

SHARED WORSHIP – Part 2

The Holiness of God

Please turn with me to the last book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation and chapter 15. Revelation, chapter 15 is a chapter that precedes the 7 bowls of wrath that God is dispensing upon the ungodly. It is the sixth out of the seven cycles in Revelation. In chapters 14 and 15, prior to the display of God's wrath, the Apostle gives us a glimpse of the Church in worship. Let's look a chapter 15, verses 2 to 4 as an example.

² And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. ³ And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! ⁴ Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

For all time and eternity, the people of God acknowledge the holiness of God. “You alone are holy.” What is God's holiness? **“God's holiness means that he is separated from sin and devoted to seeking his own honor . . . the idea of holiness as including both separation from evil and devotion to God's own glory . . .”**¹ Turn with me to Hebrews 7:26 (ESV), to see that:

²⁶ For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.

Do you see that? Separated and exalted. That's the God that invites us to worship. He is separated and exalted. The Old Testament tabernacle described this reality in detail. We read, “*And you shall hang the veil from the clasps and bring the ark of the testimony in there within the veil. And the veil shall separate for you the Holy Place from the Most Holy.*” (Exodus 26:33, ESV).

It would take you days upon days to exhaust all the references in the Bible to the holiness of God. The seraphim around God's throne cry, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:3). “The Lord our God is holy!” exclaims the psalmist, over and over again (Psalm 99:9; cf. 99:3, 5; 22:3).”

To Be Holy is to be Separate/Unique

Dr. R. C. Sproul, Sr., who has done more than any other theologian to raise my understanding of God's holiness writes, “. . . this word conveys the same idea we express when we find a garment or a golf club or some piece of merchandise that is outstanding, that has superior excellence, and we might say that it

¹ Grudem, W. A. (2004). [*Systematic theology: an introduction to biblical doctrine*](#) (p. 201). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House. [Emphasis mine]
cf. compare

is "a cut above the rest."² Even that seems pale compared to the ultimate reality of God's holiness. God's holiness also includes all of who He is. It's not just one of many outstanding characteristics. He is holy and holy in all that He does. God issues the challenge: *"To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One."* (Isaiah 40:25, ESV).

Later the prophet Isaiah will record these words: *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."* (Isaiah 55:8-9, ESV).

God is absolutely other than us. When God met with the prophet Habakkuk he recalled, *"I hear, and my body trembles; my lips quiver at the sound; rottenness enters into my bones; my legs tremble beneath me. Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us."* (Habakkuk 3:16, ESV). The Bible, over and over again recounts the reality that when sinful man met a holy God it brought indescribable trauma. It was so overwhelming that fear was the common response.

This, in part, means that when we gather for shared worship of God, nobody should feel comfortable. Nobody should feel casual. Nobody should feel "at ease in Zion." Our God is not a God you hang out with. Our God is not your buddy. Our God is not your playmate. He's not the "big guy upstairs".

"Our God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:29, ESV). You don't play with Him. You touch the Ark when you're not called to, he will kill you. You bring strange fire to His altar, He will kill you. You misappropriate His offerings and demand sexual favors from his servants, he will kill you. You lie before the Church and the Holy Spirit, he will kill you. You fail to properly discern the Lord's Body, he will kill you. Our God is Holy.

To Be Holy is to be Pure

"This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5, ESV). Moses recorded this in Deuteronomy 32:4 (ESV),

⁴ *"The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he."*

So pure and holy is God's character that the sinless seraphim who serve Him in heaven cover their faces with their wings (Isaiah 6:2). Think of that. Innocent, sinless creatures are blinded by His perfection. Stephen Charnock writes, "As there is no darkness in His understanding, so there is no spot in His will; as His mind is possessed with all truth, so there is no deviation in His will from it. He loves all truth and goodness; He hates all falsity and evil." (On the holiness of God, p115)

² Sproul, R. C., Sr., The Holiness of God, Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1985, p. 40

How Can Sinners Approach Such a God?

The writer to the Hebrews reminds us to *“Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.”* (Hebrews 12:14, ESV). Without holiness we cannot see, we cannot enter, we cannot worship. We are dead! King David makes it clear in Psalm 24:3–4 (ESV),

³ *Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? ⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.*

We are all dead! I’m dead! Peter makes it very clear: *“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.””* (1 Peter 1:14–16, ESV). We are dead!

There is but one hope. There was one Man as holy as God. There was one man that ascended the holy hill. There was one man who entered the Holy of holies. Turn with me and see this verse yourself. Mark it and remember it. It is found in Hebrews 9:24 (ESV),

²⁴ *For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.*

As Spurgeon preached, “Our Lord Jesus Christ could ascend into the hill of the Lord because his hands were clean and his heart was pure, and if we by faith in him are conformed to his image we shall enter too.”³ The only way we can enter into holy worship of our holy God is to enter with Jesus.. We enter clothed with Jesus. We enter hiding behind the perfect sacrifice for sin with Jesus. We enter by the blood of the Lamb.

We must enter on two levels. Level #1. We must enter as justified people. *“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law . . . the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”* (Romans 3:21–24, ESV). Apart from God’s verdict of justification based upon faith alone, in Christ alone, no one can enter into the presence of a holy God.

But we also enter His presence based upon practical holiness. Saving justification produces practical holiness. People who are saved by grace through faith are characterized as those who fight sin. People who are washed in the blood of the Lamb are people who are characterized as always confessing sin trusting the faithfulness of God to forgive them. People who are called by God are characterized as people who always call upon the Lord. *“For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.”* (1 Thessalonians 4:7–8, ESV)

³ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/treasury-of-david/psalms-24-7.html>

Mark Altrogge writes these important words: *“Can you imagine a hospital that said they believed in hygiene but didn’t practice it? Oh, yes, we believe in sanitation. Do we wash our hands? Naahh. Do we reuse needles? What’s wrong with that? Here, stick this in your mouth so I can take your temperature. It’s only been used a few times; you’ll be ok. I don’t want to go to any hospital that merely talks about being clean; I want them to be passionate about hygiene.*

How much more should we have a passion for holiness?

We are to be holy and righteous in every area of our lives. Holy in our thoughts. In our speech. Cursing and dirty jokes and gossip and slander should be far from our lips. We should be holy with our eyes and turn away from all impurity. We must seek to be holy in our actions.”⁴

Application

We are talking about shared worship. The most important step in preparing for shared worship, for responding to the invitation of the Father to worship is to be asking ourselves about the issue of sin. We often think that our worship service is a grand celebration, a party. It is not. James helps us understand what we are to do:

“Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.” (James 4:8–9, ESV)

That will not attract a lot of modern worshippers. This is not going to fill a stadium in Texas. The Hebrew idea of “draw near” is an altar. It’s a place of worship. The most important preparation for worship is heart preparation. Have you dealt with the sin in your life. David reminds us that *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”* (Psalm 51:17, ESV).

God is holy. We are not. We worship clothed in the righteousness of Christ, with sins washed in the blood of the Lamb. In closing turn your attention to Isaiah 57:15 (ESV),

¹⁵ For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.

That’s our hope Beloved.

⁴ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/blogs/mark-altrogge/holiness-is-not-an-option.html>