

2-Attributes-God's Majestic and Moral Holiness

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Attributes of God

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We turn now to the reading of Psalm 99 and the first 10 verses of Isaiah 6. Psalm 99.

1 The LORD reigneth; let the people tremble: he sitteth between the cherubims; let the earth be moved. 2 The LORD is great in Zion; and he is high above all the people. 3 Let them praise thy great and terrible name; for it is holy. 4 The king's strength also loveth judgment; thou dost establish equity, thou executest judgment and righteousness in Jacob. 5 Exalt ye the LORD our God, and worship at his footstool; for he is holy. 6 Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among them that call upon his name; they called upon the LORD, and he answered them. 7 He spake unto them in the cloudy pillar: they kept his testimonies, and the ordinance that he gave them. 8 Thou answeredst them, O LORD our God: thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions. 9 Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy hill; for the LORD our God is holy.

That was John Calvin's favorite Psalm, Psalm 91, very interesting when we consider what we'll hear this morning.

Isaiah 6:1-10.

1 In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. 2 Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. 3 And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. 4 And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. 6 Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: 7 And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips;

and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. 8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. 9 And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. 10 Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.

Thus far the reading of sacred Scripture.

Dear church family, the church never rises above its view of God. To understand the value of the attributes of God is critical for every congregation. Where small thoughts of God prevail, there will be small thoughts of sin, small thoughts of Christ, small thoughts of the way of salvation, there will be little spiritual vitality and godliness among the people of God. When God's attributes are diminished or ignored or marginalized or denied, a church's worship will become cold and empty, even perhaps idolatrous. Many professing Christians in our day in churches all around the world view God as some kind of indulgent figure in the sky somewhere who just loves people and wants them to be happy, and little thought is exercised about who is this God, and the end result is a Christianity very different from biblical Christianity.

The Bible sets before us a great God of infinite power, of super-abounding, matchless grace, of tender mercy, as we saw some weeks ago, a God who is a consuming fire but a God who is also filled with holiness. The true God is a holy, holy, holy God and that's what we want to look at this morning as we continue this little series of sermons on the attributes of God, we want to consider the holiness of God and we'll look at Isaiah 6:3, a few other verses as well as this is more of a topical series, but let me read Isaiah 6:3 right now.

3 And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.

And speaking about God's holiness, we want to look at two major thoughts: first, his majestic holiness; and second, his moral holiness. Majestic and moral holiness. Holiness is essential to God. If God is not holy, God is not God. It is the heart of everything the Bible declares about him. His justice is holy justice. His grace is holy grace. His love is holy love. His power is holy power. God's holiness is the crowning attribute of all his attributes. It's the jewel of them all, said one of the Puritans. It's a transcendental attribute that runs through all the rest and casts luster upon them, an attribute of attributes, the glory of all his perfections. Jonathan Edwards put it this way: it's the outshining of all his perfections. You think of, boys and girls, standing at the edge of an ocean and maybe at a sunrise or a sunset, and you see the sun coming across the waves and casting a bright white light just as the crescendo of every single wave, so as the waves come in one after another with that bright light upon them, such is the holiness of God, on the wave of every attribute, it's all glittering with holiness. Holiness is everywhere in God. Holiness is inseparable from God. Isaiah calls God holy 26 times. In fact, the word "holy" proceeds

God's attribute more than any other adjective in the Bible, and one of the persons of the Trinity is actually called Holy Spirit.

The Bible teaches us that God is holy in all of his works, Psalm 145, in all of his law, Psalm 19, and especially in his salvation that culminates in the cross of Christ, Matthew 27. But what actually is God's holiness? If it's so important, so germane to God, we need to grasp a little bit what it is. To be holy means to be sacred; it means to be consecrated; it means to be set apart from what is ordinary and to be set against what is unclean. God is the holy one, the source of all other holiness. He's the clean one over against the unclean. God's holiness is the majesty that sets him apart from all other creatures. There is no one holy like God. God's holiness expresses his infinite majesty as well as his moral excellence. It means he's set apart by his glory, for his glory more than all other creatures.

