

Knowing the Great Counselor:  
The Attributes of God in Biblical Soul Care  
~ Holiness ~  
September 15th, 2019

**I. Introduction**

***“9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies (ἀρετὰς) of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”*** (1 Peter 2:9 ESV)

1. According to 1 Peter 2:9, what is God’s purpose in saving sinners?
  
  
2. What are “the excellencies” of God?

"The attributes of God are his characteristics, the various aspects of his essence or nature. The term *perfections*, derived from the Greek term *aretas* (“excellencies”) in 1 Peter 2:9, works better than *attributes* because *perfections* specifies that the characteristics of God are each perfect and inherently characterize the God who is perfect. The term *attributes* does not inherently specify perfect characteristics and might hint that these originate in someone's concept of God rather than in God himself."<sup>1</sup>

“A general definition of *perfections* is as follows: God’s perfections are the essential characteristics of his nature. Because these characteristics are necessary to his nature, all his attributes are absolutely perfect and thus rightly called perfections. Further, since these perfections are essential to God’s nature, if any one of them were denied, God would no longer be God.”<sup>2</sup>

3. Why is the term *perfections* more helpful to describe God’s nature than *attributes*? What could be misconstrued when using the term *attribute*?

“God’s essence is identical to his perfections. There is no essential distinction between God’s essence and his perfections, and there is no essential difference between God’s perfection to one another. Each perfection characterizes God’s complete essence simply and eternally. That is to say, God is what he has. He does not merely possess love, justice, and goodness; he is love and justice, eternally, fully, and completely. God is eternally all-powerful, all-holy, and all-loving.”<sup>3</sup>

4. Why is it important to strive for precision when talking about God’s perfections? What are some dangers that we should avoid when discussing God’s perfections?

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<sup>1</sup> MacArthur & Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 161.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 164. (see also Ps. 11:7; 19:7; 29:3-4; 33:4; 34:8; 100:5; 103:8; John 3:23; 4:24; 1 Cor. 10:13; 1 John 1:5 4:8, 16...etc.)

## II. God's Holiness

***“1 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!””*** (Isaiah 6:1–3 ESV)

5. Why is the word “holy” repeated three times? What does that indicate about this attribute? (c.f. Gen. 14:10 “pit-pit” or John 5:24 “truly, truly”)

“When we say that God is holy, we are saying that God is devoted to himself. Many have pointed out that the only threefold repetition of an attribute of God in the Bible is that he is holy, holy, holy, (Is. 6:3; Rev. 4:8). Such repetition is the way biblical authors emphasize the importance of this attribute of God. We are to learn that it is a matter of central importance that God is devoted to himself.”<sup>4</sup>

6. What does God's holiness trigger the seraphim to do? What is the significance of their actions?
7. How would you define the holiness of God? What are some synonyms you might use for holiness?
8. The Hebrew term for “holy” (*qadosh*) means to “cut” or “separate.” How does that definition shape our understanding of holiness?

“We often describe God by compiling a list of qualities or characteristics that we call attributes. We say that God is a spirit, that He knows everything, that He is loving, just, merciful, gracious, and so on. The tendency is to add the idea of the *holy* to this long list of attributes as one attribute among many. But when the word holy is applied to God, it does not signify one single attribute... the word *holy* calls attention to all that God is. It reminds us that His love is holy love, His justice is holy justice, His mercy is holy mercy, His knowledge is holy knowledge, His spirit is holy spirit.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling* (Grand Rapids, MI., Zondervan, 2016), 124.

<sup>5</sup> R.C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Carol Stream, Ill., Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1998), 48.

**Definition:** *God's holiness means that He is infinitely and transcendentally separate from the world and thus the only Being worthy of all worship.*

“Transcendence describes his supreme and absolute greatness. The word is used to describe God's relationship to the world. He is higher than the world...It points to the infinite distance that separates Him from every creature. He is an infinite cut above everything else...He is so far above and beyond us that He seems almost totally foreign to us.”<sup>6</sup>

“**11** *Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?*” (Exodus 15:11 ESV)

9. How is the transcendence of God captured in Exodus 15:11?

“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. The natural man is blind to it. He may fear God's power and admire His wisdom, but His holiness he cannot even imagine.”<sup>7</sup>

10. Based on the definition of holiness above, what does it mean that all of God's attributes are holy? That His love is holy? His wrath is holy? Holy faithful?

Examples of holiness applied to other perfections:

- **13** *Your way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God?*” (Psalms 77:13 ESV)
- **16** *But the LORD of hosts is exalted in justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness.*” (Isaiah 5:16 ESV)

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<sup>6</sup> R.C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, 46.

<sup>7</sup> A.W. Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy* (New York, NY., Harper Collins, 1961), 104.

### III. God's Holiness and Man's Sinfulness

*“3 And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” 4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” 6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.” 8 And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.”” (Isaiah 6:3–8 ESV)*

11. In verse 5, how does Isaiah respond to the vision and revelation of God's holiness? Why?
  
12. What are some other examples in the Bible when man's sinfulness is confronted by God's holiness? (c.f. Lev. 10:1-3; Deut. 32:51; 2 Sam. 6:3-7; Is. 6:1-13) How does God want us to respond to His holiness?
  
13. In verse 7, how does God respond to Isaiah's sin? What is the significance of this act? (c.f. Heb. 12:14) How is able to do this for believer today?
  
