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USING EXPOSITORY PREACHING TO INCREASE
THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S HOLINESS AT
GREEN POND BAPTIST CHURCH IN
WOODRUFF, SOUTH CAROLINA

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Francis Richard Williams Jr.

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Francis Richard Williams Jr.

Read and Approved by:

Faculty Supervisor: Michael E. Pohlman

Second Reader: Timothy K. Beougher

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For Danita, who is the essence of a godly helpmate.

You are the great example of God's grace and kindness to me.

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PREFACE

This work was made possible through the support and sacrifice of many people. Michael Pohlman, my supervising professor, provided the belief that it could be done. His intellectual capacity for doctrine, church history, reading, writing, and the correct preaching of God's Word have been an inspiration to me and my ministry. His persistence and constant challenge to write tightly made this completed work possible. If this work contains examples to the contrary, the fault is solely mine. His instruction, and correction have always been clothed in graciousness. I am grateful for his unwavering Christlike manner both personally and professionally. Many other faculty members of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary have provided academic assistance and personal encouragement. Among these are Matthew Haste, Joe Harrod, Donald Whitney, and Robert Plummer. I am especially grateful for Tim Beougher for his expert teaching and his gracious encouragement to me and the subject of this work.

In his kindness, God entrusted the flock of Green Pond Baptist Church in Woodruff, South Carolina to my care. I am most grateful for the willingness of this body to play such an essential role in this ministry project. Indeed, without their cooperation, this would not have been feasible. The desire of this flock to learn and grow in their faith was instrumental to the success of this work. The encouragement, support, and love of Green Pond Baptist Church in this process has been an extension of God's marvelous grace in their lives. I am forever grateful for this part of God's universal church.

None of this would have been possible without the encouragement and prayers of many friendships. Specifically, I owe a great debt to Jeff Lethco. His graciousness in mentoring me and his friendship to me are evidence of God's grace in my life. Likewise, many years ago, God sovereignly aligned my life with that of Todd Nethery. While Todd

and I have experienced great joys and sorrows through all stages of life, this most recent stage has been the sweetest. His selfless prayers, listening, encouragement, and love have been further evidence of a lifelong friend who is closer than a brother.

While my parents, Francis and Florence, have long been taken from this world, I am constantly aware of their great faithfulness to me. Their love was constant. As members of “the greatest generation,” they taught me the value of hard work, never quitting, and being faithful to the task at hand. I am eternally grateful for God’s providence in making me their son. The remaining members of my childhood household are my two older sisters, Gail and Diane. Their long distant support in this season of my theological training and education has been an extension of God’s grace in our family. I am forever thankful for the love and support of these two sisters.

An example of God’s great kindness to me has been the gift of fatherhood. According to his great purpose, God made me the father of three beautiful daughters, Anna Leigh, Katelyn, and Sarah. As young girls, they always exhibited great support and interest in my profession. For that I am grateful, but I am most appreciative for their patience, encouragement, and love, as adult daughters during this season in my life. I am grateful to be their father and “Papa” to their offspring.

Years ago, in one of the most challenging seasons of my life, God granted me a faithful and loving wife, Danita. Her unwavering support and love in this endeavor, and all of our life together, has proven to be my greatest treasure on this side of eternity.

Dick Williams

Woodruff, South Carolina

May 2023

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Over the last century, much has been done to foster an ignorance of the holiness of God. While this is not surprising to see outside the Church, unfortunately it appears to the case within the Church. This work aims to correct this.

This project is designed to increase the Green Pond Baptist Church members' knowledge of and affection for God through expository preaching on the holiness of God. Understanding the holiness of God is essential for a greater knowledge of and affection for God. With this understanding of God's holiness, Green Pond Baptist Church will be better equipped to live in the manner worthy of their calling.

