

WORD OF TRUTH

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THE HOLINESS OF GOD

“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. 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. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:1-3).

“And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. And the four beasts 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. And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever” (Revelation 4:6-8).

In 1826 an Anglican minister in England named Reginald Heber penned the hymn *Holy, Holy, Holy*, which very likely was based on these words found in the book of Isaiah, and the book of Revelation. Most of us who are Christians have sang these words before, or at least have read them. But, do we know what they mean?.

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!

Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore Thee,
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee,
Who was, and is, and evermore shall be.

Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide Thee,
Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see;
Only Thou art holy; there is none beside Thee,
Perfect in pow’r, in love, and purity.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All Thy works shall praise Thy Name, in earth, and sky, and sea;
Holy, holy, holy; merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.

THE LORD IS A MIGHTY GOD AND TERRIBLE

Somewhere in my modest library (or stored in a box in the storage shed), I have a book once owned by this godly brother Reginald Heber with his signature affixed. I haven't been able to locate it, but it is here somewhere! Without a doubt, if he did nothing else of value in his life, he wrote a classic, God honoring hymn. I love it, and love to sing it. It seeks to glorify this awesome God. *Awesome* is the word some of the more modern translations use to describe Jehovah instead of the word often misunderstood by moderns; *terrible* in Deuteronomy 7. I still prefer the KJV, which states the following: "***Thou shalt not be affrighted at them: for the LORD thy God is among you, a mighty God and terrible***" (Deuteronomy 7:21). Moses said this to the children of Israel when instructing them about their enemies lying ahead in the promised land. They were not to be afraid of men.

Why *terrible*? The Hebrew word *yare* (yaw ray') used here means *to fear, to revere, to frighten, to be had in reverence* (Strongs). It is used 29 times in KJV-1611, e.g. Nehemiah 1:5; Psalm 68:35. (Some other readings: ESV-2001=awesome; Geneva-1587=dreadful; YLT-1898=fearful; Tyndale-1534=terrible). He *is* a God to be feared. We must recognize Him as awesome, even *terrible*. You know one major thing wrong with people today? There is *no fear of God* before their eyes. They fear many things, but they do not fear the Eternal God who has power to cast them into hell.

Holy is the Hebrew word *qadosh*, and that word and variations of it are used many times, e.g., Isaiah 6:3, and "***Holy and Reverend is HIS name***" (Psalm 111:9). *Reverend* is the same Hebrew word rendered *terrible* in Deuteronomy 7:21. So to call a man *reverend* is a misunderstanding of the word to say the least. We wouldn't say "We welcome as our speaker tonight *Terrible John Piper*, or *Terrible R. C. Sproul* or *Terrible John MacArthur*", would we? Perhaps there are some preachers we could say that about using the word in its more understood *modern* definition: "*Hard to bear; shocking; horrible; of very poor quality.*" Ironically, the number one definition in *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* is; "*Exciting terror; fearful; dreadful.*" That is so correct for the majestic God of the universe, but not so for *any mere man*. He is a **mighty** God and **terrible**, as Moses said. (He actually saw this at the burning bush, and when Jehovah told him "***Thou canst not see my face, for there shall no man see me and Live***" (Exodus 33:20). As Isaiah indicated when he fell at his feet as a dead man in Isaiah 6. As John did when he saw the risen Jesus Christ in Revelation 1:17. As Saul of Tarsus realized when he was knocked down on Damascus road. (Read Acts 9:4). To them, He was this terrible, or awesome, majestic God to be feared.

ONLY THOU ART HOLY

But what about the word "holy"? A.W. Tozer has a very good perspective on it. "*Neither the writer nor the reader of these words is qualified to appreciate the holiness of God. Quite literally a new channel must be cut through the desert of our minds to allow the sweet waters of truth that will heal our great sickness to flow in. We cannot grasp the true meaning of the divine holiness by thinking of someone or something very pure and then raising the concept to the highest degree we are capable of. God's holiness is not simply the best we know infinitely bettered. We know nothing like the divine holiness. It stands apart, unique, unapproachable, incomprehensible and unattainable...Holy is the way God is. To be holy He does not conform to a standard. He is that standard.*" –A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*. (San Francisco:

Harper Collins, 1961), pp. 104-5. Of course, this means as the standard of holiness, nothing else can be holy that is not directly associated with God. When He speaks of His holy mountain, it is only holy *because he is there*. The holy vessels of the tabernacle, only because God has pronounced them to be so. The same with holy angels; holy because they have been pronounced so, and they abide in the presence of God. Reginald Heber was right; *only Thou (God) art holy. "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" (Isaiah 57:15)*. His name is holy and He is high and lofty; above all. The place He abides is holy also, only because He is there. *"But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him" (Habakkuk 2:20)*.

