

Great Themes of Discipleship, #1

Our God Is Frightfully Holy

(Lev. 10:1-3)

--CEFC 2/6/22

Have you ever wondered why it was that Jesus came into the world

as the son of Mary and Joseph

and not as the son of Sarah and Abraham?

In other words, why did the Lord wait some two thousand years

to fulfill his gracious promise to Abraham found in the first book of the Bible

to bring blessing to all nations,

by sending his Son as the Savior of the world?

Why not just get it over with at the beginning?—

The Bible would be a lot shorter!

The simple answer has to be that the world was not ready.

Paul says that "**when the set time had fully come,**"

God sent his Son (Gal. 4:4).

What made it "**the set time**"?

I don't think it was because of

the extensive transportation network in the Roman empire,

or that Greek had become the lingua franca of the ancient world,

or that the pax Romana had calmed warring nations.

No, "**the set time had fully come**" only when the Lord had created

an environment, a cultural context,

in which what he did in Christ could be rightly understood.

For surely, the redemptive effect of a man dying on a cross as a criminal
 was not self-explanatory—
 it needed an interpretive framework.

God needed to reveal himself to a people
 such that when he acted in the life of that people,
 the gospel could be grasped
 as the wonderful good news that it is.
 And so God first raised up Israel to be to his light to the nations. /

And what was the most important thing
 he needed to reveal to the people of Israel about himself?

I think the answer to that question is pretty clear—
 God needed to create a people who would understand that he is holy.
 The awesome and fearful holiness of God is a theme that spans the whole Old Testament.

When Abraham received the covenant promise of blessing from the Lord,
 we read that a thick and dreadful darkness came over him
 when the Lord spoke to him,
 "Do not be afraid, Abram.
 I am your shield, your very great reward" (Gen. 15:12,1)./

When Moses first encountered the Lord at that burning bush,
 God said to him,
 "Do not come any closer.
 Take off your sandals,

for the place where you are standing is holy ground” (Ex. 3:5).

After Moses had brought the Israelites out of Egypt and through the Red Sea,
the people marveled—

“Who among the gods is like you, O LORD?

Who is like you—

majestic in holiness,

awesome in glory,

working wonders?” (Ex. 15:11).

When the Lord met with Moses on Mt. Sinai,

the mountain was set apart—

anyone who even touched the mountain would be put to death,

for the Lord had said to Moses,

“Put limits around the mountain and set it apart as holy.” (Ex. 19:23).

In her prayer, Samuel's mother Hannah declared—

“There is no one holy like the LORD;

there is no one besides you;

there is no Rock like our God” (1 Sam. 2:2).

When Isaiah saw the Lord high and exalted with the train of his robe filling the temple,

he saw the angelic creatures surrounding him,

calling to one another:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;

the whole earth is full of his glory” (Is. 6:3).

That three-fold repetition, which is the Hebraic means of emphasis,

occurs nowhere else as a description of God—

He is **“Holy, holy, holy**

No wonder, then, that Isaiah’s favorite expression for God is

“the Holy One of Israel,” which occurs 25 times in his prophecy.

When the Lord speaks through Ezekiel

to declare his purpose in sending his people into exile in Babylon, he declares:

“I will show the holiness of my great name,

which has been profaned among the nations,

the name you have profaned among them.

Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD,

when I show myself holy through you before their eyes” (Ezek. 36:23).

So the psalmist proclaims:

“Let the people praise your great and awesome name—

he is holy. . . .

Exalt the LORD our God

and worship at his footstool;

he is holy” (Psa. 99:3,5).

Surely, one of the primary reasons that Jesus was born as the son of Mary and Joseph

and not of Sarah and Abraham

is that the Lord wanted first to reveal himself to the people of Israel

as a **holy God**.

For only then could the gospel message be rightly understood.

So it is essential that we get that message—

that message that God is holy.

But I find that communicating the notion of holiness is not easy in our day--

the word itself has gone out of favor.

Now it's full of all kinds of negative connotations.