- “God is holy with an absolute holiness that knows no degrees, and this He cannot impart to His creatures. But there is a relative and contingent holiness which He shares with angels and seraphim in heaven and with redeemed men on earth as their preparation for heaven. This holiness God can and does impart to His children. He shares it with them by imputation and by impartation, and because He has made it available to them through the blood of the Lamb, He requires it of them.”<sup>8</sup>
  
14. In verse 8, how does Isaiah respond to God's search for a servant after coming into contact with God's holiness AND grace? How should Christians respond similarly after experiencing God's holiness and grace?

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<sup>8</sup> A.W. Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, 106.

#### IV. God's Holiness and the Believer's Response

***“14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, 15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.””*** (1 Peter 1:14–16 ESV)

15. How does Peter characterize believers in verse 14? In light of this, why does Peter go on to command them not to sin? (c.f. Rom. 6:1-14)
  
16. In verse 15, why is it significant that Peter mentions we have been “called” by God? (cf. Eph. 2:10)
  
17. How is the command in verse 14 “to not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance” similar to the command “to be holy”?
  
18. What is the motivation for holy living? (see also verse 13) How does this motivate us to be holy in our conduct?
  
19. What are some reasons why we fail to treat God as holy? What sin are we ultimately committing when do not treat God as holy?

“Christians believe that the most glorious person in the universe is God. Because he is so wonderful, we should love him more than anyone else. We should be holy, devoted to God. When we do not love God, we are not equipped to love anyone rightly because we have not put first things first.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling*, 125-26.

## V. God's Holiness and Our Worship

***“1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*** (Romans 12:1–2 ESV)

20. In verse 1, what is Paul appealing to as motivation for presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice?
21. What does Paul mean when he says “present your bodies as a living sacrifice?” How is this living sacrifice further described?
22. According to verse 2, how can we resist being conformed to the world? How does this take place?
23. If holiness refers to being separate and distinct from the world, how does that impact the choices we make in our daily lives? (e.g. entertainment, relationships, free-time, spiritual gifts)

“God is holy and He has made holiness the moral condition necessary to the health of His universe. Sin’s temporary presence in the world only accents this. Whatever is holy is healthy; evil is a moral sickness that must end ultimately in death.”<sup>10</sup>

## VI. God's Holiness and Our Trials

***“1 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory”*** (Isaiah 6:1–3 ESV)

24. Based on verse 1, what trial is Isaiah going through that would cause him distress? What could be equivalent of that today for us?

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<sup>10</sup> A.W. Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, 106.

25. How did the holiness of God cause Isaiah to focus on Him in the midst of great trial?  
How did Isaiah transition from distress to worship?

***“3 Let them praise your great and awesome name! Holy is he!  
5 Exalt the LORD our God; worship at his footstool! Holy is he!  
9 Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy mountain; for the LORD our God is  
holy!”***

(Psalms 99:3, 5, 9 ESV)

26. What trials did Job struggle with in his lifetime? (Job 1:13-19; 2:7-9)

27. What ways would Job have been tempted to respond in the midst of such suffering? How  
did he respond? (c.f. Job 1:20-22; 2:9-10)

28. How did God counsel Job in the midst of distress?

***“1 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: 2 “Who is this that darkens  
counsel by words without knowledge? 3 Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and  
you make it known to me. 4 “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell  
me, if you have understanding.” (Job 38:1–4 ESV)***

29. How is Job’s response similar to Isaiah’s upon being confronted by the holiness of God?

***“1 Then Job answered the LORD and said: 2 “I know that you can do all things, and that no  
purpose of yours can be thwarted. 3 ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’  
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did  
not know. 4 ‘Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me.’ 5 I  
had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; 6 therefore I despise  
myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”” (Job 42:1–6 ESV)***

## VII. Conclusion

In Isaiah 40:25, the Lord asks, “*25 To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One.*” God’s holiness refers to the infinite and transcendent nature of His being. He is literally an infinite cut above everyone else. Because He is holy there is nothing that can be adequately used to draw comparison. His holiness is what makes Him glorious and what warrants complete and undivided worship. As the creation, we are by definition not holy in the same sense as God. This is further compounded by the fact that we are sinful and rebel against our Creator rather than worship Him.

It is only by the grace of God through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ that our finite, puny persons can be saved from the holy wrath of God against sin. Apart from God’s grace we would never be able to stand in the presence of a holy God. Even then, when believers are sanctified and set apart as holy unto the Lord, we must daily seek to live according to the holy purpose with which God has called us. This is worship and it is the logical and reasonable response to a holy God who has shown us so much grace and love.

As believers we must have our minds renewed day-by-day to see more and more the holiness of God. As we grow in the knowledge of our Lord, our love for Him will grow, our awe, our fear, and we will grow increasingly aware of our sin, repent, and draw closer to our majestic King who is worthy of all our attention and energy. It is our duty to help one another have a high view of God and His holiness as well. As Hebrews 12:14 says, “Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.”

“As counselors we want to help people who have problems. The greatest problem a person could have is not being supremely devoted to God. When that is the case, they need help to become holy. Counseling that fails to address the most significant problem that people face is counseling that is, in the grand scheme of things, not of value. It’s easy in counseling to focus on obvious issues that led someone to seek counsel in the first place...But Christians reading their Bibles understand that the most significant counseling problem is often one that counselees did not know was a problem...Faithfulness in counseling require biblical counselors to help people grow in their devotion to God. Counselors who fail to do this are choosing the path of counseling failure.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling*, 126.