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The Holiness of God

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

To many people today, holiness is a foreign concept. For the authors of Scripture, however, holiness is one of God’s most prominent attributes. It denotes both His separation from creation as the infinitely superior One and His absolute moral purity. In this lesson, Dr. Lawson explains what it means to affirm that God is holy, and how an understanding of this truth affects how we approach the living God and live before Him in humble reverence.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Exodus 15:11; Isaiah 6:1–7

TEACHING OBJECTIVES

1. To explain what Scripture means when it calls God “holy”
2. To instill awe in the one who is exalted over all creation
3. To provide an impetus for the reverent sort of worship that God desires

QUOTATIONS

Infinite purity, even more than infinite knowledge or infinite power, is the object of reverence . . . “The Holy One of Israel” is He who is to be feared and adored.

—Charles Hodge

When the Bible calls God holy, it means primarily that God is transcendently separate. He is so far above and beyond us that He seems almost totally foreign to us.

—R.C. Sproul

LECTURE OUTLINE

I. God's Surpassing Holiness

- A. God's holiness is uniquely emphasized in Scripture.
 - i. The Bible repeatedly describes people, places, and things associated with God as "holy."
 - ii. The heavenly beings that surround God's throne continuously cry out, "Holy, holy, holy!"
 - iii. By describing God in this way, the angels are declaring that God is holy to a superlative degree, to be elevated and honored above all else.
- B. Of the many attributes used to describe God, holiness is one of the most prominent.
- C. Though Scripture often speaks of God's love, truth, and sovereignty, these other attributes are not presented with the same fanfare and trifold repetition.

II. God's Exalted Status

- A. To say that God is holy is to attest that He is separated above His creation.
 - i. The Hebrew word translated into English as "holy" primarily indicates separation or the act of setting apart.
 - ii. God is therefore distinctly and infinitely superior to His creation and His creatures.
- B. To say that God is holy is to ascribe to Him kingly majesty (Ex. 15:11; Ps. 22:3).
 - i. God's glory is too stunning for human beings to behold or comprehend.
 - ii. His royal splendor vastly exceeds that of the most exalted human monarchs.
- C. God's holiness is poignantly described in Isaiah 6:1-7.
 - i. The train of God's royal robe is so extensive that it fills the temple.
 - ii. Even the dazzling seraphim—blazing in their intensity for God's glory—must cover themselves in the presence of God's splendor.
 - iii. Overwhelmed by this glimpse of God's holiness, Isaiah became profoundly aware of his own unclean and unworthy nature.
- D. The church is at its strongest when it recognizes and honors the holiness of God.

III. God's Moral Perfection

- A. God is completely without sin or moral blemish.
- B. All of God's decisions and judgments are perfect.
- C. As an infinitely holy being, God is not neutral toward good or evil.
 - i. God takes delight in all that is true, worthy, and upright.
 - ii. Because God's very nature is one of purity, He cannot tolerate sin.
 - iii. It is only through the righteousness of Jesus Christ that guilty sinners can be reconciled to God.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The only divine attributes to be repeated three times in Scripture are holiness and love.
 - a. True
 - b. False

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2. The Hebrew word translated into English as “holy” primarily expresses _____.
 - a. Majesty
 - b. Purity
 - c. Moral excellence
 - d. Separation

 3. In Isaiah 6, the train of the Lord’s robe symbolizes _____.
 - a. His transcendence
 - b. His authority
 - c. His greatness
 - d. His presence with His people

 4. When we talk about God’s holiness, we are referring primarily to his moral purity.
 - a. True
 - b. False

BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does a proper understanding of God’s holiness lead to a greater appreciation of His saving work?
2. How should a text like Isaiah 6 inform our worship in the church today? Is there any room for “casual” worship?
3. Scripture is often referred to as “Holy Scripture.” How should a richer understanding of God’s holiness affect how we read Scripture?
4. In his first epistle, Peter quotes Leviticus 11:44, which reads, “be holy, for I am holy.” Read 1 Peter 1:13–21 and discuss how God’s holiness ought to influence our manner of living.