So to say that God is holy is to say that God is the God of the Bible, that there is no one who can compare to him. That's what Psalm 99 does so beautifully, it sets God before us, as it were, both in the majesty and the morality of his holy excellence. First, his holiness is connected to his majestic reign as the great King in verses 1 through 3, "The LORD reigneth; let the people tremble... Let them praise thy great and terrible name; for it is holy." God's holiness, his otherness, his separateness, his majesty calls us to fear and to praise him. Since God is the perfect King, the Psalm goes on to say, he loves what is right, he speaks what is right, he does what is right, he rewards what is right. He's also the moral excellence. His holiness is majestic but it's also moral righteousness. He's the majestic, moral, holy God. He is the enemy, the holy enemy of all that is morally unclean, unjust and unloving.

Well, certainly we need today to understand both the majesty of God's holiness and the morality of that holiness as Psalm 99 sets it before us, and that is manifested all throughout the Bible. If you think of the first great manifestation of God's holiness to Moses where he calls him to come near to the burning but not consumed bush and says, "Take your shoes from off your feet for the place whereon you stand, just being near my presence is holy ground." And then God reveals his name to Moses, "The I Am that I am. The unchangeable. The I was that I was. The I am that I am. The I shall be that I shall be. The unchangeable, holy, covenant-keeping God." There is no one like this God. He is unique in holiness. He's the only one who can say, "I always have been from eternity past to eternity future. I am that I am. There is none like unto me. To whom shall you compare me, the holy one of Israel?"

And that goes on to be reflected in the Old Testament revelation in various songs. I'll just mention two of them, songs that celebrate God's majestic holiness. Think of Moses' own song of praise after the exodus. God had displayed his sovereign power over the greatest world power of the day. He sent plagues upon Egypt. He liberated his people from Egyptian bondage. He parted the Red Sea so that his people could cross over on dry ground. And then they saw his holiness, his majestic holiness as he destroyed pharaoh and his hosts in the Red Sea and the walls of water came crashing down upon them. And Moses sings in Exodus 15, "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like unto thee, glorious in holiness and fearful in praises, doing wonders?" This is Israel's

God, majestic, glorious in holiness. The whole theme of the song is God's glory, God's strength, God's fearsome holy excellence. And the song ends this way, "The Lord shall reign forever and ever." Because he's a sovereign holy King who has all things in his hands, as Psalm 22 says, "The kingdom is the Lord's. He's the governor among all the nations."

Now later on in redemptive history, there's another beautiful song, the song of Hannah, you know it well, in 1 Samuel 2 after the Lord answers her prayer and gives her a son. She cries out, "There is none holy as the Lord, for there is none beside thee, no rock like our God." She connects, you see, God's strength, God's majesty, God's power, God's deliverance with God's holiness. He's a majestic, almighty, glorious Sovereign.

And occasionally in the Bible as we move forward in redemptive history, you see that God reveals his holiness even in visions before the Bible was completely encapsulated in writing and there's no vision of God's majestic holiness to match that of what we've read in Isaiah 6. This holy vision of a holy God to a prophet who felt he was unholy, Isaiah, who sees the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and his train fills the temple. Isaiah is given a glimpse, as it were, into the throne room of heaven and he beholds God there clothed in majestic splendor, ruling and reigning, and heavenly spirits flying above the divine throne, covering their faces with their wings in the presence of the august, holy presence of Almighty God crying out, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory."

And whether or not the triple repetition refers to the persons of the Trinity or perhaps what is more likely in this particular case, just the Hebrew always employing repetition for superlatives, just saying, "There's no one holy like God, his holiness is so holy," it's worthy to be repeated three times. "He's the highest degree, the superlative holy one. There is none like unto him." Edward Young wrote a three volume commentary on Isaiah and said as used here, holiness signifies the entirety of all divine perfection in God that separates him from his creation.

