

THE HOLINESS OF GOD BY R C SPROUL

CHAPTER 3: THE FEARFUL MYSTERY

References (Black book, White book, Kindle)

I. DIFFICULTY OF DEFINING HOLINESS (45, 35, K363)

- A. Hard to define because so vast a subject, so much to it
- B. Hard to define because so distant from us and foreign to us and to all languages – Beyond any dictionary
- C. Hard to define because Bible uses “holiness” in more than one way

II. THREE MEANINGS OF HOLINESS (45, 36, K363)

A. **Meaning 1 = “Purity**, free from every stain, wholly perfect and immaculate in every detail”

- 1. Although this is the first idea we think of when we hear “holy” this is the secondary meaning
- 2. “Holy, holy, holy” means much more than just “Purity, purity, purity.”

B. **Meaning 2 = Separate**, “from word meaning to cut or to separate = a cut apart/above”

C. **Meaning 3 = Transcendent**

- 1. “God’s holiness is more than just separateness. His holiness is also transcendent.”
- 2. Transcendent means exceeding usual limits – rise above and beyond certain limits
- 3. God is holy = God is above and beyond us, His supreme and absolute greatness,
- 4. God is higher than the world, and is “an infinite cut above everything else.”

D. **Conclusion:** God is holy = God is transcendentally separate

- 1. So far above and beyond that he seems totally foreign to us - He is “other,” different in a separate way

III. HOLY THINGS (47, 37, K383)

A. List of earthly things that “holy” is applied to (ground, Sabbath, seed, bread, city, etc.)

- 1. Same basic meaning when applied to earthly things – not a moral quality
- 2. Holy things are set apart/consecrated from common use to special holy use by God’s touch/command
- 3. These special things may not be eaten/touched/used for common matters
- 4. They are set apart for pure use – they reflect purity as well as apartness

B. **Summary:** Holiness includes purity but it is much more than that

- 1. It is purity and transcendence - It is transcendent purity

IV. HOLY GOD (48, 38, K394)

A. It's not that one of God's attributes is holy but He and all His attributes are holy

1. "Holy" calls attention to all that God is – not just one single attribute
2. It is not just another attribute on the list

B. His love is holy love, His justice is holy justice, etc

V. RUDOLF OTTO AND HOLINESS (50, 39, K408)

A. Otto examined holy in a scientific way, from the point of view of people's reaction to the holy

B. **Discovery 1:** Everyone found it difficult to describe or explain "holy"

1. There is an element of the holy that is beyond human words, defies human description
2. Not irrational but super-rational – above the limits of our minds

C. **Discovery 2:** The holy provokes fear and dread in us

1. The "mysterium tremendum" the awful mystery – provokes a kind of dread
2. Black spiritual: "Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble"
3. We have mixed feelings about the holy: "We can't live with it, and we can't live without it"

D. **Discovery 3:** The clearest sensation humans have when they meet the holy is of an overwhelming sense of creatureliness, finiteness.

1. Our contrast with "the other" is overwhelming
2. Death reminds us of our creatureliness but the thought of meeting a holy God is even more humbling
3. "When we encounter Him, the totality of our creatureliness breaks in upon us and shatters the myth that we have believed about ourselves, the myth that we are demigods, junior-grade deities who will try to live forever."

VI. HOLY XENOPHOBIA (56, 44, K459)

A. We all suffer from xenophobia – Fear (sometimes hatred) of foreigners, strangers

B. God is the ultimate foreigner or stranger to us and therefore the ultimate object of our xenophobia

1. Our fear is an unhealthy fear, servile fear, a fear born of dread
2. God is too great, too awesome, too difficult in His demands.
3. He is the Mysterious Stranger who threatens our security - In his presence we quake and tremble