THERE IS NONE BESIDE THEE

This "God is three persons" is unique. There is *none* beside Him. He is so unique that even the greatest theologians struggle to describe Him. Our concept of the Trinity is mysterious to us at best, but how else can we describe a God who has revealed all through scripture that He has *manifested* himself as three persons? Manifested is the *exact* word that John uses in describing Christ's *revealing* Himself to man as God. Read 1 John 1:1,2 for yourself and see what I mean. And it is fitting to mention in this study that He also *manifested* Himself as the *Holy Ghost*. Again, because God is a Spirit, and He is the *Holy Spirit*.

There is no other god that is holy, simply because **there is no other God!** Jehovah is the **true** God. These other man made idols of wood, metal, rock or stone are "*not as our Rock*." They can't even move by themselves! They have to be propped up by man. As in the case of the Philistines' fish god, Dagon, they can be knocked over and broken. Jehovah even made Dagon a mere stump, and Jehovah needed no one's help! (See 1 Samuel 5:4).

We can't call a man a "holy man" by nature either, for there are none. The only way a man can have holiness is if God makes him attain to it. None do so *perfectly* in this life. But He does say to us "*Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy*"(1 Peter 1:16). He also tells us "*Abstain from all appearance of evil*"(1 Thessalonians 5:22). Of which says one: "*This is the sum of all: for he which can abstain not only from evil, but from the appearance of evil, is so perfect as a man can be in this sinful life.*" (Henry Smith, Puritan, 1560- 1591; "England's silver tongued preacher").

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY, MERCIFUL AND MIGHTY

I believe we have sufficiently established from God's word that He is holy; that He is singularly unique; and that He is mighty. Let us look as Reginald Heber did at another attribute of this holy God. He is merciful. Oh how I thank Him that He is merciful! If He were not a merciful God, as well as a mighty and holy God, where would I be? Where would you be, friend? I tell you where; we would be in hell, or at least on our way there. "*The wicked shall be turned into hell*"(Psalm 9:17a). "*As it is written, there is none righteous, no not one*"(Romans 3:10). "*For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23). Yes, **no hope** for **any** of us who were **all** born in sin if this merciful God had not before the foundation of the world decreed **in mercy** that the lamb of God would come and give His life a ransom for many.(Revelation 13:8). Yet, so many in our day refuse to acknowledge God, or receive his mercy.

What does *merciful* mean? In the New Testament there several variations of the word *mercy*. One that comes to mind is found in Luke 18:13 where the repentant publican (tax collector) does this: ***“And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.”*** This man *knew* he was a sinner, and knew enough about the law of God, the priesthood and the mercy seat to say these words. What he was asking God to do was to propitiate; to atone for; make reconciliation for **his sins** at the mercy seat. He was a Jew, and the procedure was to present an offering for sins at God’s altar. ***“Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin”***(Hebrews 9:22b).

In Hebrews 7:27 we are told that our Lord Jesus has shed His blood in *one offering* of propitiation that satisfied God’s justice forever, **never** to be repeated. All those who are brought to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour partake of this mercy.

In Ephesians the word *mercy* is used in the sense of *compassion, tender mercy* in showing what God has done for his people. ***“But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast”*** (Ephesians 2:4-9).

God is “rich in mercy”, and exceedingly rich in grace (unmerited favor). He is not a hateful tyrant. He has shown mercy and grace to millions. Have **you** repented of **your** sins and begged for His mercy like the publican of old did? If not, why not? Maybe you have tried before and failed. *That doesn’t matter!* Come to Him in sincere repentance and ask His forgiveness, receive Christ as your Lord and saviour, and upon the authority of God’s word, He will forgive you.

Seek His mercy and grace. It is so interesting that in the bible, and the Webster’s Dictionary, mercy means the same thing. *“In this sense, there is perhaps no word in our language precisely synonymous with mercy. That which comes nearest to it is grace. It implies benevolence, tenderness, mildness, pity or compassion, and clemency, but exercised only towards offenders. Mercy is a distinguishing attribute of the Supreme Being. (Noah Webster’s 1828 Dictionary).*

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