

## Holiness (Part 2)

The Third Commandment, continued

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You might recall that two Sabbaths ago, I gave you a small portion of the application of the third commandment. It is the commandment that I feel is the one that is most neglected; and, therefore, the one that is most frequently broken by us. We are told in that commandment that we are to "not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain" (Exodus 20:7).

I spent quite a bit of time defining those words. We are to keep His name *clean*. I think that you will agree that, in this world, His name is trampled in the dirt and the dust. It is used, of course, as a source of profanity. It is also just something that is a platform for the obscene. Even *us* (who bear that holy Name), sometimes *we* use that name in ignorance and, undoubtedly, in a very careless manner—from time to time.

We are going to begin the sermon in Psalm 99, so I want you to be turning there. This is the psalm from which the song in our hymnal—"Holy, Mighty Majesty"—comes from. It begins:

**Psalm 99:1-3** The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble! He dwells between the cherubim; let the earth be moved [or, shaken]! The LORD is great in Zion, and He is high above all the peoples. Let them praise Your great and awesome name—He is holy. [Or, as my margin says, "*It is holy.*"]

Now, I would say that the world has little respect for God is vividly seen in the way that His name is used. There is little or no honor, little or no respect, no awe, and no reverence. But notice again what it says here, "His name is **holy**." And His name is holy because He is holy!

**Psalm 99:4-5** The King's strength also loves justice; You have established equity; You have executed justice and righteousness in

Jacob. Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at His footstool—He is holy.

**Psalm 99:8-9** You answered them [i.e., You answered the prophets], O LORD our God; You were to them God-Who-Forgives, though You took vengeance on their deeds. Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at His holy hill; for the LORD our God is holy.

I do not know how much you think about the holiness of God, but I think that it is something that we need to pay a great deal more of attention to. While you are thinking about that, why do we not go back to Exodus 15. This is called "The Song of Moses." It is what the children of Israel sang after they came through the Red Sea, and they were delivered from their enemies and oppressors—the Egyptians. And Moses wrote:

**Exodus 15:11** "Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, glorious in holiness . . . ?"

The idea here is that God is in a class apart. He is incomparable. He is unique. He is unapproachable—but not unapproachable in the sense of being remote from us, but unapproachable in the sense that there is nobody, anywhere, that even comes close to being like Him. "Who is like **You**, O LORD, among the gods [among the great ones, among the mighty ones]? Who is like You, glorious in holiness. . . ?"

Turn with me to I Samuel, the second chapter. The context here is Hannah praying after God blessed her with the son that she requested. He turned out to be Samuel.

**I Samuel 2:1-2** And Hannah prayed and said: "My heart rejoices in the LORD; my horn is exalted in the LORD. I smile at my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation [deliverance]. No one is holy like the LORD, for there is none besides You, nor is there any rock like our God.

God is utterly different! Again, the idea here is unapproachableness—again, not in the sense of being remote, or unattainable, or unreachable; but rather there is no one who is quite like God.

What is the first request in what is commonly called "The Lord's Prayer"? That prayer begins:

**Matthew 6:9-10** Our Father which are in heaven, hallowed be  
Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it  
is in heaven.

We often confuse the phrase "hallowed *be* Your name" with "hallowed *is* Your name"—as though it was part of the address to God. But, brethren, that is a request. The first request, in that model prayer that Jesus gave to all of us, is that God's name be *holy*. That it be held in regard, in awe, in reverence for everything that majestic name implies.

It precedes the request for the coming of His Kingdom. And I wonder if that is not a subtle implication that God's Kingdom will never come where God's name is not first hallowed. God's Kingdom is going to come to people who regard God as being holy. And God's Kingdom is going to be filled with those who have shown—through their life—that they regard God as holy, and His name as holy.

Think about what it is like where God's name is regarded as holy. I am talking about in heaven. Where God's name is regarded and held as holy, there is peace. There is beauty without end. Contrast that to where God is not held to be holy (where His name is not revered nor respected). And that, of course, is here on earth. Look at the contrast that has been produced. Where God's name has not been held holy, we have a world that is filled with violence, evil, imperfections, and filth of every kind. There is war, disharmony, and everything that mankind does not want to have.

