

“THE HOLINESS OF GOD” PART 1

Holiness

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Bruce: Holy, holy, holy art Thou, Lord God of hosts! Father, You are holy. It’s not something that we do. It’s something that You are. open our eyes, that we might behold You this day, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Bruce: I’d like you to open your Bibles, please, to 1 Peter, chapter one. We’re coming to the end of chapter one. I’d like to pick it up at verse 16 today, which is “Be holy, for I am holy.” But we’re going to need to understand its right context. So I invite you to turn in your Bibles to 1 Peter chapter 1, beginning at verse 13. I’ll be reading from the English Standard Version of the New Testament.

“Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance. But, as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”” This is the word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Bruce: Amen. If you want to read a couple of good books on this subject, I’d recommend the one by J. C. Ryle, and the one by R. C. Sproul. Both are two excellent books. They will give you far more insight and a greater depth to this subject than I will. And so I would encourage you, if you go to your local bookstore, to buy the one by J. C. Ryle, entitled *Holiness*, and R. C. Sproul’s *The Holiness of God*. We’re going to talk about God’s holiness. Yes, Don?

Don: The J. C. Ryle book is available on line also.

Bruce: Oh, thank you! Some of these books are on line, that’s true. You know, brothers, there is some great preaching online. It’s free.

Participant: Yes.

Bruce: And there is no reason that America is not exposed to good Biblical teaching, because so much of this stuff is free. You can go on to different websites to hear free preaching. You can go to the Martyn Lloyd-Jones trust. You can hear sermons. There are all kinds of good sermons on the Internet. So don’t waste your time watching TV and the Kardashians, and trying to keep up with them. (*Laughter.*)

Participant: Delete your Facebook!

Bruce: So, there is no excuse for not listening to good sermons.

As we look at these verses, beginning with verse 13, we’ve been looking at our responsibility to live lives as believers, as a result of the gracious and glorious salvation that we read about in the first twelve verses. As you recall, and I’ve said this numerous times, doctrine always precedes practice. You have doctrine and practice. You have verses 1-12. You have the doctrine of our gracious and glorious salvation. And in verses 13-16 you have the practice of living a life of a saved person, in other words, living the life of a believer.

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If you look at verse 13, the mindset of a believer, one who understands his glorious and gracious salvation, the mindset is a mindset of hope. You’ll notice that in verse 13. “Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

The next thing we saw was the motive. The motive is a love response of gratitude. “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance.” And the reason that you and I are obedient is because we have a love response to God in all of our obedience.

And today we want to talk about the mark. So we have the mindset of hope, the motive of love, and the mark is holiness. That’s verse 15. “But, as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, as it is written: “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”,”

Now the reason we will be holy is because God is holy. There is a cause and effect relationship. Be, for I am. It doesn’t say, “Be, for I do.” It says, (*paraphrase*), “Be, for I am.” It doesn’t say, “Do, because I am.” It says, “Be holy, because I am holy.”

And the reason that you and I are holy is because God is holy. Holiness is not something we do. Holiness is something that God is. “Be holy, for I am holy,” the Scripture says. God defines holiness. We’re just the visible expression of holiness. That’s a definition for us. Holiness in our lives is the visible expression of what God is doing in our lives, because God alone defines holiness; we don’t. We are just a visible expression of what God is doing in our lives. That’s the manifestation of holiness. You’ll notice that it says, “Be holy in all of your conduct.” In every area of our lives, you and I need to be holy. The reason we can be holy is because God is holy. He defines holiness. And really, what holiness is in our lives is the expression of what God is doing in our lives. When somebody sees what God is doing in your life, that is an expression of holiness. So holiness is something that God does in us. God defines it. We’re just a visible expression of what God is doing in our lives.

We don’t attain holiness. We receive it, because God Himself is holy. God shares His life with us, and when He shares His life with us, He gives us all that He is, and what is that? He gives us Himself.

Because God is holy, remember our mindset. Our mindset is hope, the motive is love, and the mark is holiness.

So let me give you some definitions of holiness. Again, this is not going to be exhaustive. We’re working our way through this expository. I’d encourage you to read J. C. Ryle or R. C. Sproul’s book on the holiness of God. They go into greater depth than what I’m going to do today.

Now there are a couple of things we need to understand. First of all, I want to define holiness for you. And then I want us to see, in the next couple of weeks, however long this takes us, I want us to see the relationship to holiness, how it relates to ourselves, how holiness relates to our sin, how holiness relates to our service, and how holiness relates to our suffering. Those are the four areas we’re going to examine, to see where holiness impacts us—ourselves, our sin, our service, and our suffering.

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So, first of all, let’s take a quick look at the definition of holiness. Quite simply, holiness is God. He defines it. Holiness is not merely one of His attributes. It really ties all of the other twenty-seven attributes together. It is more proper for us, really, to say something like this: His holy love, His holy mercy, His holy justice, His holy righteousness, His holy omnipotence, His holy sovereignty. You see, it really ties all of these expressions together, because holiness is what defines God. It sets Him apart. It can be defined as His Self-hood. How does God describe Himself? He describes Himself as holy, and therefore He has a holy love, a holy mercy, a holy justice, and so forth. Whatever He does, He always does it by His own holiness.

