

The Holiness of God

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 November 2022

Preacher: Geoff Stevens

[0 : 00] I say to you, if you know, first of all, we don't use the word that much. We don't run around saying, wow, John's really holy, which is great.

But if we do use the word, how do we, can you give some examples of what pops to mind if I said, wow, that person's really holy?

Like, what pops to mind? He's religious. Sorry, oh, religious. Yep. Holier than thou.

Metallica, yes. Yes, right. So typically not a positive connotation. And with regard to God, if someone, if we're in normal conversation and the topic of God's holiness comes up, what do people typically, what pops into mind when we think about, oh, you go to church?

You know, you believe in that there is a God and then I were to say to my friend, yes. And not only I believe there's a God, God is holy.

[1 : 20] What does a normal person do with that? What would you say? Not a trick question. Just whatever whatever pops to mind. Both their eyes. Yeah. Yeah. Why is that?

I think what you were touching on before that that holy tends not to be used in a positive term. It's more of a derogatory term.

And I think the culture more and more is responding that way. So I'm not sure that that necessarily answers your question.

Yeah. Yeah. And so I think at the outset, as we dive into some definitions, we just have to be mindful that we're not coming at these even our terminology with a clean slate.

Right. It's tainted. But so I want to just take a minute and put down two of the lenses that theologians typically use when they try to put handles on God's holiness so that we can discuss it.

[2 : 31] And then I'm going to I'm going to actually add a little bonus of my own. So I'm glad this is being recorded so that I can be dragged before the elders and they can be like, hey, no, you're you wandered off the farm.

So the first one is kind of springs from the definition of holy, which is that God is set apart. He is.

I'd like to think of this in terms of ontology, in terms of being the essence of of being. So we we all have an ontology, right?

We all have a being. So we're already into words and trying to use words and we're going to have to grapple a little. That God in the essence of his being.

Is set apart. He is. Unique. He is sacred. He is other. He stands alone.

[3 : 35] He has no equivalent or rival. These are ways that I'm trying to put a little. Meat on the bone.

So when we speak of God's holiness, we're talking about. And his essence and not an aspect.

So sometimes when we talk about God's attributes, we talk about communicable attributes and non communicable attributes. There's a fancy way of saying some of God's attributes, human beings, for example, can share in.

And then others of God's attributes belong to him alone. And then when we're talking about holiness, my way of thinking is like where we're. Our default is to think of it as the non communicable attributes.

Attributes. So. We. We might think about, like I said earlier, that God.

[4 : 48] Just by the fact that God created everything. And then everything else besides God is derivative and gets its being from God.

If you're a toaster oven, you've got your being from God. If you're Sam Stevens, you've got your being from God. But God didn't get his being.

His. He just is. Right. So this is a good time to actually pause and just say. We are going to bump up against a ton of mystery.

I think really whenever we deal with the whenever we get real with. What the scriptures teach about just about any topic. We're going to bump up against our limitations as created human beings.

And this is just one of those places. So I'd like to just fire off. A few passages for you.

[6 : 00] That will be familiar. Just to. Give us a little flavor of scripture. How scripture refers to this. God. Another way we might say it. Just in common talk is God is God. And I'll. I'll try to explain why I'm going to simplify it down to that.

As we move along. So God is God. So here's some of the way scripture talks. And this will be familiar to you. I am the Lord and there is no other besides me. There is no God.

Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?

The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the heavens of the earth. The creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary.

[6 : 57] His understanding is unsearchable. There is none holy like the Lord, for there is none beside you. There is no rock like our God. Okay. So the first category, if you will, when we talk about God's holiness is his set apartness.

The second category is what we think of when we think of a holy roller. Or when we did our little exercise, we're like, what pops into mind? When we think about someone that's just always follows the rules and is a good, you know, it's a goody-goody.

If we look at it negatively. But God is holy. He set apart morally with regard to what he does and his actions.

So we might use terms like goodness and virtuous, perfect, always does what is right, always does what is just, faithful, morally upright.

And here are some passages for us to think about. The Lord is upright. He is my rock.

[8 : 23] And in him there is no unrighteousness. God is light. And in him is no darkness at all. God is a righteous judge and a God who feels indignation each day.

I know, O Lord, that your judgments are righteous and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me. The Lord is good to all and his mercy is over all that he has made.

So, God is good. God is God. And God is good. He is morally. He's not just good.