I believe that this is a subject that we Americans tend to shy away from. We do not naturally like it. The subject, for undefined reasons, may actually be avoided because it confronts us with challenges we would rather not face. Maybe we would rather not even think about it.

We do know a little bit about it. We hear of a certain religious personality being referred to as "his holiness." We might even know that the apostle Paul calls us "holy brethren." We may know that the term "saint" has its origins in the same root as the word "holy". But, all too often, that seems to be the extent of our knowledge.

I know that in my researching into it, I have come to understand that it is a daunting subject. I have had a very difficult time getting a handle on even a small part of it. But, brethren, *holiness* touches every facet of our life. It touches far more than what we might consider to be religious.

Think about this: Is our God the Creator of the entire universe? If He is, then His lordship of His creation extends to all of the universe, and *nothing* is outside of His lordship. Since I, then, am part of that creation, then there is no part of my life that is beyond His lordship. And His holy character has something to say about economics, child rearing, education, religion, politics, marriage, dating, athletics, and romance. His holiness has something to say about *everything* that we are involved in.

Turn with me to Isaiah 43. This is primarily addressed to Israel, whom God is calling out of captivity. It is something that is going to take place in the future.

**Isaiah 43:1** But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine."

The scene continues to evolve until we get to about verse 8. In verse 8, the context shifts to a courtroom drama. Please do not separate yourself from this, because we are the Israel of God. We, too, have been called out of captivity—not in exactly the same way that the Israelites are here going to be called out in the future; but we have been in captivity to this world and to Satan the Devil. We fit this, in its spirit. So, we are involved in this courtroom drama that begins to unfold. In its direct context, Israel and the nations are in a courtroom together; and what is on trial is God's claim to uniqueness.

"Who is holy like God?" That is the question. God being the sole deity—that is what is on trial here, and Israel is to appear as God's witness (in His behalf). We find that the nations can give no witness for their impotent deities. Israel is called upon to declare all of the majestic works of God, and they have plenty that they would be able to tell on God's behalf. But, alas, we find in the context that Israel does not give any witness in God's behalf.

Brethren, this is something which we, the church, cannot fail to do! As the Israel of God, it is our responsibility to proclaim before the world that "Our God *is* God!" Notice this:

**Isaiah 43:10** "You are My witnesses," says the LORD, "and My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me . . ."

That is why God has called you and me—that we might *know* Him. That we might know His holiness and that we might, then, trust Him.

**Isaiah 43:10** ". . . and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed. . ."

God is unique! He is the sole deity that is worthy of worship. It is His uniqueness that is on trial here.

**Isaiah 43:10-11** ". . . nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the LORD, and besides Me there is no savior."

His lordship extends to the furthest reaches of His creation. Besides Him, there is no savior. That is, no one to deliver.

**Isaiah 43:12** "I have declared and saved. I have proclaimed, and there was no foreign god among you; therefore you are My witnesses," says the LORD, "that I am God."

This is a responsibility, brethren, which we cannot escape—because God is inescapable. Jonah tried to escape his responsibility of witnessing before the people of Nineveh. But God chased after him, and Jonah had to carry

through with the responsibility that God gave to him. You will find that many of the prophets of God experienced something very similar. They tried to get out of the responsibility of witnessing for God, and of revealing to the people of Israel (primarily) the holiness of God and the direction of life that God required of them—because they were the chosen of God. In each case, God made them go through with what He called them to do.

So *we* have this responsibility before the world. It has been laid on our shoulders. It is something that we must do as a work and it is something that we must do as individuals. We must witness before this world that "Our God *is* God!" Not only does He intend to penetrate into every aspect of our lives, but He also intends that this witnessing be a part of the reason that He is penetrating into our lives. And He does this in all of His majestic holiness.

Turn with me back to the New Testament, to the book of Luke, as we continue to lay a foundation here. In Luke 1, we have the background for the birth of Jesus Christ. We find in verse 46 the song of Mary, and she mentions (in her song):

**Luke 1:49** "For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name."

Then, in verse 67, Zacharias (the father of John the Baptist, who had been struck dumb) begins to speak, and he says in verse 68:

**Luke 1:68** "Blessed is the LORD God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people."

There is the subject of Zacharias' song (or, "prophecy" we might call it): the redemption of God's people. Down in verse 74, here comes the purpose of the redemption.

