

The Holiness of God (2LCF 2.1g)

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[0:00] While you're turning there, you might notice that people use the word holy as an adjective for just about anything these days. For example, cow or smokes or guacamole.

What exactly is holiness? Well, the Second London Confession of Faith says that God is most holy. So what does that mean? Does that mean that God in some way is like guacamole? Let's find out. In Isaiah chapter 6, we will read verses 1 to 7. In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up.

And the train of his robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim. Each one had six wings. With two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

And one cried to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory.

[1:11] And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said, Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.

For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal, which he had taken with the tongs from the altar.

And he touched my mouth with it and said, Behold, this has touched your lips. Your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged.

Lord, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the means of grace. We thank you for the ways in which you communicate grace to us through the means of grace. And Lord, we know from your word that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.

So as we sit under your word, as we hear from your word, we pray that you would indeed increase our faith. And I pray, Lord, for your Holy Spirit, that you would enlighten our minds in our knowledge of Christ as revealed in your will.

[2:24] I pray that you would bless the preaching of the word, the hearing of the word. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. And the main point of Isaiah 6, 1 to 7, is that God is most holy and man needs atonement.

So I want to draw your attention to three things in the text this evening. The first one is the glorious awe of holiness. The second one is the traumatic effect of holiness.

And the third one is the consequent necessity of holiness. So first of all, notice the glorious awe of holiness. When Isaiah has this vision, there's something that stands out to him, something that's observed, something that he remarks, something about God, something, a divine nature about the divine essence that he notices, that he observes.

What do you think that is about God's essence? Now, if we hadn't sung the hymn that we did, and if you haven't read this before, and you're asked that question, you might think, well, maybe God's love.

People talk a lot about God's love or maybe about mercy, about how God's mercy is magnified. But what is it that when Isaiah has this vision, what is it that stands out and that as a result of this attribute of God, it gives cause to say that the whole earth is full of his glory.

[3:53] So there's a link between this attribute of God, this perfection of God, and the whole earth being full of his glory and for the temple to be filled with smoke. The intensity of God's presence and God's glory filled the temple in this vision because of his observation of this perfection of God.

So what perfection do you think that is? Well, of course, it's his holiness. What does holy mean?

What is holiness? Holy means set apart.

It means separate. It means other. It also means transcendent moral purity. So God is separate and transcendent moral purity.

God is infinitely pure. Because God is infinitely pure, he cannot tolerate sin because of his absolute transcendent moral purity. So to put it another way, the holiness of God is the pure, glorious excellence of his being and the observation of it causes to say that the whole earth is full of his glory and for the temple to be filled with smoke.

But in the text, it doesn't just say holy is the Lord of hosts. Holy is repeated three times. Now, why do you think this occurs? It is a description of increasing intensity in the English language.

[5:14] What we would do is we can articulate something in the positive, in the comparative or in the superlative. So if something is good in the positive, we say it's good.

In the comparative, what do we say? We say it's gooder. We say it's better. And then in the superlative, we say it's goodest. We say it's best. So in the English language, we say good, better, best.

Or if it's holy, we could say holy, holier, holiest. And increasing increments of intensity. In the Hebrew language, instead, there's repetition of the word.

So to say in the Hebrew language, holy, positively, it would be holy. To say it comparatively, it would be holy, holy. And to say it superlatively is holy, holy, holy.

So in the Hebrew language, for it to be repeated three times is the superlative, which means most holy. Which is how the Second London Confession of Faith describes God's holiness, that he is most holy.

[6:17] Is there another use that you can think of in Scripture where a word is used in the superlative? You might be thinking, yes, Revelation 4, 8. It's the same word, holy, holy, holy.

Is there another word that you can think of that's used in the superlative in Scripture? Well, it's also in Revelation, Revelation 8, 13. This is what John wrote.

He said, The superlative of woe.

What does woe mean? Woe represents deepest grief or calamity or unhappiness. The deepest grief to the superlative. The most deepest grief to the inhabitants of the earth.

Why? What's going on here? Is that it's indicating divine judgment against the ungodly. So there's something about God that causes to the superlative the deepest of grief to the inhabitants of earth because of their ungodliness.

[7:21] So there's something about God and there's something about ungodliness that causes the deepest of grief for those in ungodliness. God who is absolute transcendent moral purity, holy, holy, holy.