If someone seems to be acting in a judgmental and moralistic manner

we say they have a "holier than thou" attitude.

If a person takes their religion too seriously, too enthusiastically,

they're a "holy roller." /

We live in a "profane" world—

and that word "profane" ranges in meaning from secular, to irreverent, to obscene,

and our culture increasingly expresses that--

profanity no longer shocks us.

"What is sacred, what is holy, anymore?"

What is there that we dare not seek to manipulate or control,

that we dare not try to capture in some commercial enterprise,

or reduce to a mere scientific specimen?

What is there in our world that we recognize is, in fact, higher than we are,

and ought to control us?

Holiness is a foreign concept to many in our world today.

And sadly, that can be true even in churches—

even in Evangelical churches.

Our view of God can be far too casual.

As theologian David Wells puts it,

In the minds of many God exists merely to satisfy our own needs.

He is a God who has no real authority to compel us.

“God is not worshipped, he is used.”¹

“God is seen as a supporting actor in our own life movie.”²

Wells writes,

"The fundamental problem in the evangelical world today is not inadequate technique,
insufficient organization, or antiquated music,
and those who want to squander the church's resources bandaging these scratches
will do nothing to stanch the flow of blood
that is spilling from its true wounds.

The fundamental problem in the evangelical world today

is that God rests too inconsequentially upon the church.

His truth is too distant,

his grace is too ordinary,

his judgment is too benign,

his gospel is too easy,

and his Christ is too common.”³

Jesus has become a mere mascot for our cause, or our party or our nation,

¹ William James (cited in Horton)

² Michael Horton

³ David Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, p. 30.

rather than the mediator apart from whom we face God

only as “a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29).⁴ /

And what should we do about this deadly condition?

The antidote to this disease, I believe,

is found in a rediscovery of our topic this morning—

to overcome the trivialization of God

to rediscover his gravity, his weight, his glory,

we must come to know more of his holiness. /

So what is holiness?--

Frankly, I can't tell you exactly what holiness is.

It is never defined for us in the Bible.

It is a hard notion to get our heads around exactly,

partly because holiness is what God is--

it is his essential nature.

Someone has described holiness as "the white light of God's being"

in which all the various colors of his nature are combined.

I can't know precisely what holiness is

because I can't know exactly what God is in himself. /

But we can speak about how God's holiness is described

and how it functions in the Bible.

We see this especially in the way God is to be worshipped.

⁴ Horton

God's holiness is the central quality that was to be displayed
 in the entire structure of worship given by God
 to his people Israel in the Old Testament.
 And particularly as that worship is prescribed in the Book of Leviticus.

Holiness is what the book of Leviticus is all about.

Lev. 19:2—The Lord says, "**Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them:
 `Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.'**"

The word "holy" and its cognates appear 152 times in the book--
 20% of all their occurrences in the whole Bible.

"Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy" --
 this expression is found three times in the book
 and should probably be seen as its official motto./

To get a glimpse of this theme in Leviticus

I invite you to turn back to that passage we just read from Lev. 10,
 which is as good as any in the book
 in communicating the seriousness of this subject.

Chaps. 1-7 of Leviticus give a detailed description of the various sacrifices
 that the Lord prescribed for Israel--
 the burnt offering, the grain offering,

the fellowship offering, the sin offering and so on.

Then in chaps. 8 and 9 we have the ordination of Aaron and his sons as priests
to administer these sacrifices.

The priests were to enter the sacred tent, the Tabernacle, and offer sacrifices there
only in the manner that the Lord instructed.

But what do we see in 10:1?

**"Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers,
put fire in them and added incense;
and they offered unauthorized fire before the LORD,
contrary to his command."**

Now, we don't know exactly what they did that was "unauthorized"--

but all that matters is that whatever they did
was not what the Lord had told them to do.

**"So"--we read in v. 2--"fire came out from the presence of the LORD
and consumed them, and they died before the LORD."**

The Lord became judge, jury and executioner

in an instant application of the death penalty on these two.

And what is the justification for this?

