

Topic 18. The Holiness of God

“Holy, holy, holy is Jehovah of hosts” (Isa. 6:3); “You only are holy” (Rev. 15:4)

Unit 2. The Holiness of God

Introduction: The biblical testimony to God’s holiness¹ commends the following categories of thought: First, Scripture defines *the concept* of God’s holiness.² Second, it unfolds *its display* in creation, special revelation, redemption, and damnation.³ Third, it overtly faces the *seeming contradictions* associated with it.⁴ Fourth, it commends its *practical application* to experiential religion.⁵ Charnock expounds holiness similarly.⁶ He frames his exposition with an epitomizing text.⁷ In his introduction he stresses its preeminence.⁸ Then he expounds its “nature.” He identifies six distinguishing properties.⁹ Next he unfolds its “demonstration”¹⁰ and explains its “relations” to sin: “the purity of his nature in all his acts about sin.”¹¹ Finally, he applies its practical “uses.”¹²

I. The Concept of God’s Holiness

Introduction: definition of God’s holiness

From my study of the biblical testimony I offer the following definition of God’s holiness:

God’s holiness is: from eternity, his eternal moral purity, which is his supreme separateness and immaculateness; upon creation, his moral supremacy, which separates him from and exalts him above all creatures and so-called gods; and upon sin, his absolute impeccability, which separates him from and sets him vehemently against all sin.

This definition specifies God’s *absolute* holiness in eternity and two *relational* aspects of his holiness, his moral supremacy in relation to creation and absolute impeccability in relation to sin. Although Berkhof defines majesty holiness more generally, he confirms these two relational aspects of divine holiness:¹³

The Scriptural idea of holiness then is twofold. In its original sense it denotes that He is absolutely distinct from all His creatures, and is exalted above them in infinite majesty. So understood, the holiness of God is one of His transcendental attributes, and is sometimes spoken of as His central or supreme perfection . . . It may be called the majesty-holiness of God, and is referred to in such passages as Ex.15:11; 1 Sam.2:2; Isa.57:15; Hos.11:9.

But the holiness of God also has a specific ethical or moral aspect in Scripture, and it is with this aspect of it that we are more directly concerned. The ethical idea of the divine holiness may not be disassociated from the idea of God’s majesty-holiness . . . The fundamental idea of the ethical holiness of God is also that of separation, but in this case, it is separation from moral evil or sin. In virtue of His holiness, God can have no communion with sin, Job 34:10; Hab. 1:13 . . . But the idea of ethical holiness is not merely negative (separation from sin); it also has a positive content, namely,

¹ I catalogue the use of the major biblical terms for God’s holiness in an appendix to this topic.

² Exod. 15:11; Josh. 24:19; 1 Sam. 2:2; Job 4:17; Pss. 5:4, 111:9; Isa. 40:25; Hab. 1:13; 2 Cor. 6:16-7:1; Heb. 7:26; James 1:13; Rev. 15:4

³ Lev. 20:26; 2 Kings 19:22; Pss. 5:4-6, 12:6, 19:8, 89:35, 111:9; Isa. 6:3; Hab. 1:13; Luke 1:49; Rom. 7:12; Eph. 4:24; Heb. 12:10; Rev. 6:10

⁴ Ezek. 36:20-22, 39:7; Hab. 1:13

⁵ Lev. 19:2; Josh. 24:19; 1 Sam. 6:20; Pss. 33:21, 99:3, 5, 9, 106:47; Isa. 6:3, 57:15; Eph. 4:24; James 1:13; 1 Pet. 1:15-16; 1 John 3:3; Rev. 6:10, 15:4

⁶ Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, 446-532

⁷ *Exod. 15:11*: Who is like unto you, O Jehovah, among the gods? Who is like unto you, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?

⁸ Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, 446-452

⁹ *Ibid.*, 452-461

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 461-473

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 473-500

¹² *Ibid.*, 501-532

¹³ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 73-74

that of moral excellence or ethical perfection. If man reacts to God's majestic holiness with a feeling of utter insignificance and awe, his reaction to the ethical holiness reveals itself in a sense of impurity, a consciousness of sin, Isa. 6:5 . . . The ethical holiness of God may be defined as *that perfection of God, in virtue of which He eternally wills and maintains His own moral excellence, abhors sin, and demands purity in His moral creatures.*"

I now expound and support God's eternal holiness, moral supremacy and absolute impeccability.

A. God's Eternal Holiness: his supreme separateness and immaculateness

God's holiness exists before the creation of the universe or the advent of sin. God's *eternal moral purity* is his "*supreme separateness and immaculateness.*" Divine holiness is an absolute attribute, essential to God's very being. If God were not holy, he would not be God. God always was supremely separate and immaculate. Charnock confirms that God's supreme moral purity is eternal:¹⁴

The holiness of God *negatively* is a perfect . . . freedom from all evil. As we call gold pure that is not imbedded by any dross, and that garment clean that is free from any spot, so the nature of God is estranged from all shadow of evil, all imaginable contagion. *Positively*, it is the rectitude or integrity of the divine nature . . . He is essentially and necessarily holy. It is the essential glory of his nature. His holiness is as necessary as his being, as necessary as his omniscience. As he cannot but know what is right, so he cannot but do what is just . . . He is as necessarily holy as he is necessarily God; as necessarily without sin as without change. As he was God from eternity, so he was holy from eternity.

God's *supreme separateness* is the reality behind ceremonial rituals that sanctify various persons and inanimate objects. When something is ceremonially "sanctified," it is separated from similar things and common use and consecrated especially to God. It is dedicated to a solely religious use and especially devoted to God's honor and glory. Similarly, his "supreme separateness" is his total dedication to his own glory, his complete devotion to his own sovereign designs. God's *eternal immaculateness* is his unalloyed moral purity, the total absence of moral contamination. Thus, it summarily embraces all his virtues. Separateness from all moral contamination is separateness from malice, injustice, and dishonesty. In positive terms, separateness from malice is goodness or love; separateness from injustice is justice; and separateness from dishonesty is faithfulness. Scripture affirms this by closely associating God's holiness with his justice¹⁵ and faithfulness.¹⁶ Boyce confirms this feature of God's holiness:¹⁷

Holiness is, however, not a distinctive attribute, but rather the combination of all these [moral] attributes. We may suppose a being in whom there may be love without justice, or truth, or any one of these to the exclusion of the other two; but no being can be holy, who does not combine in himself all of these, and all other moral perfections . . . It is evident, therefore, that holiness is the sum of all excellence and the combination of all the attributes which constitute perfection of character.

Thus, in eternity God's holiness consisted in his complete dedication to his own glory and in his infinite moral perfection. Now consider biblical support for God's eternal holiness.

*1. Isa. 57:15*¹⁸

This text explicitly connects God's holiness with his eternal existence. We considered this text when we expounded God's eternity. It literally asserts that God "abides in perpetuity." God ever was, now is, and always will be. "*Holy*" is the name of the God who now is and always was. Therefore, God now is holy and always was holy. He did not become holy only after he created. Rather he was eternally holy. Before he created the world he was morally immaculate and supremely dedicated to his own glory.

¹⁴ Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 452

¹⁵ Acts 3:14

¹⁶ Rev. 6:10

¹⁷ Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, 92-93

¹⁸ *Isa. 57:15*: For thus says the high and lofty One that inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy

2. *Rev. 16:5*¹⁹

Similarly, this text asserts that God always was holy: “who are and *who was, you Holy One.*” Further, this text identifies God’s holiness with all his moral virtue: “*You are righteous, who are and who was, you Holy One.*” The text also discloses how God displays, in history, the holiness that characterized him from eternity: “You are righteous, who are and who was, you Holy One, *because you did thus judge: for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink: they are worthy.*” God’s just punishment of sinners springs from and displays his eternal immaculateness (freedom from moral contamination) and his eternal separateness (dedication to his own purpose and glory).

