

God's Holiness - Part 3

by Richard Owen Roberts

God's holiness is the very nature of his being, an essential part of his deity that affects everything he is and does.

Duration: 28:44

Scripture: 1 Peter 1:13-25

Topics: "Character Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the concept of perfection and how it is unattainable for humans. He emphasizes that everything in this world is imperfect, including the earth and the goods made by humans. The speaker then refers to the Epistle of Peter, chapter 1, and encourages the audience to strive for holiness in their lives. The sermon also explores the contrast between God's nature and human nature, highlighting God's infinite, unchanging, and holy attributes. The speaker concludes by discussing the source of temptation and sin, explaining that they arise from our own lustful cravings and can lead to death.

Transcript

The Epistle of Peter, chapter 1, starting at verse 13. First Peter, chapter 1. Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ, as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lust in your ignorance, 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.

And if ye call on the Father, who without respect to persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear. For as much as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you. Who by him do believe in God that raised him up from the dead and gave him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God.

Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit, unto unfamed love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart, fervently, being born again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth forever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away,

but the word of our Lord endureth forever, and this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

Now all the truths that we've been thinking of these weeks about God reveal the great contrast between God and ourselves, and the more we contemplate God and search the scripture to see what God says about himself, the greater will be our awareness of the fact that God is indeed unlike us, and we are vastly removed from him. There is no way in short that we can go on contemplating those truths the scriptures reveal about God without becoming increasingly poor in spirit ourselves. It is the very nature of such a pursuit.

Now in our first lesson we were contemplating the fact that God is the first cause, and in contrast to that we discover that we are nothing but the effect. The second week we were talking about God who is from everlasting to everlasting, and in contrast with ourselves it gives us a tremendous sense of smallness. We are very, very finite, but God is indeed infinite.

Then we discussed the unchanging nature of God or his immutability, and that set in contrast to us is a startling difference, for we are fickle and ever in the process of change, and most of us can scarcely make up our mind even on a subject and hold to it for any length of time. God is absolutely without change. Then last week we were weighing the issue of God's holiness from the perspective of his being high and lifted up, and that too is so readily contrasted with us, for we are low and common and there doesn't seem to be any real sense at all in which we are like God.

Today we are to consider the subject of the holiness of God again, but this time from the standpoint of God being pure and without sin, absolutely without any blemish of any sort. We contrast that with ourselves, we are full of blemishes and impurity. So I repeat again, the more we learn about God, the more we become aware of how unlike him we are, and when we read a statement such as man is made in the image of God, this kind of a study brings us to the realization of how little that really means.

Now there is a tremendous amount of arrogance in the world, and you not infrequently hear men speak of themselves as if they were nearly equal to God, and I have heard men use the expression I just cited, we are after all made in the image of God, and by that they seem to mean that they are so nearly like God that you can scarcely see the difference. I wouldn't for a moment cast any doubt about the validity of the statement that we are made in the image of God, but we don't want to forget that it was Adam who was made in God's image, and it was Adam also who sinned, and he faced that image horribly, and we are all descendants of the fallen Adam, not the Adam as he was first created. So that even the significance that statement had in the beginning, is a far lesser significance today than originally.

But even originally while Adam was made in God's image, Adam was not made like God. He was made by God with some marvelous qualities and abilities, but he was absolutely and totally unlike God in the most significant ways, even in his innocent state, and that we don't want to lose sight of. Now in thinking about the holiness of God last week, we were reflecting upon the fact that holiness in scripture carries two primary meanings.

First, to be separate from, or distinct, and secondly, to be pure. Now our subject last week was the separateness of God from mankind, and we spent our time meditating upon that text in Isaiah 47, 15, 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, who is of a contrite and a humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the hearts of the contrite ones.

A beautiful statement of the holiness of God. But this morning we are going to be thinking in terms of his holiness from that perspective of his moral perfection. God is absolutely perfect.

There cannot be found in God even the slightest imperfection. He possesses total freedom from all sin and all stain. He is wholly perfect.

Those words are easily stated, but they really are not easily comprehended, because to be wholly perfect is something we know nothing about. Everything that we handle, everything we brush against, everything that we have to do with, has its imperfection. The very earth upon which we are placed is an imperfect earth.

All the goods made by man's hands are imperfect, and of course in these days more so than they used to be. Because as man becomes increasingly greedy, his workmanship gets lousier and lousier, to the point where practically all the goods that we buy have noticeable defects immediately. And you know as well as I do how often you go back with something that you just purchased, and it becomes a wearisome thing.