In v. 3 Moses has the answer--

He says to Aaron--

"This is what the LORD spoke of when he said:

"Among those who approach me I will be proved holy;

in the sight of all the people I will be honored."

Then we read that **"Aaron remained silent"**—

there was nothing he could say--

God's holiness had been defiled,

and the penalty for such desecration was death.

"Among those who approach me I will be proved holy;

in the sight of all the people I will be honored."

This is a clear one-sentence explanation for everything that we find

in the book of Leviticus.

"Among those who approach me I will be proved holy;

in the sight of all the people I will be honored."

God gives instructions about all manner of activities

in the life of Israel—

all the prescriptions about various animal sacrifices and offerings

and the many regulations about what makes people clean or unclean

in what they eat or even touch—

the Lord gives all this,

because he wants to show himself to be holy.

And by obeying these commands, these people will honor him as a holy God--

under penalty of death.//

So how are we to think of this thing called "holiness" that is so central to this book

and which God himself takes so seriously?

There are two dimensions I want us to consider this morning--

I. First, holiness speaks of Separation--

That reflects the etymology of the Hebrew word— $v^{\text{®}}dúO;q$

holiness speaks of something being set apart or separate.

For example, we use the term "holiday"--holy-day--

for a day set apart from the others for specific purposes.

In the Bible the seventh day, the Sabbath, is called holy--

it is to be set apart from the rest of the week.

The holiness of God, then, first of all, speaks of his uniqueness, his transcendence,

his majestic separation from all that is created.

He is holy.

Exod. 15:11—"Who among the gods is like you, O LORD?

Who is like you-- majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?"

In the Bible there is an absolute distinction between the Creator and creation—

they are not to be confused, as occurs in the many variations of paganism

with its fertility gods and gods emerging from the sea and so on.

The God of the Bible creates *ex nihilo*, out of nothing, by the word of his mouth.

God is holy, first, because God is separate.

He is the transcendent Creator who stands over his creation.

He is not one creature among others.

He never comes into existence—he simply is.

He is majestic and glorious, utterly unique. /

This means, quite simply, that **he is not like us**.

He is alien—he is foreign, he is mysterious.

He is beyond our understanding.

We need to get over the idea that **we can fully comprehend God**.

We must quit thinking

that we should be able to understand everything there is to know about him

and that we should be able to fit God

into our neat conceptions of what he should be like.

I encounter people all the time who don't seem to get this.

They think that if there is something they can't understand about God,

then they won't believe it;

it can't be true.

"I don't understand why God would do this

or why God would do that?

I just can't believe in that kind of God."

But why should we think that God is simple and easy to understand?

He is holy.

Isn't this the central issue of the book of Job?—

In that story Job's friends thought they had God all figured out—

and Job thought he could figure God out, too.

God had to challenge that notion in the end of the book
 with a few pointed questions
 that displayed his transcendence, his glorious majesty
 above all others.

Job finally shuts his mouth and comes to the conclusion,

**"Surely I spoke of things I did not understand,
 things too wonderful for me to know"** (Job 42:3).

Our God is beyond us—

he comes from beyond this world, this solar system, this galaxy, this universe—
 he comes from another realm altogether.

And because of that,

quite naturally, it seems to me,
 there will be things in the Bible,
 and there will be things in this world,
 and there will be things in your life
 that God in his wisdom does
 that you simply will not be able to understand.

Get over it.

Because our God is holy, he is beyond us.

And this notion of holiness as separation is reflected in the fact that

holiness characterizes everything that he separates (or consecrates)
 so as to belong to him for his use.

His name, which expresses his character, is holy

and must not be profaned (10:3; 22:2,32).

Israel, as a people, belongs to God and is called a holy nation (Exod. 19:6).

The **priests** within the nation who were set apart to serve in the worship of God--
they were holy.

The **high priest** wore a turban with a plate of pure gold upon it,
with these words engraved: "**Holy to the Lord**" (Ex. 28:36)

The **equipment** used in worship was considered holy (Ex. 30:26-29)--

The offerings that were given were designated holy to the Lord, too.

