

No One Like Him

A
Study
of
God's
Perfections

Men of the Word
2022-23

Holiness

Wednesday,
January 11, 2023

I. Definition of Divine “Holiness”

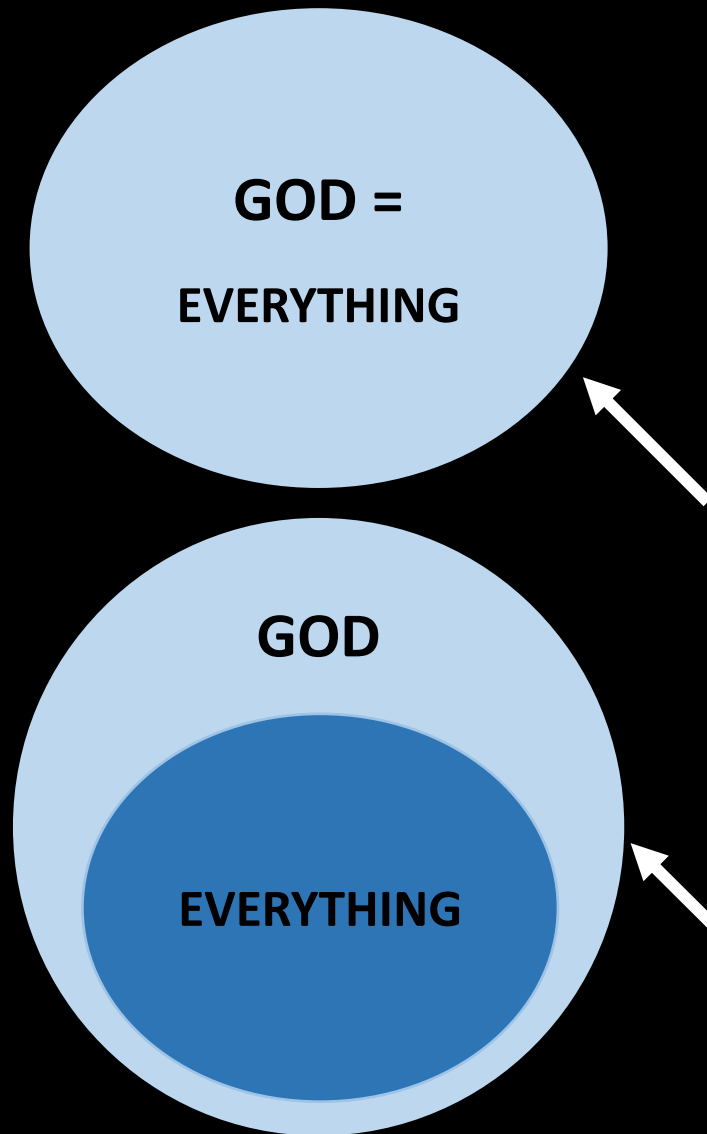
- It is important to define God’s holiness according to how *He* has described it of Himself, and not according to our own experience of it.
- Thomas Brooks: “Holiness in angels and saints is but a quality, but in God it is His essence.”
- **The holiness of God refers to His absolute transcendence and moral purity.**
- *Two emphases*: God is absolutely distinct from creation, and He is absolutely distinct from anything antithetical to His perfection.

- The attribute of God's holiness is emphasized and explained particularly in the Old Testament.
- The Hebrew verb for “to be holy” is קָדַשׁ (*qādaš*) which likely comes from the verb קָטַע , meaning “to cut.”