Let me give you some examples. Look at Amos chapter 4, verse 2. Whatever God does, He always does it through His own holiness. Amos 4:2: “The LORD God has sworn by His holiness.” He’s making a statement, and He is backing Himself up when He puts His holiness on the line, because God defines everything by His own holiness.

Then, in Amos chapter 6, verse 8, “The LORD God has sworn by Himself.” How is “Himself” defined? It’s defined by His holiness. God always defines His actions by doing what He does by His own holiness.

Now the evidence of holiness, being defined by God, is how we look at it as an adjective describing His nature. You can look at a verse such as Isaiah chapter 6, verse 3. Sometimes it is used as an adjective to describe His nature. “Holy, holy, holy art Thou, LORD God of hosts!”

It’s used to describe His divine personality. You could look at a verse like Ezekiel chapter 20, verse 41.

Transcriber’s Note: Ezekiel 20:41. “As a pleasing aroma, I will accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered. And I will manifest My holiness to you in the sight of the nations.”

Or Ezekiel 28, verse 22.

Transcriber’s Note: Ezekiel 28:22: “Thus says the LORD God, “Behold, I am against you, O Sidon, and I will manifest. And they shall know that I am the LORD, when I execute judgments in her, and manifest My holiness in her.”,”

Holiness is what makes God who He is. The word used to mean “glory,” “abundance,” “the opposition of common,” “that which is not common.” It means “clear,” it means “bright.” It means “radiance,” it means “purity.” In the Old Testament, the word *holiness* is defined by its use. Let me give you some uses.

One of the clearest is found in Hosea chapter 11, verse 9. “For I am God, and not man, the Holy One in your midst.” He’s defining Himself by the characteristic of His holiness. “For I am God, and not man,” comparing Himself against us. He is God; we are not. The difference is that He is holy, and we are not. “For I am God, and not man, the Holy One in your midst.”

And there we begin to see the otherness of God, His incomparability to mankind, to created things. We also see His nearness, in being involved with people’s affairs. Notice 11:9 of Hosea. “... in your midst.” Now there you see two descriptions of God’s nature. First of all, you see His incomparable nature. He is the incomparable One. “For I am God, and not man.” You can’t compare Him to anything. And suddenly, His nearness to

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His people; you see the kindly One, adjectives describing His holiness. Holiness is the way in which God relates to His people. So He has a love for us, but it’s a holy love.

Another one would be Isaiah chapter 6, verse 3. Take a look at that one. In Isaiah chapter 6, verse 3, Isaiah comes to the temple to inquire of God concerning Israel, and He sees the Sovereign One in verse 1. He sees the seraphim, who are six-winged creatures, angelic attendants, whose chief duty was to praise God. But notice this. These are six-winged characters, created beings to worship God, in Isaiah chapter 6. Now notice. Two cover their feet. Now where does that sound familiar? Two cover their feet. What did He say to Moses?

Men: You’re on holy ground.

Bruce: (*Paraphrase*): “Take your shoes off, because you are on holy ground.” Even these created beings who worship Him cover their feet because they are in the presence of what?

God’s holiness! Do you see how magnificent that is? Two of their wings are created to cover their feet, just as He told Moses, “Take your shoes off, because you stand on holy ground.”

Participant: Bruce?

Bruce: Yes?

Participant: When you take your shoes off, wouldn’t your person be more unholy than your shoes?

Bruce: It’s a sign of reverence and awe in the presence of a holy Being. So you take your shoes off, because if He is there in His presence, and you’re standing in His presence, you’re recognizing His reverence and awe, His glory. So it’s just a symbolism of recognizing His reverence.

Participant: Or it makes you more vulnerable, too?

Bruce: It could do that. Basically, it’s a sign of reverence and respect. Yes, Ted?

Ted: And that shoes are also the things we track around, and pick up dirt and dust and wipe off our feet.

Bruce: It’s a sign. Sure. Yes, please?

Participant: They were also made from the skin of dead animals. This is the living God.

Bruce: There are several images one could derive from that, but basically it has to deal with a sign of respect, because of how unclean we are, and how clean He is, how pure He is. That’s all part of the definition of holiness. So, you see, two cover their feet. Yes, Don?

Don: Finish what you’re going to say.

Bruce: No, go ahead.

Don: You’ll probably cover this too, but what is interesting to me is that holiness is the only attribute of God that is repeated three times. No other attribute is.

