

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE HOLINESS OF GOD

*"Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? (Ex. 15:11). "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?" (Hab. 1:13).*

We are living in a day of mental and moral and spiritual indolence, and therefore a time of superficial thinking in things relating to God and eternal matters. The Divine attributes have been discarded, even in theological schools, to the junk heap of dry and uninteresting and unprofitable subjects. The feeling largely prevails that the proper study of mankind is man. In the popular mind the God who does wonders is eclipsed by man whose breath is in his nostrils. This is a restless, nervous, and jittery age, and the very atmosphere seems surcharged with enemies to the quiet, meditative, and studious spirit.

#### The Fundamental or Basic Attribute

The holiness of God is the purity and rectitude of His nature. He is necessarily and essentially holy. His very being is the sole source and standard of right; therefore, whatever He wills is ethically right. There is no standard for God; He Himself is the standard of holiness. God is under no law of holiness; He Himself is the law of holiness.

The attribute of holiness gives glory and harmony to all the rest of His attributes. Without holiness, wisdom and knowledge would be but craft and cunning. Without holiness, power would be but tyranny, oppression, and cruelty. "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

There is an emphasis given to this attribute above all the other attributes. There are certain attributes we prefer, because of personal benefit derived from them. We esteem God's love, mercy, and grace before His justice, wrath, and anger. But, in the Bible, the holiness of God has preeminence over all others.

(1) No other attribute is spoken of with such solemnity and frequency by the angels: *"And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa. 6:3); "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" (Rev. 4:8).*

(2) God singles out this perfection to swear by. *"Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David"* (Ps. 89:35). *"Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath"* (Heb. 6:17). Here is a grand argument for the security of the believer: God says, in effect, "I will lay My holiness in pawn for your security. If I fail to keep you safe, then I will cease to be holy."

God's holiness is the beauty and glory of His being. He is "glorious in holiness." *"Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?"* (Exo. 15:11). We also read about the "beauty of holiness." *"Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness"* (I Chron. 16:29). *"And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever"* (II Chron. 20:21). *"Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness"* (Ps. 29:2). When we take a picture of a man we take the most beautiful part, his face, which is the member of the greatest excellency, and that which distinguishes his personality. So when God is pictured in the Bible, He is drawn in this attribute as being the most beautiful perfection. Power is His hand; *"The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand"* (John 3:35). omniscience His eye; *"The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD'S throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men"* (Ps. 11:4), mercy His bowels, *"If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies"* (Phil. 2:1), eternity His duration; *"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"* (Isa. 57:15), and holiness is His beauty. *"O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth"* (Ps. 96:9). Moral distance from Divine holiness is sin. His holiness is in view when it is said that *"all have sinned and come short of the glory of God"* (Rom. 3:23). In sinning man was deprived of the glory or holiness of God.

### **The Holy Trinity**

Holiness belongs equally to the three persons of the Godhead, they partake of the same common and undivided nature. The Spirit is usually called the Holy Spirit. Our Lord Jesus Christ addresses the Father under the endearing title of "holy Father": *"And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those*

*whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are" (Jno. 17:11). The Lord Jesus is called "the holy One of Israel" more than thirty times in Isaiah alone. "Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee" (Isa. 12:6). The devil himself said to Him, "Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God" (Mk. 1:24). The Holy Spirit is the Author of holiness in men. Man, in his natural and fallen state, is chaotic morally; his understanding is darkened, "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph. 4:18): and he is spiritually deformed and ugly. The Holy Spirit is the Divine Person who restores to normalcy; He brings order and beauty out of chaos; He dispels the darkness and diffuses spiritual light by means of the gospel. The saved man is indebted to the blessed Holy Spirit for all the light he has on spiritual things. "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (I Cor. 2:9-14).*

### **The Manifestation of Divine Holiness**

1. The Holiness of God appears in creation. There was not a flaw in creation when it came from His hand. Everything was beautiful and glorious. "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day." (Gen. 1:31). And again, "The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works" (Ps. 145:17). So far as is known there are only two kinds of moral beings: angels and man, and these were created morally holy. But sin has marked and defaced God's handiwork, so that nothing is like it was when created except, perchance, the holy angels. Man is ruined and fallen, by nature a child of wrath. And the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain, waiting to be delivered from the curse of sin. "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now"

(Rom. 8:22).

2. God is seen in His holiness as a Lawgiver. A holy God gave a law that was just and holy and good. Any other standard for His creatures would be inconsistent with His holiness. We are not commanded to be as wise or powerful as He is, but we are commanded to be as holy as He is holy: *"But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation. Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy."* (1 Peter 1:15,16).