Context

Green Pond Baptist Church (GPBC) in Woodruff, South Carolina, was organized in the summer of 1804, in the farming community of Green Pond. The current covenant membership is just over 100 members with a majority over the age of 55, including many elderly members who are physically unable to attend. Hence, the usual weekly worship attendance ranges from 60 to 75. GPBC served as the only church in this farming community for the better part of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As the dawn of the new millennium approached, several other churches were planted in the more densely populated areas near Green Pond. Consequently, the membership of GPBC began to wane in the late 1980s. Two decades of internal strife, poor pastoral leadership, and unhealthy church polity, coupled with already declining membership resulted in a dysfunctional, struggling church. As a result, much of the last decade, prior to 2018, was riddled with brief pastoral stints, many interims with little or no pastoral care, and moral

failures within the lay leadership. This culminated with a core group of 35-40 attenders.

Strengths and Weaknesses

While this core group of 35-40 individuals were certainly disillusioned and unsure, God in his providence provided strength through his giftings. Because these members had witnessed and survived so much conflict over the years, there was unity among this small membership. This unity and desire for harmony gave them a great willingness to follow leadership that they believed they could trust. As in any context, there has to be a period where that trust is developed. Once the mutual trust between the leadership and members was established, this core group has followed in a biblically obedient way for the past two years. In addition to their loyalty and willingness to obediently follow trusted leadership, GPBC exudes a loving attitude among themselves and to visitors. Because of the rural location, the norm is not a routine of visitors each week who have no prior relationship with the church or its membership. Although when visitors do attend, they are welcomed warmly. Additionally, there is a gradual traffic of individuals who once attended or were members of GPBC but left in the tumultuous prior decade. Some have been a part of nearby churches, but many have not attended any gathering since terminating attendance at GPBC. While there is a warm and loving tone throughout the worship gathering, the current membership does engage more easily with those with whom they have a prior relationship.

A quick view of recent ecclesiastical trends across the rural southern region of the United States shows that many traditional churches established in the 1800s or even later, like GPBC, have already closed their doors and the membership is deceased. Because of God's providence, that has not been the case for GPBC, but could still be the result if critical spiritual weaknesses are not addressed and strengthened in the coming years.

Among the areas of spiritual weaknesses of GPBC is the lack of knowledge concerning correct Christian doctrine. Most notably in this void is knowledge and understanding of ecclesiology and soteriology. This lack is due largely to a void of correct

preaching, teaching, and caring for the flock. After interviewing individuals and reading the history of the church's last thirty years, it is apparent that, even in the days considered the healthiest because of high attendance and long tenured pastorates, much of the preaching was more opinion driven and interest was primarily focused on events coupled with theologically weak lyrics in the music. Hence, the idea of ecclesiology or church membership was reduced to whoever made a practice of attending events. Eventually, those individuals migrated into leadership positions to advance personal agendas. The idea of requirements and expectations for membership was lacking. Also, a clear understanding of church polity was absent, which resulted in no system to deal with conflict or differences of opinion. Consequently, infighting ensued and ultimately, one "side" would claim victory and the others would leave the fellowship. This lack of understanding of ecclesiology is closely joined with an equal lack in soteriology.

Since no standards or expectations were followed concerning church membership, the doctrine of salvation has been reduced to a progression of walking an aisle, signing a card, and going through the motions of believer's baptism. At best, the gift of God's grace in saving a person from the wrath of God has been reduced to reciting the "sinner's prayer" and trying to uphold some type of moral legalism. This ceremonial profession of faith usually ended in the disappearance of individuals when they experienced a challenging trial in their life or a moral failure. No discipline process was in place to shepherd those who left; hence, GPBC became a revolving door of many different people. Throughout the community, GPBC has been viewed as a difficult group of people who were always at odds with one another. Poor soteriology and ecclesiology have manifested many false conversions with no biblical understanding of the church or the depth of God's holiness.

