

# Of the Holiness of God.

by John Gill

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*The holiness of God is his nature and essence, which is purity and rectitude, and it is displayed in his works, including creation, providence, and acts of grace.*

**Scripture:** Exodus 15:11, Deuteronomy 32:4, Psalm 27:4, Isaiah 40:25, John 17:11, 2 Corinthians 7:1, 1 Thessalonians 4:7, Hebrews 1:8-9, 1 Peter 1:15-16, Revelation 15:4

**Topics:** "The Holiness of God", "Divine Perfection"

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## Description

John Gill emphasizes the holiness of God as an essential and immutable attribute that defines His nature and essence. He explains that God's holiness is the foundation of His perfection, distinguishing Him from all creation, which is inherently flawed. Gill illustrates how God's holiness is evident in His works of creation, providence, and grace, asserting that it is the source of all true righteousness and purity. He also highlights the holiness of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, affirming that all three persons of the Trinity share this divine attribute. Ultimately, Gill calls believers to reflect God's holiness in their lives, as they are called to be holy as He is holy.

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## Transcript

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity

Book 1--Chapter 20

OF THE HOLINESS OF GOD.

Having considered those attributes of God which bear a likeness to affections in men; I proceed to consider those which in them may be called virtues; as holiness, justice, or righteousness, truth, or faithfulness; and shall begin with the holiness of God. And, 1. First, show that it is in God, and belongs to him, and what it is. The scriptures most abundantly ascribe it to him; he is very frequently called "holy", and "the Holy One"; this title he takes to himself, (Isa. 40:25; Hoses 11:9) and is often given him by others, angels and men; and, indeed, without holiness he would not be that perfect being he is; unholiness is the imperfection of every rational being in whom it is; it is what has made angels and men both impure and imperfect; and since no men, even the best, are without sin; therefore none are in themselves perfect.

But as for God, his ways and works are perfect, and so is his nature; being just and true, and without iniquity (Deut. 32:4). Holiness is the purity and rectitude of his nature; whose nature is so pure, as to be

without spot or stain, or anything like it: he is light and purity itself, and in him is no darkness or impurity at all; as "he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity", so he is of a purer heart and mind than to have one sinful thought in it: his thoughts are not as ours; he is the pattern of purity and holiness, and to be copied after: men should be holy, as and because he is holy; it is one of the imitable perfections of God, in which he is to be followed; though it cannot be attained to, as it is in him, (Lev. 11:44, 45, 19:2; 1 Peter 1:15, 16).

Holiness is an essential attribute of God; it is his nature and essence; it is himself; he is holiness itself; "he swears by himself, because he can swear by no greater"; and he will not swear by any less, and yet he swears by his holiness, (Heb. 6:13; Ps. 89:35; Amos 4:2, 6:8) which places put and compared together show that the holiness of God is himself; and it has been thought to be not so much a particular and distinct attribute of itself, as the lustre, glory, and harmony of all the rest; and is what is called "the beauty of the Lord", (Ps. 27:4) as it is the beauty of the good angels, and of regenerate men; and, indeed, what is wisdom or knowledge, without holiness, but craft and cunning? or what is power, without it, but tyranny, oppression, and cruelty? but God is "glorious in holiness", (Ex. 15:11) this gives a lustre to all his perfections, and is the glory of them; and therefore none of them are or can be exercised in a wrong manner, or to any bad purpose.

And as it is his nature and essence, it is infinite and unbounded; it cannot be greater than it is, and can neither be increased nor diminished; 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; Matthew 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.

And as it is his nature and essence, it is immutable and invariable; the holiness of a creature is changeable, as the holiness of angels and men; which has appeared by the apostasy of the one, and the fall of the other; and the holiness of saints, though its principle is the same, the acts and exercises are variable. But God is always the same holy Being, without any variableness, or shadow of turning. He is originally holy, he is so in and of himself, and of no other; there is none prior and superior to him, from whom he could derive or receive any holiness; as his Being is of himself, so is his holiness, which is himself: the holiness of angels and men is not of themselves, but of God; he is the fountain of holiness to all rational creatures that partake of it; it is peculiar to him, yea, only in him; Hannah says, in her song, "There is none holy as the Lord", (1 Sam. 2:2).

In another song yet to be sung, the song of Moses and of the Lamb, it is said, "Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy" (Rev. 15:4). The holiness of creatures is but a shadow of holiness, in comparison of the holiness of God; the holy angels are chargeable with folly in his sight, and they cover their faces with their wings, while they celebrate the perfection of God's holiness; as conscious to themselves, that theirs will not bear to be compared with his (Job 4:17,18; Isa. 6:2, 3).