He is the holy, holy, holy God and Isaiah is just overwhelmed with the majesty and the sovereignty and the greatness of this God. In the first five verses of this chapter, he calls him the Lord, the Lord of Hosts, the King. And the angels are overwhelmed as well. Even though they never sin, they cover their faces with their wings in the presence of this thrice holy Lord of Isaiah's vision. This is uniqueness of being, God in his holiness, but also in personal plurality. If the holy, holy, holy does not refer to the three persons, and it may well, certainly when God turns to Isaiah then and says, "Who will go for Us," this plural "Us" is not referring to the angels or to any human person, for God will not share his glory with another. The "Us" refers to the Father, the Son and the Spirit. And we know that from John 12:41 where the apostle tells us that the one whom Isaiah saw was the pre-incarnate Son of God, but also the Apostle Paul in 28:25 through 27 ascribes this speech of Isaiah 6:9 and 10 to the Holy Spirit, and yet these are the words that Isaiah attributes to the voice of the Lord, he says, who he beheld. These three in one, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, are the Triune God, fearful, majestic in glory.

So this majestic holiness which is so awesome in God, calls for a response, Isaiah 6 tells us. We're not just spectators of his holiness when we open his word, when we hear his word preached. We're not just to run away from that holiness and say it's overwhelming, but this holiness is to have a double effect upon us, Isaiah tells us. First of all, it is to prostrate us before God in humble worship, in humble worship. Isaiah is exposed in his creaturely finitude, his corrupt fallenness. He's utterly undone. He's overwhelmed. He's in a sense crushed by the majestic holiness of God. He can scarcely comprehend, scarcely believe the magnitude of what he's seeing, a sight, you see, of our holy God enthroned on high will bring us low. It will cause our souls to unravel. It will evoke profound worship when you catch the vision of God's holiness in the pages of Scripture. And in all of its grandeur, in its majesty, even part of its grandeur, the tallest mountains, the deepest seas are like little bits of dust or drops of water compared to this immeasurable greatness, and the sun which we cannot view directly is just a faint spark compared to the infinite brightness of his glory. And so the holiness of God teaches us that we should not adore or worship or give adoration in any way to any man, any woman, any object, any creature. The holy God deserves all our worship, all our adoration, and so Paul tells us even if an angel were to come from heaven, he's just a mere messenger, a mere servant of God. God alone must be our God, the sole object of all our worship, for he is majestic in holiness.

But profound worship is not our only reaction to God's holiness. Isaiah says there's another reaction we need and that's consecration, consecration to God's service. God turns and asks Isaiah, "Whom shall I send and who will go for Us?" God is looking for a man, this is astonishing, a mere human man who will be his prophet to his rebellious people, and it wasn't a good job description, it wasn't an easy one. Isaiah was to go and to tell the people of God that ridicule and rejection and poverty would be his own portion because they would reject his word, there would be great opposition and great suffering. Who would be so foolish to say, "Here am I. Send me"? If you knew you were going to go forward and the people's ears would be shut and their hearts would be hardened, and yet Isaiah says immediately, "Here am I. Send me."

His sight of the Lord, you see, didn't just make him become overwhelmed with fear but it made him willing to serve God no matter what the cost. You see, when God's majestic holiness overwhelms you, God becomes big and you become small. It's not your will then that you want to run your life, but his will, and you want to surrender everything to this majestic God. You know then that Christian discipleship is characterized by bearing the cross, and whether you will be scorned by the world, as you will be, whether you will be rejected by men, as you will be, it doesn't matter ultimately. One dominant thing matters, "I want God to use me. I want to glorify this great, majestic, holy God."

