

BIBLICAL TRUTH ABOUT GOD THE FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT

Lesson 6: God is Perfect

Biblical doctrine is the study of what the Bible teaches about God and other important truths. So far, we have studied lessons about The One True God, God is Three in One, God is Eternal Spirit, God is the Creator, and God is the Sovereign Ruler of all things. In this lesson we will explore the biblical teaching that God is Perfect.

MAIN TRUTH, CENTRAL SCRIPTURE, AND OUTLINE

God is altogether perfect in every way. He is perfect in holiness and beauty. His holiness means that He is separate from all creatures and He is separate from all sin and sinfulness of all creatures. The prophet Isaiah saw a vision of the Lord which revealed His absolute holiness. As a result, Isaiah instantly recognized his need to repent before God. His vision also revealed God's ability and willingness to purify sinners and make them fit for His service. (Isaiah 6:1-8)

Isaiah's vision of God's majesty highlights His holiness and glorious perfection. It also reveals God's merciful intervention to transform sinners into servants. In the year that King Uzziah died (Isaiah 6:1) Isaiah saw the King of Kings seated on His throne in heaven. This is a powerful reminder that even in the darkest times God is still reigning and is always in control.

1. God's glorious perfection (Isaiah 6:1-4)

- A. Isaiah's testimony – The Lord seated on His throne reveals that He alone is the sovereign Ruler of all. God is infinitely greater than all other rulers. All earthly kings like Uzziah eventually die and their reigns come to an end, but God is the unchanging, eternal, supreme King.
- B. The testimony of the seraphim – These angelic beings were specifically created to worship and serve God. Each of the seraphim have six wings: two that cover they face, showing that God is so glorious that even heavenly creatures cannot look directly at Him; two more wings cover their feet, showing that they are unworthy to stand in God's presence; and their other two wings enable them to fly as they cry out, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isa. 6:3).

2. God's sanctifying perfection (Isaiah 6:5-8)

The holiness that enacts justice on guilty sinners is the same holiness that makes repentant sinners holy. Only a work of God can convert a sinner into a saint and a servant, making him useful to the Lord. God cleanses the sinner and then commissions him for service.

- A. Isaiah' repentance – Isaiah confessed his sin and unworthiness to stand in God's presence. The statement, "Woe is me" (vs. 5) is an admission that he was under the curse of God because of his sin. When Isaiah saw the Lord he then understood his sin and utter depravity. He cried out to the Lord in repentance, showing God's work in his heart to convict him of sinfulness and causing him to turn from his sin and turn to God for mercy
- B. Isaiah's cleansing – God graciously provided the cleansing from sin that Isaiah desperately needed. God cleansed his sin and set him apart for service. God alone is able to make a person holy and fit for His service by removing their guilt.

MEMORY VERSES

Isaiah 6:3 *And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.*

1 Peter 1:15-16 ¹⁵ *But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;* ¹⁶ *Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.*

Psalms 18:30 *As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him.*

ADDITIONAL NOTES

The following notes are from *The Holy One: A Handbook of Biblical Truth about God*, a book being written by Pastor Stan with a projected publishing date in the early part of 2024.

Holiness is the most sparkling jewel of His crown.

THOMAS WATSON (1620-1686)

It would be no wonder if an unholy God could love unholy men; but that the God whose name is Holy, the infinitely holy God, could love beings so utterly sinful as we are, that is the wonder of the eternities. There are many deep mysteries in the Bible, but no other so profound as this.

R. A. TORREY (1856-1928)

Skeptics and unbelievers may ask the question, "How could a loving God send people to Hell?" However a more profound question is often ignored, "How could a holy God allow sinners into Heaven?" The answers to both questions are found in a correct understanding of God's holiness and grace.

DEFINITION OF GOD'S HOLINESS

1. John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue: "God's holiness is his inherent and absolute greatness, in which he is perfectly distinct above everything outside himself and is absolutely morally separate from sin" (*Biblical Theology*, 183). Two aspects of God's holiness are his majestic holiness and his ethical or moral holiness. God's majestic holiness "speaks to the fact that God is inherently great and resists all compromises of his character and therefore is transcendentally distinct from all his creatures in infinite majesty. He is majestically unique." Concerning his ethical or moral holiness "he is most certainly separate from sin, being morally and ethically

perfect, abhorring sin and demanding purity in his moral creatures” (*Biblical Theology*, 183-184). Holiness is “the utter separateness of God’s being from all other creatures and things, as well as His moral separateness from sin” (note on Psalm 99:1-9 in *The MacArthur Study Bible*).