Bruce: That is called the *Trihagion*. “Holy, holy, holy.” Three times holy. You don’t see God as “love, love, love,” or God as “mercy, mercy, mercy,” although He is. That’s the only time you see that. And that’s because, in the *Trihagion*, in Hebrew literature, any time you put something at the beginning of a sentence, and you duplicate it or repeat it

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two or three times, it’s a point of emphasis. You see that in the New Testament. Jesus will say, “Truly, truly, I say unto you.” “Verily, verily, I say unto you.” Basically, he is saying, “This is important! This is important!” Now there is only one time in the Scripture where it is used three times, and that is in Isaiah chapter 6, verse 3, where it says, “Holy, holy, holy art Thou, LORD God of hosts!” It’s called the *Trihagion*, the *Three Times Holy*. It’s for a point of emphasis. In other words, pay attention.

It’s just like on the one end of the sea, on the quarter of the ship, and the boatswain mate types a message to the captain, and they give a message. “Now hear this! Now hear this!” When you listen to what the captain says, it’s the same thing as emphasis. Yes, please?

Transcriber’s Note: A participant wants to know how to spell *Trihagion*.

Bruce: The *Trihagion*, which means “three times holy.”

So, notice. The two wings cover his feet. Then the two cover his face in the presence of God. Now what does that remind you of? What other passage in Scripture? The seraphim were created beings who worship God. With two of their wings they cover their feet, a sign of reverence, a sign of awe, a sign of respect. Two more cover their faces. What does that remind you of in the Scripture??

Participant: The veil over Moses’ face?

Bruce: The veil over Moses, but also this. No one can see God and

Men: Live.

Bruce: Live! They covered their faces. They are created beings whose sole purpose is to praise Him, and with two of their wings they cover their faces because His holiness is so majestic that, if they were to open their eyes, they wouldn’t live. The Scripture says, (*paraphrase*), “No one can see God and live.”

Years ago, there was a woman in downtown Pittsburgh who used to walk the streets, and she would come up and say, “I’ve seen God.” Somebody told me about that one day. So I’m walking down the street, and, sure enough, this lady came up to me, and she said, “You know, I’ve seen God.”

And I said, “Really!”

And she said, “Yes.”

And I said, “May I touch you?”

She said, “Why would you want to do that?”

And I said, “Because you must be dead.” (*Laughter.*)

She said, “What do you mean?”

I said, “The Scripture says that no one can see God and live. You must be dead! Can I touch a walking dead person?” And she just kind of walked around and said, “Get away from me!” (*Laughter.*) Yes, Don?

Don: John MacArthur talked about something where he had heard that someone was shaving, you know, and “God appeared to me. Jesus appeared to me.” And John’s reaction was, “What was he doing, still shaving?” He should have been on his knees, as one dead, like John, you know?

Bruce: That’s right.

Don: It’s amazing, what people say.

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Bruce: See, we have such a warped view of God’s holiness, and the glory that it possesses. But notice these created beings. Their whole purpose is to praise Him, and two of their wings cover their feet. Two of their wings cover their faces. And the other two move them around. And so there is just a symbolism there of the tremendous reverence that we ought to have for God’s holiness. We take His holiness so lightly, because we define it in human terms, rather than in terms of letting Scripture define who God is. “Verily, verily” is for emphasis.

Holiness can call attention to the otherness of God. It means to be different, to be distinguishable. Let me read you a quote from J. C. Ryle. “God is free of all considerations and conditions, absolutely free, Master of His own will, of His feelings, even of His wrath, mighty, not having any responsibility or requiring any justification, exalted over all, Lord absolutely of His own resolutions and decisions, and therefore to be feared absolutely, holy, at once supreme and fearful.”

You see, we really don’t understand the fear of God. Now when we talk about the fear of God, there are two definitions of fear. One is standing in the presence of awe. We hold God in tremendous awe and reverence. The other one is just that you’re afraid. Now there is a combination and balance of both of those. You and I need to be afraid, in the sense of God’s glory, in one sense, because it will draw us to Himself. The other sense is this. We just need to stand in awe of Him, and His glory and His reverence.

And that impacts the way we worship. Now look at this! These created beings in Isaiah chapter six have one purpose for existence. That is to praise and worship God. And notice their attitude, how they come into His presence. They’re covering their feet, they’re covering their eyes, because there is such majestic glory that they can’t stand it and live. How is it when we go to church to worship God? What do we do? We bring in our Starbucks coffee and our doughnuts, just like we’re going to a show. You see, sometimes I think that the way that we worship is an offense to God’s holiness, because we don’t stand in awe of who He is. Now I’m not suggesting that we take off our shoes from off our feet, though that might not be a bad idea, if it helps us to understand a sign of reverence. But all I’m saying, brothers, is this. Do you really take worship seriously? I mean, you’re going into the presence of God.

I remember, a couple of years ago, I saw the NCAA Girls’ Basketball Team in the presence of President Obama. They went to the White House to get their praises from the President. And I noticed how they were dressed, in dresses and flip flops. A lot of them had flip flops on. Now I have nothing against flip flops. But my point would be this. When they go to church, what are they going to wear? Probably shorts and a T-shirt. Yet, when they go to the President’s house, they go and put on a dress. Who deserves more of our honor and glory, the President, or God Himself when we worship? Now I’m not saying that you can’t worship and dress the way you want. That’s not what I’m saying. It’s an attitude of the heart. All I’m saying, you know, is that we’ve got to take seriously this idea of worship. Worship is something that we do because of God’s majestic holiness. How is it that we participate in worship? Do we do it with a sense of His glory, or do we do it with a sense of entertainment? Yes, Don?