He hates and judges what is unholy. That is, he hates and judges what is morally unclean. And that's why it says, woe, woe, woe.

The superlative most deepest grief to the inhabitants of earth for divine judgment against ungodliness. So next we see in Isaiah the traumatic effect of holiness.

Holiness exposes what is unholy. In John 3, 19 to 20, it says, And this is the condemnation that the light has come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.

For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. Evil deeds, ungodly deeds, sin is exposed by holiness.

[8:39] God's holiness exposes sin and has a traumatic effect. And to paraphrase John Calvin in the Institutes, he said that as long as we're looking horizontally, we're safe.

But as soon as we look vertically, as soon as we look up to God, then one is confronted with one's own unholiness. So if we compare ourselves to others, I mean, we could compare ourselves to Hitler and Paul and Stalin.

And we're safe because we're comparing ourselves to others horizontally. But as soon as we look up, as soon as we look vertically, as soon as we look at God and his holiness, we are confronted by our unholiness, by one's own sinfulness.

So what does this traumatic effect look like? The traumatic effect of holiness, what does it look like? Well, there are some examples in Scripture I want to draw your attention to.

The first one is in our text that we're reading, Isaiah. What happens to Isaiah when he's confronted with his unholiness? He beholds the holiness of God and he's confronted with his unholiness.

[9:43] And what does he do? What does he say in verse five? He said, woe is me. We already looked at the word woe. It's the deepest grief, calamity, unhappiness.

And then he says, I am undone. Woe is me. I have come apart. He's come apart because his own sinfulness is exposed and he's of the deepest grief over sin, over his own sin.

Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips. Some other examples before we move on to that is, of course, Adam and Eve. The very beginning. Adam and Eve, when they sinned, they hid themselves.

Man's instinct, man's reaction, when the holiness of God exposes their unholiness, man's reaction is to hide. Adam and Eve hid themselves from the Lord in Genesis 3.8.

Another example is Habakkuk in Habakkuk 3.16. His response, he said, my body trembled, my lips quivered at the voice, rottenness entered my bones, and I trembled in myself.

[10 : 52] In the New Testament with Peter. Peter in Luke 5.8. He fell down at Jesus' knees saying, depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

He sensed the weight of his own sin. And then John, the book of Revelation 1.17. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. Now, if we were to be in the presence of an earthly king, our king, I guess it's kind of more difficult in our day and age to try to picture than what it would have been to be in a kingdom with a king ruling over.

But if you were to be brought before the king, you would probably prepare yourself to show yourself reverently before him. Here, Isaiah and these other examples, they are sensing the presence of the king of kings and his holiness causes a traumatic effect on him that they do not treat it cavalierly or casually.

But it causes trembling. It causes them to want to hide. It causes rottenness entered into my bones and falling down flat. There is a traumatic effect of God's holiness on those who are unholy.

And in light of God's holiness, we are confronted with our own unholiness. And of course, as I said, man's instinct is to tremble, to prostrate, to hide.

[12 : 18] Why is that? Why is that that man's response is to do that? Is to do that? Well, Isaiah tells us, he says, Woe is me, for I am undone, because, and here's the reason, I am a man of unclean lips.

And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. For my eyes have seen the king. He has beheld the holiness of God.

And what is brought to his mind is uncleanness. And it has caused him to be of deepest grief and to come apart, to come undone. So because of the traumatic effect of holiness, first of all, the glorious awe of holiness, the divine essence, causes the traumatic effect of holiness on those who are unholy, which brings to the third point, the consequent necessity of holiness.

Isaiah, in our text, he's confronted with his uncleanness. And what's God's response? God's holiness isn't set aside.

It's not ignored. What happens? God's holiness is actually at the forefront. Even though Isaiah is unclean, God doesn't change.

[13 : 32] He doesn't set aside his holiness. God's holiness is at the forefront of everything that goes on in this vision. So what happens? It's Isaiah's uncleanness is purified.

It's purified by cauterization. Isaiah 6, 6-7. Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal, which he had taken from the tongs from the altar.

And he touched my mouth with it and said, Behold, this has touched your lips. Your iniquity is taken away and your sin purged. His uncleanness isn't ignored.