B. God’s Moral Supremacy

God’s moral supremacy “separates and exalts him above all creatures and so-called gods.” God’s moral supremacy exalts him infinitely above his creatures. God always was supremely holy. After he creates a myriad of beings that are finite, temporal, mutable, dependent, and lapsable, his holiness necessarily consists in his infinite moral exaltation above all creatures. This especially pertains to every created being or thing that people worship as their god. In reference to morality God alone is inherently and infinitely immaculate. Even if there were no sin, with respect to morality God would still be infinitely separate from and exalted above his creatures. God alone has ideal moral purity that can never be improved, for it already is infinitely perfect. God alone has unoriginated moral purity. God alone has inherently immutable moral purity. His moral purity is not only impeccable but also untemptable. God alone has self-existent holiness that does not need any standard or arbiter outside himself. God alone is both its norm and its judge. In these ways only God is “holy,” morally supreme. His supreme holiness is infinite, eternal, immutable, ideal, and independent. Charnock confirms God’s moral supremacy:²⁰

God is only absolutely holy: ‘There is none holy as the Lord,’ 1 Sam. 2:2. It is the peculiar glory of his nature. As there is none good but God, so none holy but God. No creature can be essentially holy, because mutable; holiness is the substance of God, but a quality and accident in a creature. God is infinitely holy, creatures finitely holy . . . As all the wisdom, excellency, and power of the creatures, if compared with the wisdom, excellency, and power of God, is but folly, vileness, and weakness, so the highest created purity, if set in parallel with God, is but impurity and uncleanness . . . Job 25:15; ‘the heavens are not pure in his sight, and his angels he charged with folly,’ Job 4:18.

Consider with me five biblical witnesses that testify of God’s moral supremacy in relation to creation.

1. *Exod. 15:11*²¹

This text contrasts the living God with false gods: “who is like unto you, O Jehovah, among the gods?” God’s uniqueness consists in his immaculate virtue, “glorious in holiness,” and supernatural power, “fearful in praises, doing wonders.” God displays his holiness and power when he overthrows the Egyptian army. When God thus displays supreme moral purity, the sea covers his enemies (15:10) and the earth swallows them (15:12). In contrast, when he displays lovingkindness, he guides Israel to their inheritance (15:13). This powerful display of his holiness elicits praise and adoration from his people (15:11) and dread from their enemies (15:14-15). His moral opposition to sin is bound to omnipotence. What holiness demands, omnipotence supplies. Thus, sinners should fear the God of singular holiness.

2. *1 Sam. 2:2*²²

This text closely connects God’s supreme holiness with his Supreme Being: “There is none holy as the Jehovah, *for there is none besides you*, neither is there any rock like our God.” God’s unique holiness rests on his identity as the bedrock of all existence. There is none as morally immaculate as the Lord, because

¹⁹ *Rev. 16:5*: You are righteous, who are and who was, you Holy One

²⁰ Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, 453-454

²¹ *Exod. 15:11*: Who is like unto you, O Jehovah, among the gods? Who is like you, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?

²² *1 Sam. 2:2*: There is none holy as Jehovah; for there is none besides you, neither is there any rock like our God

God's moral purity is infinite, eternal, unchangeable, self-existent, and ideal. Thus, God's infinite moral perfection separates him from all created beings. This text reveals that omniscience undergirds his infinite moral purity: "Talk no more exceeding proudly, let not arrogancy come out of your mouth, for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed" (2:3). In infinite moral purity he humbles and condemns the wicked, but blesses and comforts his saints: "he will keep the feet of his holy ones; but the wicked shall be put to silence in darkness" (2:9). This display of his moral supremacy does not evoke from God's children a desire to run in dread from an unapproachable God. Rather, it produces a disposition to draw near to him with joy: "Hannah prayed, and said: My heart exults in Jehovah; my horn is exalted in Jehovah; my mouth is enlarged over my enemies; because I rejoice in your salvation. There is none holy as the Jehovah" (2:1-2).

3. *Job 4:18, 15:15, 25:5*²³

Scripture affirms that God's moral purity is infinite: "his angels he charges with folly"; "the heavens are not clean in his sight"; and, "the stars are not pure in his sight." These passages present God's absolute immaculateness in almost shocking terms. When I expounded God's ideality I observed: "This does *not* mean that either the inanimate heavens or God's ministering angels are guilty of sin, disobedience, or rebellion. Yet, not even his glorious angels or the vast heavens can compare with him. Compared to his infinitely perfect wisdom, even the wisest angels are 'foolish.' Compared to infinitely perfect being, even the spotless heavens are 'unclean,' that is, unsuitable for contact with him." Thus, these texts affirm that in relation to creation God's holiness is his supreme immaculateness.

4. *Isa. 40:25*²⁴

Scripture again contrasts the Almighty with his creatures: "to whom then will you liken me, that I should be equal to him? Says the Holy One." In this passage, Scripture reproves men who turn created things into false gods: "To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare unto him? The image, a workman has cast it" (40:18-19). It then describes God's supremacy as Master of the universe (40:21-22). Isaiah affirms that his sovereign rule renders human rulers insignificant: "that brings princes to nothing, that makes the judges of the earth as vanity" (40:23-24). This exalted Sovereign describes himself as, "the Holy One." The unequaled Holy One hates idolatry and makes human rulers into nobodies because: "all the nations are as nothing before him; they are accounted as less than nothing and vanity" (40:17). This Holy Ruler ever remains supremely devoted to his own honor and glory: "I am Jehovah, that is my name, and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images" (42:8). Thus, this text underscores that God's supreme holiness, in relation to creation, consists in his supreme devotion to his own infinite glory as the Creator and Ruler of the universe.

5. *Rev. 15:3-4*²⁵

As God alone is supremely good, even so God's holiness is supreme and unique: "only you are holy." This passage depicts the ultimate infliction of God's wrath and vengeance on sin (15:1-16:21). His vengeance stems from his supreme holiness. Thus, this passage highlights the fact that his holiness consists in his supreme opposition to sin and his resolve to avenge it. Further, God's supreme holiness elicits both fear and respect: Who shall not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name, *for* only you are holy." Thus, his holiness produces in creatures a sense of utmost helplessness and dependence. In sinners, it produces a sense of their wretchedness and decadence. Supreme holiness deflates human pride and self-righteousness. Nevertheless, God's holiness draws the righteous from every nation to bow before him in adoration and worship: "for only you are holy; *for* all the nations shall come and worship before you."

²³ *Job 4:18*: his angels he charges with folly; *15:15*: the heavens are not clean in his sight; *25:5*: the stars are not pure in his sight

²⁴ *Isa. 40:25*: To whom then will you liken me, that I should be equal to him? says the Holy One

²⁵ *Rev. 15:3-4*: they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvelous are your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are your ways, O thou King of the ages. Who shall not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? for you only are holy; for all the nations shall come and worship before you; for your righteous acts have been made manifest

In sum, these passages affirm clearly that God in reference to creatures is uniquely holy. He alone is supremely dedicated to his own glory. He alone is morally immaculate immutably and independently. Yet, nevertheless, God's moral creatures truly reflect his singular holiness and moral purity.²⁶

Conclusion: a modern view of "majesty holiness"

I conclude with a modern view of God's holiness. Some claim that his holiness in relation to creation is not a moral attribute, but rather is his transcendence, or essential deity. For example, Berkhof, says: "holiness in this sense of the word is not really a *moral* attribute . . . but is rather something which is co-extensive with, and applicable to everything that can be predicated of God."²⁷ It is true that God's supreme moral purity exalts him infinitely above his creatures. Yet Berkhof defines "majesty holiness" so generically that he eliminates its moral significance. Yet Scripture does not support severing holiness from morality. Bavinck outlines the historical development of this modern notion:

Very closely related to God's goodness is his holiness. Formerly it was defined as 'purity, free from every stain, wholly perfect and immaculate in every detail.' . . . Protestant theologians defined God's holiness in terms similar to the definition just quoted; it was said to consist in 'moral perfection, purity,' and was discussed now in connection with God's justice, then in connection with his goodness or with his veracity or wisdom. The study of the Biblical concept of holiness has gradually brought about a different view concerning the character of this attribute. At present all acknowledge the fact that the concept of 'holiness' in Old and New Testament indicates a relation of God to the world. But opinions are divided with respect to the exact character of that relation . . . Menken thought of God's condescending goodness or grace. Baudissin, however, was of the opinion that God's holiness was expressive rather of his absolute transcendence above and power over all creatures . . . Schultz . . . defines God's holiness as his consuming majesty, his unapproachability and inviolability, the infinite distance which separates him from every creature.²⁸

Now the idea of holiness becomes clear when we consider what it signifies when it is ascribed to God . . . holiness is not primarily a relation of the creature to the Creator, but vice versa . . . it pertains to God in the first place, and to the creature in a secondary sense . . . Now when the word holy is ascribed to Jehovah, it doesn't signify one definite attribute. On the contrary, God is called holy in a very general sense: in connection with every revelation which impresses man with God's exalted majesty. Holiness is synonymous with divinity, Amos 4:2.²⁹

It is true that God's holiness embraces all his moral virtues. But Amos 4:2: "the Lord Jehovah has sworn by his holiness," does not prove that holiness means "deity" rather than "moral purity." Surely we are not twisting Scripture if we take the text to mean, "the Lord Jehovah has sworn by his [moral purity]." We skate on thin ice if we read it: "has sworn by his [transcendence]." An imaginative mind could read almost any attribute into this text. Yet that is not how to conduct biblical studies. Again, some cite Hosea 11:9:³⁰ "for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of you." Yet, the fact that God identifies himself as the "Holy One" does not affirm or even imply that holiness equals deity. What it actually affirms is that the Supreme Being is unlike sinful humanity because he is *holy*, "totally dedicated to his own glory and averse to all sin." Here is the marvel. This holy God dwells in the midst of his people, not in wrath, but in compassion. In sum, I have found no compelling evidence that clearly supports, let alone demands, that God's holiness is his *deity* or *transcendence*.

Finally, it seems impossible to reconcile this new idea with these texts: "as he who called you is holy, you yourselves also be holy" (1 Pet. 1:15), or, "For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed good to

²⁶ Heb. 12:10; 1 Pet. 1:15-16

²⁷ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 73

²⁸ Bavinck, *Doctrine of God*, 209-210

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 213

³⁰ *Hos. 11:8-9*: How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? *How* shall I cast you off, Israel? How shall I make you as Admah? *How* shall I set you as Zeboiim? My heart is turned within me, my compassions are kindled together. 9 I will not execute the fierceness of my anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of you; and I will not come in wrath

them; but he for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness” (Heb. 12:10). These texts cannot possibly mean: “that we may be partakers of his [deity]” or, “as he who called you is [transcendent], you yourselves also be [transcendent].” Thus, *holiness* is *communicable*. Christians are devoted to God’s glory and separate from sinners. The glorified spirits in heaven are totally devoted to God’s glory and impeccably separate from all sin. Yet even the glorified spirits are not *transcendent*. Again, Christ says, “there is none good but one, even God.” Clearly he doesn’t mean “there is none [transcendent] but one.” Rather, he means that God alone has supreme goodness that is ideal, independent, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. Similarly, “you alone are holy,” means that God alone has supreme holiness that is ideal, independent, infinite, eternal and unchangeable. Thus, *supreme* holiness is *incommunicable*. Our definition of divine holiness must fit the *total witness* of Scripture.

C. God’s Absolute Impeccability

In relation to sin God’s holiness signifies his *absolute impeccability*: “which separates him from and sets him vehemently against all sin.” Both Charnock and Berkhof confirm this aspect of divine holiness and stress its importance. God’s infinite moral purity and supreme devotion to his own glory mandate his absolute separateness from all sin and vehement opposition to it. His holiness stands in sharp contrast with the pollution of fallen men and angels. As space emphatically displays God’s infinity, and as time emphatically displays his eternity, so also, sin emphatically displays his holiness. Consider with me the testimony of ten passages that highlight God’s absolute impeccability.

1. Josh. 24:19³¹

Joshua warns that because God is holy he stands so resolved to punish sin that sinners cannot serve him acceptably. Jehovah is devoted to his own honor and infinitely pure. Therefore, he stands vehemently opposed to sin. Their treacherous idolatry provokes his jealousy and evokes his vengeance. Therefore they “cannot serve Jehovah.” Thus, Joshua urges them to put away their foreign gods and incline their hearts to the Lord (24:23). Clearly God’s holiness consists in his separation from sin. This separation involves his indignation toward sin, his detestation of sin, and his resolve to avenge sin.

2. Job 4:17³²

This text compares men’s moral character with God’s. The ASV margin translates it: “can a mortal man be pure before his Maker.” No matter which reading we adopt, the text presents divine virtue as infinitely superior to human purity. Human purity involves purging sin from the heart: “Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?” (Prov. 20:9). Thus, divine moral purity consists in his total freedom from any tendency to sin and even from the capacity to be tempted to sin.

3. Ps. 5:4-6³³

This text presents God’s holiness by negation: “you *are not* a God that has pleasure in wickedness. Evil *shall not* sojourn with you. The arrogant *shall not stand* in your sight.” God separates from sin by banishing the wicked from his special presence. He will not fellowship with the arrogant. Because God is holy, he dwells only with humble and contrite souls (Isa. 57:15). This passage also depicts the import of God’s holiness: “You hate all the workers of iniquity. You will destroy them that speak lies. The Lord abhors the blood-thirsty and the deceitful man.” God separates from sinners because he detests them. In holiness he will punish them and “destroy” them forever in hell.

³¹ Josh. 24:19: And Joshua said unto the people, you cannot serve Jehovah; for he is a holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgression nor your sins

³² Job 4:17: Shall mortal man be more just than God? Shall a man be more pure than his Maker?

³³ Ps. 5:4-6: For you are not a God that has pleasure in wickedness: Evil shall not sojourn with you. The arrogant shall not stand in your sight: You hate all workers of iniquity. You will destroy them that speak lies: Jehovah abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man

4. *Hab. 1:13*³⁴

This text pictures God's holiness in human terms: "purer eyes." As holy men turn their eyes away from things they know they shouldn't see, so also the holy God separates himself from sin. He can't stand the sight of sin. He never looks with delight or desire at sin. He has no experiential fellowship with sin.

5. *2 Cor. 7:1*³⁵

This text relates holiness to sin. Paul exhorts Christians to strive to complete holiness. This involves cleansing ourselves from all sin, both inwardly in our souls and outwardly in our words and actions. This text does not mention divine holiness explicitly. Yet it affirms plainly that Christian holiness, which reflects divine holiness, consists in separation from all sin.

6. *Eph. 4:24*³⁶

This text affirms explicitly that Christian holiness reflects divine holiness. God re-created the Christian morally in his image: "the new man, that *after God has been created in righteousness and holiness of truth.*" Even as Christian holiness consists in separation from sin, so also does divine holiness. Scripture explicitly confirms this: "For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed good to them; but he for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness" (Heb. 12:10). When he conforms us to his holiness, we partake in his moral virtue. This virtue consists in his dedication to his own glory and separateness from sin. In glory God will conform every Christian to his holiness impeccably and permanently.

7. *Heb. 7:26*³⁷

This text declares that Christ's suitability as high priest stems from his holiness and his exaltation. The writer amplifies the features of divine holiness: "guileless," "undefiled," and "separated from sinners." Holiness is the absence of guile and defilement. It is separation from sinners. Thus, in relation to sin, holiness is freedom from sin's pollution and separation from those who live in sin and delight in it.

8. *James 1:13*³⁸

This text addresses divine holiness implicitly. God's separation from sin is so complete he cannot even be tempted or induced to sin. Thus, God's supreme holiness involves total detachment from moral evil.