The **altar** on which they were laid was consecrated
so that it became "**most holy, and whatever touched it became holy.**" (Ex. 29:37)

All that is set apart for God and his use is called holy. /

This explains how Israel can be called a holy nation,
even when her behavior was anything but pleasing to God.

Israel was set apart by God for his purposes;
she was in a privileged position,
but also in a position of great responsibility.

And this notion of holiness as separateness also explains why
the Christians of the New Testament
can be called "**saints**" or, more literally, "**holy ones.**"

This is particularly striking when Paul writes to the Corinthians--
he says they have been sanctified in Christ Jesus,
"**called as saints**" (klhtoi" aJgivoi").

Their behavior was anything but holy--

but in Christ they had been set apart as belonging to God--

and as God's possessions, they were holy.

Only God can make something holy—he consecrates--

and he does that by setting things and people apart for himself.

And the separation of holiness is illustrated particularly

in the layout of the place of worship in Israel--the **tabernacle**,

that tent which was the model for the temple.

The tabernacle was divided into several courts,

and in the center, the main work area for the priestly activity

was called the Holy Place.

Here only the priests were allowed.

But in the center of this Holy Place,

was the core of the entire enterprise—

a veiled room known as the Most Holy Place, or the Holy of Holies.

This was the room in which the sacred Ark of the Covenant was kept,

which held the tablets on which were written the Ten Commandments.

And into this room no one was allowed except the High Priest,

and he only once a year after a week of purification ritual.

And on the cover of this Ark, the blood of the atoning sacrifice was sprinkled

on that most holy day, Yom Kippur—the Day of Atonement.

The design of the temple visually displays God's holiness. /

God is holy—he is separate from us. /

And it is important to see that this separateness

involves more than just ceremonial matters.

The separation and purity that God demands in the Mosaic Law

is also moral.

Isa. 5:16--"the LORD Almighty will be exalted by his justice,

and the holy God will show himself holy by his righteousness."

It is a separation from every form of evil or moral impurity.

II. So God is holy not only because he is separate from us in his transcendent nature,

he is also holy because he is perfectly pure in his moral character.

This is a distinctive feature of Biblical religion.

Unlike the religion of the Canaanite religions of Palestine,

unlike the Greek religions the early Christians faced,

unlike the many popular religious philosophies we face today,

our God is morally pure,

and he demands that his people live holy lives.

The holiness of God means that religious worship

not accompanied by godly living

is an abomination to him.

He doesn't want our holy offerings

without the offering of ourselves in holiness.

Holiness is more than ritual--

it also entails righteousness.

God requires ethical as well as ceremonial holiness—

We see this clearly in Leviticus 19—

which has been called the “holiness code.”--

Lev. 19:2-- "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them:

‘Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.”

and the Lord then expounds that command in all sorts of ways--

v. 11-- "Do not steal. "Do not lie. "Do not deceive one another.

v. 13--"Do not defraud your neighbor or rob him.

"Do not hold back the wages of a hired man overnight."

v. 14--"Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind,

v. 18-- "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people,

but love your neighbor as yourself.”

The prophets of Israel take up this theme,

concerning what we could call “social justice”—

In Isaiah we read,

“The multitude of your sacrifices—

what are they to me?” says the LORD. . . .

I have no pleasure

in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. . . .

Stop bringing meaningless offerings! . . .

I cannot bear your worthless assemblies

Wash and make yourselves clean.

Take your evil deeds out of my sight; . . .

Learn to do right; seek justice.

Defend the oppressed.

Take up the cause of the fatherless;

plead the case of the widow" (1:11-13, 16-17).

This connection of religious ritual with personal righteousness is picked up by Jesus.

He says, "If you are offering your gift on the altar

and there remember that your brother has something against you

leave your gift in front of the altar.

First, go and be reconciled with your brother,

then come and offer your gift."

Or as we read in Heb. 12:14--

"Make every effort to live in peace with all people and to be holy;

without holiness no one will see the Lord."