It's not overlooked. It's dealt with. It's purified. And in this sense, by cauterization. Our sin, our uncleanness needs to be atoned for.

It needs to be purified. It needs to be cleansed. We need holiness to stand before a God who is most holy. To stand before a God who is holy, holy, holy.

[14 : 33] We need holiness. Now the one who Isaiah saw, as he described as being high and lifted up, is the word who became flesh and was lifted up on the cross.

Lifted up on the cross in that he was rejected by the world, but yet suspended before heaven, bearing the misery and burden and condemnation and wrath of sin.

And for us looking to Christ lifted on the cross, the sinner understands the vileness of their own sin. And by looking to Christ lifted up on the cross, the sinner understands the wretchedness of their own sin.

And by the sinner looking to Christ lifted up on the cross, the sinner understands the misery of their sin. And in rightly understanding God's holiness and rightly understanding our sin, and in rightly

understanding how vile, wretched, and miserable sin is, then we truly understand the immensity of God's mercy through Christ.

Christ, though he himself knew no sin, he bore our sin so that our sin would be atoned for, so that we would be purified, that we would be cleansed, and that we would be presented in Christ as spotless before most holy God.

[15:57] So there are a few concluding uses I want to draw your attention to from this text. The first one is to ask the question, what's the big deal? Why is it so important to understand the holiness of God?

Because if we see God as small, then we see sin as small. And if we sin as small, then we see God's judgment as small, and we see Christ as small.

And we see Christ crucified as small. But God's holiness demands atonement. And think back to in Leviticus, with Nadab and Abihu, and the demonstration of God's holiness and why it's important, the statement that was made, and how God's holiness doesn't change.

And while we are in the New Testament, God's holiness has not changed. Nadab and Abihu, they offered strange fire.

And when you read it, you might at first think, well, wouldn't God just be delighted? They're offering, so they're set apart as priests. It's Aaron's sons, Aaron's the high priest.

[17:04] They're set apart as priests. They're appointed to serve God, to worship God. And the offering of incense was regulated by God to do so. So they're worshiping God, they're offering up incenses, they're rightly set apart to do it.

But it says they offered strange fire. We don't know exactly the details of it, but something about what they did was not exactly as God required, as God regulated in his word.

And the result was that fire came down and they were consumed. And the remarkable thing of it is Moses's response to Aaron.

Aaron was the father, he was the high priest, and Nadab and Abihu were priests. Aaron's, Moses's response to Aaron, if you remember it, it says, There is a statement being made in what occurs with Nadab and Abihu, that God must be regarded as holy.

And those who draw near to God, who draw near in worship, must regard him as holy. Now, there was, whatever it was, some slight alteration. They were worshiping God, they weren't worshiping another God.

[18:26] They were doing it in the temple, there were those who were set apart for it, but the smallest detail, they offered strange fire. Did every time that a detail was altered, God brought down fire and consume them?

No. God had made a statement about his holiness, that those who draw near to God, and any time, in any place, he must be regarded as holy. Many times, Israel worshiped God in a way different than what he prescribed, but fire didn't come down and consume them.

So also, in the New Testament, in the church age, fire doesn't come down and consume people every time they worship in a way not according to how he was prescribed. But, God is still holy.

That doesn't mean that God ceases to be holy, or that he's gotten over it, and his holiness isn't that important. God, by those who come near me, I must be regarded as holy.

So when we think about God's holiness in worship, you probably think of Hebrews 12, 29, which says, Since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire.

[19:43] And by saying God is a consuming fire, it's bringing to mind Nadab and Abihu. Hebrews is the New Testament in Christ, but it's bringing to mind that God is holy, and those who draw near to God must do so acceptably.

And God must be regarded as holy, for our God is a consuming fire. And this is the God of the Bible. This is the God in whom we worship. And people want to worship their own wills instead of seeing God as holy.

But this is the God of the Bible. The God who must be regarded as holy, and the God who must be glorified. Now to close, I want to actually bring you to Revelation to kind of shift our focus future in Revelation 4, 8, the other verse which we mentioned earlier, which speaks of God's holiness in the superlative.

Revelation 4, verse 8. Oops, sorry, wrong book. Revelation 4, verse 8.

The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come. [21 : 22] Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the 24 elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power.

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