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Don: I think it’s interesting that the fear of God is not just something in the Old Testament, but it’s found in the New, too. You know, Jesus said, “I say to you, my friends, ... be afraid of the One who is able to cast both soul and body into hell.” I read in Hebrews 12, verse 29, that “our God is a consuming fire.” We still have to have this sense of awe when we come into His presence in worship.

Bruce: Absolutely. There is a balance between the fear, the reverential fear and the respect, and the fear of our destiny in the understanding of God’s holiness. There is a balance of that. So there is a sense in which we should be fearing God in the sense of His majestic glory.

But notice what the passage is saying. “Be holy, for I am holy.” Our being holy is not something we do. It is something God is. And what holiness is in our lives is the manifestation or expression of what God is doing in your life, as an expression of His holiness. That’s what the text is teaching us. It’s the manifestation of what God is doing in your life, as an expression of His holiness. And notice that there is a cause and effect relationship. “Be holy, for I am holy.” Why is it that you and I are holy? Because He is. It’s not because of what we do, but because of who He is. Yes, please?

Participant: I’m not understanding the whole notion of fear—not the awe fear, but the other fear, as a believer. To me, that fear went away as soon as my eternal destiny was secured, and the awe went through the roof, and the abject fear disappeared. Am I missing something?

Bruce: No, you’re right. That is exactly what happens. But the abject fear is a motivation now, not to violate His law. It’s a motivation for obedience, because of a love response. It’s a motivation for us now, not a fear so that you’ll cower back in terror, but it’s a motivation to say, “I don’t want to offend the One who has loved me so much by sacrificing Himself.” So I’m fearful that I will disobey Him, and not please Him. Our whole life is to please the Father, and the fear of that is that I don’t want to displease Him. I don’t want to do that. You just don’t want to do that to somebody you love so much. So there’s a balance there. Yes, Bishop?

Bishop Rodgers: “God disciplines those whom He loves.” But it’s quite all right not to want the discipline.

Bruce: There is a fear that I’m going to be disciplined, and we have to understand that. It’s good; it’s a motivation. The fear prior to our salvation drives us away. The fear after our salvation draws us to Him, because of our love response. Ted?

Ted: I just think that often we hear it taught that the fear we have is really just a great respect and reverence and awe of God. I think it’s more than that. I think we’re not fearful for the ultimate consequences, we’re saved by Christ. But we are fearful of God in His Person.

Bruce: Right. Absolutely.

Ted: In Hebrews, it says that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” And I think there is a terror before God of who He is, just His Person. But in terms of our standing, that fear has been removed.

Bruce: You’re exactly right. Well said, Ted. There has got to be a fear that motivates us to be pleasing to the Father, because of our redemption and our regeneration and our

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salvation. So it's not this terror of being fearfully afraid of the consequences, but the understanding of what Ted has just said is absolutely true. There has got to be a fear of who He is in His Person. Yes, Tom?

Tom: I think that the other half of fear, too, is not only realizing how great He is, but how little we are.

Bruce: Absolutely. Yes, sir.

Participant: One thing that I've found, that the difference between Christianity and Islam, is that in Islam people live out of fear of God, being punished by Him. In Christianity, it's the love of God. That's the issue of fear and respect. But if you live by fear, every time you do something wrong, you're punished.

Bruce: Right.

Participant: That's the fear that I see, fear out of respect, but not fear of punishment.

Bruce: Excellent. Very good. Thank you. Any other comments? Yes, please?

Participant: Your response to this may be “You just need to watch that.” But I'm curious to get your thoughts on this. I struggle with the concept of “you go to church; you dress well.”

Bruce: Sure.

Participant: I do that. I want to be respectful. I also don't like (and I'll be critical of my own religion here), but I get very critical of the superstitious aspects with respect to Catholicism in a lot of ways that I see creeps through. Now I just have trouble with it. So I struggle with the balance between respectfulness and superstition. I see it creeping more toward superstition. And, like I said, your answer may be, “Well, you've just got to watch that.” But I just wanted to know if you had any thoughts on that.

Bruce: Well, I'd say, avoid it. You might want to avoid the superstition. Traditionalism can turn itself into worship, and we can get stuck into a particular style of worship because of tradition. Now we have a Christian ethic, which is our tradition, so there is certainly a Christian tradition. But we have to be careful not to indulge in these manmade traditions that we create ourselves just to express something. So we have to be careful.

So I would just have to say, Remember this, brothers. Wherever you go to church, you are responsible for your own worship. It's not the role of the pastor to make it a good service for you. Now granted, it doesn't mean you can be sloppy. I'm not saying that. But all I'm saying is that, wherever you go, it's your responsibility to worship God correctly.