Holiness speaks of separation--

God is transcendent.

God is above us and he is beyond us.

And holiness speaks of moral purity--

God is righteous and just in all his ways,

and he demands that those who worship him

be righteous and live justly also.

Everything about the worship of God in Israel was holy.

And there were degrees of holiness depending on
the proximity of an item or person to the Lord.

The closer something gets to God
and the holier it must be lest it be consumed by God's holiness.

It's as if God himself were a fiery furnace or a nuclear reactor--
the closer you get to him the more protection you need
or you'll get burned up--
as Nadab and Abihu did.

Their disobedience left them unprotected from the full heat of God's holiness.

For, you see, in the Bible **God's holiness is a dangerous thing--**

In Lev. 16:2 the LORD said to Moses:

**"Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses
into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain
in front of the atonement cover on the ark,
or else he will die,
because I appear in the cloud over the atonement cover."**

We have to understand,

these ceremonial instructions were the means given by God to his people
for their protection as they come into his presence. /

And when you put these together you arrive at a most sobering conclusion,
voiced by the writer to the Hebrews--

Heb. 10:31—"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

I sometimes hear people say,

I wish God would simply appear to me—and make himself known,
and then I would believe in him.

They do not know what they are asking for.

They might as well ask to be put in the midst of a raging hurricane. /

But why?

Why is God's holiness so dangerous?

Why the frequent warnings about approaching him?

It is because as a holy God, he is perfectly pure in his moral character—

he is absolutely good and just and righteous in every way—

and we are not.

Therefore, we are all subject to God's wrath.

God's wrath is his righteous repulsion

against all that is contrary to his holy nature.

It is neither arbitrary nor capricious,

but a necessary expression of his holiness.

Like the fire that came from the presence of the Lord

and consumed Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1-3),

so God's holiness consumes all evil that enters its presence (cf. Heb. 12:29).

Consequently, sinful human beings are disqualified from coming before him.

The prophet Habakkuk says, "**Your eyes are too pure to look on evil;
you cannot tolerate wrong**" (Hab. 1:13).

Isaiah falls down on his face before God's holiness,

and cries out **"Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips."**
 and we should be led to ask with the men of Beth Shemesh,
 who had just seen 70 of their neighbors struck dead
 because they dared to look into the sacred ark of the covenant,
"Who can stand in the presence of the LORD, this holy God?" (1 Sam. 6:20).

In his holy presence we not only feel our frailty and finitude;

we also feel our moral failure, our moral shame—

we want to crawl under the floor and hide.

Before his holiness we are exposed, as if left naked in his presence—

for we know his blazing eyes see right through us,

examining all the thoughts and intentions of our hearts—

and that is not a pleasant feeling,

for we know that what he sees there is not a pretty picture.

We feel nothing but shame,

as though stripped naked at some public assembly—

which is every person's nightmare!

This is where the biblical notion of cleanness comes in—

Physical cleanness becomes a symbol of an inward moral state.

As sinful creatures, we are unclean, we are dirty, we are defiled.

And the Mosaic law given by God

with all its ceremonial rituals

were designed to engrain in the minds of the Israelites

that they dare not come before a holy God without being cleansed.

Doesn't the psalmist say, in answer to the question

"Who may ascend the hill of the LORD?"

**Who may stand in his holy place?,"--
The one who has clean hands and a pure heart" (Psa. 24:3-4).**

But our hands and our hearts are not clean.

Our lives are stained with a moral filth
that no human cleanser can ever take away.

That's why we need to understand that

Our God is frightfully holy.

You will not understand the LORD's demand for moral purity and justice;

You will not understand the LORD's hatred of idolatry;

You will understand the LORD's righteous wrath;

You will not understand the Lord's passionate concern for his own glory—
none of it will make any sense to you at all,

if you do not understand that **our God is frightfully holy.**

In fact, I'd say that the whole Bible won't make sense to you—

Why did the LORD cast Adam and Eve from the Garden

simply because they disobeyed one divine command?

Because our God is frightfully holy.