**Luke 1:47** "To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear."

Just like the prophets—just like Moses, just like Samuel, and just like Jeremiah and Isaiah—we have been called of God. We have been redeemed,

we have been given salvation, in order that we might serve Him without fear. And the next verse tells us the nature of this service.

**Luke 1:75** [That we might serve Him without fear. . .] "in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life."

So the purpose of our calling and our redemption is to serve Him without fear. And the nature (nature means, "the essential aspect; the inner force—what drives us; the essential character; the essence the disposition) of this redemption is "*in holiness and in righteousness.*" Brethren, we must seek to understand holiness. We dare not seek to avoid it—because there can be no true service of God, no true worship, no spiritual growth or obedience without it. It is that important.

Remember—do not ever forget—this is attached to the third commandment. It is why I said that it is the third commandment that measures us against the Standard and determines the *quality* of our witness for God.

**I Peter 1:15-16** But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

Here we find a command—that we are *to pursue after holiness* .

Today, I think that many Americans tend to equate "holiness" with a feeling that one has in a sanctuary. Or, they may equate it with "a holy Joe"—usually somebody who has his collar turned around, or someone who seems to have a sanctimonious appearance about him. That is, someone who seems to frown on even the simple pleasures of life. It is associated with those monks who live in monasteries, cultivating "the spiritual life"—which somehow, or another, seems to (in the mind of an American) put them beyond the possibility of sin. But is it any one of these things?

These two verses say three things. First, God is holy. Second, the acceptance of this way of life, the acceptance of salvation, the acceptance of the blood of Jesus Christ—that is implied; it is not stated there directly. But the best way

to say it, in a general way, is "with the acceptance of this salvation." With it, holiness *must* be an issue in our life. And then third, we must be holy—because God is holy.

Mankind created in the image of God *must* be holy! This is something that we cannot attain to on our own. It is primarily the work of God in us, but that does not excuse us from making the most serious exertions of our life, in an attempt to attain it. We are reaching, brethren, for something that is awfully high. But God is not requiring something that is beyond our reach. If He commands that we be holy, then we *can* be holy. But I guarantee you that it is not going to have any of the appearance that Americans tend to put on it.

Turn with me to the book of Job, chapter 4. Eliphaz is the one who is speaking here. Again, this is just to give us a sense of how *high* it is that we are reaching in our lives.

**Job 4:18-19** If He [God] puts no trust in His servants [angels], if He charges His angels with error, how much more those who dwell in houses of clay [you and me], whose foundation is in the dust. . . ?

I want to hasten to assure you that he is not trying to discredit angels in any way. Rather, he is trying (in his way) to exalt God. What he is saying here is that, in comparison to the holiness of God, even the creatures (that is, angels) which are ethically and physically pure (or, seemingly the purest)—compared to God, they are impure.

Have you ever been confronted by the holiness of God in any power at all? Let us begin to chase this out in the book of Isaiah.

**Isaiah 6:1-5** In the year that King Uzziah died, I [Isaiah] saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet [They are symbols of humility.], and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said: "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, the LORD of hosts.

Here is a man who is confronted by holiness of an awesome power, and lived to tell about it.

What has happened to men in the presence of the holiness of God? What is our response to be like? Can we really become holy?

"Holy, holy, holy" the seraphim said. In English, when we want to emphasize something, we underline it, or we "bold" it, or we put an exclamation point after it, or we write it in italics. In Hebrew, what they did was repeat it. Here "holy" is repeated three times, and that raises it to the superlative. That attaches to it a super importance. Only one characteristic of God, in the entirety of the Bible, is elevated to this transcendent level—and that is His holiness. Never is God called in the Bible, "Love, love, love." Or, "peace, peace, peace." Or, "justice, justice, justice." Only one characteristic is raised to the superlative. *God is **holy, holy, holy**.*

When Isaiah was confronted, what did he do? He pronounced *a plague* upon himself. "Woe!" You are familiar enough with the prophecies to know that is the word the prophets used to indicate that a plague from God was coming upon a city, or upon a people. "Woe unto Bethsaida! Woe unto Chorazin!" Jesus said. Isaiah said, "Woe is me, for I am undone!" He knew that he was in the presence of something [or, Someone] that was so distinctively different from what he was, he unraveled. He became unglued. He came apart at the seams. Isaiah caught a glimpse of the Holy One of Israel, and immediately his self-esteem was shattered. In a brief second, he was made to feel naked, exposed before the absolute Standard of holiness.