9. *1 Pet. 1:15-16*³⁹

Again, this text presents God's holiness as the pattern for Christian holiness. Clearly, God's holiness is his moral purity. God stands devoted to his own glory in the midst of a wicked world that despises him. So also, Christians should be devoted to live for God's glory. God is morally separate from this wicked world. So also, his spiritual children must avoid the corrupting influence of sinners.

10. *1 John 3:3*⁴⁰

This text also stresses the correspondence between Christian moral purity and God's. Christians that hope to see Christ and be like him purify themselves from every stain of our remaining sin. Our immaculate God

³⁴ *Hab. 1:13*: You that are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and that can not look on perverseness, why do you look upon them that deal treacherously, and hold your peace when the wicked swallows up the man that is more righteous than he?

³⁵ *2 Cor. 6:16-7:1*: And what agreement has a temple of God with idols? for we are a temple of the living God; even as God said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be to you a Father, and you shall be to me sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God

³⁶ *Eph. 4:24*: and put on the new man, that after God has been created in righteousness and holiness of truth

³⁷ *Heb. 7:26*: For such a high priest became us, holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens

³⁸ *James 1:13*: Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God can not be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no man

³⁹ *1 Pet. 1:15-16*: but like as he who called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living; because it is written, You shall be holy; for I am holy

⁴⁰ *1 John 3:3*: And every one that has this hope set on him purifies himself, even as he is pure

and Savior is the pattern of our holiness. When we see him, we too will be impeccably dedicated to God's honor and absolutely free of all moral contamination.

Conclusion: God's holiness is his eternal moral purity, moral supremacy, and absolute impeccability. God always was holy, supremely devoted to his own glory and infinitely immaculate. In relation to creatures, his holiness consists in his *moral supremacy*. God alone has moral purity that is infinite, eternal, unchangeable, self-existent, and ideal. In relation to sinners, God's moral purity and devotion to his own glory consist in his separateness from and opposition to all sin. I now collate biblical support:

God's holiness is: from eternity, his eternal moral purity, which is his supreme separateness and immaculateness;¹ upon creation, his moral supremacy, which separates him from and exalts him above all creatures and so-called gods;² and upon sin, his absolute impeccability, which separates him from and sets him vehemently against all sin.³

1. Isa. 57:15; Hab. 1:9; Rev. 16:5

2. Exod. 15:11; 1 Sam. 2:2; Job 4:18, 15:15, 25:5; Isa. 40:25; Rev. 15:4

3. Josh. 24:19; Job 4:17; Ps. 5:4-6; Hab. 1:13; 2 Cor. 6:16-7:1; Eph. 4:24; Heb. 7:26, 12:10; James 1:13; 1 Pet. 1:15, 16; 1 John 3:3

II. The Manifold Display of God's Holiness

Concerning this display I recommend Charnock and Gill. Charnock unfolds God's holiness as Creator, Lawgiver, and Redeemer.⁴¹ Gill shows how each Person of the Trinity displays God's holiness.⁴² All God's works display his moral purity and virtue.⁴³ I develop its display in *creation*, in *special revelation*, in *redemption* from Egypt and from sin, and in *damnation*.

A. The Display of God's Holiness in Creation

When God created the universe and all things in it, he displayed his moral purity in his creative work. Scripture features this display in his entire creation, in his angels, and in man.

1. All creation displays God's holiness.⁴⁴

God creates everything for his own glory: "for of him, and through him, and *unto him* are all things" (Rom. 11:36). Therefore, the purpose of all creation displays divine holiness. It displays his ultimate devotion to his own glory. This calls on every moral being to praise their holy Creator.⁴⁵

2. The creation of angels displays God's holiness.

The creation of angels displays God's moral purity.⁴⁶ Originally every angel was morally pure. Even the devil once reflected God's moral purity. Angels that did not sin reflect the spotless moral purity of God.⁴⁷ The good angels ever remain totally dedicated to God's glory and totally free from all sin.

3. The creation of man displays God's holiness.

The creation of man, God's image, preeminently displays God's holiness. Angels have no material body. They are invisible. God created man as his living visible representation: "in the image of God made he him" (Gen. 1:27). Adam heart was preeminently devoted to God's glory and morally immaculate. Further, man is visible. Thus, Adam and Eve displayed God's holiness visibly. Further, as God patterned the

⁴¹ Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 461-473

⁴² Gill, *Body of Divinity*, 1:151-153

⁴³ *Ps. 145:17: Jehovah is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.*

⁴⁴ *Isa. 6:3: And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory*

⁴⁵ *Rev. 4:8-10: . . . Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God the almighty, who was and who is and who is to come . . . the four and twenty elders . . . shall worship . . . saying, You are worthy, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power, for you did create all things, and because of your will they were and were created*

⁴⁶ *Mark 8:38: he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels (also: Acts 10:22; Rev. 14:10)*

⁴⁷ 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6

original humanity after himself, so also his new creation of man restores what sin defaced. Christians, as God's new creation, reflect God's commitment to his own glory and separateness from sin.⁴⁸

B. The Display of God's Holiness in Special Revelation

Special revelation especially displays God's holiness in Scripture, in God's law, and in his gospel.

1. Scripture displays God's holiness.

Scripture is preeminently dedicated to God's glory and totally free from moral contamination.⁴⁹ The authors of Old⁵⁰ and New⁵¹ Testaments are set apart for God's glory. Every word of Scripture is pure truth.⁵² Every word is absolutely reliable, completely without error, and incapable of falsehood. Holy Scripture enlightens about living by faith for God's honor and glory.⁵³

2. God's law, the Decalogue, displays God's holiness

God's moral law, the Decalogue, defines the duty all mankind. It displays his supreme purity. It is totally dedicated his glory and absolutely opposed to all sin.⁵⁴ It gives light in a world darkened by sin.⁵⁵

3. God's gospel displays God's holiness.

Similarly, God's gospel defines God's revealed will concerning salvation from sin. Peter warns about those who turn from its "holy" requirement.⁵⁶ It is a holy gospel because it is devoted completely to God's glory and opposed to all sin.

C. The Display of God's Holiness in Redemption from Egypt

Scripture highlights five ways that the redemption of Hebrew Israel displays his holiness: his covenant commitment to them, their separation from the nations, his special presence with them, his jealousy over their idolatry, and their restoration from captivity.

1. God's covenant commitment to Hebrew Israel displays his holiness.

God's sworn commitment to Abraham and his posterity is holy.⁵⁷ It is wholly dedicated to God's glory. When he redeemed Israel from Egypt and brought them to the land of Canaan, he fulfilled this holy promise.⁵⁸ He revealed his holy name.⁵⁹ Thus, his covenant promises to Abraham and his posterity, framed in love and fulfilled in faithfulness, display God's supreme dedication to his own glory.

2. God's separation of Hebrew Israel from the nations displays his holiness.

God displays his holiness in his unique relationship with his people. The holy God is separate from the world of sinners. He sets his people apart from sinful nations and dedicates Israel supremely to his own

⁴⁸ *Eph. 4:24*: and put on the new man, that after God has been created in righteousness and holiness of truth

⁴⁹ *Rom. 1:2*: the holy scriptures

⁵⁰ *Luke 1:70*: As he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began (also: *Acts 3:21*; *2 Pet. 1:21*; *Rev. 18:20, 22:6*)

⁵¹ *Eph. 3:5*: Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit

⁵² *Ps. 12:6*: The words of Jehovah are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace on the earth, purified seven times

⁵³ *2 Tim. 3:15*: And that from a child you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

⁵⁴ *Rom. 7:12*: the law is holy, and the commandment holy, righteous, and good.

⁵⁵ *Ps. 19:8*: the commandment of Jehovah is pure, enlightening the eyes

⁵⁶ *2 Pet. 2:20-21*: For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the last state is become worse with them than the first. 21 For it were better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment delivered unto them

⁵⁷ *Luke 1:72-73*: To perform the mercy *promised* to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; the oath that he swore to Abraham our father

⁵⁸ *Ps. 105:42*: For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham his servant.