He is goodness. He's not just good. He's perfectly good. And this includes, the Bible teaches, that when God demonstrates wrath, or when God demonstrates judgment against sin, or when God exercises his freedom to choose a course of action over another course of action, or to choose a person for a particular calling, or even for their eternal destiny, the Bible teaches that God is good.

God is good. He is right. He is never capricious, never doing evil, never harming someone else's autonomy.

[10 : 08] So now we're kind of getting into, we touched on this, Tyler touched on this a little bit last week, but we're getting into some territory where questions may arise.

And I want to talk about those in a bit. But I want to go on to my third bonus that is sort of hovering around this discussion. And I just want to say that I think we can talk about God's holiness in terms of him being set apart aesthetically with regard to his glory.

So you can hardly pick up a paragraph of scripture and not encounter the overflowing, grasping for words to even describe the glory of God.

And I think when we're talking about holiness, we should have glory in mind. Because what we're not doing here is a cold exercise of science.

We're dealing with ultimately, mysteriously, a God who is also a person. We have feelings because God has feelings.

[11 : 33] We have emotions because God has emotions. And we think something's amazing, and we just are overwhelmed because there is a thing called glory.

And it's, part of God's set apartness. We could use words like weightiness, or worthiness, or magnificence, or great beauty, or value is a terrible word, actually, because it sounds like Walmart.

But, you know, you know, value. A theologian, who I like, said, the glory of God is the manifest beauty of his holiness.

It is the going public of his holiness. I really kind of like that. It was John Piper. I really kind of like that formulation. So, these are sort of the three ways, I think, just to have the discussion.

And now, I want to talk about how God's holiness, when we talk about God's holiness, holiness, we're not doing so in a vacuum, right?

[13 : 06] We're not innocent creatures that are analyzing God's holiness, and it's point one, two, three, four. We're doing it in a context. And our context is where we find ourselves on the timeline of God's redemptive history.

And that means, as we all know, and we talk about all the time, that God's holiness and our sin and our rebellion and our lack of acknowledging God as God and our lack of bending the knee to God and saying, you are good.

And when we encounter God's glory, we want our own glory, right?

Going all the way back to the beginning of the story. So, what I want to do now is just acknowledge there's a huge, huge chasm between God and human beings.

This is obvious, right? But because if we're thinking about God's holiness, obviously we could talk a lot more about digging into what it is, but I think it'd be fruitful in this class as we're just encountering the attributes of God to say, okay, why does this matter to us?

[14 : 53] So, I want to say all human beings experience this chasm, not just Christians. In fact, many of us here, some of us here never knew a day when we wouldn't have called ourselves a Christian, but many of us here had seasons of our life where we were far away and had been brought near.

So, I want to take a second and just open up to the room how do human beings experience this chasm?

In what ways do we good, if we're going to think in these terms, good ways?

Like, have you ever eaten an apple? like, the apple just magically grew on a tree and somewhere, somehow, that thing came into being maybe by pure chance but maybe not because it's delicious, comes with its own wrapper, grows from a seed magically, but, and then there are a lot of bad or hard ways we encounter this holiness.

So, I wanted to just ask, how do we as human beings, not necessarily Christians, encounter this holiness and encounter the chasm?

[16 : 42] How do we feel the chasm? Or do we feel it? Laura?

What comes to mind is when we see things in nature that we can't really take in on a dark night, if there were such a thing in this part of the country, but to see those stars and to see like there's no way I could even begin to count them or to stand, it comes from standing on the edge of the ocean and realizing it goes for thousands of miles and it's deeper than I can imagine or standing at something like the Grand Canyon, just things that are, we can't, we can't take it in, it's too big.

Yeah, and I think it touches on if we, if part of God's holiness is that he created and we, there's the creator, whatever, I don't even want to make a ball, like whatever that is, and then there's all of us and everything and the Grand Canyon and the ocean and the whales and the poppins, I mean, they're amazing.

what else? What else do we experience in our normal life where we feel the chasm? We feel it.

You don't have to be a Christian. Yes? I think it also happens in grief when we've loved someone deeply and taken out of our lives and we stand at the edge of a train and say, how can life go on without, where did that person go?

[18 : 20] They were, they weren't a commodity. They were a being and now they're not here. Where, where did they go? It's like literally being on the edge of the chasm.

Matt? In a very different way, I'm going to suggest something, separateness, you mentioned, and goodness as, you know, ways of looking at holiness.