But it helps to keep us aware of the fact that we live in an imperfect world, and we utilize imperfect goods, and we ourselves are living evidences of imperfection. Now I had a very sobering letter yesterday from a customer of ours. He ordered some books two or three months ago, and he was sent the wrong books.

And he was indignant and rightly so, and he sent some of them back. And then last week he was sent a notice for not having paid for the books that he sent back. Well the imperfections of my company are more than obvious in the light of a letter like that.

But all around us there are imperfections. We are so acquainted with imperfection, it is difficult to focus our minds adequately upon God, who is absolutely perfect. We scarcely know anything about him, because he is so unlike us in this regard.

Now we read already the statement out of 1 Peter 1, verses 15 and 16, that is, he which has called you is holy. So be ye holy in all manner of conversation, because it is written, be ye holy, as I am holy. And then we have that magnificent statement of God's perfection in Matthew, the fifth chapter at verse 48, Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Now when we read those exhortations, we say, why, it's impossible. How could I be perfect? How could I be holy as God is holy? But while we may sense how far we are from the perfection and the holiness of God, we want to recognize that the thrust of Scripture on the subject of holiness is not merely that somewhere off there there is a being who is perfect, but that this perfect being requires us to be like him. That is the whole thrust of Scripture on the subject of holiness.

Now God's moral perfections, as viewed in Scripture, must be seen from two standpoints, the negative and the positive. Notice these contrasting words. In Psalm 11, 7, it says, For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness.

But in Psalm 5 at verse 4, it says, Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall the evil dwell with thee. So that in viewing from biblical standpoint the whole subject of holiness, it's easily observed that the holiness of God always rolls in two directions, the positive direction of God's love of holiness and the negative direction of God's hatred toward sin. And there is no way one can correctly comprehend the biblical teaching of God's holiness without seeing those dual patterns of love for and hatred against.

Love for that which is right and hatred of that which is evil. Now the holiness of God is interesting to observe as one of the least disputed of all of God's attributes. Angels in Scripture frequently ascribe holiness to him.

We read these words out of Isaiah 6 last week. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory.

And those, of course, were the words of angelic beings. But even more intriguing is the realization that in Scripture, demons also acknowledge the holiness of God. Listen to these words out of the first chapter of Mark.

There was in the synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And the unclean spirit cried, saying, Let us along. What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know, says the unclean spirit.

I know who thou art, the Holy One of God. Bible saints constantly ascribe holiness to God. And even the ancient philosophers who were a very long ways, in most instances, from any real knowledge of God, were free in their declarations saying that God was holy.

Plutarch expressed it well in contrasting himself with God. He said that if someone said that he was non-existent, it would be far less of an insult than for someone to say that he was a debauched fellow, loose and vicious in his person. In short, it is less wrong to discard any knowledge of a divine being than it is to debase that being by thinking of him or referring to him as anything other than holy.

It's interesting to observe that in our country, deists and Unitarians have acknowledged almost consistently the holiness of God. I read this week a very intriguing book by James Fenimore Cooper. Some of you are acquainted with his deerstalking tales.

But I read a book this week, which had been laying around for a long time, and I just thought, well I'll have a look at this. And in looking at it, I discovered that there were some things to do with Christianity. And I was so intrigued, I read the thing through, and I discovered that this famous author had to be a born-again Christian.

And in this book called *The Sea Lion*, he presents a marvelous defense of the deity of Christ and his incarnation. But Cooper, in portraying this great hero of the story, in the early periods, described this man as practically a Unitarian who could not see any possible value in the deity of Christ and who was absolutely sure Christ could not be divine, but who nonetheless consistently thought of God as holy. I say even, even deists and Unitarians have held to the holiness of God.

And is it not interesting to observe that when wicked men curse and swear, they swear by the holy God. Just the other day I heard someone cursing and they used the very words, the holy God. It is universally accepted that God is holy, but there is a vast gulf between those who intellectually ascribe holiness to God and those who have been broken in heart and humbled in spirit by their awareness that God is indeed holy.

And it is my sad observation that vast numbers of professing Christians who readily give lip service to the holiness of God have still to be deeply affected in their own lives by an awareness of how truly holy God is. So I ask you now to join me not merely in the contemplation of biblical truths concerning God's holiness, but to join me in having your soul now in these moments deeply stirred and affected by these truths. Let us

begin then, and I want to give you this morning a series of seven affirmations concerning the holiness of God, but let us begin with this affirmation, God is by his very nature holy.