Why did the LORD send a flood on the world and only save Noah and his family?

Because our God is frightfully holy.

Why did the LORD send ten plagues on the Egyptians?

Because our God is frightfully holy.

Why did the LORD have the Israelites wipe out the Canaanites

when they entered the promised land?

Because our God is frightfully holy.

Why did the LORD send fire to consume Nabad and Abihu

when they offered strange incense to him in worship?

Because our God is frightfully holy.

Why did the Lord strike down Uzzah simply because he reached out

and took hold of the ark of God when the oxen pulling the cart stumbled?

Because our God is frightfully holy.

Why does Jesus speak so much about the punishment of hell

for those who refuse to repent?

Because our God is frightfully holy.

And why was it that when Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane

and prayed that he might not have to die on a cross—

that the LORD said No, there is no other way--

there was no other way to rescue my people from their sin?

Why did the LORD have to send his own Son into the world to die for us?

Because our God is frightfully holy. //

Yes, in Christ, this great and awesome God becomes our Father—

but he remains a holy Father, a righteous Father.

The prayer the Lord Jesus gave to us

begins with a concern for holiness--

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Thy name"--

that is, "may you be treated as holy."

And isn't that what evangelism is about?

It is fueled by a desire that God no longer be blasphemed and profaned in this world--

but that he be honored as the holy God that he is--

that every knee would bow to him.

One day we know that God's name will be hallowed—

we have God's word on the matter--

cf. Ezek. 36:23--"I will show the holiness of my great name,

which has been profaned among the nations,

the name you have profaned among them.

Then the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Sovereign Lord,

when I am proved holy through you before their eyes."

Or as we read in Lev. 10--

"Among those who approach me I will be proved holy;

in the sight of all the people I will be honored."

It is perhaps this notion of God's awesome holiness,

and his wrath that flows from it, that we most need to grasp today.

Without it the gospel makes no sense—

without it, we have no conviction of our sin and no need of a Savior.
 And without it we have no understanding of the new life to which we are called
 and the final goal of our salvation—
 that we might clothed with Christ
 and share the very character of God himself.

For the Lord says, "**Be holy**

because I, the LORD your God, am holy" (Lev. 19:2; 1 Pet. 1:16). //

I need to wrap this up,

but I can't conclude without addressing at least briefly

a central question—

How can we become holy? /

In one sense, we can't—not in ourselves, not in our own strength.

We are hopelessly lost, corrupted by sin—

we are unclean—naked in our shame before God's holiness.

We can only become holy if God makes us holy—

holiness must be a gift from God.

And this gift of holiness is at the heart of the gospel.

For the holy God sent his own Son,

his own Son who was recognized in the Gospels as the Holy One of God.⁵

⁵ Mark 1:24 "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the **Holy One of God!**" cf. John 6:69; Acts 3:14; 4:27

God sent him to be our representative, our substitute—
 and in the language of Hebrews, to be our high priest.

For the gospel message of God's grace
 reveals to us that this consuming fire of God's holiness—
 this wrath that flows from God's holiness--
 it has been poured out—
 and in a mysterious exchange
 God has taken it upon himself on the cross of Christ.

And now that same New Testament book of Hebrews
 describes how, through the work of Jesus Christ—
 our great high priest--who offers himself as the atoning sacrifice for our sin—
 through that cross-work of Christ
 God's fiery throne of holiness
 becomes for us a throne of grace.

We read, “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence,
 so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us
 in our time of need.”

Heb. 10:19—“Therefore, we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place
 by the blood of Jesus,
 . . . let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith,
 having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience
 and having our bodies washed with pure water.”

We can come into the presence of this Holy God—

through Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest.

In union with Christ, we are cleansed by his blood

and we are clothed with his righteousness—

Heb. 10:10—"we have been made holy

through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

In Christ we have been sanctified—made holy—

by the work of the Holy Spirit.

In union with Christ we are God's "holy ones"—his "saints."