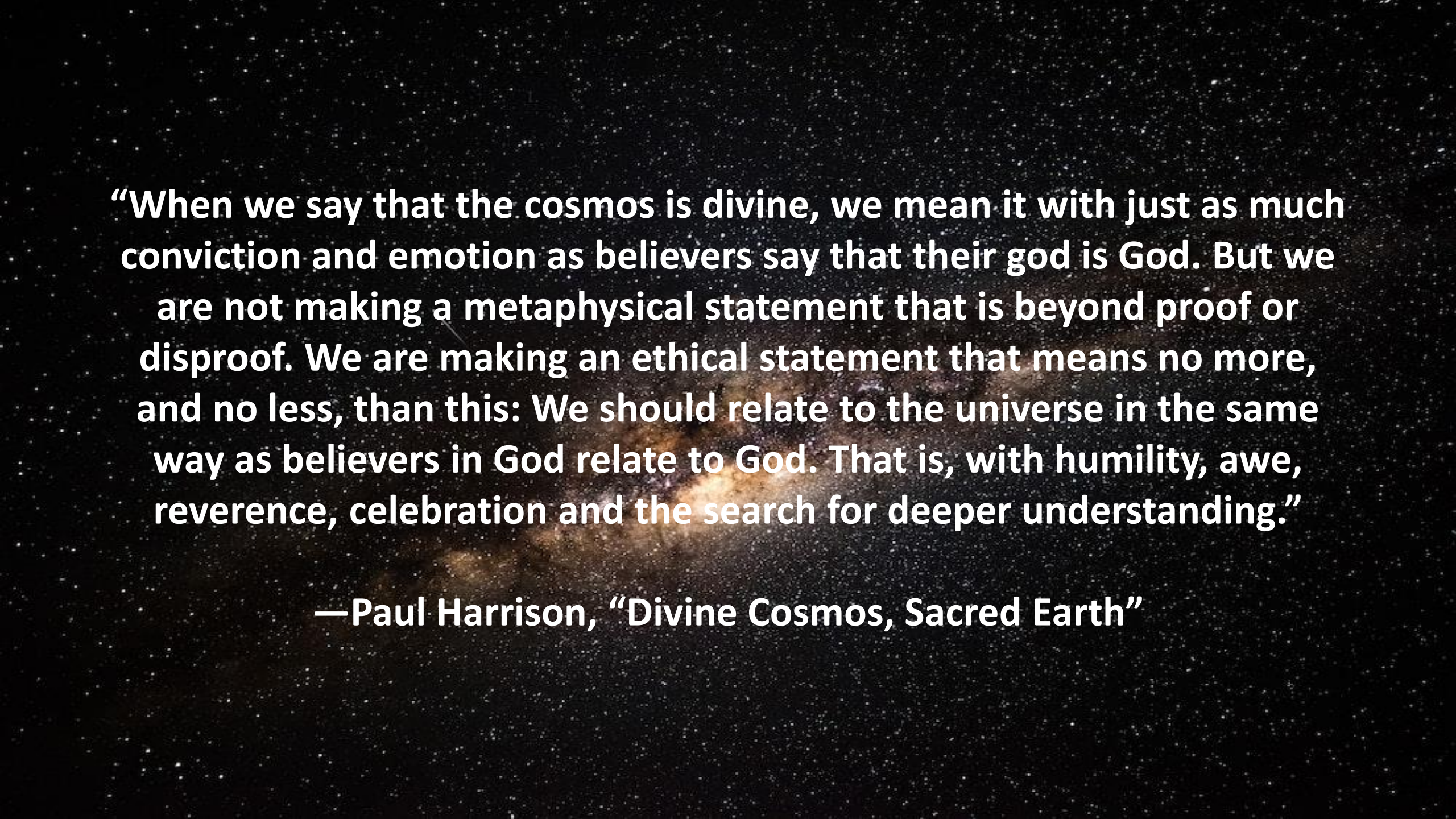


- When something is cut, a necessary separation takes place.
- Thus, “to be holy” has the fundamental idea of *separation*.
- The term “sanctification” maintains this idea—(1) a *separation* from something; and (2) a *consecration* to something else.

1) In the primary sense, God is *separate* in relation to *creation*.



- His essence is utterly distinct from anything else that exists; He is “high and lifted up.”
- God’s holiness is what establishes the great *Creator-creation* distinction.
- His holiness is what repudiates ***pantheism***, the belief that everything is part of an all-encompassing God—that the universe, or nature, and God are equivalent.
- His holiness is what repudiates ***panentheism***, the belief that God and creation share existence—that God is in the world and the world in God.



“When we say that the cosmos is divine, we mean it with just as much conviction and emotion as believers say that their god is God. But we are not making a metaphysical statement that is beyond proof or disproof. We are making an ethical statement that means no more, and no less, than this: We should relate to the universe in the same way as believers in God relate to God. That is, with humility, awe, reverence, celebration and the search for deeper understanding.”