2. R. C. Sproul: “The biblical word *holy* has two distinct meanings. The primary meaning is ‘apartness’ or ‘otherness.’ When we say that God is holy, we call attention to the profound difference between Him and all creatures. It refers to God’s transcendent majesty, His august superiority, by virtue of which He is worthy of our honor, reverence, adoration, and worship. The secondary meaning of *holy* refers to God’s pure and righteous actions. God does what is right. He never does what is wrong. God’s always *acts* in a righteous manner because His *nature* is holy” (*Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, 47).

3. Louis Berkhof: “The scriptural idea of the holiness of God is twofold. In its original sense it denotes that He is absolutely distinct from all His creatures, and is exalted above them in infinite majesty. 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 possible, 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 co-ordinated 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.... The ethical holiness of God may be defined as that perfection of God, in virtue of which He eternally wills and maintains His own moral excellence, abhors sin, and demands purity in his moral creatures” (*Systematic Theology*, 61-62).

4. John Snyder: “God alone is holy. God is infinitely holy. God is unchangeably holy. And God is all of this without any effort on His part—it is *who* He is. It is not a list of rules that He must keep. Holiness is essential to His existence. It is as natural to Him to be holy as it is for us to be human” (*Behold Your God: Rethinking God Biblically*, 99).

5. Wayne Grudem: “God’s holiness means that he is separated from sin and devoted to seeking his own honor. This definition contains both a relational quality (separation from) and a moral quality (the separation is from sin or evil, and the devotion is to the good of God’s own honor or glory)” (*Systematic Theology*, 201).

6. Steven Lawson: Holiness is the one singular attribute of God most supremely praised in heaven. “This electrifying aspect of His divine nature is recognized above all other attributes by those who are in His immediate presence.... They make this emphasis on the holiness of God three times in rapid succession—to elevate this attribute to the superlative degree. In other words, God is not merely holy as others would be holy. He is not simply holier than any of His creatures. Instead, this three-fold anthem proclaims that God is the single holiest being in the entire universe.... This one characteristic is the sum and substance of His entire being. In reality, holiness is wholly comprehensive of all that God is” (*Show Me Your Glory*, 83-84).

Isaiah 6:1-3 ¹ *In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.* ² *Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six*

wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. ³ And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.

Revelation 4:8 *And the four beasts (living creatures) had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within; and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.*

A. The word “holy” means separated or set apart.

Holiness means that God is separate from His creation, and He is separate from His creation’s corruption. Holiness is an attribute that makes God unique. This perfection is first mentioned in the song of Moses after Israel’s miraculous passing through the Red Sea. Samuel’s mother Hannah also referred to God’s incomparable holiness in her prayer.

Exodus 15:11 *Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?*

1 Samuel 2:2 *There is none holy as the LORD: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God.*

Job 15:15 *Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight.*

Job 25:4-6 ⁴ *How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?* ⁵ *Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in his sight.* ⁶ *How much less man, that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm?*

Revelation 15:4 *Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.*

B. Holiness is related to God’s transcendence.

God’s transcendence refers to His existence above and beyond all created beings. Paul Washer observes: “Regardless of their splendor, all other beings on earth and in heaven are mere creatures. God alone is God; separate, transcendent, and unapproachable. The most splendid angel that stands in the presence of God is no more truly like God than the smallest worm that crawls upon the earth. God is incomparable” (*Knowing the Living God*). The highest archangel is actually closer in nature to a worm than it is to God. In his vision Isaiah saw God as high and lifted up (Isa. 6:1).

C. Holiness is related to God’s sinless perfection.

1 John 1:5 *This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*

This text refers to the sinless character of God. In the Bible light and darkness are often set in contrast. Doctrinally, light refers to truth and darkness refers to error. Morally, light refers to purity and darkness refers to sin.

Psalms 5:4 *For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee.*

Habakkuk 1:13 (NASB) *Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You cannot look on wickedness with favor.*

Because God is holy and without any taint of sin, He cannot tolerate or condone sin. Man can and does find pleasure in sin, but God can never find pleasure in it. Pink comments: “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” (*Attributes of God*, 33). Lawson states that God “is perfectly sinless, possessing no blemishes in His character. Being faultless, God is completely pure in His thoughts, words, and decisions. God is marked by moral excellency in His being, nature, and motives. He is without any taint of sin in His thoughts and actions. He is unspotted and unstained in the entirety of His holy being” (*Show Me Your Glory*, 89).

