

SUMMARY

God's Holiness cannot be underestimated or underemphasized. This (RE)Cap installment will not be an attempt to consider God's Holiness, but instead thoughts on why reconsidering His Holiness is imperative.

It is a mistake to see God's love as the foundation of Who He is, for God's Holiness is the foundation. Misplacing these two results in a theology very different than His. Compare these two viewpoints:

God's Foundational attribute is love, followed by His Holiness: God intends me to worship Him for His love, to become increasingly loving, and I will escape Hell as a receiver of Christ's standing in love before God. It is through His Holiness that He will bring me to this outcome.

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At our last meeting, we discussed the Author's approach to God's Holiness, and found his treatment lacking. This month, rather than backfilling his thoughts, let's consider this Bedrock Issue of God and His Person.

KEY POINTS

A thought about God's Glory

If on a warm summer's day, perhaps we could consider that the searing nuclear source of the Sun is like Father God, and the warmth and the Sun's effect is like the Holy Ghost. The One who offers sunscreen, sunglasses through which we may look safely into the Sun, Who explains the Sun to us and shields us from the destroying radiation if we were to stand right in front of it – is Jesus.

We rightly enjoy the warmth of the Sun and the good it brings. We rightly embrace the loving offer of Jesus and all of the priceless and incredible benefits He offers. What of our pursuit, recognition, worship of God's Holiness? God's Glory, His Holiness, is the consuming force behind all things seen and unseen, proceeding and outlasting Creation. If Holiness is central to His Person, how do our priorities compare? What if we ask to enjoy the warmth but not the Sun? What if we focus on the sunglasses or the benefits, but not the Sun? The warming effect, our Friend Jesus, the Sun in the sky – all are to be taken together. Fixating on one at the expense of the Whole is our loss, and it is not what He expects from us.

God is Holy

How much human effort has gone into considering and writing about God's Holiness? Any honest treatment on an attribute of God demands volumes of thought. In fact, as vast as God is, it can be argued that our efforts to capture a full understanding will fail, as we are mere dust, mere fallen creatures veiled from seeing Him.

“For now we see in a mirror, **dimly**, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.” (1 Cor 13.12)

Yet in an effort to understand – which He endorses us to undertake – consider John Piper's definition:

God's holiness is His infinite value as the absolutely unique, morally perfect, permanent Person that He is and Who by grace made Himself accessible — His infinite value as the absolutely unique, morally perfect, permanent Person that He is.

Jesus was sent to us as one of us, that we might grasp the enormity of God through a Person Who took on our form. Yet even the God-Human Jesus revealed the brilliance of His Holiness on the Mount as Peter, John and James looked on:

As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening. // But Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep; and when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men who stood with Him. (Luke 29.29, 32)

God's greatest Attribute

God's expression of love is the greatest aspect we currently see, in Christ. According to His Word however, this is not His greatest attribute, but it must be His Holiness – the ultimate seat of His Person. Consider John's reaction to Christ's revealing Himself in John's vision.

And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I *am* He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.” (Rev 1.17-19)

John's reaction is not to Jesus' love, but to His Holiness. Also, consider the four living creatures attending to Father's Throne, who say "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!" (Rev 4.8), and, the twenty-four Elders seated around His Throne, who John observed "And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God". (Rev 11.16) Jesus shows us the God Who is Love, but this Message of love is built upon the truth that His Love could not be perfect without His underlying Holiness.

Yes, His love is most excellent. Yet, we err if we conclude His love is the center of the God we are to pursue.

Or do you presume upon the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? (Rom 2.4)

He calls us to repentance to His Holiness. The reason to trust His Person is His Holiness. His intent, His ability, His guidance, His grace, His Son, His Salvation, His promises, even His love – all of these rely and rest upon His Holiness.

We are His Workmanship. He trains us into Holiness.

As God values the prayers of the Saints, Peter tells us our adherence to His command to be Holy effects His hearing of our prayers. And what of our growth in submission to His Holiness? When do we often find ourselves calling out the most to Him? Christians are pitched into learning to navigate a relentless struggle between our nature of sin and His demand of holiness. Don't we each soon forget God when we are at ease, then cry to Him again when need arises again?

Remove falsehood and lies far from me; Give me neither poverty nor riches – Feed me with the food allotted to me; lest I be full and deny You, and say, "Who is the Lord?" Or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God. (Prov 30.8-10)

If this is true – that we forget God, and that He intends to continue our training in holiness until our time here is done – can we deny His allowance of a steady diet of new challenges specifically tailored to address where He sees we need to grow in Holiness? We have an endless need to grow in holiness and reverence. Yet our pride, our misconceptions of Him, our fears, our wrong use of reliance upon ourselves and others and objects – all of these He commands against. Our better grasp of His Holiness offers answers to all of these sins. As He sees fit, He crushes and He uplifts – all under His Holy Throttle – to press out our sin and extract the wine of Holy Worship. We cannot afford to not grasp His Holiness, and fortunately, He will not allow it.

We tend to learn more of God's Character when we are pressed into trials that compel us to turn to Him for relief. Our desire for rescue brings us to consider our sin and His response. His response deepens our understanding of His Character and value. This better understanding drives our worship further as we realize His Holiness, love and care.

And what is promised to those who overcome, who succumb to the training and overcome sin, embracing holiness?

To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God. (Rev 2.7)

He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death. (Rev 2.11)

To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it. (Rev 2.17)

And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations (Rev 2.26)

He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. (Rev 3.5)

He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name. (Rev 3.12)

He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. (Rev 21.7)

And this is rooted in pursuing Him and learning holiness through the direction of His Word.

Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you today; and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you today, to go after other gods which you have not known. (**Duet 11.26-28**)

Shall we sin, neglecting Holiness, so that grace and love abounds?

God loves us, and we are invited to flee to Him and His rescue through Jesus. Jesus' offer and Work is the means to the end – our journey does not end at the Cross, but instead begins the road to holiness, the road to overcoming sin, free of condemnation for our mistakes and disobedience. He beckons us first to the Cross, and next He says 'Follow Me.'

To loosely quote Spurgeon: Are we no longer accountable to His Standards of Holiness? We under Christ are no longer under His Law, but under grace (Rom 6.13). Jesus said not a jot or tittle would pass away, so the Law remains – but for what? Under the Blood, the punishment for disobedience – death – is quenched, but not the command to follow it, nor the benefits that obedience to Holiness brings. The Law reflecting His Holiness has been shifted from the outside of our rebellious hearts and moved, written on a new heart of flesh desiring to follow Him. The Law is there to become instilled, soaked through, to increasingly

become the controlling factor in the believer's heart. It is His living command, the right road to a Holy life. The promise from our Holy Guide 'involves lifelong security: Salvation at once, guidance unto our last hour, and then endless blessedness'.

This affects how we view, approach, respond to, and pursue God

Beware of simply making God's kindness to us as the seat of our Worship, for this aspect of Him is not the source of Who He is. True, this is an essential part of Him, but it is fully and absolutely His Holiness that exceeds all else. The Apostle John, who dwells on God's love extensively, first confirmed of His Holiness, upon which he built his Epistles. For if we rest finally on God's love, and mistake it for His final and defining thought towards us, where will we be when He rightly decides to correct us? Will we, in the worst of experience, question Him and Who He is? Will we question His love, even His existence, if we conclude the outcome He conducts is not loving? Yet, if we conclude His outcome is Holy, we stand on firm ground. Consider Job and how he settled this issue, following his great loss – he praised God for His Holiness, and as that was the unquestionable basis of his worship, Job was clear to give thanks to God for both giving and for taking away. Job valued His Holiness.

“The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord.” In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong. (Job 1.21a-22)

This also affects our stance on the teachings and Worship music we sit under. Are we fed a constant diet of His kind treatment towards us, or are we exposed to a Biblical proportion of the High Church sort, of His Glory, Honor, Holiness? Singing week after week about our woes and how He loves us is a poor nutrient by itself. But including the right portion of His unquestionable worth, glory, majesty keeps us in a right posture towards the unseeable, otherwise unapproachable God. It is then, knowing more of our utter lowliness, that we can rightly value Christ in His bridging this incredible gap.

Jesus left a greater position to stoop down and become flesh. Yes, His Labor at Calvary was magnificent, His Work pure and sufficient. It was out of the vault of Father's Love and Glory that Jesus was sent to us on loan.

Consider too, Jesus' appearance was normal and typical, **“He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him, and no beauty that we should desire Him.” (Isa 53.2a)** Yet at the Transfiguration on the Mount, he allowed His burning Glory – His Holiness as God – to be seen. Jesus revealed the core of the true God, a Holy Glory otherwise unbearable without Jesus as our Shield and Reconciliation to the Holy God.

He certainly accomplished the utmost more than any son of man could, because none of us could ever qualify as the sinless Lamb nor bear the burden of the Cross. However, this gargantuan Love cannot be God's greatest attribute. It must be what undergirded His ability to carry out this Task – it must be first His Holiness.

God shows us a Holy God first, followed by holy Love:

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”³⁷ And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.³⁸ This is the great and first commandment.³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” – **Matt 22.36-40**

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me. – **Exod 20.2-3**

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. – **Exod 20.12**

Both passages demonstrate the order of Holiness first, followed next by love. In the Ten Commandments, the first half are of the Holiness of God, the second half of loving others.

The Pendulum Swings?

Many of us have been exposed to ‘Fire and Brimstone’ ministers who almost exclusively focus on God’s Wrath (attached to His Holiness) and the need to repent. Perhaps we’ve also been exposed to the ‘Love and Grace’ ministers who almost exclusively focus on forgiveness and peace (attached to His Love). For those who have experienced a lopsided diet of either, predictable problems arise – that God is impossible to satisfy and I will likely be lost (heavy on Holiness), or, God winks at my sin and has no expectations whatsoever (heavy on Love). In fact, both halves have truth in God’s character, actions and intent. But of course, one half of the ingredients won’t make a cake. A Biblically proportioned view of His Holiness – expressed in Love – underlies the entirety of His Word to us.

The obvious solution is a clear representation of the whole truth, as God tells it. Ministries that have taken this tact have predictably flourished. Sounds simple, doesn’t it?

But it’s not. The Heart is tricky (The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it?– **Jer 17.9**); Accordingly, our motives and understanding are flawed (Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. – **Prov 3.5**); It is therefore easy to misrepresent God, Who holds leaders to a high standard (Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. – **Jas 3.1-2**), and Who takes the issue very seriously (For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. – **Rev 21.18-19**)

Coming off of the recent swing of 'Fire and Brimstone', it is argued that we've fled to the 'Love and Grace' side to appeal to an injured or perhaps more stiff-necked public. Yet, in considering how Jesus would approach this question, we can conclude He would take it on the whole, straight down the middle. As we read the Gospels, we see that is exactly what He did. Yes, He was killed for it, but none the less, He accepted Father's driving Holiness to be tantamount, and refused to swerve to the left or the right. Father called this good and accepted His Work.

Thanks and praise to a Holy God, Who loves us relentlessly.