—Paul Harrison, “Divine Cosmos, Sacred Earth”

THE HOLINESS OF GOD

RCSPROUL

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

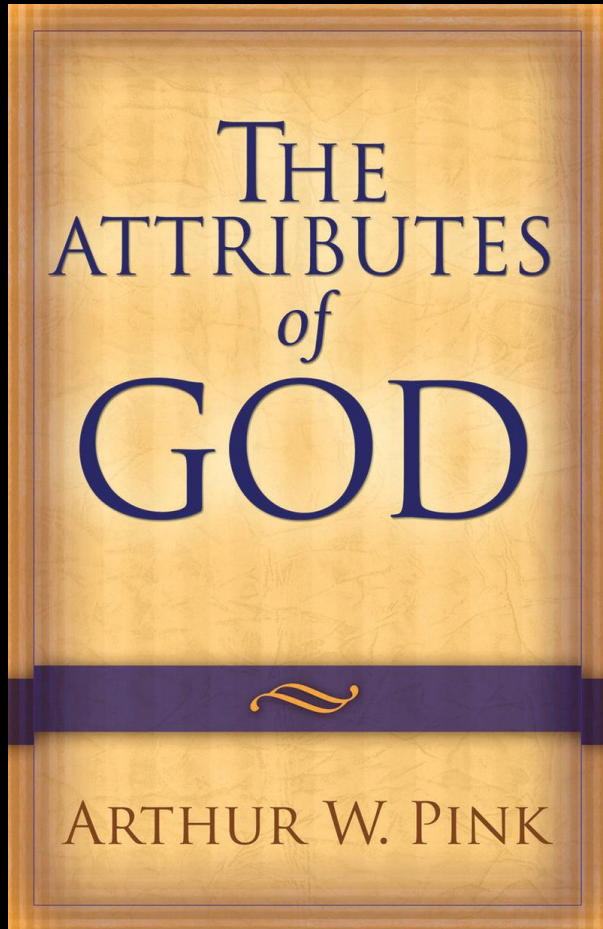
—R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, 38

“So understood, the holiness of God is one of His transcendental attributes, and is sometimes spoken of as His central and supreme perfection. It does not seem proper to speak of one attribute of God as being more central and fundamental than another; but if this were permissible, the Scriptural emphasis on the holiness of God would seem to justify its selection. It is quite evident, however, that holiness in this sense of the word is not really a *moral* attribute, which can be coordinated with the others, such as love, grace and mercy, but is rather something that is co-extensive with and applicable to everything that can be predicated of God. He is holy in everything that reveals Him, in His goodness and grace as well as in His justice and wrath.”

—Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 73

2) In a secondary sense, the holiness of God describes His *moral purity*.

- He is untainted by any blemish that would render Him less than absolutely perfect.
- There is no hint of moral or rational defect in God's *existence, decrees, words, works, ends, or means*.
- It is impossible for God to *commit* evil; nor can He act to make others commit evil.
- It is this sense that we think of when we speak of our duty to "pursue holiness" (*moral purity, separation from sin*), because it is this secondary sense, and not the first sense, that can be reflected by us as God's image-bearers.



“As God’s power is the opposite of the native weakness of the creature, as His wisdom is in complete contrast from the least defect of understanding or folly, so His holiness is the very antithesis of all moral blemish or defilement.”

—A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, 51

“We are so accustomed to equating holiness with purity or ethical perfection that we look for the idea when the word *holy* appears. When things are made holy, when they are consecrated, they are set apart unto purity. They are to be used in a pure way. They are to reflect purity as well as simply apartness. Purity is not excluded from the idea of the holy; it is contained within it. But the point we must remember is that the idea of the holy is never exhausted by the idea of purity. It includes purity but is much more than that. It is purity and transcendence. It is a *transcendent purity*.”

—Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, 57

II. Biblical Testimony to God's Holiness

A. God's absolute distinction from creation.

- **Exodus 15:11** – “Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?”
- **1 Samuel 2:2** – “There is no one holy like the LORD, indeed, there is no one besides You, nor is there any rock like our God.”
- **Psalms 47:8** – “God reigns over the nations, God sits on His holy throne.”

- **Psalms 99:1–5** – “The LORD reigns, let the peoples tremble; He is enthroned *above* the cherubim, let the earth shake! The LORD is great in Zion, and He is exalted above all the peoples. Let them praise Your great and awesome name; holy is He. The strength of the King loves justice; You have established equity; You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. Exalt the LORD our God and worship at His footstool; holy is He.”



- **Isaiah 6:1–4** – “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. 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. And one called out to another and said, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.’ And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke.”
- **Isaiah 40:25** – “To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him?’ says the Holy One.”
- **Isaiah 57:15** – “For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, ‘I dwell *on* a high and holy place, and *also* with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.’”