3. There is a display of Divine holiness in redemption. His holy nature will not allow Him to look upon sin with the least degree of allowance. Salvation is not at the expense of His holiness. The Redeemer must bear the wrath due the sinner, for wrath is the exercise of His holiness. God's hatred of sin was as much manifested in redemption as it will be in judgment. The only difference is that in redemption the guilt of the sinner is transferred to the Savior. The wrath that fell upon the Savior on Calvary had its source in the holiness of God.

4. God's holiness appears in human conversion. *"And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness"* (Eph. 4:24).

5. Holiness will be displayed in the glorification of the believer. When our salvation is consummated we will be restored to the holiness of God. We will not have His power, nor His wisdom, but we will have His holiness. The Psalmist said, *"As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness"* (Ps. 17:15). This likeness will be both moral and physical, and the moral likeness to God will be holiness. The believer, while here on earth, struggling against sin, rejoices in hope of the glory of God. *"By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God"* (Rom. 5:2). Sin is an awful burden to the believer; salvation is the restoration to his original holiness in creation.

6. The holiness of God will appear in all its purity in the day of judgment. Because God is holy, His wrath will be hot. His holy face will be too much for sinners to look upon. *"And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb"* (Rev. 6:16).

### **Exhortations to Holiness**

The Scriptures abound in exhortations to holiness. *"Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy"* (1 Peter 1:16). We are exhorted to lift up holy hands in prayer: *"I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting"* (1 Tim. 2:8). *"Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord"* (Heb. 12:14). *"Be ye therefore followers of*

*God, as dear children"* (Eph. 5:1). All these exhortations to holiness are addressed to believers, and show that we are not personally 'holy.' *"As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness"* (Ps. 17:15). We are holy in Christ now; we will be personally holy when we are glorified, for our glorification will be our personal holiness.

It is a principle of universal recognition that all imitation of others is from an intense love and admiration of their persons. And we become like those with whom we associate. The heathen are so wantonly wicked because their gods are represented as vulgar and vicious. It is said that Plato wanted to have all the poets banished, because, in their poems, they dressed the gods in such wicked and vicious garb, thus encouraging the people to commit crime.

### **Take Time to Be Holy**

Believers, in the pursuit of holiness, must take time to meditate upon the holiness of God. *"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night"* (Ps. 1:1-2). It takes time to be holy. Sin cannot be banished by a single gesture or an occasional look at the good and beautiful. Meditation upon the holiness of God will develop a spirit of meekness and humility, *"But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price"* (I Peter 3:4). Comparing ourselves with ourselves may lead to pride and boastfulness, but when we are occupied with thoughts of the holiness of our Savior we will be filled with reverence and godly fear. "What torch can be proud of its own light when compared with the light of the sun?"

The temple of Incas at Cuzco, Peru, consisted of three walls, north, south, and west. The eastern side of the structure was open. The walls were smoothly plastered, and overlaid with finely hammered gold. These people were sun worshippers, and this was the way they worshipped: they would come to the temple just before dawn and stand in the opening to the east, facing the western wall. In front of them and on either side was a golden mirror. The sun would rise at their backs, and long before they could see it directly they could see its reflection in the western wall, and be covered with its golden light. Their faces would be illuminated, and their bodies would be literally bathed in light. Now the Gospel covenant is a mirror into which the believer looks with unveiled face at the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and ultimately will be entirely conformed to His image. *"But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord"* (II Cor. 3:18). Occupation

with the holiness of the Lord will change us from one degree of holiness to another degree of holiness. *"And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints"* (I Thess. 3:12-13). *"For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness"* (I Thess. 4:7). *"Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord"* (Heb. 12:14)

"Holy God, we praise Thy name!  
 Lord of all, we bow before Thee;  
 All on earth Thy scepter claim,  
 All in heaven above adore Thee;  
 Infinite Thy vast domain,  
 Everlasting is Thy reign.  
 "Hark! the loud celestial hymn,  
 Angel choirs above are raising:  
 Cherubim and Seraphim  
 In unceasing chorus praising,  
 Fill the heavens with sweet accord  
 Holy! holy! holy! Lord!  
 "Holy Father, Holy Son,  
 Holy Spirit, three we name Thee,  
 While in essence, only one,  
 Undivided God, we claim Thee;  
 And, adoring, bend the knee,  
 While we own the mystery."