This poor understanding of soteriology and ecclesiology has caused the greatest weakness of GPBC: several members with little evidence that they have been saved. Or, as the apostle Peter says in 1 Peter 1:3, "According to his great mercy, he has caused us

to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”¹ Regrettably, far too many GPBC members are not familiar with the theology Peter states in this verse. Ultimately, this lack of understanding of the church and how one is saved is due to a lack of knowledge about God. Because the last decade or more has consisted of short-term pastorates with little or no theological training, or at best moderate theological leanings, the membership is not only void of knowing the depth of who God is and his attributes, but they also have developed a resistance to being challenged by biblical truth. Through conversations, counseling sessions, Sunday school lessons, etc., it has become apparent that, for many, their faith is based on some imaginary being of God that suits their circumstances rather than the God of the Bible. Unfortunately, for many members of GPBC, church has become more like a twelve-step self-help program than the Bride of Christ.

Most twelve-step programs refer to God as a “god of my understanding.” This dangerous oversimplification of God has many problems. First is a false assurance of salvation. Another is a failure to understand progressive sanctification and God’s command to be holy. Additionally, these beliefs usually coincide with one’s lack of understanding God’s complete intolerance of sin. The aforementioned attitudes are unfortunately very prominent in the majority of the GPBC membership. This weakness can best be articulated as a resistance to putting forth the effort to learn and know the complexity of the God of the Bible. Undoubtedly, the Holy Spirit is the only one who can change the heart of man. However, if one has indeed been born of the Spirit, then there will be a desire to obey the Word. This obedience, and consequently the glory God receives from said obedience, will only increase when one knows God in a more intimate way. One can only know God by spending time with him in his revealed Word. This growing intimacy and knowledge of God is only correctly learned through God’s self-revelation: his Word.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV)

When one knows God and his holiness more deeply, a deeper affection for God and his complexities will follow.

Rationale

As previously stated, doctrinal weaknesses abound in GPBC membership concerning their knowledge and understanding of soteriology, ecclesiology, and most importantly, theology proper. Scripture is clear that each individual is accountable for his actions before God: “And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment” (Heb 9:27); yet, God’s Word is equally clear about the pastor’s responsibility to protect the flock from false teachers, as Paul directs the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28-31. The apostle John similarly warns the flock in 1 John 4:1-6 about false teachers who will come and profess lies about Jesus and his followers. Jude also provides this warning in Jude 4, recalling that specific men have been designated “to creep in” and espouse false doctrines. Second Peter 1 and 3 also addresses this issue. The apostle Paul warns Timothy that a time will come when people will deny the truth and bring in false teachers to tell them what their “itching ears” desire to hear (2 Tim 4:3-4). Because the GPBC membership has been the recipient of false teaching, either intentionally or unintentionally, many possess a blatant misunderstanding of the character of God. Therefore, correct biblical preaching and teaching on the character of God must be the top priority. Many New Testament passages support this priority of correct preaching and teaching. A particularly poignant passage is in the apostle Paul’s farewell address to the Ephesian elders.

In this address found in Acts 20:20-29, the apostle Paul states the four-fold purpose of an elder, pastor, overseer, or shepherd. These four purposes are to lead (Acts 20:28), feed, which is teaching or preaching (Acts 20:20, 27), protect (Acts 20:29), and care for (20:28). All four functions, as Paul describes here, are based on the Word of God being correctly delivered to the people. For the church, the Word being correctly preached is the power that God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, uses to change hearts. Whether

that change is to awaken a spiritually dead person to salvation, to strengthen the child of God to become more like Christ (2 Cor 3:18), or to worship God correctly (Col 3:16), it does not occur without the Spirit of God and the Word of God. Martyn Lloyd Jones writes, “The primary task of the Church and of the Christian minister is the preaching of the Word of God.”² Undoubtedly, Lloyd-Jones understood this “primary task” in the environment of the weekly gathering, which is commanded in Hebrews 10:25. All members are encouraged when gathering together to worship. While individual and small group discipleship is also essential for the body, John Calvin reminds that the public gathering to hear the preached Word is the basis of discipleship and one of the determining factors of the church.³

In Acts 2, the visible beginning of the church is on display as the apostle Peter, anointed by the Holy Spirit, expounds the Word of God, from the prophet Joel, and preaches the gospel, whereby God calls 3,000 unto salvation. Paul tells that all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved (Rom 10:13). He further explains in the following verses that faith only comes from hearing the Word of Christ, and this Word must be preached in order to be saved (Rom 10:14-17). Jesus makes the case in John 17:17, when praying to his Father, that not only is the preached Word necessary for salvation but also for sanctification: “Sanctify them in truth, your word is truth.”