- **Luke 1:46–49** – “And Mary said: ‘My soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant; for behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed. For the Mighty One has done great things for me; and holy is His name.’”
- **Revelation 1:13–17** – “. . . When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man.”
- **Revelation 4:8** – “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 IS AND IS TO COME.’”

B. God's absolute separation from evil.

- **Leviticus 11:44–45** – “For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. . . . For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God, thus you shall be holy, for I am holy.”
- **Psalms 15:1–2** – “O LORD, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart.”
- **Isaiah 6:5** – “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.’”

- **Luke 5:4–8** – “. . . But when Simon Peter saw *that*, he fell down at Jesus’ feet, saying, ‘Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!’”
- **Hebrews 12:10** – “For they [earthly fathers] disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines us* for *our* good, so that we may share His holiness.”
- **1 Peter 1:14–16** – “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, but 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.’”
- **1 John 1:5** – “This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.”

C. God's intolerance for erasing the distinction.

- **Deuteronomy 4:23–24** – “So watch yourselves, that you do not forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a graven image in the form of anything *against* which the LORD your God has commanded you. For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.”
- **2 Samuel 6:6–7** – “But when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out toward the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen nearly upset *it*. And the anger of the LORD burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his irreverence; and he died there by the ark of God.”

- **Psalm 5:4–6** – “For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; no evil dwells with You. The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes; You hate all who do iniquity. You destroy those who speak falsehood; the LORD abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit.”
- **Psalm 11:4–7** – “The LORD is in His holy temple; the LORD’s throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men. The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked, and the one who loves violence His soul hates. Upon the wicked He will rain snares; fire and brimstone and burning wind will be the portion of their cup. For the LORD is righteous, He loves righteousness; the upright will behold His face.”
- **Habakkuk 1:13a** – “*Your* eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You can not look on wickedness *with favor*.”

“The bow of God's wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready on the string, and justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow, and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood.”

—Jonathan Edwards, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”



III. What Holiness Demands from Us

A. Extol the holiness of God.

- **1 Chronicles 16:10** – “Glory in His holy name; let the heart of those who seek the LORD be glad.”
- **Psalms 99:9** – “Exalt the LORD our God and worship at His holy hill, for holy is the LORD our God.”
- **Matthew 6:9** – “Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name.’”



“God has appeared to me, a glorious and lovely being chiefly on account of His holiness. The holiness of God has always appeared to me the most lovely of all His attributes.”

—Jonathan Edwards

“Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty”

Holy, holy, holy!
Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning
Our song shall rise to Thee.

Holy, holy, holy!
Merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons,
Blessed Trinity!

B. Abhor the trivialization of God.

- The holiness of God should always give us pause before speaking of Him or using His name thoughtlessly.
- **Exodus 20:7** – “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.”
- **Leviticus 19:12** – “You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the LORD.”
- **Isaiah 66:2** – “‘For My hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being,’ declares the LORD. ‘But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.’”