I've been in some terrible situations, where the sermon was out of *Reader's Digest*. And I had to realize that I'm responsible for my response to this. And so I have to worship in my own way at that point, in the midst of that context. So all I'm saying is, take responsibility for your own worship. We have to do that. We are our own providers of worship. We have our own responsibilities. That doesn't mean that we can be sloppy, and not create environments conducive to it. But all I'm saying is, bottom line, that it's our responsibility to worship correctly. Anything else? Yes, please?

Participant: Jerry Bridges, in the book *The Practice of Godliness*—

Bruce: Right.

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Participant: He says that Abraham, being enabled by faith, was motivated by fear.

Bruce: That’s correct. Thank you. Saved by grace, motivated by fear.

Now what does that fear mean? Remember, a couple of years ago, when we did that whole two-year series on the fear of God? We covered that in great depth. You might want to go back and look at some of the notes on that, because we covered the balance between fear of the consequences, which is still there, but it’s now a motivation for obedience. It’s not a fear of damnation; it’s a fear of being disobedient, coupled with a sense of respect. So there is that balance that Ted and the bishop talked about. It’s a both/and, not an either/or. Yes, Ian?

Ian: Just going back to my original question. Now that I’ve heard all of this, this notion of fear, (not the awe side of it, but the other side of it), it’s still limited by the fact that I know that the One whom I fear loves me enough that His Son died for me. The nature of that fear is different from the abject fear I would have for someone who I know would take my life gladly, and destroy my family and all that I care about. There is a different quality of fear.

Bruce: Yes, there is.

Ian: And it’s fearing One whom you know loves you intensely, even as a Father, as a disciplinary Father on occasion. It’s just a very different quality of fear.

Bruce: Oh, it is! Absolutely. It changes because of our redemption. Bishop Rodgers?

Bishop Rodgers: I was just thinking back about my own dad. One of the things is that you know that your Dad, Himself, has a high moral standard. That’s just who He is. And I have indwelling sin. So, as I come before the Lord, there is a certain awareness. I’m made aware of my continued indwelling sin, and I am ashamed, and low down, so to speak, before Him. But you’re really just honoring who He is.

Bruce: Our fear for Him, in our regeneration, has been turned into a love response to be obedient. Remember the mindset. Prepare your mind for action. It’s based upon hope. It’s a love motivation. So our fear now is a love motivation. I don’t want to dishonor or displease the One who has loved me so much by saving me. So you have that fear, but it’s not the fear of your eternal damnation, because that’s taken care of. Now you have the fear of not responding in a love response to the One who gave so much to you. So I have the fear of disappointing the Lord. Not that it means that I’m motivated by works. I’m not saying that. Down in the depths of my own soul, I just don’t want to displease Him. There is a fear I have that I’m going to displease Him. If I make this choice, I’m fearful that I might be displeasing to Him. And that fear motivation removes that desire to want to do that, because I understand what it means now, to love the One who loved me so much that He gave Himself for me. So there is a balance there, but that terror has now become a fear of motivation, of displeasing the One who loves you.

That’s why you’ve heard me say that we have duties. There is nothing wrong with saying that we have duties as believers. But that duty is motivated by a love response to the One who gave Himself for me, just as our brother indicated with the difference between Islam and Christianity. One is a love response; the other is a fear of death or

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retribution. Is that correct? There is a difference there, and that’s what the love changes. So it becomes a love response. So the fear is that I don’t want to disappoint the One who loves me so much, because of a love motivation, and my understanding of Him.

Anything else? Yes, sir?

Participant: That’s why, in Islam, you have no doctrine of assurance.

Bruce: Correct.

Participant: And in certain forms of Christian doctrine you don’t have a sense of assurance. You’re still trying to figure out, when you die, whether you have a plus or minus in your good works.

Bruce: Correct. Absolutely. You’ve got to remember this. One of my Puritan friends says this. “You’ve got to recognize that Jesus is a better Savior than you are a sinner.”

Men: Amen. Very good.

Bruce: Jesus is a better Savior than you are a sinner. Somehow, in the midst of all of this, in much of our understanding, we’ve got to realize that He is a better Savior than I am a sinner. It doesn’t give us an excuse, but it helps us with our love response in obedience.

The real issue is, why do I make the choices I do? Ideally, as Peter is telling us, it’s a love response in obedience, not to offend the One who loves you so much. That’s what we are fearful of, because God is holy.

Let’s take a look, first of all, at the relationship of God’s holiness to us individually, to our individual personhood. Now the relationship of God’s holiness to us individually is based upon how God manifests His own holiness. How God reveals His holiness is how God relates to us. And that’s why my definition of personal holiness is the visible expression of what He is doing in your life. Because He is holy, therefore I am holy. And why am I holy? Because He is holy. I am in Christ, you are in Christ. Therefore, the visible demonstration of what God is doing in my life is my personal holiness.