"Who will go for Us?" "Here am I. Send me." I think so often of Edward Payson, a nineteenth century divine who was a great man of God, and sometimes he'd just sit in his study, he said he was all alone and he would just clap his hands for joy, just overwhelmed that God would use a sinner like him as an ambassador of this holy Jesus Christ. You see, when we get a vision of who God is, when we understand something of the majesty of his holiness, we realize what an immense privilege it is to bear his name, to engage in his mission whether it be as a parent, or as a Sunday school teacher, or as a minister of the

Gospel, an elder, a deacon, or just to engage in evangelism of our coworker, it's just an amazing thing to have a mission from God. Moses willingly forsook Egypt and stood defiant before pharaoh, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible, Hebrews 11:27 says. You see, even if it meant suffering and death, Moses said, "It's okay. I'd rather declare this holy God than dwell in the courts of Egypt with all its finery. It's the highest of honors to serve the holy King of the universe."

So knowing the majesty of God's holiness doesn't only make us bow down and worship, it makes us also stand up and say, "Here am I, Lord. What shall I do? Here am I. Send me." And it makes us realize how fleeting, how feeble, how minuscule our lives are compared to this great God. And so Isaiah's in that position, he's just a needy sinner but his sins are forgiven. The call comes on his lips, "Your iniquity is purged." He's overwhelmed. "The holy God will purge me?" And so when God says, "Who will go for Us?" There's no hesitation. There is no counting of "Well, I'd better do this first. I'd better do that first. I better consult with..." No, no, "Here am I. Send me. No matter what the call, no matter how I'm rejected. This majestic holy God is my whole desire."

You see, when God's holiness in its majesty fills our soul, it delivers us from our radical natural selfishness. It helps us to see ourselves in our proper perspective. You and I, congregation, we're just dust. Our life is but a vapor, James says, and it vanishes away. When you see the greatness of God in his majesty, you understand that you can no longer be consumed with yourself or about yourself or by yourself. You're so small. God is so big. And so then you understand that every relationship you have, every item you purchase in the store, every activity you engage in, it convicts you. By nature, it's all about you, it's about what you want. You see, this is the way of sin to which all of us are prone by nature, but if we could catch but a glimpse of the glory of God's majesty, you would see the wickedness of a self-focused life for what it is. So beholding the majestic holiness of God reorients all of Isaiah's life toward God, and it reorients all of our life toward God. It will enable us joyfully to live out, albeit imperfectly, the command of Paul, "Whether therefore you eat or drink or whatsoever you do, do all, do all to the glory of God." That's the desire of every believer when you see the majestic holiness of God.

Can I say just a word to you young people? As pastors, we're so encouraged to see in so many young people a concern for godliness and the work of the Holy Spirit we know is in many of you by God's grace, and we're humbled by that, and some of you, of course, are missing that but may I just say to all of you this world flies in the face of what I'm talking about right now, this world says to you, "Just live for yourself," even if you're a Christian, "Do what you want to do. Stand up for what you want. Exalt your own rights." True Christianity says just the opposite, it says you were created for one purpose, to serve God. You were created for a purpose far far far bigger than who you are. The holy God of the universe calls you this morning not to capitulate to the worldly philosophy around you and the natural tendency within you, but it calls you to know God and serve God. God beckons you, he invites you, he allures you with his majestic holiness to bow down in worship and cry out, "Here am I. Send me." What higher privilege could there be than this?

But God is not only a God of majestic holiness, he's also a God of moral holiness. Moral holiness, and we want to look at that. God's holiness is majestic but it's also moral, that is to say it is absolute righteousness, perfect moral purity. So God desires to glorify himself because he is perfection. In us, self-glorification is a horrific sin. In God, it's a virtue because of who he is and because he made all things to glorify him. The supreme purpose of everything is to glorify God. That's what the angels said, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of thy glory." That's what heaven will be but now in perfection, full of the glory of God. Heaven is a world of perfect love and that perfect love will be centered on one thing, the glory of a holy Triune God. So God's holiness is absolute morality in the good perfect sense of the word. God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. God has settled opposition in his own inherent nature against all that is impure. He's the holy one who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, Habakkuk says. He cannot look upon iniquity with approval or pleasure, the Bible says. The totality of God is the totality of absolute righteousness.