You know, brethren—like Isaiah—as long as we are free to measure ourselves against other people, we feel reasonably good. But I can guarantee you, on the evidence from God's Word, if any of us is ever exposed to the holiness of God (the way Isaiah was), we are going to be spiritually and morally annihilated. We are going to become unraveled, and we are going to come apart at the seams, just like Isaiah did.

Is it any wonder that God does not expose us to that? Whenever that happened, Isaiah's integrity, which we understand to mean "wholeness,"—Isaiah really had it together. He was all man! He was a godly man. He was a good man. He was a righteousness man—but, when he was confronted with the holiness of God, even his integrity was broken. And so God, in His mercy, does not expose you and me to a holiness of that power. God allows us at least some latitude, to maintain our sense of balance—because, brethren, if that happened to us, like Isaiah, we would have guilt and self-condemnation streaming out of every pore of our body.

So, Isaiah said, "Woe is me, for I am undone!" He immediately recognized his filthiness and said, "I am a man of unclean lips." You know, *out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks*. And Isaiah knew his heart was not like God's.

It is good to know that, though God shattered Isaiah, He also put him back together again. He took the shattered man with the dirty mouth and He put him into His ministry, and Isaiah became God's spokesman before God's people, Israel. God redeemed him. God healed him. And God sent him forth.

Job had a similar experience. It was not quite of the same magnitude as Isaiah's, but Job argued forcibly and convincingly against his friends. But whenever God came into the picture, Job was forced to say, "I have heard of you by the hearing of my ears; but now my eyes see you. Therefore, I abhor myself; and I repent in dust and ashes."

You might recall Israel at Mt. Sinai. They did not see God, but they were close enough. God gave them just enough revelation, and they threw up their hands and they said, "Moses, Moses. Go up there and talk to Him." They fled before Him, because they could not stand the exposure to *the holiness of God*.

Let us go back to the New Testament. This time to Mark 4, where Jesus' disciples had an experience with Him I think that is very illuminating. This happened on the Sea of Galilee.

**Mark 4:35-41** On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us cross to the other side." Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"

Try to put yourself in their position. They were at a place that was familiar to them. They were aware that, from time to time, the Sea of Galilee would blow up into a storm and that it could do it awfully quickly. Not only was it quick, but they were quite violent for the boats that were plying the waters there. So they began to have a storm that seems to be stronger than many they had experienced before. And they asked of Him a question that is a not-so-veiled accusation. They were charging Him (God) with a lack of compassion. What is implied is that God is cruel, that He is unloving, that He is aloof, that He is remote, that He has not done enough for us.

I want you to notice what Jesus did. First of all, He did not respond to their accusation. He saved His words for the wind and the sea. Jesus' life was a blaze of miracles, but brethren, we have here one of the most astounding things that He ever did. I want you to notice—He did not even pray! He did not ask God to deliver them from the tempest. He simply gave the divine command, and instantly nature obeyed the voice of its Creator. The wind ceased, and the sea became like glass.

Now look at the reaction of the disciples. They were more terrified than ever! Their fear increased. In the power of Christ, they met something that was more terrifying than anything that they had ever met in nature. They were in the presence of the Holy One of Israel.

Do you see what they tried to do? "Who can this be?" They tried to categorize Him. They tried to put Him into a niche that maybe could contain Him in some way. But brethren, like us, they were in the process of learning that He could not be categorized. He was separate. He was apart. He was in a class all by Himself. He was unique! Because of that, He made people uncomfortable. He was holy. That is what He was. He was holy.

Let us go to chapter five of Luke, which is almost a reprise of what we just saw there in the book of Mark.