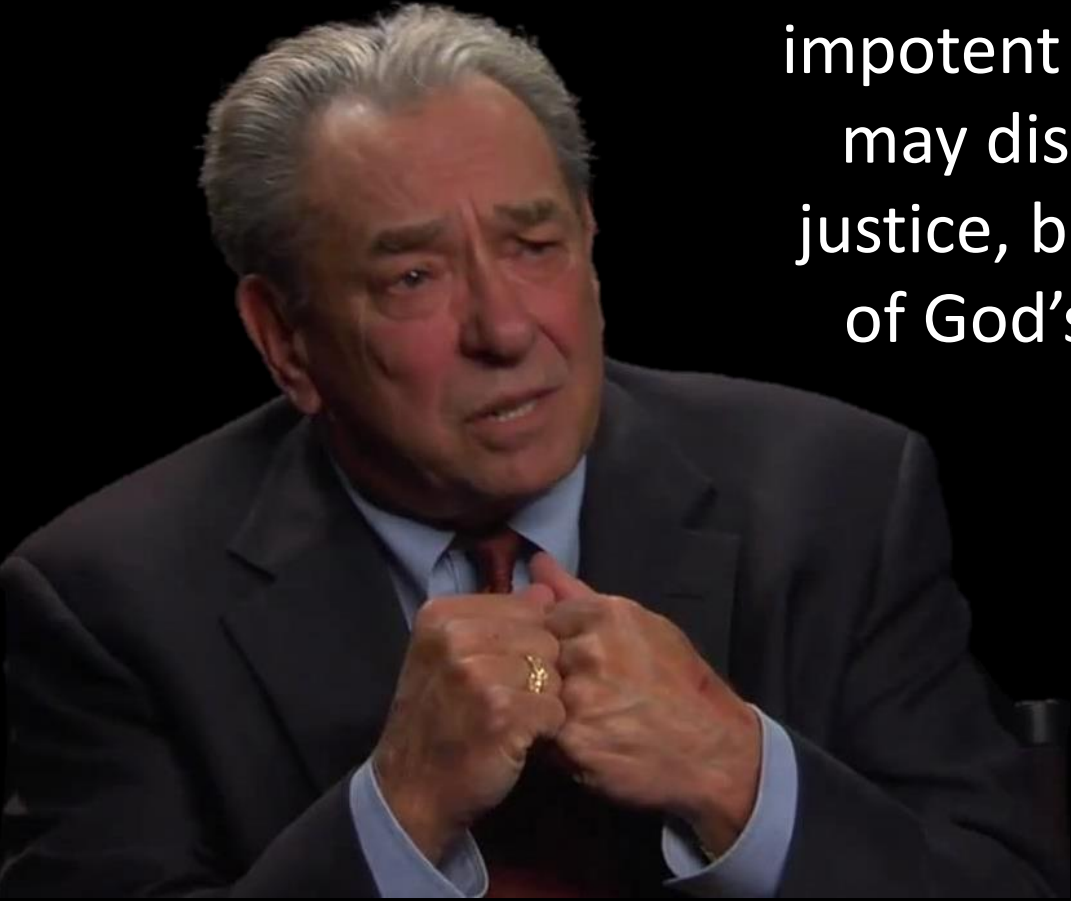
C. Recognize the hideousness of your sin.

- One of the best indications that you are growing in your understanding of God's holiness is that your sin is becoming increasingly more ugly in your sight.
- **Isaiah 6:5** – “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.’”
- **Luke 5:8** – “But when Simon Peter saw *that*, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, ‘Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!’”
- It is to such ones that the Lord *draws near* (Isa 57:15; 66:2).



“Is God so infinitely holy? Then see how unlike to God sin is. Sin is an unclean thing, it is hyperbolically evil. . . . God has no mixture of evil in him; sin has no mixture of good, it is the spirit and quintessence of evil; it turns good into evil; it has deflowered the virgin soul, made it red with guilt, and black with filth; it is called the accursed thing. . . . No wonder, therefore, that God hates sin, being so unlike to him, nay, so contrary to him: it strikes at his holiness; it does all it can to spite God; if sin could help it, God should be God no longer.”

—Thomas Watson, *A Body of Practical Divinity*, 56



“When we understand the character of God, when we grasp something of His holiness, then we begin to understand the radical character of our sin and hopelessness. Helpless sinners can survive only by grace. Our strength is futile in itself; we are spiritually impotent without the assistance of a merciful God. We may dislike giving our attention to God’s wrath and justice, but until we incline ourselves to these aspects of God’s nature, we will never appreciate what has been wrought for us by grace.

—Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, 183

D. Marvel at the miracle of the incarnation.

- Although God is infinitely transcendent, He has also revealed Himself to be perfectly *immanent*.
- He is not merely “the Holy One,” but “the Holy One *of Israel*,” who manifested Himself ultimately in the incarnate Son of Glory, Immanuel—God with us!
- **Isaiah 7:14** – “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.”
- **John 1:18** – “No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*.”

E. Rejoice for the achievement of the cross.

- Matthew Henry: “No attribute of God is more dreadful to sinners than God’s holiness.” Rightfully so.
- It was ultimately through the cross that the ineffably holy God brought ruined sinners near to Him.
- **Isaiah 53:5** – “But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed.”
- **2 Corinthians 5:21** – “He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

E. Reflect the holiness of God.

- As a result of God application of Immanuel's finished cross-work to us, the ability to reflect the holiness of God has been restored—and more!
- **1 Corinthians 1:30** – “But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.”
- **1 Peter 1:14–16** – “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, but 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.’”

“To run hard after holiness is another way of
running hard after God.”

—Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in our Holiness*, 123

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