IMPORTANCE OF GOD’S HOLINESS

Stephen Charnock writes about this perfection of God: “God is oftener styled *holy* than *almighty*, and set forth by this part of His dignity more than by any other. This is more fixed on as an epithet to His name than any other. You never find it expressed ‘his mighty name’ or ‘his wise name,’ but His great name, and most of all, His holy name. This is the greatest title of honor; in this latter doth the majesty and venerableness of His name appear” (cited by Pink, *Attributes of God*, 33). John Howe calls God’s holiness “an attribute of attributes” and states: “This may be said to be a transcendental attribute, that, as it were, runs through the rest, and casts luster upon them” (cited by Pink, *Attributes of God*, 3). Paul Washer maintains that “holiness is the preeminent attribute of God and the greatest truth that we can ever learn about Him” (*Knowing the Living God*, 80). In Scripture God is frequently called “the Holy One.” A key text on God’s holiness is Isaiah 6:1-7, in which the prophet saw a vision that highlighted God’s transcendent holiness and his own sinfulness.

Isaiah 6:1-7 ¹ *In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. ² Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. ³ And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. ⁴ And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. ⁵ Then said I, 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 mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. ⁶ Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: ⁷ And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.*

Psalms 99 is another text in which God’s holiness is prominent. This psalm has three distinct references to His holiness. Of all things that the Bible reveals about God’s perfections (attributes), none is more basic or important than His holiness.

Psalms 99:1-9 ¹ *The LORD reigneth; let the people tremble: he sitteth between the cherubims; let the earth be moved. ² The LORD is great in Zion; and he is high above all the people. ³ Let them praise thy great and terrible name; for it is holy. ⁴ The king's strength also loveth judgment; thou dost establish equity, thou executest judgment and righteousness in Jacob. ⁵*

Exalt ye the LORD our God, and worship at his footstool; for he is holy. ⁶ Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among them that call upon his name; they called upon the LORD, and he answered them. ⁷ He spake unto them in the cloudy pillar: they kept his testimonies, and the ordinance that he gave them. ⁸ Thou answeredst them, O LORD our God: thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions. ⁹ Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy hill; for the LORD our God is holy.

BIBLICAL REVELATION OF GOD’S HOLINESS

1. God’s creation of man reveals His holiness.

Ecclesiastes 7:29 *Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.*

God made man in His own image and to reflect His holiness. When Adam and Eve sinned they rebelled against God’s purpose, and as a result God’s image in man was marred and ruined, yet not totally destroyed. We can still see the residual evidence of God’s holiness in man’s conscience and God’s law written upon the heart. All people have an inner awareness of right and wrong, even though it is flawed.

2. God’s name reveals His holiness.

God’s name represents His character and attributes. He is the Holy One.

Psalms 103:1 *Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.*

Psalms 111:9 *He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant forever: holy and reverend is his name.*

Isaiah 40:25 *To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One.*

Isaiah 57:15 *For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.*

God is designated as “the Holy One of Israel” thirty times in the prophecy of Isaiah. Jesus taught us to pray: “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed (holy, set apart) be thy name” (Mt. 6:9).

3. God’s covenant reveals His holiness.

Psalms 89:34-35 ³⁴ *My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. ³⁵ Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David.* God pledged to keep His word by His own holiness because it is steadfast and unchangeable.

4. God’s moral law (Ten Commandments) reveals His holiness.

Romans 7:12 *Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.*

One purpose of the Ten Commandments is to reveal God's perfect character. In His moral law God reveals this absolute standard of holiness. God does not conform to an external standard of holiness; He is the standard and His law reflects that perfect standard.

5. God's worship reveals His holiness.

God gave His people two great object lessons in both places prescribed for Old Testament worship. Acceptable worship took place in the Tabernacle, a tent or moveable structure, and later in the Temple, a permanent place of worship. Both the Tabernacle and Temple had a similar layout. There was an outer court, a holy place, and then the most holy place (Holy of Holies), where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. God said the most holy place is where He would dwell on earth. God taught His people to respect Him and approach Him in a holy and reverent manner. An Old Testament Jew would never have thought of entering the Holy of Holies because it would result in sudden death. Only the High Priest, God's chosen and authorized representative, could enter once a year on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). The entire sacrificial system reminded God's people of His holiness. As animals were killed and their blood was sprinkled upon the altar, worshipers were constantly reminded of the hideous nature of sin and the perfect holiness of God.