Now, in relation to ourselves and to our persons, the word “holy,” in its context means heavy, weighty or important. There is a sense of weightiness here, about the word “holy.” It’s a weight of value, not of size. It’s talking about the weight of value.

In Biblical times, when you were going to the marketplace, and you would buy your goods and services, you had certain amounts of coins that you would put down on a scale, and the weight would go down. So there is a sense of weightiness here. And it doesn’t have to do with the size of the object, but the value of the object. When the weight would go down, you would have greater value than when the weight went up. So the whole issue of God’s holiness here has to do with His value. That’s how He relates to us now. My point is this. Your value and my value is because of what? The fact that God is holy. That’s where your value comes from. That’s the weightiness, the value—not in the size of who you are, or what you do, but in the value of who He is. It’s not insignificant, but important. That means intrinsic holiness, value in and of itself. God is the standard of value. And if you and I are in Christ, then what is that? Your standard of value is who God is. Our value is based on His intrinsic glory, and not our own efforts. Yes, Don?

Don: Yes. And that flies in the face of secularism and evolution. I remember that R. C. Sproul said that we talk about the dignity of men and race relations and everything.

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But if our value is just in ourselves, than what’s the difference whether we regard black, or white, or yellow germs? What’s the difference if we give more dignity to white germs, black germs, yellow germs, or amoebae, or whatever? But that is what secularism says, that our value is intrinsic in and of ourselves. What makes human beings dignified is the fact that we were created in God’s image, and our significance is derived from that.

Bruce: Absolutely. That’s my next page. *(Laughter.)* You said it right. You’ve introduced it well. You’re my in man, Don. Thank you. *(Laughter.)*

Now listen to what Don just said. Listen to what we’re saying. Our value is based on His intrinsic glory, and not our own efforts. That is what the Scripture says. “Be holy, for I am holy.” It doesn’t say, “Do holiness, for I am holy.” It says, “Be holy.” Your value, and your worth as a person, is the result of God’s holiness, His intrinsic value.

Holiness is used to describe or signify our relationship to God. Let me give you some examples.

Our value is based upon our relationship to God, not our productivity because of what we do. Here are some descriptions in the Old Testament. The point is this. Holiness is used to describe someone who has a relationship to God Himself, personally.

Here are some examples in the Old Testament. Israel is described as “holy to the LORD.” The nation is described as what? “Holy to the LORD.” Now why are they described as holy to the LORD? Because God had a relationship with the nation of Israel. That’s why you are holy. God has a relationship with you.

How about “a holy nation” in Exodus 19:6? “A holy people.” “A holy seed.” “A holy race.” “A community of saints.” “Holy ones.” “A kingdom of priests.” “A holy congregation.” Now those are all Old Testament descriptions of God, the unique relationship that God had with the nation of Israel. And so what gave them their worth and their value was the relationship that He had with them. Our value and our worth is the result of the relationship that God has with us, not because of what we do for Him.

In the New Testament you have very similar concepts of holiness. The Old Testament prophets in Luke 6 were described as being “holy.” Why were they holy? Because God had a relationship with them. John the Baptist was described as what? A holy man, in Mark chapter 6. Why is that? Because God had a relationship with him. Where was the value, the worth, the significance of John the Baptist? It was because God had a relationship with him. In our relationship to God, He always does it through His holiness. Because of our position before God, in Christ, and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, we are properly designated as holy, because God has a relationship with us because we’re in Christ, through the cross.

Participant: Bruce?

Bruce: Yes?

Participant: With John the Baptist, wasn’t one of the reasons that he was considered more holy than all the other prophets because of the work that he was given, meaning that he was the proclaimer of Christ? And don’t we get—

Bruce: That had to do with his work, but not his person.

Participant: Correct, because he was given the honor of that work, just like sometimes we’re given more honor. I don’t know if we can be counted more holy. I

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guess that’s the question. Do we become more holy like John the Baptist, depending upon the work that God—

Bruce: No, we’re not more holy because of what we do. We are holy because of who He is. Now what we do is an expression of who He is in us, and that is a manifestation of His holiness. But we don’t get more credit for what we do. Our intrinsic worth and value is because He is holy. So John the Baptist was a holy man because God had a relationship with him. Now, as an expression of that relationship, John the Baptist was given the assignment to be the proclaimer. But his worth and his value were not in his proclaiming. It was the fact that God had a relationship with him, in His holiness.

Participant: I can’t remember the Scripture reference, but it says that John the Baptist was—

Bruce: The greatest.

Participant: The greatest.

Bruce: Yes, that’s right. I understand that. My point is this. In God’s holiness and relationship to us, God relates to us in His holiness. Therefore we are holy. Forget what you do. Separate that. We’re going to talk about that in a moment—God’s relationship to us in our sin, in our service, and in our suffering. Right now, we’re talking about ourselves. The reason that you and I are holy is because God has a relationship with us, and God always manifests His relationship with His people through His holiness.