Being holy means first of all recognizing that you now belong to God,

and you need to see yourself as one of his "holy ones"--

set apart *by him* and *for him*.

Holiness is something to be received as a gift

by faith in union with Christ.

Friends, have you don't that?

Have you received that precious gift of God's grace?

But holiness is also something to be sought as a moral quality

as Christ's life flows through us.

The Puritan Jeremiah Burroughs writes,

"from [Christ] as from a fountain,

sanctification flows into the souls of the Saints:

their sanctification comes not so much from their struggling,

and endeavors, and vows, and resolutions,
as it comes flowing to them from their union with him.”⁶

Holiness means being joined to Christ in both his death and his resurrection.

We must join him in dying to our old sinful way of life,
and rise with him in the new life he gives by the Holy Spirit.
And this process involves a conscious effort on our part.

I appreciate the strong words of Don Carson:

"People do not drift toward holiness.

Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward
godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord.

We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance;

we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom;

we drift toward superstition and call it faith.

We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation;

we slouch toward prayerlessness

and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism;

we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated."⁷

No. Our personal holiness requires effort,

but we must always remember that even our effort

flows from the work of God in us

through the gospel gift of the Holy Spirit.

⁶ *The Saints Treasury*, p. 46.

⁷ Desiring God website.??

Let's always remember, in the words of the Puritan John Owen:

“Holiness is nothing but the implanting, writing,
and realizing of the gospel in our souls.”⁸

Or as J.I. Packer puts it: “Holiness is the healthy growth of morally misshapen humans toward the moral image of Jesus Christ, the perfect man.”⁹

Heb. 12:14--” **Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy;
without holiness no one will see the Lord.”**

Prayer—

Prov. 9:10 **“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.**

Rev. 15:4 **Who will not fear you, O Lord,
and bring glory to your name?**

For you alone are holy.

⁸ Cited in Brian G. Hedges, *Christ Formed in You*, p. 115.

⁹Cited in Brian G. Hedges, *Christ Formed in You*, p. 147

Our God Is Frightfully Holy (Lev. 10:1-3)

Have we trivialized God? Is our God too common and familiar? Have we lost a sense of reverence and awe before him? This morning we focus on the centrality of holiness in the Bible's presentation of God and the significance of that emphasis in our understanding of the gospel and of the life to which we are called.

I. The Centrality of Holiness in the Bible

II. What is Holiness?

The Message of Leviticus

A. Holiness speaks of *Separation*--

God is transcendent.

B. Holiness speaks of *Purity*--

God is righteous.

II. God's Holiness is Dangerous

God's wrath is his righteous repulsion
against all that is contrary to his holy nature.

III. How can we be holy?

A. Holiness is received by faith

in union with Christ.

*"we have been made holy through the sacrifice
of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" -- Heb. 10:10*

B. Holiness is sought by diligent determination
as Christ's life flows through us.

*"Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy;
without holiness no one will see the Lord" --Heb. 12:14*

Sermon Response—**“Our God Is Frightfully Holy”****(Lev. 10:1-3)**

- What was your initial response when you read the story in Lev. 10:1-3? How does an understanding of God’s holiness help you to understand what happened there?
- What do you think the Bible means by “the fear of God”? Why is it so important as an attitude toward God? (It is the “beginning of wisdom.”)
- Why should God’s holiness be considered “frightful”? How does God’s holiness relate to God’s wrath?
- Why is it that only God can make us holy? How does he do that?
- What is our responsibility to become what God has declared us to be?
- What would you say holiness looks like in a Christian’s life? Do you know someone you would describe as “holy”? Why?
- Consider these words about holiness—
C.S. Lewis: “How little people know who think holiness is dull. When one meets the real thing...it is irresistible.”

Jonathan Edwards: “Holiness is a most beautiful and lovely thing. We drink in strange notions of holiness from our childhood, as if it were a melancholy, morose, sour and unpleasant thing; but there is nothing in it but what is sweet and ravishingly lovely.”

How can you think of holiness as something beautiful?

•What keeps you from pursuing holiness in your life?