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to use expository preaching about the holiness of God to increase the Green Pond Baptist Church members’ knowledge of God and his holiness.

² Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching & Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 26.

³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 4.1.9-10.

Goals

The following goals were to assist in determining the development and successful completion of this project.

1. The first goal was to assess the GPBC members' knowledge of God in relationship to his holiness.
2. The second goal was to prepare a six-week sermon series on the holiness of God.
3. The third goal was to increase GPBC members' knowledge of God's holiness by preaching the prepared sermon series on the holiness of God.

A specific research methodology has been created that measured the successful completion of these three goals. This methodology is described in the following section.

Research Methodology

Three goals determined the effectiveness of this project. The first goal was to assess GPBC members' knowledge of God in relationship to his holiness. At the outset of the project, the Holiness of God Survey was administered to the GPBC membership to determine the knowledge level of the holiness of God.⁴ This goal was considered successfully met when thirty members responded to the survey. Each participant remained anonymous, as the results were determined on a group sample and not individually.

The second goal was to prepare a six-week sermon series on the holiness of God. This goal was measured by an expert panel who used a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, clarity, and relevance of the sermon series.⁵ This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level.

The third goal was to increase GPBC members' knowledge of God's holiness by preaching the approved six-week sermon series. This goal was measured by administering the Holiness of God Survey to the same participants who previously took

⁴ See appendix 1.

⁵ See appendix 2.

the survey.⁶ The goal was considered successfully met when the *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

Technical and theological terms used throughout this project are defined below to aid the reader.

Expository preaching. Bryan Chapell's definition for *expository preaching* will be used for this project: "The technical definition of an expository sermon requires that it expound Scripture by deriving from a specific text main points and subpoints that disclose the thought of the author, cover the scope of the passage, and are applied to the lives of listeners."⁷

Holiness. Wayne Grudem's definition for *holiness* will be used for this project: "God's holiness means that he is separated from sin and devoted to seeking his own honor."⁸

The only limitation to this project was that the sermon series was preached in eight successive weeks in the morning worship gathering at Green Pond Baptist Church. In the event that someone was not be able to attend all messages, an audio and video recording of each sermon was available online.

Two delimitations applied to this project. First, the sermon series did not include every biblical passage about the holiness of God. Rather, the sermon series consisted of representative passages. The second delimitation was that the sermon series only included

⁶ See appendix 1.

⁷ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 23.

⁸ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 202.

one attribute of God. While all the attributes of God are equally significant, the attribute of the holiness of God seemed most appropriate for the allotted time.

Conclusion

God has commanded his children to be holy because he is holy. This holiness can only occur when believers know God more intimately. The foundation of this increased knowledge for God results from hearing the Word of God preached correctly. The following chapters focus on this process of correct biblical preaching about God's holiness. Chapter 2 provides the biblical and theological basis for this project, while chapter 3 considers the pastoral ministry of John Calvin in Geneva, with a focus on his teaching on the holiness of God. Chapter 4 provides a description of the development and implementation of the sermon series, "The Holiness of God," preached at Green Pond Baptist Church. Chapter 5 concludes with an evaluation of the purpose, goal, strengths and weaknesses of the project.

CHAPTER 2

THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR USING EXPOSITORY PREACHING TO INCREASE KNOWLEDGE OF THE HOLINESS OF GOD

Introduction

Throughout Scripture God is described by many attributes. While none of these attributes singularly distinguish the complete nature of God adequately, the holiness of God provides valuable insight into the fullness of God and his glory. This chapter argues that biblical and theological teaching on the holiness of God is essential for GPBC's knowledge of the holiness of God to increase. Therefore, representative passages from the Old and New Testament will be exegeted and various systematic theologies referenced.

