledge, reverence, and love of Who He is.

God is infinite and eternal, and the study of His character is inexhaustible, but it is helpful for us to select a few attributes of God that will give us "windows" into His being and His works. Over the next three weeks, we will study His holiness, His sovereignty, and His goodness.

Covenant Renewal

In Joshua 24, the Israelites have newly entered the promise land, and Joshua leads them in a covenant renewal ceremony at Shechem. Here they are to listen again to the Word of God and to restate their loyalty to Him. When Joshua asks them which God they will serve, they claim to want to serve the Lord, "for he is our God." Joshua then raises a profound and provocative objection: "You are not 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." Eventually the Israelites prevail: they will put away their idols and serve the Lord alone. Joshua then set up a large stone under the terebinth as an enduring witness to their covenant vows.

Why did Joshua warn them so strongly? What is it about God's holiness that they and we need to know in order to serve Him?

Perhaps we should begin by asking what is God's holiness. The word "holiness," at its root, means "separateness" or "apart-ness." The Scriptures teach us several aspects of God's holiness: His beauty and splendor (Psalm 29:2; Isaiah 6:1-4), His sovereignty and transcendence (Exodus 15:11; Isaiah 57:14, 15; Rev. 15:4), His goodness in redeeming us (Isaiah 43:1-3a, 14, 15; 49:7; 54:5), and His moral purity (Habakkuk 1:12, 13). He alone can sanctify us or anything else (Exodus 31:13; 19:4-6).

Why is it important for us to know God's holiness? In the Scriptures, we see that it is an essential element of personal spiritual renewal (cf. Isaiah 6:5-8), it provides the model and motivation for our sanctification (cf. Leviticus 11:44, 45; I Peter 1:15, 16), it inspires our worship and service to the Lord (Psalm 99; Isaiah 6:8; Matthew 6:9), and it excites our desire to see Him face to face on the Great Day of the Lord (Matt. 5:8; Rev. 1:12-18).

Joshua was saying, in effect, to the Israelites "you can't renew your covenant with the Lord unless and until you assess properly Who your covenant partner is! If you trifle with Him, He will consume you!" The same would be true with believers today. Have we fully considered the holiness of the Triune God? Has His holiness wrought in us a desire to be holy and to worship and serve Him wholeheartedly and to see Him one day face to face?

"Any sin is more or less heinous depending upon the honor and majesty of the one whom we had offended. Since God is of infinite honor, infinite majesty, and infinite holiness, the slightest sin is of infinite consequence. The slightest sin is nothing less than cosmic treason when we realize against whom we have sinned."

—Jonathan Edwards

Discussion Questions

- 1) Why do we not naturally think of God in His holiness as He is revealed to us in the Scriptures? What most often motivates and informs our view of God’s character other than the Scriptures?

- 2) What are some ways in which believers tend to trifle with God’s holiness?

- 3) How can we grow in our knowledge and experience of the holiness of God?

Related Reading

[*The Holiness of God*](#)

by R.C. Sproul

[*The Attributes of God*](#)

by A.W. Pink

Notes:

Digging Deeper

What evidences in your life show that you have taken God’s holiness very seriously? What evidences in your life show that you need to take His holiness more seriously?