⁵⁹ *Ps. 111:9*: He has sent redemption unto his people; he has commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his name

glory as his special possession.⁶⁰ Thus he makes them “holy” unto himself. He joins himself in covenant loyalty to them alone. Therefore, he calls them to serve him alone. He calls them to a lifestyle separate from the ways of wicked nations.⁶¹ He even calls them to be separate from sinners in their dress and diet.⁶² Thus, he displays his separateness from sinners and dedication to his own glory.

3. *God’s special presence with Hebrew Israel displays his holiness*

In grace, mercy, and forbearance the holy God manifests his special presence with his people.⁶³ The place of his special presence is his temple, Zion. His temple is holy. It excludes the wicked nations.⁶⁴ Those that walk uprightly abide there.⁶⁵ It is dedicated to his glory. There his people bless and worship him.⁶⁶ Thus, his holy temple displays his holiness.⁶⁷ It is a tremendous blessing to witness this profound display.⁶⁸ It satisfies his people spiritually and brings them great joy.⁶⁹

4. *God’s jealousy over idolatry in Hebrew Israel displays his holiness*

God displays his holiness by his opposition to the idolatry and immorality of his people.⁷⁰ Idolatry provokes the jealousy of the holy God who stands vehemently opposed to all sin. His people cannot serve both Jehovah and other gods because the Lord is wholly dedicated to his own glory. In the wilderness he dwells outside the camp so that he will not consume them for rebellion and unbelief. When they profane his worship, in his jealousy he consumes them in their sin.⁷¹ This elicits fear and awe. Therefore, God’s holiness calls his people to worship him alone, only in the manner he prescribes in his Word.

5. *God’s restoration of Hebrew Israel from captivity displays his holiness*

God displays his holiness when delivers a remnant of his people from captivity.⁷² Their restoration displays “his jealousy for his holy name.” He frees them from the oppression of the wicked. This displays his strong opposition to sin. Further, he brings his people back to Canaan in fulfillment of his promise to David to

⁶⁰ *Lev. 20:26*: And you shall be holy unto me: for I, Jehovah, am holy, and have set you apart from the peoples, that you should be mine

⁶¹ *Lev. 19:2*: Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, You shall be holy: for I Jehovah your God *am* holy

⁶² *Lev. 11:44-45*: For I am Jehovah your God: sanctify yourselves therefore, and you be holy; for I am holy: neither shall you defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that moves upon the earth. For I am Jehovah that brought you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: you shall therefore be holy, for I am holy

⁶³ *Ps. 5:7*: But as for me, I will come *into* your house in the multitude of your mercy: *and* in your fear will I worship toward your holy temple

⁶⁴ *Ps. 24:3*: Who shall ascend into the hill of Jehovah? or who shall stand in his holy place? 4 He that has clean hands, and a pure heart; who has not lifted up his soul unto falsehood, and has not sworn deceitfully.

⁶⁵ *Ps. 15:1-2*: A Psalm of David. Jehovah, who shall abide in your tabernacle? Who shall dwell in your holy hill? 2 He that walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart

⁶⁶ *Ps. 138:2*: I will worship toward your holy temple, and praise your name for your lovingkindness and for your truth: for you have magnified your word above all your name

⁶⁷ *Ps. 99:9*: Exalt Jehovah our God, and worship at his holy hill; for Jehovah our God *is* holy.

⁶⁸ *Ps. 65:4*: Blessed *is the man whom* you choose, and cause to approach *unto you, that* he may dwell in your courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, *even* of your holy temple

⁶⁹ *Ps. 46:4*: *There is* a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy *place* of the tabernacles of the most High.

⁷⁰ *Josh. 24:19*: And Joshua said unto the people, you cannot serve Jehovah; for he is a holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgression nor your sins

⁷¹ *I Sam. 6:19-20*: And he smote of the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of Jehovah, he smote of the people seventy men, *and* fifty thousand men; and the people mourned, because Jehovah had smitten the people with a great slaughter. 20 And the men of Beth-shemesh said, Who is able to stand before Jehovah, this holy God?

⁷² *Ezek. 39:25*: Therefore, thus says the Lord Jehovah: Now I will bring back the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for my holy name.

perpetuate his throne.⁷³ When he keeps his word, he displays his dedication to his own purposes and glory. He displays his moral purity and virtue: “once I have sworn *by my holiness*: I will not lie unto David.” This text confirms that when God swears by his holiness, he swears by his moral purity, in virtue of which he cannot and will not lie. This affords great comfort and hope to his people. It elicits joyful adoration and praise (Ps. 106:47).⁷⁴

D. The Display of God’s Holiness in Redemption from Sin

We consider this display in the accomplishment, application, and completion of redemption.

1. The accomplishment of redemption from sin displays God’s holiness.

The immaculate incarnation of the Son displays God’s moral purity and devotion to his own honor and glory.⁷⁵ The sinless life of Christ displays divine holiness.⁷⁶ When God pours out his wrath upon Christ on the cross to atone for sin, Christ enters the “holy place.”⁷⁷ This displays, to the uttermost, God’s absolute devotion to his own honor and glory and his vehement opposition to sin.

2. The application of redemption from sin displays God’s holiness.

God applies redemption from sin both individually in the Christian life and corporately in the Christian church. He displays his holiness when he renews, fellowships with, and preserves his people in Christ.

a. God’s moral renewal of his people in Christ displays his holiness

The Christian life is a “holy calling.” It is a life of dedication to God’s glory and separateness from sin.⁷⁸ Thus, God displays his holiness in the moral renewal of Christians at conversion⁷⁹ and throughout the Christian life.⁸⁰ This calls us to imitate God’s moral purity.⁸¹ It calls us to strive for nothing less than the sinless perfection of Christ.⁸² It calls us to a life of wholehearted consecration to God.⁸³ In this way Christians display God’s dedication to his own glory and his aversion to all sin. Further, God morally renews the entire society of his people so that they are a holy priesthood⁸⁴ and spiritual nation.⁸⁵ In virtue of this corporate renewal Christian churches also display God’s holiness. They “show forth the excellences of him who called” them “out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

b. God’s fellowship with his people in Christ displays his holiness

⁷³ Ps. 89:34-6: My covenant I will not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once I have sworn by my holiness: I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before me

⁷⁴ Ps. 106:47: Save us, O Jehovah our God, and gather us from among the nations, to give thanks unto your holy name, and to triumph in your praise

⁷⁵ Luke 1:49: For he that is mighty has done to me great things; and holy is his name

⁷⁶ Heb. 7:26: For such a high priest became us, holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.

⁷⁷ Heb. 9:12: Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he *entered in once into the holy place*, having obtained eternal redemption *for us*

⁷⁸ 2 Tim. 1:9: Who saved us, and called *us* with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began

⁷⁹ Eph. 4:24: and put on the new man, that after God has been created in righteousness and holiness of truth

⁸⁰ Heb. 12:10: For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed good to them; but he for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness

⁸¹ 1 Pet. 1:15-16: but like as he who called you is holy, you yourselves also be holy in all manner of living; because it is written, You shall be holy; for I am holy

⁸² 1 John 3:3: And every one that has this hope set on him purifies himself, even as he is pure.

⁸³ Rom. 12:1: I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service.