Now let me give you some examples. Hang on with me, guys. First of all, why are we designated as holy? I would say that one of the answers is because God chose us. We didn’t choose Him; He chose us. Now we are holy because God chose us. Whatever God chooses is what? Holy! Who did He choose? He chose us! What are we? Holy!

Participant: We’re saints.

Bruce: We’re saints! My point is this, brothers. God relates to us through His holiness. And when He chose you for salvation, in eternity past, you now take on His holiness, because that is the way He relates to us, through His holiness.

Look at a couple of verses. Read Colossians 3:12. “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones,” Now, notice what it says next. “holy and beloved.” Why is it that you are holy? Because God chose you, and this is what you have to understand. Whatever God chooses is holy, because of what? Because He is holy. If He chooses something, that object He chooses is holy, because this is an intrinsic expression of His own worth and value in that thing that He chooses. You’re holy, friends, because God chose you, because whatever God chooses is holy, because that is who He is. That is how He relates to you and me individually. He relates to us through His holiness. That’s why the Scripture says, “Be holy, for I am holy.” If you are chosen in Christ, then you are holy.

It doesn’t mean that you’re perfect. We’re not talking about sinless perfection. We’re just talking about the way that God relates to you individually, as a man. He relates to you through His holiness. When He chose you, you were holy, because He chose you, because whatever God chooses is holy. Yes, Tom?

Tom: At one time we were not holy.

Bruce: Correct.

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Tom: Jesus baptizes us with the Holy Spirit, circumcises our hearts, and because He chose us, we’re holy. I mean, He works on us. It’s what He does to us that changes us.

Bruce: He relates to us through His holiness. That’s my whole point. He relates to us through His holiness. That’s why we’re separate from the rest of the world, because He is working through us in His holiness. Now remember. Our personal holiness is a visible expression of what God is doing in us. That’s my definition of personal holiness—the visible expression of what God is doing in us.

Now you have to understand that the way God works in us is because He is holy. It starts right there. The way He relates to you and me is through His holiness—His holy love, His holy mercy, yes,—but He relates to us through His holiness.

How about going to another verse, 2 Timothy 1:9? If somebody has it before I do, read it, please.

Participant: “Who saved us, and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works, but because of His own purpose and grace, which He gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.”

Bruce: Let’s read that again. 2 Timothy 1:9. Let me read it from the English Standard Version. Well, let’s look at verse 8 to understand its context. “Therefore, do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me His prisoner. But share in my sufferings for the gospel, by the power of God, who saved us, and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works, but because of His own purpose and grace, which He gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.”

Brothers, you may not like the doctrine of predestination. You may not like the doctrine of election. But I’ll tell you what. Therein lies your worth.

Men: Amen!

Bruce: Therein lies your value, because if God chose something, the object He chooses is what? Holy! And why is that? Because God is holy. Now you can refute the doctrines of predestination and election, but you’re going to have a tough time proving your worth, because your worth is in what God *chose*. God chose me from before the foundation of the world. Therein lies your worth and your value, brothers. We just need to live in that. Yes, please?

Participant: If we’re so holy, why do we call ourselves sinners?

Bruce: Good question.

Participant: If we are going to be winners at the end, why do we call ourselves losers?

Bruce: Good question.

Participant: When I read John chapter three, it says that when we are born again, we’re born of the Spirit. We’re not born in sin, but because we were born in sin, we were sinners. Now you’re born of the Spirit.

Bruce: Yes.

Participant: We should be not sinners, but Spirited, or whatever you want to call it. Christians. But that’s what I’m confused about. This class makes me feel like I’m totally depraved. But that’s not the way God sees us.

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Bruce: Now there are two things. Both things are true. First of all, yes, you are totally depraved, and yes, God sees you differently.

Participant: Well, the problem is that we see depravity in one side. Let me give you an example.

Bruce: Please.

Participant: Man made the automobile. And he said, “It goes 44 to 55 miles an hour. Not good. I’ll make it go a hundred miles an hour.” So he made the pedal that pushes the gas, and it goes a hundred miles an hour. (*Unclear.*) Say that if the object is moving, it cannot stop. (*Unclear.*) So, man forgot to put the pedal on the break. And guess what? He doesn’t stop. He crashes. God made man, and He knows what He made. And there is depravity in him, but there is conscience. That’s a weight. The conscience is the thing that makes us feel guilty. And, because of that, that’s my whole problem with total depravity. And not only total depravity, but also with utter depravity. Total depravity and utter depravity are the same thing.

Next Participant: No. No, they’re not.

Participant: And that’s where I have a problem with depravity.

Bruce: Hang on a second, please. Don?

Don: I would have to disagree with that, and I’ll tell you why. We are totally depraved. That means that sin affects every part of us, every part of our being. But if we were utterly depraved, we would all be Hitlers. There would be no restraint on sin.

Participant: No remorse.

Don: No remorse, no restraint. In God’s common grace, He restrains that, and we’re not utterly depraved. But I would also say this, that we are, as Luther said, at the same time saints and sinners. Paul says, “In my flesh dwells no good thing.” We are still sinners, in that we still sin, but now we’re not of the same status as the unbeliever. We are saints, we are holy, yet at the same time we still sin, and it will be that way till glory.