God only is essentially, originally, underderivatively, perfectly, and immutably holy. This must be understood not of one person in the Deity, to the exclusion of the rest; as not of the Spirit, though he is peculiarly called the "Holy Ghost", and the Holy Spirit, yet not to the exclusion of the Father and Son; so not of the Father, to the exclusion of the Son and Spirit; for as they are the one God, who is a Spirit, they partake of the same common and undivided nature, and all the perfections of it, and of this with the rest.

Hence we read of the holy Elohim, or divine Persons, in the plural number; and of the Holy Ones, the Holy Father, the Holy Son, and the Holy Spirit, (Josh. 24:19; Prov. 30:5; Dan. 4:17). And no doubt respect is

had to the holiness of the three divine persons, by the seraphim, when they said, "holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts!" (Isa. 6:3) and by the four beasts, or living creatures, continually employed in the same divine service, celebrating the perfections of God in much the same language, saying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty!" (Rev. 4:8).

As there is no doubt made of the Deity of the Father, there can be none of his holiness: our Lord addresses him under the relation of "Father", and under the epithet of "Holy Father", (John 17:11) and all that has been said of the holiness of God belongs to him; of which there can be no question made: and it is as true of the Son as of the Father; for as the Father is the holy Father, he must be the holy Son, since he is of the same nature, and is "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person"; and as the Father is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, so is the Son; as the Father loves righteousness and hates iniquity, this is expressly said of the Son, (Heb. 1:8, 9) he is eminently called "the Holy One of God", (Ps. 16:10) and "the Holy One of Israel", more than thirty times in the prophecy of Isaiah; and particularly is so called along with the titles of Redeemer and Husband, which are peculiar to the second Person, the Son of God, the Redeemer of his people, and the Husband of his church, (Isa. 47:4, 54:5) yea, he is called the "most holy", who was anointed with the Holy Ghost above his fellows, and "having the Spirit without measure", (Dan. 9:24) the title of holy he takes to himself when addressing the church, which is an emblem of the purest state of the church militant on earth, the church of Philadelphia; "These things saith he that is holy" (Rev. 3:7).

Nay, the devil himself gives it to him; "I know thee, who thou art, the Holy One of God" (Luke 4:34). Besides, Christ is not only holy in his human nature, even perfectly so, and sanctified and set apart to his office as Mediator, by his Father; for which office holiness is a necessary requisite and qualification; but he is the Fountain of holiness to his church and people; they are sanctified in him and by him; he is made sanctification to them, and all the holiness, or holy graces that are in them, are all from him, (John 1:14, 16) which could not be, if he was not holy, and even holiness itself.

And as for the blessed Spirit, the third Person in the Deity, the epithet of "holy" is commonly given to him, as before observed; and very truly, since he is of the same nature with the Father and the Son; and so he is holy by nature and essence, and as appears by his graces, operations, and influences; and by his being grieved, speaking after the manner of men, with the sins and impurities of men; the reason of which is, because they are so contrary to his pure and holy nature, that he cannot bear them, but expresses his dislike and displeasure at them (Eph. 4:29, 30).

And all this will be still more clear and manifest, by considering, 2. Secondly, The instances whereto and whereby the holiness of God is displayed, which are his works, and actions, and proceedings towards his creatures; God is holy in all his works; or his holiness is manifest in them, and by them (Ps. 145:17). 2a. The holiness of God the Father; which is visible, 2a1. In the works of creation; for as he made all things by his Son, not as an instrument, but as co-efficient with him, so when he overlooked them, he pronounced them very good; which he would not have done, had there been anything impure or unholy in them.

Angels, not only those that stood, but those that fell, were originally holy, as made by him: the elect angels continue in the holiness in which they were created; and the angels that sinned are not in the estate in which they were at their creation; they kept not their first estate, which was an estate of purity and holiness; and abode not in the truth, in the uprightness and integrity in which they were formed (Jude 1:6; John 8:44). And as for man, he was made after the image, and in the likeness of God, which greatly consisted in holiness; a pure, holy, and upright creature he was; and had a law given him, holy, just, and

good, as the rule of his obedience, and which was inscribed on his heart; some remains of which are to be found in his fallen posterity, and even in the Gentiles. 2a2.