Both of which, I think, tend to be at odds with our society's value of tolerance. and when somebody in Christian or non-Christian, you know, has a sense that, ah, you know, God's different than me and, and he says, I'm not good.

I have failed to be what I should be. I'm not accepted by God. Then, the sinful rebelliousness of his, you know, mounts up and wants to reject that.

And either acknowledging the chasm that God, if he's there, has created or rejection of such an idea that would reject us.

[19 : 58] I would like to re-say back to you what I heard, which is, first of all, there's guilt. There is guilt because in our hearts, regardless of, there's, there's guilt because we know we do bad stuff.

There you go. That's fifth grade version. Then, there's the reordering of what good is and the chaos that ensues when, when we, when human, when people take hold of, um, their consciences and say, um, you know, they, they re, they reorder right and wrong and it's just, it's just chaos ensues.

You know, it's another way I think we all encounter this chasm is that God doesn't come down on Wednesday. God has revealed a lot, you know, in his scriptures but out there in the workaday world and the people who are ignoring scriptures or even those of us that have them or, let's face it, I mean, we're confused about a lot of stuff and there's the chasm.

I mean, obviously, God could just come down and one day perhaps will and it's just like, ooh, with this light, that clears up a lot, you know, but right now I'm going to murder my own baby because I want freedom.

Sorry, but I'm just saying, like, there's ways we all get everything all confused because there's a separate, God is at a distance in a way, you know.

[21 : 34] What else? What about death? What, you're kind of hitting on it a little. Have you ever been to a funeral, I had this experience where Mona lost a grandparent and it was just devastating and they were one of, he was a wonderful man and I remember talking to his daughter after the service and I said, this just isn't right.

It is just not how things are supposed to be and I honestly thought that that was a human, she wasn't a believer at all and I just thought that's, that's human when we see death or we see someone get a horrible disease when they're young and, you know, there's that part of us that's just like, no.

You know, well, she actually replied, this is completely natural. This is completely normal and if you were to embrace that then you wouldn't be sad right now and you would just say this is the, whatever the Disney thing is, the circle of life, whatever.

But the point is that there's chaos, you know, and so we have this chasm yeah, one more part of the chasm I'd like to mention is the mystery, the mystery component where God has revealed himself in nature and in creation, he's revealed himself in scripture, he's revealed himself to believers by the Holy Spirit, but there's still mystery shrouding a lot and it's to be a human being and to not have answers to big questions, some of them we were touching on last week, it's very dissettling and it's, what I want to point out is I think it's just, it is part of that God is holy and perfect and pure and we have rebelled and the result is a separation.

When I teach the third graders, but then I had a bunch of my own third graders, so like I had training for this, but I used to say to them, you know, the magnitude of the crime is in part determined by the stature of the offended party.

[24 : 38] so, let's say you're on the playground and you kick your friend in the shins and they go and tell their mom and then their mom calls your mom and it's like, oh, you got in trouble, you know, you can't kick people.

But let's say you kick the principal in the shins. Well, now you're in a different, well, of course, well, maybe today that would be okay. Maybe they're like, oh, kick me again.

When I was growing up, that would be really bad. We got paddled, y'all. Like, seriously, like, assume the position. I am not kidding. At least they had to call my mom.

She's like, yes, paddle him. But imagine it's, Ronald Reagan came and spoke in the Fairfield Green when I was in high school and we all went.

And imagine that you somehow broke through all the security people and you get in there and you just kick the president of the United States in the shins as hard as you can.

[25 : 46] I think you just vanish if you do that. They put you in a black car and then you're gone. Where did he go? I don't know, but you can't kick the president in the shins.

and I think imagine kicking the God of the universe, literally giving the double birds to the God of the universe.

Like, so, there's a chasm. It's serious. I mean, it's so serious that, you know, just the fact that we get up every day and everyone we know is going to be dead in like 80 years.

I mean, and then we, the things we quibble over are almost absurd when you take a step back and say, this is, the chasm is real and the signs of it are everywhere.

So, now, what I want to do is talk about as Christians about Jesus bridging the gap of that chasm and then I want to give some encouragement.

[27 : 13] I want to throw some verses on the table and have a discussion to encourage us because what I'm going to say about Jesus is going to be familiar and then there's a big and yet the chasm remains because of our place on the timeline.

Right? So, let's talk about Jesus bridging the chasm. I'm just going to read a couple passages and maybe in light of what we talked about already they'll have a particular saltiness.