Bruce: When you look at the pilgrimage of a person’s life, you have justification, sanctification and glorification. Justification is freedom from the penalty of sin. Sanctification is freedom from the power of sin. Glorification is freedom from the presence of sin. We still are in the presence of sin. Now you have a good point. We need to remind ourselves—

Participant: Do you call a rosebush a rosebush or a thorn bush? I’m not a farmer, but a few of you are farmers.

Bruce: Sometimes I might call it a thorn bush because I just got my finger pricked. (*Laughter.*) Then I’ll call it a thorn bush. But when my wife gives me a rose, I’m going to call it a rosebush. I’m going to call it what it is.

Participant: Then it’s a rosebush.

Bruce: It is a rosebush, but it might be a thorn bush. It’s a both/and; it’s not an either/or. You see, you have to understand this. There are times when we have to recognize who does God say we are? Now I agree with you at that point. We need to understand who God says we are. God says that we are His children. We are His love objects. We’re the gift of the Father to the Son. We need to understand who we are, because the

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world is always going to tell us what we are not. So sometimes, you just have to realize, who does God say I am? God relates to me because He is holy. We need to understand that. When you understand that feature of your life, you don't overlook the sinfulness of your life, because you do realize that there is sin still in your members, because you've not been glorified. You don't have a glorified body yet. That will always be there. Read Romans 5 and 6, and you'll see that. We don't have a glorified body until our final glorification. That's why we celebrate the going home of a believer, because, for the first time, he'll be free from the presence of sin. We're still in the presence of sin, although we are not sinful, because of the blood of Christ. We are still involved in the sinful world, so we need to have that particular balance.

So sometimes, you just have to say, “Who does God say I am?” Most of the time, we are guilty because we choose to feel guilty. Most of the time, guilt is a choice, because we choose to feel guilty.

Participant: And at that time, when we are fully home, then and only then will we be able to look upon God.

Bruce: That's correct. We will see Him purely. Yes?

Participant: Romans 7 gives us a great understanding of the war that goes on within us.

Bruce: Yes. That's why Paul says, (*paraphrase*), “Don't let the members of your body be given as slaves of unrighteousness.” It's possible that this can happen, you see? Yes, Bishop?

Bishop Rodgers: I was just thinking that Paul's one statement, which says, “It is no longer I who sins, but sin which dwelleth within me.”

Bruce: Right.

Bishop Rodgers: That creeps up a bit on what our brother is trying to say. Of course, we have this conflict, but we need to decide who we are, and then not to let that within us which is not compatible with that.

Bruce: Absolutely. Yes, please?

Participant: Well, the other thing is in Galatians where it says that the flesh vies against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. The flesh is going to try to achieve its own righteousness, so that, in my flesh, I'm going to try to be humble. And then, at a certain point in time, I'll think, “I really am a humble guy.” (*Laughter.*) This is where pride comes back to total depravity. There is nothing in my own flesh, in my own effort, that will achieve the holiness that God intends for me, unless you see that and look into that. So that's why we're sinners, because in our own flesh we try to achieve what only God can give. (*Unclear.*)

Next Participant: Okay, but 1 Peter 2 says here (Bruce read it the other day), “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God.” Why do we insist on calling ourselves sinners, when God, in Genesis 1, was so happy to create us, “and God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male

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and female He created them.” And then it says, “God saw all that He had made, and it was very good.”

Next Participant: But that was before the Fall.

Bruce: That was before the Fall.

Participant: If we no longer sin—

Bruce: Whoa, whoa, whoa! Let’s relax! (*Laughter.*) That was before the Fall. Man was good before the Fall. Then he became tainted with sin. While we’ve been redeemed in the blood of the Lamb, and you’re absolutely right; we are a holy priesthood, a holy nation, a people called unto God. But my point is this, brothers, and let’s close on this. God relates to us through His holiness. And when He chose us, we are holy. You need to think of yourselves that way, so that you’ll be motivated to pursue your duties in obedience. It becomes a love response, in obedience. That’s what we’ve talked about previously, to think of yourself the way God views you, as a motivation to be obedient, not to become prideful. So God relates to us through His holiness. When He chose us in Christ, we are all holy because He is holy. We need to look at ourselves that way, because that becomes your motivation. Don’t let the world tell you what you are not. You have to ask yourself, “Who does Scripture say I am?” Don’t let the world say what you’re not.

So, in one sense, if you want my description, I’m a redeemed sinner.

Let us pray. Father, there has been much discussion today about the majesty of Your glory and Your grace, and Your holiness. We’re probing things, Father, which, in our human infallibility, which we do not have. In our fallibility, we cannot understand even what we’re trying to discuss. So we rely upon Your Holy Spirit to only give us those things that are consistent with Your revelation and Your glory and Your holiness. And may it be so, for Jesus’ sake. And all the Brave Men said, “Amen!” (*Applause.*)