The holiness of God appears in his works of providence; which, though many of them are dark and intricate, not easily penetrated into, and to be accounted for; yet there is nothing criminal and sinful in them: the principal thing objected to the holiness of God in his providences, is his suffering sin to be in the world; but then, though it is by his voluntary permission, or permissive will, yet he is neither the author nor abettor of it; he neither commands it, nor approves of it, nor persuades to it, nor tempts nor forces to it; but all the verse, forbids it, disapproves of it, dissuades from it, threatens to punish for it, yea, even chastises his own people for it; and, besides, overrules it for great good, and for his own glory; as the fall of Adam, the sin of Joseph's brethren, the Jews crucifixion of Christ; which have been instanced in, and observed under a former attribute: wherefore the dispensations of God, in his providence, are not to be charged with unholiness on this account. 2a3.

The holiness of Jehovah the Father is to be observed in those acts of grace which are peculiar to him; as in choosing some in Christ his Son to everlasting life, before the world began. Now though not the holiness of the creature, nor even the foresight of it, is the cause of this act; yet holiness, or the sanctification of the Spirit, is fixed as a means in it; and it is the will of God, that those whom he chooses and appoints to salvation should partake of it, or come to salvation through it; nay, he has not only chosen them "through" it, as a means, but he has chosen them to it, as a subordinate end; he has chosen them to be holy in part, in this life, and perfectly in the life to come; and holiness of heart and life, is the evidence of interest in it, and nothing more powerfully excites and engages to it.

The covenant which he has made with his Son Jesus Christ, on the behalf of the chosen ones, provides abundantly for their holiness, both internal and external; see (Ezek. 36:25-27) and the promises of it serve greatly to promote it, and to influence the saints to be "perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). And in this covenant is laid up a rod of correction, in love, to chastize with it the sins of God's people (Ps. 89:29-34). Justification is an act of God's grace towards them; it is God, even God the Father, that justifies, through the imputation of his Son's righteousness to them; by which the holy law of God is so far from being made void, that it is established, magnified, and made honourable: nor are justified persons exempted from obedience to it, but are more strongly bound and constrained to serve it; and though God justifies the ungodly, yet not without a righteousness provided for them, and imputed to them: nor does he justify, vindicate, or approve of their ungodliness, nor connive at it; but turns it from them, and them from that: and faith, which receives the blessing of justification from the Lord, by which men perceive their interest in it, and enjoy the comfort of it, is an operative grace, works by love to God, to Christ, and his people; and is attended with good works, the fruits of righteousness: the like may be observed with respect to other acts of the Father's grace; as adoption, pardon, &c. 2b.

Secondly, The holiness of the Son of God is to be seen in all his works; in the works of creation and providence, in common with his divine Father; and in all his works of grace; in giving himself to sanctify his church, and make it a glorious one, without spot or wrinkle, through his blood and righteousness; in redeeming his people from all iniquity, to purify them to himself a peculiar people; in bearing their sins, and making satisfaction for them, that they might live unto righteousness, and that the body of sin might be destroyed, (Eph. 5:25, 27; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:24; Rom. 6:6) and so in the execution of all his offices; as a Prophet, he has appeared to be an Holy One; the faith delivered by him to the saints, is a most holy faith, wholesome words, doctrines according to godliness: as a Priest, he is holy and harmless, separate from sinners, and has offered up himself without spot to God; and though he makes intercession for

transgressors, it is upon the foot of his sacrifice and righteousness: as a King, all his administrations are in purity and righteousness; and his laws, commands, and ordinances, are Holy Ones; and when he comes as judge of the world, he will appear without sin, and "judge the world in righteousness". 2c.

Thirdly, The holiness of the blessed Spirit, is visible in the formation of the human nature of Christ; in separating that mass out of which it was framed in the virgin; in sanctifying it, and preserving it from the taint and contagion of original sin; in filling the human nature, when formed, with his holy gifts and graces, and that without measure; and through him it was offered up without spot; and he was declared to be the Son of God with power, by the Spirit of holiness, through the resurrection from the dead.

Moreover, his holiness is manifest in the sanctification of the chosen of God, and the redeemed of the Lamb, which is therefore called, "the sanctification of the Spirit", (2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2) in convincing them of sin, of the evil nature and just demerit of it; in converting them from it; in calling them with an holy calling, and to holiness; in implanting principles of grace and holiness in them; in purifying their hearts by faith, through the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus; in leading them in the way of holiness, in which men, though fools, shall not err; and in carrying on, and perfecting the work of sanctification in them, "without which none shall see the Lord".

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