

# The Holy God of Love

By Dana Dexter

The Holiness of God can be terrifying. Why is this? Well to start, if sinless angels who worship God in His presence must cover their eyes and feet (Isaiah 6:2), then what hope is there for the man whose feet can't leave the ground, whose heart is stained by unholy sin, and whose eyes are accustomed to gazing at a dark world? We may be tempted to look away from the reality of God's holiness or minimize it by recasting God's character to make Him a more approachable image. But we must not! We must embrace God's holiness. For the better we understand and delight in the holiness of God, the better we are able to appreciate the quality of the love God has displayed for us at the cross through Jesus Christ. Let's see what God thinks of His holiness, then look at some temptations to shy away from His holiness, and finally examine the beauties of what God has accomplished in His holy love through Jesus.

Two Old Testament stories well portray the terror of God's holiness as it collides with people who misjudge God. We thus get a window into what God thinks about His holiness. Leviticus prescribes distinct rules and regulations for how the people of Israel could live in the presence of and approach a holy God without being destroyed. In Leviticus 10, God's detailed orders are transgressed. Two of Aaron's sons are consumed by fire for offering unauthorized incense in God's presence. Their cavalier approach to God cost them their lives. God afterward declares *"Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified"* (Leviticus 10:3). What must God's holiness mean to Him to elicit such a response? We might respond, "Come on, it's just a slight deviance, is it that big of a deal?" But refusing to listen to God's means of approaching Him in His holiness is fatally serious.

Another example arises in 2 Samuel 6 when David attempts to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. The Ark was of no small consequence in God's display of His holiness to His people and in their drawing near to Him. It was the centerpiece of the sacrificial system and resided inside the holy of holies. The high priest made atonement for the sins of Israel once a year on it and him only. It was so holy that it wasn't to be touched by unclean hands but rather transported by poles that were fed through rings attached to the Ark (Exodus 25:14). Thus, our story with David starts off with an ominous foreshadow when the Ark is said to be transported in a new cart (2 Samuel 6:3). The scene of David and his envoy dancing and singing and worshiping takes a drastic turn when the oxen powering the cart stumble, and a man, Uzzah, puts his hands onto the Ark to prevent it from crashing to the ground. God strikes Uzzah dead on the spot. David's response is anger, then fear (6:8-9). Once again, God is misjudged. The point of these stories is that God is holy, and He will be appropriately honored. We must pay close attention to His means of approaching Him, because it will never be in God's nature to disrespect His own holiness.

These are pictures of God's love for His holiness. While it can be terrifying, rightly knowing God in His holiness can be the foundation for our deep love-filled worship of God. Yet we are tempted to minimize the holiness of God, and this is often for at least two reasons. First, this kind of God is hard to share with a culture that only believes in a sentimentalized view of God. Their god is a god of love, meaning he has warm affection towards everyone and condones every lifestyle, whether that be the life of the devote saint, the party boy, the adulterer, the alcoholic, the drug addict, the atheist, the Buddhist, and so forth. This god has little to say about the daily life of any human, other than to make us nice to one another and tolerate each other's lifestyles. Beloved, this is not the God of the Bible. This is an idol. This is a god made in the image of American individualism, not the God who made us in His image for His glory. It's a god of shallow love, whose love is no bigger than we are able to imagine. But we have a God to share whose love is far greater because it is a holy love, as we will see shortly.

Second, we can minimize God's holiness when we forget His love for it. It is easy to forget that our God cares about His holiness when we do not see daily demonstrations of that zeal. We assume that

because He does not strike people dead for profaning His holiness today, His zeal must have cooled off or perhaps He doesn't take Himself as seriously as He used to. However, God acted in history to prove otherwise when Jesus offered Himself on the cross. The cross is a far more shocking scene than that of Aaron's sons or of Uzzah falling under the wrath of God's holy hand.

The cross stands forever to refute any attempt to minimize God's holiness. The terror of God's holiness is evident in the gruesome nature of the cross. At the cross, Jesus is beaten, mocked, rejected by His own people, and convicted then crucified by the Roman authorities. Yet the deepest horror comes when the holy Father turns His face away from the Son. Jesus thus absorbs the wrath of God Almighty that was reserved for our sins, for our belittling of God's holiness. Why such a horrendous penalty? Because the worth and glory of God is so great that the offense of our sin is magnified exponentially. But this very act of God displays His love for His holiness AND for us! In the cross, we see a deeper love from God than our hearts can comprehend, because we see a God who goes to infinite lengths to maintain His holiness in redeeming and forgiving unholy people. God could give no cheap grace. So the price to make us holy and fit to approach Him was the sacrifice and substitution of His holy Son. And He paid it! How He loves us! This is the highest degree love could reach.

Further, as mentioned, in this work of Jesus we are invited to come, draw near to God, and partake in His holiness! Through Christ, we have better than a burning coal placed to our lips by sinless angels – we have the very holiness and righteousness of God Himself secured by Jesus' perfect life, death and victorious resurrection applied to our hearts! Paul says *“For our sake He [the Father] made Him [the Son] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God”* (2 Corinthians 5:21). He took our sin on Himself, and we receive His righteousness and holiness. Jesus is the means by which we can be fit to approach God in His holiness. If we seek to draw near to God by anything besides Jesus, we join Aaron's sons and Uzzah in their folly, and open ourselves to eternally fatal consequences. Praise God for His Son!

In sum, God is holy. He loves His holiness! We are sinful. Yet He loves us! In Christ, God secured a substitute for our sins so that we could enter into His holy presence with joy and boldness and give God the praise He deserves for all eternity. The day is coming when everything unholy, evil, sick, painful, warped, amiss and truly ugly will be banished from the presence of God and His children. We will worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness (Psalm 96:9). Because of Jesus, we can dwell forever in God's presence, basking in His love, worshiping Him in His holiness. So take hold of Jesus Christ in faith and marvel in God's love and holiness.