In his *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Wayne Grudem states, "God's holiness means that he is separated from sin and devoted to seeking his own honor."¹ Grudem then gives a biblical basis for this separation and devotion to his honor:

The word *holy* is used to describe both parts of the tabernacle, for example. The tabernacle itself was a place separate from the evil and sin of the world, and the first room in it was called the "holy place." . . . But then God commanded that there be a veil, "And the veil shall separate for you the Holy Place from the Most Holy" (Ex. 26:33). The most holy place, where the ark of the covenant was kept, was the place most separated from evil and sin and the most fully devoted to God's service.²

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 240. See also Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 *Revelation and God*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019); Gerald Lewis Bray, *God Has Spoken: A History of Christian Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 135; John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 276-77; Robert Letham, *Systematic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019); Michael S. Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 61-62.

² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 241.

Grudem offers further biblical reasoning for God’s devotion to his own honor: “God himself is the Most Holy One. He is called the ‘Holy One of Israel’ (Pss. 71:22; 78:41; 89:18; Isa. 1:4; 5:19; 24, et al.).”³ This perfection of holiness is why God’s devotion must be directed to his own honor.

Additional insight into God’s holiness is given by Louis Berkhof: “The holiness of God is one of His transcendental attributes, and is sometimes spoken of as His central and supreme perfection. It does not seem proper to speak of one attribute of God as being more central and fundamental than another; but . . . the Scriptural emphasis on the holiness of God would seem to justify its selection.”⁴ Berkhof’s understanding of God’s holiness justifies the Christian’s pursuit of growing in the knowledge of God’s holiness. Knowing more of the biblical teaching on the holiness of God gives the Christian insight into God’s “central and supreme perfection.”

In his work *Das Heilige (The Idea of the Holy)*, Rudolf Otto designates holiness as what is most significant about God, which he terms the “numinous,” which in the Latin refers to “arousing mysterious or religious emotion, mysterious or awe inspiring.” Otto concludes that this holiness cannot be understood conceptually and includes ideas such as “absolute overpoweringness” or “aweful majesty.”⁵ This “numinous,” awe, or fear of God is precisely what the prophet Isaiah encountered upon seeing the holiness of God.

R. L. Dabney, a nineteenth century Southern Presbyterian pastor, joins this chorus exalting the significance of knowing the holiness of God. In his summation of the moral attributes of God, given in *Systematic Theology* (notes from his class lectures at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia) Dabney declares, “His moral

³ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 241.

⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, new combined ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 73.

⁵ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino, 2010), 10-14.

attributes are the special crown; His intelligence and will are the brow that wears it. His holiness is the collective and consummate glory of His nature as an infinite, morally pure, active, and intelligent Spirit.”⁶ This theme of God’s crown being composed of his attributes, specifically holiness, is also seen in one of the great Puritan preachers. Thomas Watson states this same sentiment in *A Body of Divinity*: “Holiness is the most sparkling jewel of his crown; it is the name by which God is known. . . . His power makes him mighty, his holiness makes him glorious. God’s holiness consists in his perfect love of righteousness, and abhorrence of evil.”⁷ Watson notes that God’s holiness is essential to his very being: “But holiness in God is his essence, he is all over holy, and he can as well lose his Godhead as his holiness.”⁸ Indeed, that holiness is the “essence” of God gives warrant to the study of the holiness of God.

It is essential to establish a biblical foundation for the holiness of God. The following exegesis of representative texts from the Old and New Testaments will establish the firm biblical foundation needed for GPBC to grow in their knowledge of the holiness of God. This growth in the knowledge of God’s holiness will have the corresponding desire for a life of obedience to a holy God and his revealed Word.