So, in the Gospel of Mark we have this simple but profound couple of verses. And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last and the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

What was the curtain in the temple about? Yeah, why?

Because we're not. Yeah, so we'll pause for one second and just do a minute of the temple being God is like both and.

[28 : 58] It's God hasn't abandoned humanity even though we kicked him in the shins in the garden. But he can't just come down like here I am and all my holiness.

We would all just burn and we'd all incinerate. And so there was an elaborate system of barriers and that included these purity laws that have to do with our cleanliness of our being.

not just going out and openly sinning but doing things in ordinary life that God said if you touch this thing which you have to touch because it's part of life now you're unclean in your being and you have to be made clean again by doing these things over here.

The point being that God is teaching us that we need a cleansing and we need to be pure if we're going to come into his presence and even our representatives have to be super pure and there's a literal curtain this far and no further.

So somehow when Jesus died that curtain was no longer needed it came down. And then listen to this from Ephesians but now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ for he himself is our peace who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility so the chasm has been breached by Jesus providing for our cleanliness and dealing with what our sins deserve by the way next week

[31 : 35] I am we're going to take on grace so so we kind of did it on purpose like holiness and then grace and mercy which are different but anyway so I don't I think I'm just going to stop there because I think we are all I think everyone in this room is professing believer if not sorry see me after class and I want to move on to the and yet we still experience much of the chasm that one day we will not experience if God's promises are true for example we're going to physically die like it's just always out there but we're going to physically die our bodies get sick our relationships are tortured messes under the hood there's still mystery everywhere

God commands us to believe in Jesus he holds us responsible for believing in Jesus and he tells us we have to be born again to even see any of it to even be awake to choose Jesus and he tells us we're responsible in Romans 9 and then when we get to the end it's like I'm God and you don't get to come up here and come behind my curtain and put me in the dock on this you're just going to trust me but that's hard right I mean it's a mystery that mysteries remain there's existential turmoil everywhere even for believers and sometimes even especially for believers do we encounter the disdain of other human beings who are also in their muck and mire because of this chasm and we're like here's a like here's a buoy and like get your buoy away from me and you get away from me and get your laws off my body and just blah and so

I want to be realistic and I want to just acknowledge and I want all of us to acknowledge that to do real business with God and the gospel is not to slap a face on of happiness an artificial like just chin up of course we have resources and we have a lot of I'm not trying to sound like we should be in despair at all in fact I want to give a fresh word of encouragement by way of talking about holiness again the Bible does not teach that

God is holy and pure and perfect and we kicked him in the shins and we are sinful and we deserve his wrath and Jesus made a way for us to just have a shield over us and then hide under that shield and then when it's all said and done God will let us sit in the back row of heaven but you made it that's not what the Bible teaches in fact the Bible teaches that in a mysterious sense and I want to be very careful here but we are to share in the holiness of God and I want to revisit the three categories that I put on the table the first category is this in our being so God is

God he created everything we're not the creator we're never going to be the creator but God has a holiness in his being that we're invited to to share in let me just read you a few verses that hint at this sorry got the wrong papers in front of me hang on okay so Peter says through these he has given us his precious and magnificent promises so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature now that you have escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires so in some sense

[37 : 29] Christians through Christ being united to Christ being adopted into God's family partake in the divine nature Paul says such were some of you but you were past tensed washed you were sanctified you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the spirit of our God he says elsewhere he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him Jesus said to the disciples already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you Paul says for

God has chosen us in Jesus before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in his presence so I'm going to stop here and I just want to say this is where it actually becomes important that we do have some categories for a word like holy because if we only think of holy in terms of our moral performance then it's hard to square with some of a lot of these amazing passages that refer to our holiness as a status you might say or as a part of who we are because we're in Christ so maybe we can be holy rollers that was the name of it I play adult kickball so don't judge me for that but you know everyone had a pun on either kicking or you know you roll the ball so they were the holy rollers bunch of folks from the

Catholic church so in a sense we share in or we partake in God's divine nature as believers and it's impossible to avoid the timeline do you do you hear the timeline it's there's there's already and not yet is the theologians way right but already we're pure without being born again we can't even see the kingdom of God so if we see it and we're however lamely putting our faith in Christ and bowing the knee and begging for forgiveness we're participating in the divine nature and we are in some mysterious sense seen as pure by our father so I find that to be very encouraging when we're still in the middle of the chasm the distance okay we also share in God's righteousness we share in his moral he's morally perfect and he's inviting us into a combination of being reckoned morally righteous but a call to live out that moral righteousness this is a very hard thing to talk about