Now God's holiness is not simply an act of his will. If it were simply an act of his will, he might also decide to be unholy sometime. Holiness is the very nature of God.

It is an essential part of his deity. He cannot be other than holiness. It is so essential to the nature of God that it is impossible to conceive of God without conceiving of his being a holy God.

The holiness of God affects and permeates everything that God is and everything that God does. Notice these words in Psalm 145. The Lord is righteous in all his ways and holy in all his works.

His name is holy. His truth is holy. His promises are holy.

His law is holy. His justice is holy. His wisdom is holy.

His power is holy. His benevolence is holy. His mercy is holy.

And his wrath is holy. Everything about God is holy. There is absolutely nothing God is or God does that is or ever could be even slightly unholy.

All of God is perfectly holy. He can no more cease to be holy than he can cease to be eternal. The holiness of God is as rigidly fixed as his immutability.

And I think you can immediately see the tie between his holiness and his immutability. If God began, and of course he didn't because he didn't have a beginning, but if God began as a holy God and is immutable or unchanging, then he could never cease to be holy. Now in actual fact, God has always been holy and he is now holy and he always shall be holy and he cannot be anything but.

Holiness is a fixed aspect of his nature. Now let us consider this second declaration. God cannot be tempted to be anything other than holy.

He is absolutely immune to temptation. God cannot be tempted to sin. He cannot be tempted to any act or any thought of unrighteousness.

Now meditate upon the matter of temptation, will you? Normal temptations come to us from unfulfilled cravings. If you haven't thought this through, I urge you to go home today and to sit down and to reflect upon your weaknesses and those sins that you are prone to fall into and realize how frequently your sin stems from unfulfilled cravings. And then weigh in that connection these words out of James, first out of the first chapter, verses 13 to 15.

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God. For God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. For every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and in type.

Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and when sin is finished, it bringeth forth death. Now there is the pattern. God isn't tempted, he can't be, he never tempts anyone.

All temptation, we are told, springs out of our own lust, our unfulfilled craving. And of course, lusts are not merely unfulfilled cravings, but cravings that are inordinate, cravings that in and of themselves are wrong. But sin begins with an unfulfilled craving for that which is wrong, and it marches onward to the point where

some overt response is made, or some thought is in the mind which is unholy, and sin is committed, and sin, as we're told in that passage, leads to death.

Now notice these further words out of the fourth chapter of James, verses one to three. From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence even of your lust that war in your member? Ye lust, and ye have not. Ye kill, and ye desire to have, and ye cannot obtain.

Ye fight, and ye war. Ye ask not, or ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and ye receive not, because ye ask amiss that ye may consume it upon your lust.

But the heart of unholiness is unfulfilled craving. Now if you will think about God, you will see that God cannot be tempted, for God has no unfulfilled craving. God is complete.

He is perfect. He has everything, and there is no shortage, and there are no desires in the heart of God that are unattainable, or that are inordinate, or that are improper, or that cannot be fulfilled, or that ought not to be fulfilled. God is, I repeat, complete and perfect in and of himself.

Now the problem of sin that exists in the life of man on earth exists because man is not content. I say again, if you will sit down soberly and reflect upon your sins, you will see that they rise out of malcontent. For instance, take the sin of gossip.

Why do people gossip? Well, they gossip because they are not content. If they were content, it would not be necessary to put someone else down, or to put themselves up, and that really is the heart of gossip, the lowering of someone else and the increase of yourself, maybe by having some secret information that you can pass along, or maybe by having some choice tidbit against someone. But the root of man's sin, I repeat, is unfulfilled cravings, and God cannot be tempted because he has no unfulfilled cravings, and there is a very practical application of this also.

If you want to become holy, if you really and truly want to be holy, then be content with such things as you have. That is what produces holiness, contentment. Godliness with contentment is great gain, says the scripture, and Paul says, I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content.

And if we want to follow the injunctions we read to begin this morning, be ye perfect as I am perfect, be ye holy as I am holy, then learn contentment and say, thank God. And when something occurs in your life that you weren't expecting, even if it's negative, say, thank God. I'm content with what God sends.

Learn to rejoice in what God gives, and you will discover the key to genuine biblical holiness. Now, someone may ask then, in the light of what I've been saying, how could the Bible say Jesus was tempted in the wilderness when you are dogmatically insisting God cannot be tempted?

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