⁸⁴ 1 Pet. 2:5: Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

⁸⁵ 1 Pet. 2:9: But ye *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

God displays his holiness in communion with his people in Christ. At Pentecost by his Spirit he dwells with his people, after he has purged them of the wicked and washed them in the blood of Christ. Thus, he makes his people his temple⁸⁶ and walks among them by his Holy Spirit.⁸⁷ Thus, all his people are priests, called to draw near to him in the holy place of his special presence to offer spiritual sacrifices.⁸⁸ Thus, the reverence and exuberance of Christian worship display God's holiness. Acceptable worship is God-centered, devoted to God's glory. Thus it displays humility and contrition.⁸⁹ Thus, it is profoundly reverent.⁹⁰ When men lose sight of God's holiness, their worship deteriorates into a circus. They center on their own entertainment rather than on God. They address the High and Holy One as if they were speaking to a common and lowly man. Yet, God-centered worship is also joyful and exuberant, because divine holiness makes his saints glad.⁹¹ Thus, God's holiness calls the churches remain pure. It calls them never to receive unbelievers into membership, and, if they discover any in membership, to remove them.⁹² God's holiness also calls his disciples to seek his face together in peace, hearts devoted to God's glory and hands unstained with sin.⁹³ God's holiness also calls Christians to engage in fellowship marked by separateness from worldly lusts.⁹⁴

c. God's preservation of his people in Christ displays his holiness

God also displays his holiness in the certain preservation of his saints. As their rock, their place of security, the Holy One protects and preserves his people.⁹⁵ He keeps us in spite of our weakness and waywardness, in the face of foes we could never defeat. He stands committed to preserve his church in every generation. He stands committed to preserve every Christian through every trial unto glory. Complete redemption of Christ's church and every Christian is as secure as his devotion to his own glory.

3. The completion of redemption from sin displays God's holiness.

At death Christians attain the sinless perfection toward which they pressed throughout life.⁹⁶ When Jesus comes again, God will display his holiness climactically in the total eradication of sin from his people individually⁹⁷ and corporately.⁹⁸ Then his people will be completely dedicated to his glory and totally free from sin forever. This calls us to remain steadfast in a life of faith and godliness.⁹⁹

E. The Display of God's Holiness in Damnation

⁸⁶ *1 Cor. 3:17*: If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which *temple* you are

⁸⁷ *Eph. 2:21-22*: In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: 22 in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit

⁸⁸ *1 Pet. 2:5, 9*

⁸⁹ *Isa. 57:15*: For thus says the high and lofty One that inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite

⁹⁰ *Heb. 12:28-29*: let us have grace, whereby we may render service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe: for our God is a consuming fire

⁹¹ *Ps. 33:21*: For our heart shall rejoice in him, because we have trusted in his holy name. *Ps. 105:3*: Glory in his holy name; let the heart of them rejoice that seek Jehovah.

⁹² *2 Cor. 6:14-16:14*: Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? or what communion has light with darkness? 15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what portion hath a believer with an unbeliever? 16 And what agreement has a temple of God with idols? For we are a temple of the living God; even as God said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

⁹³ *1 Tim. 2:8*: I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting

⁹⁴ *1 Cor. 16:20*: All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with an holy kiss.

⁹⁵ *1 Sam. 2:2*: There is none holy as Jehovah; for there is none besides you, neither is there any rock like our God

⁹⁶ *Heb. 12:23*

⁹⁷ *Eph. 1:4*: that we should be holy and without blemish before him

⁹⁸ *Eph. 5:27*: that he might present the church himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish

⁹⁹ *Col. 1:22-23*: to present you holy and without blemish and unreprouable before him. 23 if so be that ye continue in the faith, grounded and stedfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel

God stands committed to punish the wicked.¹⁰⁰ When he redeems his people from Egypt, he displays his holiness in the judgment of the Egyptians.¹⁰¹ When Jesus comes, God furnishes the ultimate display of his holiness by damnation of the wicked in the lake of fire.¹⁰² Ironically, even God's enemies display his opposition to all sin and devotion to his own honor and glory. That awful display will last forever.

III. Seeming Contradictions Associated with God's Holiness

Scripture frankly acknowledges two seeming contradictions associated with the concept and display of God's holiness. The first difficulty stems from the tension between God's holiness and his relation to sin. The second difficulty arises from the tension between God's holiness and his union with his sinful people. Men have not imposed these tensions on the Bible. Rather, Scripture presses them on us.

A. The Seeming Contradiction Between God's Holiness and his Control over Sin

How can a holy God, completely separate from sin, decree sin in eternity and be sovereign over it in history? I commend Charnock's treatment of the tension.¹⁰³ The prophet Habakkuk agonizes over this.¹⁰⁴ It troubles him greatly. He pours out his deep consternation before God. Wicked men swallow up those more righteous than they. How can a holy God ordain that? How can he watch that happen and hold his peace? How can he use sin to achieve his purposes without being contaminated by it? Why did he decree? Consider with me biblical testimony that states and resolves this tension.

1. The tension stated: Scripture declares both God's holiness and his sovereignty over sin.

Habakkuk unashamedly confesses God's holiness: "O Jehovah my God, my Holy One? . . . You that are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and that cannot look on perverseness." Yet, he also confesses his sovereignty over sin: "O Jehovah, you have ordained him for judgment; and you, O rock, have established him for correction." We must do likewise. We must not deny either his moral purity or his sovereignty.

2. The tension resolved

Consider with me three aspects of the biblical testimony to the resolution of this tension.

a. God holds the wicked fully accountable for their sin and fully avenges it.

In part resolution lies in the fact that a holy God holds wicked men fully accountable for their sin and thoroughly avenges it.¹⁰⁵ In the final analysis people don't get away with mistreatment of their fellow humans. The stone they roll on others eventually returns on their own heads, because God is holy.

b. God ordains wickedness to fulfill his own righteous purposes.

In part resolution lies in the fact that God has no fellowship with their evil designs. Rather, he ordains their wickedness to fulfill his own righteous purposes: "O Jehovah, you have ordained him for judgment; and you, O rock, have established him for correction." God ordains to use Chaldean ambition as a rod to correct his people for their idolatry and rebellion. The Chaldeans have evil designs, but God intends their conquest of Israel for good. Much mystery cleaves to God's method. We can't understand how the Almighty, without contaminating his own infinite purity, uses sinful actions to achieve his good and holy purposes. Nonetheless, Scripture affirms explicitly and repeatedly that he does so.¹⁰⁶

c. We must embrace by faith all Scripture teaches, even if we can't explain it.

¹⁰⁰ Ps. 5:4-6: For you are not a God that has pleasure in wickedness: Evil shall not sojourn with you. The arrogant shall not stand in your sight: You hate all workers of iniquity. You will destroy them that speak lies: Jehovah abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man

¹⁰¹ Exod. 15:11

¹⁰² Rev. 6:10, 15:4, 16:5

¹⁰³ Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, 473-500

¹⁰⁴ Hab. 1:12-13: Are you not from everlasting, O Jehovah my God, my Holy One? we shall not die. O Jehovah, you have ordained him for judgment; and you, O rock, have established him for correction. You that are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and that cannot look on perverseness, wherefore do you look upon them that deal treacherously, and hold your peace when the wicked swallows up the man that is more righteous than he?

¹⁰⁵ Hab. 2:1-17

¹⁰⁶ Gen. 50:20; Isa.10:5-7; Acts 2:23, 4:27-28

Ultimately, resolution lies in our faith in God. We must believe whatever he tells us in his Word: “the righteous shall live by his faith” (Hab. 2:4). This emphasizes that the righteous, by trusting in God, believing his Word, and obeying it, will escape from God’s wrath inflicted by means of the Chaldeans. Accordingly, we must trust God and believe whatever his Word says, even though we cannot explain logically how it can all be true. In the final analysis we cannot fully explain this seeming contradiction. We must believe that God is both holy and sovereign over sin because Scripture declares it. Thus, Scripture leads us back to the fence around the mystery.

B. The Seeming Contradiction Between God’s Holiness and his Union with Sinners

How can a holy God join himself to a sinful people? Consider biblical testimony regarding this tension.

1. The tension stated: Scripture declares that his union with Israel causes profaning of his holy name

When God’s people behave wickedly, they profane the holy name of their God among the nations.¹⁰⁷ God’s enemies blaspheme his holy name because of his union with sinful people in covenantal loyalty.¹⁰⁸ How can a holy God join himself to a sinful nation without being sullied by their sin?