I think we all know this but listen to these verses Paul says in Romans but now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God the fruit you reap leads to holiness and the outcome is eternal life so here the timeline now we have a forward looking aspect to that particular thought elsewhere for his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law but that which comes through faith in Christ the righteousness from God that depends on faith that might could have gone in the first category but let's move on we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of

God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory you ever read Bible words and they just turn into Bible words and they're just like a little piece of cardboard that pangs off your forehead and you're just like oh yeah glory in God's kingdom and yeah I'm gonna read this again hold on we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God who calls you into his own kingdom and calls you into his glory you know this is future looking but man is there hope there to sustain us as our friends die as our co-workers we're in a mess with our like as we're in the grind of the chasm that still remains man this is some amazing hope right and then

[43 : 47] Peter simply says that God says be holy because I am holy be holy because I am holy God first establishes us he makes us clean he washes us we're passive in that regard and then he's like you're in the family now and this is how the family rolls come joyfully participate it's a privilege right to try to strive to take that path it will not be a privilege if we get this timeline out of order it will be yet another burden if we don't see that God has cleansed us that the blood of

Jesus is potent enough to cover us and establish us and make us children and then we're called in to follow God and being good and it's good to be good I've wrestled with this for a long time but it's good to be good and have a pathway open to being good you know we're familiar with God saying no one can please me at all apart from faith and I read that to mean any goodness that we do apart from recognizing faith in Jesus where we're cleansed and where the curtains come down isn't goodness that's going to count so now this last one kind of on my own out here this where we'll see what

Pastor Matt says but so we share in God's glory in some sense we share in God's divine nature we share in God's righteousness his moral perfection we share in it we're invited into it and in some sense we share in God's glory few verses for you so this is Jesus praying in John gospel John I ask that they may all be one just as you father are in me and I am in you that they also may be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me the glory that you have given me

I have given to them that they may be one even as we are one and in them I in them and you in me that they may become perfectly one I mean whatever that means it doesn't mean that we're going to just get into heaven by the skin of our teeth and we're in the back of the bus because we kick God in the shins and he loves us enough to not to not separate from us for forever but you're going to have to stay away in fact not only does it feel like we're being invited into the room but through

Jesus I mean the words fail you you know but being brought in like truly being brought in and God's glory is God's glory and if he's going to bring us in and graft us in and somehow we're in the middle of that glory that goodness this should have sustaining power and listen you got many people in this room know me well and they hear the way I talk and I'm preaching myself up here but it should fuel our hope when we look at this a few more he called you to this through our gospel that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ Paul goes on to say and we who with unveiled faces all reflect the glory of the

[49 : 16] Lord are being transformed into his image with intensifying glory which comes from the Lord who is the spirit and those he predestined he also called those he called he also justified those he justified he also glorified and after you have suffered a little while the God of all grace who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ will himself restore confirm strengthen and establish you for this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison so the chasm is real the grind is real we're in the wilderness season still and by the way the wilderness season they're all over scripture literally they are literally all over the scriptures this season of trust me trust me my grace is sufficient for you in this season but you're still in the season and so

I hope that you know contemplating the holiness of God for Christians it can be an amazing rejuvenating thing not a depressing thing okay I've done so much talking and that's not how you're supposed to do Sunday school but it's just a big topic next week I hope to be a little more interactive thoughts questions comments when you talked about separateness you know I thought of the phrase I've heard God is holding other some people say ah that's you know the base meaning of the word holiness but then God says to us be holy because

I'm holy so the first time I put those together whatever God's holiness is communicable to us you know to some extent thank you yes like for that dot to be connected one of my favorite passages scriptures is in gospel of Luke where he describes the encounter of Jesus at the house of Mary and Martha there's so much that is captured right there and what you just said Matt be holy Mary was made holy in that moment I believe by the way that she worshipped when she knew that she would be held and gazed upon by Christ and she offered her life her that was holiness her holiness was being restored and believe in that moment that's how I see it alright let me pray for us

Father in heaven we thank you for Jesus we thank you for not leaving us alone to go our own way and to be far from you forever and we simply pray that you would increase our faith be real to us help help us to see things rightly and to cling to Christ in Jesus name we pray amen oh God them I please that looks Ländern you I can hook you

I