God's holiness sanctifies all that he is, all that he does, and it punctuates divine glory into all his works. Without moral holiness, God would not be God just as he would not be God without majestic holiness. Edward Lee writes, "Holiness is the beauty of all God's attributes without which his wisdom would be but subtlety, his justice would be but cruelty, his sovereignty would be tyranny, his mercy would be but foolish pity." But with holiness, all God's attributes just shine with this absolute blazing purity.

Wow, if all this is true, what hope is there then for us? We're all sinners. Well, Isaiah feels that, the overwhelming sin of his nature when he stands in the midst, as it were, of this holy vision of God's majestic holiness and his moral holiness and he says, verse 5, "Woe is me! Woe is me! I'm undone. I am a man of unclean lips." God's holiness and my sin, it's incompatible. I can't appease God with any of my efforts. I can never do anything enough to please God apart from his Son. I'm created in his image but I become unholy in his sight, and it's my fault. You see, it's not the nature of man that God hates because God made us upright and very good, it's the corruption of our nature that God hates which is what you and I have done and by nature do every day of our lives.

So sin always dishonors the holy one for it's a failure. Sin is always a failure to love God supremely for who he is in his holiness. Sin is always a rejection of God as God. One old Puritan put it this way, he said every time you knowingly sin, at that very moment you are acting like a practical atheist saying God is not, because if you knew, if you knew, if you really stood in Coram Deo as the Reformers said, in the face of God, in the presence of God, you wouldn't dare to sin in the presence of this august, moral holiness. So when you sin, for that moment, you see, when you consciously sin, you're acting like a practical atheist. You're forgetting that God cannot overlook sin without denying himself.

So Isaiah sees that now and that sense of moral uncleanness which is repulsive in God's sight, he feels, "That's who I am. That's who I am in the presence of this God. I have disobeyed him. I've despised his word. I've treated the sacred as if it were profane. I've come up to the temple as if I was going to a shopping mall instead of into the presence of the Almighty." The holy God, Isaiah realizes it now, sees our every sin, hates our every

sin. Do you understand that? Has it ever been real for you that God hates every sin? And what horror, what horror would fill the souls of unforgiven sinners if he were to appear in his holy glory in the clouds today. Psalm 68 says they would be driven away as smoke and melt like wax in the fire. They would perish in his presence.

So God's holiness guarantees that he will glorify himself in executing justice upon sinners. Just before this chapter, Isaiah 5:15 and 16, Isaiah says that the common man shall be brought down and the mighty man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled for the Lord of Host shall be exalted in judgment, and that God is holy, God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness. Every unforgiven sin merits an everlasting hell in the sight of this holy God.

Well, the question is just screaming at us at this point, isn't it: how then can sinful people like Isaiah, like you and me, be delivered from the holy judgment of this perfectly moral, this august, majestic, holy God? And the answer is only by way of holy sacrifice, by way of someone suffering for us. That's what the whole Old Testament talks about, the animals pointing, the blood of bulls and goats pointing to the Messiah to come. He has to shed his blood once and for all. Jesus Christ is the only mediator, he is the only infinite one who can satisfy an infinite God. A finite creature can never satisfy an infinite God; even if we could live sinlessly for the rest of our lives, we could never satisfy God. But Jesus can and Jesus did, and God's grace on the cross is superlatively manifest in that his only begotten Son met all the demands of the majestic, moral holiness of God to satisfy his justice for sinners. And so through God's Son and only through his Son. Not one iota of one percent through you, but 100 percent through his Son, an unholy sinner may come into the presence of a holy God and be received when that sinner by the grace of the Holy Spirit through faith and repentance surrenders entirely to God's Gospel terms of salvation, which is simply this that Jesus does it all, and we put all our confidence and all our trust in him.