**Luke 5:1-7** So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret [that is, Galilee], and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing their nets. Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat. When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing: nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.

Look at Peter's rather seething sarcasm this time. "Look, Jesus. As a theologian, there is none better. You confound us with all of your insights. But, please, give us a bit of credit. We are professionals—professional fisherman, you know. We know the fishing business from one end to the other, inside and out. And we've been out here all night. This fish just aren't running! Zilch. Nothing at all. But, You've been a good guy. So, just to pacify You, we'll let down the nets. Blasted preachers! They're all the same. They think they know everything."

Now look at verse 8.

**Luke 5:8** When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

At that moment, Peter had a flash of insight into *holiness incarnate*—in the flesh. And what happened is that he saw himself as small, unworthy, filthy—just like Isaiah—immoral. He wanted Jesus to leave, to get out of there, so that he could, once again, feel somewhat comfortable; so that he could once again measure himself against other men, rather than the holiness of God.

**Luke 6:26** "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets.

Think about these last several verses that we have given here. We can begin to see, at least, a part of *why* the carnal mind is enmity against God, of *why* Israel killed the prophets, of *why* Jesus Christ was killed, and *why* "all who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" in this world. The carnal mind cannot stand the comparison! And rather than change, it either rejects or it persecutes. It either gets out of the area, or it tries to destroy the holiness that is calling it into account.

If the world loves us, it must be because we are like them. It can accept its own, because it is not convicted by the holiness of God in us. The carnal spirit instinctively recognizes a person that is apart from, separate from, its own. You can see this working in an evil way. The carnal spirit begins immediately to pick out something that is different (let us say, in a minority) and begins to reject it and persecute it. It is that same principle that is at work in regards to things that are holy.

What does *holy* mean? "Holy" is not easily defined. One reason is, because this is what God is, it is foreign to all languages. Brethren, God is "foreign" to us. He is not a man. He is from another world, as it were. And when He comes here, even though it is His own [world/creation], He is going to be received as an alien. So the holiness of God is foreign to every language.

I do not consider myself equal to the task here; but I will give you what I have been able to understand of it. The English word that we use is derived from a Saxon word that means, "whole, sound, complete, or integrated." At first glance, the Hebrew word seems to indicate "separation, or difference,

because of purity." It does indicate "freedom from every stain, immaculate in every detail, separation from all that is sinful, evil or imperfect." And that is fine.

But when the seraphim sang, they were not saying, "Purity, purity, purity." There is a great deal more contained within that name than the concept of purity. The root of this word "holy" comes from a word that means, "to cut (as with a knife)." And when you cut something with a knife, it separates what you are cutting into (let us say) two pieces. And so it means to cut apart, or to separate. You might think of it in terms of a shepherd, or a rancher, who cuts an animal from the herd or from the flock. He separates it from the flock.

But perhaps even more accurate, when applied to God, is "a cut above"—implying superiority.

When we find a product that we feel is superior to other products, we say that it is a cut above the rest. Therefore, I feel that the one English word that best defines the word "holy" is *transcendence*. That is, something that is above everything else. Transcendence means exceeding usual limits. God, indeed, is above and beyond us. There is an infinite distance that separates Him from us in every quality. ***God is transcendently separate.*** He is so far above us that He seems foreign to us. God Himself even says, quite a number of times, "I am not a man."

So, to be holy is to have a sense of transcendental "otherness." (Kind of unwieldy.) To be transcendently "different" in a very special way.

I would say, from the examples that we have seen here, that the clearest sensation that a human being has when he experiences the holy is an almost overwhelming and overpowering sense of being a mere creature. When we meet the Absolute, we know that we are *not* absolute. When we meet the Infinite, we know that we are finite. When we meet the Eternal, we know that we are temporal. So to meet the holiness of God is going to present the human being with a study in contrasts.

John Calvin (the man generally considered to be the founder of Presbyterianism) said,

Holy men were struck and overwhelmed whenever they beheld the presence of God. Men are never duly touched and impressed with a conviction of their insignificance until they have contrasted themselves with the majesty of God.