6. God's judgment reveals His holiness.

Whenever God judges sin, He reveals His holy hatred of sin. When He judged the world with the flood, when He judged Sodom and Gomorrah, when He judged Nadab and Abihu for offering strange (unauthorized) fire, God was revealing His holiness (Lev. 10:1-11). In the final judgment of the world Christ will judge all people in righteousness and holiness. God must punish sin because He is holy. Some people assume that God is so good He would never punish sin. The fact remains that He is so good He *must* punish sin.

7. God's ultimate sacrifice for sin reveals His holiness.

The supreme demonstration of God's holiness was Christ's sacrificial death on the cross. Christ's death is not merely a proof of divine love; it is a demonstration of God's holiness. His holiness caused Him to forsake Christ while bearing our sin as the perfect Lamb of God.

Psalms 22:1-3 *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent. But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.*

Isaiah 53:6 *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

Berkhof provides a helpful summary: "The holiness of God is revealed in the moral law, implanted in man's heart, and speaking through the conscience, and more particularly in God's special revelation. It stood out in the law given to Israel. That law in all its aspects was calculated to impress upon Israel the idea of the holiness of God, and to urge upon the people the necessity of leading a holy life.... Moreover, it was revealed in the manner in which God rewarded the keeping of the law, and visited transgressors with dire punishments. The highest

revelation of it was given in Jesus Christ, who is called ‘the Holy and Righteous One,’ Acts 3:14. He reflected in His life the perfect holiness of God. Finally, the holiness of God is also revealed in the Church as the body of Christ. It is a striking fact, to which attention is often called, that holiness is ascribed to God with far greater frequency in the Old Testament than in the New, though it is done occasionally in the New Testament, John 17:11; 1 Pet. 1:6; Rev. 4:8; 6:10. This is probably due to the fact that the New Testament appropriates the term more particularly to qualify the third Person of the Holy Trinity as the One whose special task it is, in the economy of redemption, to communicate holiness to His people” (*Systematic Theology*, 62-63).

OUR RESPONSE TO GOD’S HOLINESS

1. God’s holiness is the basis of all acceptable worship and calls for the utmost reverence.

Leviticus 10:3 *Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the LORD spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace.*

Psalms 96:9 *O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth.*

Psalms 99:5 *Exalt ye the LORD our God, and worship at his footstool; for he is holy.*

2. God’s holiness is the primary reason to hate sin and turn from it.

Psalms 97:10 *Ye that love the LORD, hate evil: he preserveth the souls of his saints; he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked.*

Pastor Joseph Bellamy (1719-1790) provides several reasons why sin is to be hated (cited in John Snyder, *Behold Your God: Rethinking God Biblically*, 148):

- A. Sin is contrary to the nature of God. It is against His love, His holiness, His majesty, and His mercy.
- B. Sin is against the law, authority, and government of Almighty God.
- C. Sin is against the being of God.
- D. Sin is against the honor of God.

3. God’s holiness is the chief motivation for personal holiness.

2 Corinthians 7:1 *Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

Hebrews 12:14 *Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.*

1 Peter 1:15-16 ¹⁵ *But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;* ¹⁶ *Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.*

Charnock writes: “We do not so glorify God by elevated admirations, or eloquent expressions, or pompous services for Him as when we aspire to a conversing with Him with unstained spirits, and live to Him in living *like Him*” (cites in Pink, *Attributes of God*, 37). Gill adds this comment: “When, therefore, men are exhorted to sanctify the Lord, and are directed to pray that his name may be hallowed, or sanctified (Isa. 8:13; Mt. 6:9), the meaning is not as if he was to be,

or could be made more holy than he is; but that his holiness be declared, manifested, and celebrated more and more; it is so perfect that nothing can be added to it" (*A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 73).

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND MEDITATION

1. What is the primary meaning of God's holiness?
2. In what ways is God separate from His creatures?
3. Why is God's holiness considered to be His preeminent attribute?
4. How is God's holiness revealed in Scripture?
5. Why are the Tabernacle and Temple considered to be object lessons of God's holiness?
6. Why is Christ's death the supreme demonstration of God's holiness?
7. How is our hatred of sin related to God's holiness?
8. Why is God's holiness the chief motivation for our personal holiness?

And truly for sinners to have fellowship with God, the infinitely holy God, is an astonishing dispensation.

JOHN OWEN (1616-1683)

Power is his hand, omniscience his eye, mercy his heart, eternity his duration, but holiness his beauty. It renders him lovely and gives beauty to all his attributes. Every action of his is free from all hints of evil. Holiness is the crown of all his attributes, the life of all his decrees, and the brightness of all his actions. Nothing is decreed by him and nothing is acted by him that is not consistent with the beauty of his holiness.

STEPHEN CHARNOCK (1628-1680)