Isaiah 6:1-7

While all of Scripture is inspired by God and necessary to know God and his nature, one particular passage, Isaiah 6:1-7, epitomizes the revelation of the holiness and glory of God. Critical to the meaning of this passage is not only the holiness of God but also the unholiness of man. As previously mentioned, this is why God cannot be in

⁶ R. L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology: Syllabus and Notes of the Course of Systematic and Polemic Theology Taught in Union Theological Seminary, Virginia*, 3rd ed. (Asbury Park, NJ: Presbyterian Publishing Company, 1885), accessed September 20, 2021, https://www.google.com/books/edition/Syllabus_and_Notes_of_the_Course_of_Syst/JqYVY-kIlq0C?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=dabney%22systematic+theology%22+syllabus+and+notes+of+the+course+of+Systematic+and+Polemic+theology+taught+in+Union+Theological+seminary+virginia&pg=PA440&printsec=frontcover.

⁷ Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (New York City: Scriptura, 2015), 65.

⁸ Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 66.

relationship with man. While his holiness cannot tolerate unholiness, God has made a way to impart his holiness in man. That way being the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ, the gospel (Rom 5:6, 18-19). Hence, it is essential for the people of God to increase their knowledge of the holiness of God.

Without knowing the depth of the holiness of God's nature, man cannot adequately understand his need for a Savior. In his enduring work, *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer addressed this problem nearly fifty years ago, yet it remains the fundamental impediment of the church today. Packer writes, "Ignorance of God—ignorance of both his ways and of the practice of communion with him—lies at the root of much of the church's weakness today."⁹ Packer astutely attributes this weakness to two trends in the modern era. The first being much space being given to great thoughts of man leaving only minimal thoughts of God. The second is the influence of modern skepticism influencing Christian minds to call all foundational scriptural truths into question.¹⁰

This brief passage of Isaiah 6:1-7 is a microcosm of the gospel. In seven verses one witnesses Isaiah's recognition of his separation from God and impending wrath due to his sin and lack of holiness, and God's gracious reconciliation, or as Alec Motyer suggests, "The triumph of grace."¹¹ The setting for this passage is a vision God gives to Isaiah whereby Isaiah is shown "the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple" (Isa 6:1).¹² This was not unusual, given this was the dwelling place of God; yet mentioning the "throne," "high and lifted up," and his train "filling the temple" are all indicators of God's sovereignty, power, and kingship over the world. With this vast description of the scene in the temple, Motyer discerns that

⁹ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2018), 12.

¹⁰ Packer, *Knowing God*, 12-13.

¹¹ J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 75.

¹² All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

while Isaiah “saw” the Lord, no description was given of him, understanding that his holiness and glory is beyond description.¹³

Following this introduction, an amazing insight from the vision is given: “And above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: With two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew” (Isa 6:2). Noting how this fact exalts the depth of God’s holiness, renowned pastor and theologian R. C. Sproul opines in his book *The Holiness of God*, “The seraphim are not sinful humans burdened with impure hearts. Yet as angelic beings, they are still creatures, and even in their lofty status as consorts of the heavenly host it is necessary for them to shield their eyes from a direct gaze on the face of God.”¹⁴ These first two verses of Isaiah 6 present a clear picture of God’s holiness, but arguably the most poignant passage of Scripture concerning the holiness of God follows as Isaiah recalls, “And one called to another and said: Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of host; the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isa 6:3).

These words alone are quite the declaration of God’s holiness; but, when viewed in the context of the literary technicalities of the Hebrew language, these words become even more significant. Sproul explains that this repetition is a mechanism used for emphasis in the Hebrew. In English, bold type or italics may signal special emphasis, but in the Hebrew language, repetition is used.¹⁵ No other trait, attribute, or otherwise descriptive term about God is ever used three times in Scripture, as holiness is in this instance. Sproul explains, “The song is called the *Trisagion*, which means simply the ‘three times holy.’”¹⁶

In essence, these first three verses depict, in a dramatic fashion, the first part of

¹³ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 76.

¹⁴ R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, 2nd ed. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 1998), 22.

¹⁵ Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, 23.