When we use "holy" in reference to God, we run into another problem. We generally try to describe God by giving a list of characteristics or qualities—or, we might call them attributes. We say God is Spirit. We say God is omnipotent. We say God is omniscient. We say God is love. We say God is merciful. God is just. Then we add the idea that God is holy, as if it was just another attribute.

Indeed, God is holy; but this attribute (holiness) is used by the Bible in a general sense. It does not call attention to a single quality, or attribute; but, rather, to everything that He is. What this means is that God's Spirit is Holy Spirit. God's justice is a holy justice. His love is a holy love (as contrasted to human love). Do you begin to get the idea?

Holiness pervades every other aspect, every other attribute, and every other characteristic of God. It applies to them all. God is transcendental in everything! What human being can even begin to compare to something like that?

Now turn with me to Psalm 50. This is written to those who have made a covenant with God.

**Psalm 50:4-5** He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that He may judge His people: "Gather My saints together to Me, those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice."

Then we drop down to verse 16, where the scene shifts a little bit.

**Psalm 50:16** But to the wicked God says [Now, these are "wicked" who have made the covenant with Him. Keep that in mind.]: "What right have you to declare My statutes, or take My covenant in your mouth?"

Dropping down to verse 20, He is beginning to list some of their flaws.

**Psalm 50:20** You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son.

Now, verse 21 is the one I want to get to here—because we find a major flaw in people who are not striving for holiness's thinking.

**Psalm 50:21** These things you have done, and I kept silent . . .

You might compare this to Ecclesiastes where Solomon said, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." We can get caught in that trap. And why do we get caught in that trap? He is going to tell you here.

**Psalm 50:21** These things you have done, and I kept silent. You thought that I was altogether like you.

God is not like us. He is not a man. He does not think the way we do. His love is holy love. Everything about Him is holy. He is a just God, as well as being a merciful God. But here we find a serious flaw: in people thinking that God is like them.

Brethren, I feel that the most serious question, at any time, before the church—and before each of us as individuals—is always God Himself. That is, what each of us in our heart-of-hearts conceives Him to be. The reason this is so serious is because (spiritually, morally, and ethically) we tend to move—that is, to conduct our lives—toward *our mental image of our God*.

These people here, and those people there in Ecclesiastes where Solomon said what he did about their hearts being fully set to do evil—they thought that God was forgetful. They thought that, because God was not doing anything, that He was overlooking what they were doing. (Oh, no. He was not!) He was giving them time to repent, giving them space to change their mind. God is a God of holy justice. How many times have we been told that God *will not budge*, will not give one inch, on His law? Or, allow us to treat willy-nilly the sacrifice of His Son? (No, not at all.)



Whatever our God is—whatever our conception of God is—we tend to move in that direction and serve it. So, if our god is money, we work to make money and to serve that god. (I am simplifying things here.) If our god is athletics, we will spend all of our time and energy thinking about, studying into, and playing athletics; and it can get out of hand. And on and on it goes.

What we are and what we become are directly tied to *our conception of God*. So, a right conception of God is not only essential to making a systematic theology for a church to have a foundation of doctrine to teach its people, it is absolutely essential to practical Christian living as well. So *the image of God* is basic to the kind of character that we have, or that we will have.

Low views of God are going to destroy those who hold them, because the essence of idolatry is the entertainment of low thoughts about God Himself—thoughts that are unworthy about Him. (Like this one in Psalm 50, which says that He is like us.) It begins in the mind. Then, you see, it begins to invade and pervade every aspect of life. The idolater simply imagines things about God and then acts as if they are true. So the first step down is to surrender our high opinion of God.

Remember, God is not like anything else! In all of creation, there are only vague likenesses of Him. We are in His image. So we, generally, look like God. God intends that we be in His image spiritually as well, but we are not there yet. So there are only vague likenesses of God, because God is transcendent.

If we are not careful, we want to get God to where we can use Him. We want a god that we can, in some measure, control. That is dangerous! We are getting the cart turned in the wrong direction, because we are His servants and we are to do His will.

Where can we learn all that we need to know about God? That is the next step. The primary way is through the life of Jesus Christ—because in Christ, and by and through Christ, God gave us as complete a self-disclosure as is needed for salvation. But you have to understand this—He discloses Himself not just to reason. Reason is involved. Reason comes into play when we

study His Word, and it is absolutely essential that we do that. But if that was all that was necessary, then anybody on earth (picking up the Bible and just reasoning things through) would become like God is. But that is not enough.