So God's holiness does not only reveal his majesty and his perfect moral holiness, but it also reveals his intimacy through his Son, and let me illustrate this this way for you boys and girls. When Abe Lincoln was President of the United States of America, he had a son who met a homeless boy on the street and the boy had no father and no mother, was an orphan, and Abe Lincoln's son befriended this boy and one day he took him to see his father, and he walked past the guards that were protecting Abe Lincoln and no one said a word to him because he was Abe Lincoln's boy. He had a right to go to his father, and so that homeless dirty boy went in, went in right into the presence of Abe Lincoln with Abe Lincoln's boy, and when he got there he said, "Dad," he said, "this boy has no home. Can he live with us?" And Abe Lincoln said, "Absolutely. You can come into our home, we'll clean you up, you can sit at our table, you can have meals with us. We'll treat you as if you were my son. Come and live with us." And this little boy came into the circle of the intimacy of the Lincoln family.

You see, that's exactly, exactly what Ephesians 2:18 says, that we have access by one Spirit, the Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ into the presence of the Father. So when the Holy Spirit saves us, you see, what happens is he shows us the things of Jesus and Jesus,

I'm putting it in picture form now, it's not literal but it's figurative, Jesus takes us by the hand and brings us past all the impossibilities straight into the presence of his Father and says, "Father," more than Abe Lincoln's son could say, "I have given the ransom for this sinner. I have paid for his sins with my blood." And the Father says, "You're welcome into my family." And you have all the family privileges, all the family rights, all the family access, and you have a new Father and a new elder brother, and a new family. You see, when you by the grace of God trust in God's holy Son for the cleansing that only his blood can afford you, the merits of his death and resurrection received by faith in you, you're not only saved but you have access to this holy God, to be in his presence. It's amazing. Thomas Goodwin, the Puritan, said when God delivered him from bondage, he said, "It was as if I sat among the three divine persons and not one of them objected to my presence because I was holy in Christ Jesus."

So what happens, you see, when by faith you believe in him alone, then Christ's righteousness, his perfect holy righteousness that meets all the demands of the holy, holy, holy God, that is imputed to you and all your sin is imputed to him, and he bore it on Calvary's cross all the way and buried it in his burial, as it were, and rose pure and perfect as a complete Savior, and now as your complete intercessor to keep you all the way to the end. Trusting in Christ, you see, you can appear before the holy, holy, holy tribunal of God on the day of judgment without terror or without shame because your obedience and your perfection is Christ's obedience and Christ's perfection imputed to you.

What a glorious thing faith is and, you see, when that happens and you're set free in Jesus, then God's holiness and your holiness are not in opposition but then Christ's holiness becomes a pattern. You're saved by grace, you're definitively holy, but now you want to be in your condition more holy and so you see Christ as your pattern for holiness, you see Christ as the perfect image of God's holiness, and you beg of him, you beg of him to make you more like him. And Paul tells us over and over again, doesn't he, how the Holy Spirit does that. He helps you to put off the old man, the old nature, and to put on the new, and to clothe yourself with the armor of the Christian warfare in Ephesians 6:10 through 20, and to go out and to do battle and to grow in sanctification through Jesus. So when you're saved, your state of holiness is conferred upon you but your condition must be pursued. There must be a progressive dying to self and a living unto God. That's why the Westminster Confession of Faith put it this way, "Sanctification is the work of God's free grace whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin and to live unto righteousness."

So there are four important truths we need to glean from this before we close. The first is this: being holy like our holy God, being sanctified is a work of God's free undeserved grace. Christ Jesus is not only our justification, 1 Corinthians 1:30, but the text goes on to say he's our sanctification and our total redemption. Our sanctification happens in and through Jesus by his Spirit in us, the Spirit taking the word, revealing the things of Christ and making us more like him. So we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure. So without the gracious indwelling of the Spirit taking the things of Christ and revealing them to us, we would never be able to sanctify ourselves.

So God is a God of total salvation by his amazing grace. Secondly, sanctification is essential for our renewal after God's image. In our fall, we defaced and defiled God's image. In our sanctification, God reverses the effects of the fall and he renews us that we might reflect him in this world. So holiness must be an inward thing that must spill outward. It must extend to all of our life. That's why Paul said to the Thessalonians, "I pray, God, that your whole spirit, your whole soul, your whole body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Sanctification is a whole life commitment, a whole life, "Here am I, send me," commitment to live God-ward and to set all things apart for the Lordship of Jesus Christ despite all my struggles with ongoing indwelling sin.