2. The tension resolved

Consider with me two aspects of the biblical testimony to the resolution of this tension.

a. God judges and punishes the sins of his people

The resolution lies in the fact that God chastises his people and punishes their sins. When he sends judgments on them for their sin, he distances himself from complicity in its pollution. Thus, the child conceived from David’s adultery dies in infancy,¹⁰⁹ and Israel and Judah go into captivity.¹¹⁰ Ultimately, God vindicates his holy name when God the Son himself comes to earth and dwells with his people.¹¹¹ The cross displays God’s vehement opposition to the sins of his people. Christ pacifies in his blood all God’s wrath against our sin. God thus displays his purity in his forbearance and forgiveness of our sin.¹¹²

b. God eradicates the sin of his people

The resolution also lies in the fact that God completely removes sin from his people. He removes our sin corporately and individually, not all at once, but through the process of progressive moral renewal. In each Christian this process begins at conversion, continues throughout life, and consummates at death or at the return of Christ. For the community of God’s people this process begins with removal of unbelievers from the society of the saved under the new covenant, continues throughout the heavenly reign of Christ, and consummates when Jesus returns in glory.¹¹³ This underscores the importance of gospel holiness for each Christian and each Christian church. If we live wickedly, God’s enemies blaspheme his holy name and Word.¹¹⁴ We should thus take to heart the solemn stewardship of union with God’s holy name before the eyes of men and angels.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁷ *Ezek. 36:20-22*: And when they came unto the nations, whither they went, they profaned my holy name; in that men said of them, These are the people of Jehovah, and are gone forth out of his land. But I had regard for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations, whither they went. Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord Jehovah: I do not this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations

¹⁰⁸ *Rom. 2:24*: The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you, even as it is written

¹⁰⁹ *2 Sam. 12:14*

¹¹⁰ *Isa. 10:5; Hab. 1:12*

¹¹¹ *Ezek. 39:7*: And my holy name I make known in the midst of my people Israel; neither will I suffer my holy name to be profaned any more: and the nations shall know that I am Jehovah, the Holy One in Israel

¹¹² *Rom. 3:25-26*: whom God set forth a propitiation, through faith, in his blood, to show his righteousness because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God; for the showing, I say, of his righteousness at this present season: that he might himself be just, and the justifier of him that has faith in Jesus.

¹¹³ *Eph. 5:25-27*

¹¹⁴ *Titus 2:5*

¹¹⁵ *1 Tim. 6:1*: Let as many as are servants under the yoke count their masters worthy of all honor, that the name of God and the doctrine be not blasphemed.

Conclusion: Practical Application of God's Holiness

I commend Charnock's treatment of what he calls "uses" for information, comfort, and exhortation.¹¹⁶ We consider the practical application of God's holiness to sinners and saints.

A. Practical Application of God's Holiness to Lost Sinners

God's holiness calls sinners to face the fact that they can't serve God acceptably while they live in sin.¹¹⁷ It calls them to face the certainty of his punishment.¹¹⁸ It calls them to face the finality and propriety of his punishment.¹¹⁹ It presses them to get right with God through Christ now, while they still have a chance to do so.¹²⁰ Death is coming. Christ is coming. When they come, it will be too late.

B. Practical Application of God's Holiness to Christians

1. God's holiness calls Christians to humility and contrition before God.

God's holiness uncovers our remaining corruption. The more we behold his purity and devotion to his honor, the more we see our uncleanness and self-centeredness. The more we dwell in his presence, the more we feel helpless and wretched.¹²¹ Thus Job¹²² and Isaiah¹²³ came to feel their remaining sin.

2. God's holiness calls Christians to filial fear of God.

God's unequivocal devotion to his own glory elicits dread. We have meaning, purpose, and value only in relation to him and his design for us. He holds our life in his hands, to do with as he pleases, when he pleases, for his glory. Thus we should walk softly with him in filial fear.¹²⁴

3. God's holiness calls Christians to reverent and joyous worship.

Divine holiness demands both reverence¹²⁵ and joy¹²⁶ in our worship. The display of his holiness in creation¹²⁷ and redemption¹²⁸ calls for songs of adoration and praise. Our infinitely holy God stands worthy of incessant praise from his creatures in heaven and on earth.¹²⁹

4. God's holiness calls Christians to imitate to his holy character.

¹¹⁶ Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, 500-532: information (500-514), comfort (514-517), exhortation (517-532)

¹¹⁷ *Josh. 24:19*: And Joshua said unto the people, you cannot serve Jehovah; for he is a holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgression nor your sins

¹¹⁸ *Ps. 5:4-6*: For you are not a God that has pleasure in wickedness: Evil shall not sojourn with you. The arrogant shall not stand in your sight: You hate all workers of iniquity. You will destroy them that speak lies: Jehovah abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man

¹¹⁹ *Rev. 16:5*: You are righteous . . . you Holy One, because you did thus judge: for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink: they are worthy.

¹²⁰ *Rev. 6:10*: and they cried with a great voice, saying, How long, O Master, the holy and true, do you not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

¹²¹ *Isa. 57:15*: For thus says the high and lofty One that inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite

¹²² *Job 4:17*: Shall mortal man be more just than God? Shall a man be more pure than his Maker?

¹²³ *Isa. 6:3, 5*: And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory . . . 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 my eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts

¹²⁴ *Rev. 15:4*: Who shall not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? for you only are holy.

¹²⁵ *Heb. 12:28-29*: let us have grace, whereby we may render service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe: for our God is a consuming fire

¹²⁶ *1 Chron. 16:10*: Glory in his holy name: Let the heart of them rejoice that seek Jehovah

¹²⁷ *Rev. 4:8-10*: . . . Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God the almighty, who was and who is and who is to come . . . You are worthy, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power, for you did create all things, and because of your will they were and were created.

¹²⁸ *Ps. 106:47*: Save us, O Jehovah our God, and gather us from among the nations, to give thanks unto your holy name, and to triumph in your praise

¹²⁹ *Ps. 99:3, 5, 9*: Let them praise your great and terrible name: Holy is he . . . Exalt ye Jehovah our God, and worship at his footstool: Holy is he . . . Exalt ye Jehovah our God, and worship at his holy hill; for Jehovah our God is holy

God's holiness mandates putting away sin. Imitating his holy character is essential evidence of true religion.¹³⁰ To this end he re-created us in his image¹³¹ and chastens us in love.¹³² We should imitate our Father because we love him and want to be like him¹³³ and in order to defend his good name.¹³⁴

5. God's holiness calls Christians to trust him and rely on him.

God is our Rock.¹³⁵ He has sworn to bless us in Christ. His honor stands bound to our welfare. Holiness moves him to protect and preserve us. Thus, we must trust him to fulfill his sworn commitments to us.¹³⁶ We must rely on our Holy One for help, security, and provision of all our needs in Christ.¹³⁷

In conclusion, we should never forget the great importance of God's holiness. Let us dwell on it until we live every day devoted to his glory and longing to see him as he is and be like him.

¹³⁰ *1 John 3:3*: And every one that has this hope set on him purifies himself, even as he is pure.

¹³¹ *Eph. 4:24*: and put on the new man, that after God has been created in righteousness and holiness of truth

¹³² *Heb. 12:10*: For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed good to them; but he for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness

¹³³ *1 Pet. 1:15-16*: but like as he who called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living; because it is written, You shall be holy; for I am holy

¹³⁴ *1 Tim. 6:1*

¹³⁵ *1 Sam. 2:2*: There is none holy as Jehovah; for there is none besides you, neither is there any rock like our God

¹³⁶ *Ps. 89:35*: Once have I sworn by my holiness: I will not lie unto David.