God also reveals Himself to faith and to love. He does this experientially. That is, He does it through the experiences that He has in the lives of those who are striving to be like Him. So, reason is not all that is needed—but reason, coupled with faith and love. The faith provides the foundation to keep us motivated and going. (That is, faith in the sense of "trust." Not mere belief, but trusting Him. It is an active faith.) Secondly, love is the means by and through which we can experience the holiness of God in our own lives. So it is the three of them together (reason, faith, and love). It is necessary, then, that we *do* something with what we know about God. If we do not do anything, then the holiness does not accrue to us.

**Hebrews 3:1** Therefore, holy brethren . . .

How can this be, seeing that we fall so far short? How can we possibly be holy? The beginning of that answer is right here in this book. Let us go to Hebrews 9.

**Hebrews 9:12** Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

Did you see? He entered the Most Holy Place. Drop down a little bit further, to verse 24.

**Hebrews 9:24** For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands . . .

**Hebrews 9:25** Not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another.

Even inanimate objects can be made holy. You might remember all the way back in Exodus 3, around verse 5, that Moses was on holy ground; and so he was told to take off his sandals. You will find, scattered throughout the

Bible, such things as holy place, holy censors, a holy convocation, a holy Sabbath, holy tithe, holy covenant, holy bread, and on and on it goes. I have not even begun to exhaust it.

Remember that the primary meaning of the word *holy* is to separate, to cut away. Things that are holy are things that are set away, apart—separated from the rest. What this generally means is that they have been consecrated, dedicated, or (as the biblical word is) sanctified. They are elevated from the commonplace unto the Lord. That is, unto His service.

Nothing created is holy of itself, and only God can consecrate or sanctify something else as holy, thus lifting it from the commonplace to something that is special. When He does that, that thing is changed. It is different from other things in its relationship to Him—and, of course, by extension in its relationship to men.

Let me get you to thinking about Hebrews 3:1 again—where we are called *holy brethren*. That does not have any particular reference to a quality of life. Rather, it is only (or, merely) indicating a state or condition. We have been sanctified by God. Our relationship with Him has changed. We have been lifted from the commonplace in terms of our relationship to Him. But, in that context, it has nothing to do with anything more than a state, or a relationship. (Just like a holy censor, a holy Sabbath, or holy bread, or anything else.)

But there is one thing that we have to add on to this. Things that are made holy—that is, consecrated or sanctified; lifted out of the commonplace—are also *set apart unto purity*. That is, they are to be treated in a special way. The holy vessels of the Tabernacle or the Temple were to be treated differently from other vessels that might have been made of the same materials. So they are also, then, set apart unto purity. Thus, they are to be used in a pure way. You will recall that the ark had to be carried in a certain way—indicating that it was to be treated with deference and respect because of its relationship to God.

*You are holy brethren*. Therefore, you are also then to *reflect purity*—as well as simple apartness. Purity is not excluded from the idea of the holy, but is contained within it. Whereas the holiness of God is absolute, the holiness

that any angel has, or things have, or we have is either ceremonial, imputed by God, or is derived by a simple conformity to His will by means of His Spirit. (That is where we are.)

**I Peter 1:13-14** Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ: as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance.

We are to gird up the loins of our mind. One Bible says, "Prepare your mind for action." Be self-controlled, in order that you might be holy. Now, *why*?

**I Peter 1:15-16** But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be [you] holy, for I am holy."

So even inanimate things can be made holy—by the sanctification of God. But brethren, we are not inanimate! We have mind. We have will. We have attitude. We can make choices. And for us, holiness not only involves the sanctification of God, it also involves choices (attitudes) leading to right conduct of life.

Before conversion, we lived in ignorance and were consequently dominated by the satisfaction of our own desires. But when God calls us, we must cease living according to what is profane. (You shall not profane the name of your God.) Remember that holiness implies separation to God. And therefore we have to seek to produce the divine likeness of *holiness* in all of our behavior. This is where the Holy Spirit comes in.