And third, say the Puritan divines in this wonderful answer, the Westminster Standard, my sanctification is worked out in daily life in the holy war of dying unto sin, that's called mortification, killing sin, and living or being animated unto righteousness, that's called vivification. So again listen to the definition: sanctification is the work of God's free grace, that's number 1, whereby we are renewed in the whole image after the whole man after the image of God, that's number 2, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, mortification, and live unto righteousness, vivification. So there's a warfare that goes on in the believer's life, all his life, an intense warfare. Either we strike a deadly blow to sin or sin will destroy us. It's as John Owen put it, be killing sin or sin will be killing you.

So we must not only seek to put carnality and worldliness to death, we must also seek to do the will of God from the heart, to live a life of sanctification. So if you're a Christian, God is working in you to make you more like himself and the more you become like him, the more sensitized your conscience will be to sin, the more you will hate sin, the more you will cry out with Paul, "O wretched man that I am, who should deliver me from this body of death!" but the more you also cry out, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord who gives me the grace I need to kill sin and to reflect in this world the moral beauty of holiness that is in God."

So the more you live the Christian life by the grace of the Holy Spirit, the more the words, "Be ye holy for I am holy," do not terrify us but encourage us, and that's my fourth point, encourage us to use the spiritual disciplines that God provides to make us holy: his Bible, the reading of it, the meditating upon it, the prayer, spiritual fellowship with those around us, sound literature to stir our souls, evangelizing others also to stir us up in the things of God. All of these disciplines and more are to help us to grow in holiness, to honor this majestic, moral, holy God.

So what's the conclusion of all of this? Well, the conclusion is fear the holy one with a childlike fear, like that dirty boy brought in from the street. "I am unclean, O Lord," like Isaiah, but brought in through Christ into the presence of the holy God, "I want to fear him." David prayed, "In thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple." Proverbs 9 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the holy one is understanding." Fearing God. Fearing God means that you live all of life in the presence of God with a childlike fear.

John Murray describes the fear of God as the controlling sense in one's life of the majesty and the holiness of God. Fearing God in this sense does not mean being scared of God, it means reverencing him, honoring him, bowing low in his presence, loving him. It means that when we do sin, we regret it and we can go right back to him for forgiveness. It means we live our lives in the face of God. It means that we fear the smiles of God more than those of men, and the frowns of God more than those of men. It means what pleases him or displeases him begins to outweigh all other considerations in our life. So while carnal and slavish fear drives us away from the things we fear, childlike fear draws us to the God we fear, it attracts us to him. Isaiah 8, two chapters after our text says this, "Sanctify the Lord of Hosts himself. Let him be your fear and he shall be for you a sanctuary." Do you get it? If you fear him with a childlike fear, you reverence him, you adore him, you'll be brought into the sanctuary of worship and you'll worship him forever.

Cultivate by the grace of the Spirit this reverential fear of God in your life through the spiritual disciplines. Is your worship sluggish? Is your obedience halfhearted? Do you find yourself easily distracted by worldly desires, anxieties? Have you shrunk back from opportunities to speak up as a witness for the Lord? Go back to the Lord. Say with the psalmist, Psalm 86:11, "Unite my heart to fear thy holy name." Maybe there's no prayer the Lord delights in more than that one and no prayer that produces more happiness than that one because, you see, happiness is never found by searching for happiness. Never, never, never. Happiness is only found as a byproduct of holiness. "Happy is the man who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God." Amen.

Great God of heaven, holy majestic God, God of holiness who makes us holy and brings us to fear thy name with childlike fear, draw us, Lord Jesus, into the presence of the Father, trusting thee alone for salvation. Give us access, give us communion, give us holiness in the presence of the holy God and bless us with a sense of thy august majesty and thy moral perfection so that we may bow like Isaiah low in worship, but also may be of a ready mind to say, "Here am I. Send me." In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.