¹³⁷ *Ps. 33:21*: For our heart shall rejoice in him, because we have trusted in his holy name

APPENDIX: PRIMARY BIBLICAL TERMS FOR GOD'S HOLINESS

OLD TESTAMENT TERMS

First, the primary word family for God's holiness includes three words and a phrase: (1) the noun, קֹדֶשׁ (*qodesh*), "holiness," or "holy"; (2) the adjective קָדוֹשׁ (*qadôsh*), translated, "holy," or "the Holy One"; (3) the phrase קֹדֶשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל (*qadôsh b'yiśra'el*), translated, "the Holy One of Israel"; and (4) the verb, קָדַשׁ (*qadash*), "to consecrate," "to honor as sacred." In general this word family conveys the notion of "separateness" or "apartness." These words most frequently refer to persons and things set apart for God, consecrated to him, or wholly devoted to a sacred purpose. They depict divine separateness some 110 times. *First*, the noun, *qodesh* depicts divine separateness at least these 31 times: Exod. 15:11; Lev. 20:3, 22:2, 32; 1 Chron. 16:10, 35, 29:16; Pss. 30:4, 33:21, 60:6, 89:35, 97:12, 98:1, 103:1, 105:3, 106:47, 108:7, 145:21; Jer. 23:9; Ezek. 20:39, 36:20, 21, 22, 39:7(2), 25, 43:7, 8; Amos 2:7, 4:2; Mal. 2:11. Scripture closely associates his holiness with the place of his special presence (Deut. 26:11, Isa. 63:15, and Zech. 2:13) with various phrases: "the habitation of your holiness"; Pss. 2:6: "the hill of my holiness," 5:7: "the temple of your holiness," 20:6: "heaven of his holiness," 47:8: "the throne of his holiness," 48:1: "the mountain of his holiness." *Second*, the adjective, *qadôsh*, "holy," "the Holy," or "the Holy One": depicts divine separateness at least these 27 times: Lev. 11:44, 45, 19:2(2), 20:26, 21:8; Josh. 24:19; 1 Sam. 2:2, 6:20; Job 6:10; Pss. 22:3, 99:3, 5, 9, 111:9; Prov. 9:10, 30:3; Isa. 5:16, 6:3(3), 10:17, 40:25, 57:15; Hos. 11:9; Hab. 1:12, 3:3. *Third*, the phrase, *qadôsh b'yiśra'el*, "the Holy One of Israel," or similar expression, depicts divine separateness at least these 35 times: 2 Kings 19:22; Pss. 71:22, 78:41, 89:18; Isa. 1:4, 5:19, 24, 10:20, 12:6, 17:7, 29:19, 23, 30:11, 12, 15, 31:1, 37:23, 41:14, 16, 20, 43:3, 14, 15, 45:11, 47:4, 48:17, 49:7(2), 54:5, 55:5, 60:9, 14; Jer. 50:29, 51:5; Ezek. 39:7. *Fourth*, the verb, *qadash*, in the Niphal and Piel themes, depicts honoring God and his Name as sacred at least these 17 times: Lev. 10:3, 22:32; Num. 20:12, 13, 27:14; Deut. 32:51; Isa. 5:16, 8:13, 29:23(2); Ezek. 20:41, 28:22, 25, 36:23, 38:16, 23, 39:27.

A second word family for God's holiness includes the noun טָהוֹר (*tahôr*), translated "pure," "clean"; and the verb טָהַר (*tahër*), translated "cleanse," "make pure." This word family signifies to be clear, unalloyed, unadulterated, uncontaminated. These words usually refer to ceremonial cleanness or chemical purity. Occasionally, they depict moral purity (Ps. 51:7, 10; Prov. 15:26, 20:9, 22:11; Ezek. 36:25). The noun, *tahôr*, depicts God's moral purity 2 times: Ps. 12:6, "The words of Jehovah are *pure* words"; and Hab. 1:13: "you are of *pur*er eyes than to behold evil." The verb, *tahër*, depicts it once: Job 4:17, "Shall a man *be* more *pure* than his Maker?"

A third word family for God's holiness includes the verb בָּרַר (*barar*), translated, "purify," "polish," "make shining," the adjective בָּר (*bar*), "pure," "clear," and the noun בֹּר (*bor*), "cleanness," "purity." These words often refer to physical purging, polishing, and purifying. They also depict moral purity among men (2 Sam. 22:21, 27; Pss. 18:26, 24:4, 73:1). The verb, *barar*, in the Hithpael theme, depicts God's moral purity 2 times: "with the pure you will *show yourself pure*" (2 Sam. 22:27; Ps. 18:26). The adjective, *bar*, refers to the purity of God's law once: "the commandment of Jehovah is *pure*, enlightening the eyes" (Ps. 19:8).

Fourth, the Old Testament also presents God's holiness by affirming his impeccability at least 2 times: Ps. 5:4: "evil shall not sojourn with you"; and Hab. 1:13: "that can not look on perverseness."

Fifth, general assertions of God's infinite perfection imply his holiness. At least 3 occasions of this are: Job 4:18, "his angels he charges with folly," 15:15, "the heavens are not clean in his sight," and 25:5, "the stars are not pure in his sight."

NEW TESTAMENT TERMS

The first word family for God's holiness includes the adjective ἅγιος (*hagios*), translated, "holy," the nouns ἁγιοτης (*hagiotēs*) and ἁγιωσύνη (*hagiosunē*), both translated "holiness," and the verb ἁγιαζω (*hagiazō*), "to set apart as sacred," "to honor as sacred." Much like the *qadôsh* family in the Old Testament, these words signify "separateness," "apartness." Peter's quotation of Lev. 19:2 (1 Pet. 1:15, 16) confirms the close connection of these two word families. These words often describe persons and things consecrated to God, devoted wholly to his service. They sometimes depict the moral purity of Christians, that is, their separateness from this sinful world and its wicked ways (2 Cor. 7:1). They depict divine separateness some 15 times. The adjective, *hagios*, translated "holy," depicts divine holiness at least these 8 times: Luke 1:49; John 17:11; 1 Pet. 1:15, 16; Rev. 4:8(3), 6:10. On several occasions it refers to Christ as "the Holy One" (Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34; Acts 3:14) and as God's "holy child" (Acts 4:27, 30). It most frequently (92 times) serves as a proper name for the Third Person of the Trinity, "the Holy Spirit." It also depicts the purity of God's revealed will (Rom. 7:12). The noun, *hagiotēs*, "holiness," occurs only once, Heb. 12:10, where it depicts divine holiness. The noun, *hagiosunē*, also translated "holiness," occurs 3 times. Twice it depicts the moral purity of God's people (2 Cor. 7:1, 1 Thess. 3:13). Once, it designates the Spirit of God (Rom. 1:4). The verb *hagiazō*,

to sanctify, depicts the consecration God the Son for his redemptive mission 2 times: John 10:36, 17:19. It depicts honoring God and his Name as sacred **3** times: Matt. 6:9; Luke 11:2; 1 Pet. 3:15

A second word family for God's holiness includes the adjective ὅσιος (hosios), translated "*holy*", and the noun ὁσιότης (hosiotes), translated "holiness." They signify what is intrinsically right, moral purity (Strong's Lexicon, p. 53). They depict God's holiness 3 times. The adjective, *hosios*, depicts God's holiness at least these 2 times: Rev. 15:4, 16:5. It twice depicts Christ as God's "Holy One" (Acts 2:27, 3:25). It also describes Christ's holiness as High Priest (Heb. 7:26). The noun, *hosiotes*, occurs only twice. In Luke 1:75 it depicts the holiness of God's people. Once, in Eph. 4:24, it depicts the new man, created in holiness after the image of God, and thus, at least implicitly, denotes God's moral purity.

Third, the adjective ἄγνος (hagnos), "*pure*", depicts divine moral purity once: 1 John 3:3.

Fourth, the New Testament also affirms God's impeccability at least **2** times: Titus 1:2; James 1:13.

Fifth, the New Testament presents God's holiness graphically: Heb. 12:29, "our God is a consuming fire."

Summary: These terms and idioms account for at least 121 references to God's holiness in the Old Testament, 22 in the New. Thus, in total, the Bible contains at least 143 references to divine holiness. If we add the 94 references to the "Holy Spirit" (2 OT + 92 NT), and the 8 to Christ's holiness, the total becomes 245. This emphasis, though significant, falls far short of that placed on God's goodness (825 references). Thus, we should present God's character biblically, and not as if there were four times as many references to his holiness in the Bible than to his goodness.