¹⁶ Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, 23.

the gospel, that of understanding who God is in his holy, righteous, and perfect character. For much of the modern church, this is the nature of God that has been forgotten or dismissed, as Packer described previously as man makes much of himself and little of God and his Word. This part of Isaiah's vision explains the great chiasm between God and man due to God's holiness and man's lack thereof. Herman Bavinck, renowned Dutch Calvinist theologian of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, concisely notes this great chiasm as revealed, by Isaiah and other prophets: "They pointed out that the holiness of God consisted especially in His moral perfection, in His exaltedness above and His contrast to the sinfulness of the creature (Isa. 6:3-7)."¹⁷ The following verses (Isa 6:4-7) depict the result that occurs when this great contrast of God's Holiness and man's sinfulness is revealed to man.

Immediately after the seraphim's song, Isaiah witnesses "the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke" (Isa 6:4). This picture demonstrates the power of God and his holiness. Motyer submits, "Concentrated on *doorposts* and *thresholds* it specifically prohibits Isaiah's entry to the divine presence, just as *smoke* forbids him to see God. The divine nature as such is an active force of exclusion."¹⁸ This exclusion, of course, is the result of the divide between God's holiness and perfection and man's sinfulness and depravity. This rendering of physical destruction and smoke due to God's presence also demands a response of awe, shattering, and even dread, as Otto explains in *The Idea of the Holy*.¹⁹ Otto gives further insight into this fear and awe citing Luther's stance that fearing God is beyond the capacity of the natural man. Otto continues this thought moving to the idea of shuddering: "The natural man is quite unable to shudder (*grauen*) or feel horror in the real sense of the word.

¹⁷ Herman Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God: Instruction in the Christian Religion according to the Reformed Confession* (1909; repr., Glenside, PA: Westminster Seminary, 2019), 453.

¹⁸ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 77.

¹⁹ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 15.

For ‘shuddering’ is something more than ‘natural’, ordinary fear. It implies that the mysterious is already beginning to loom before the mind, to touch the feelings.”²⁰ This reasoning on fear and shuddering gives credence for Solomon’s words that “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (Prov 9:10).

Amid the revelation of God’s holiness and the awe and fear that it inspires, Isaiah reveals another and greater fact—apart from God he nor any man has a remedy for this separation from God. Isaiah desperately claims, “And I said: ‘Woe is me! For I am lost. For 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 host” (Isa 6:5). Sproul refers to the King James Version (KJV) of this passage, which is “Woe is me I am undone!” He explains that, psychologically, this is a truer indication of man’s reaction upon the awakening to a holy God. About Isaiah, Sproul remarks, “As long as Isaiah could compare himself to other mortals, he was able to sustain a lofty opinion of his own character. The instant he measured himself by the ultimate standard, he was destroyed—morally and spiritually annihilated. He was undone. He came apart. His sense of integrity collapsed.”²¹ Furthermore, Isaiah pronounces “woe” on himself. Sproul explains that this “woe” was the negative part of a specific form of divine utterance prophets used called an “oracle.”²² Sproul continues specifically explaining that this oracle Isaiah pronounced on himself was due to the realization of understanding the holiness of God: “Isaiah’s use of *woe* was extraordinary. When he saw the Lord, he pronounced the judgment of God upon himself. ‘Woe to me!’ he cried, calling down the curse of God, the utter anathema of judgment and doom upon his own head.”²³

²⁰ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 15.

²¹ Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, 28.

²² Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, 26.

²³ Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, 27.

Isaiah's realization of his sin was also specific as he described, "For 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 host" (Isa 6:5). It was not that Isaiah believed his lips or mouth were the only sinful part of him. As Sproul submits, Isaiah's realization was that his mouth was the measure of his heart. Referring to Jesus' words, "that it is not what goes into people's mouths that defiles them; it' what comes out of their mouths that defiles them."²⁴ Jesus also stated, "For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45).

Apart from God's grace, judgment and woe await all of mankind. Fortunately, Isaiah is shown the grace, mercy, and compassion of God amid his great holiness. Immediately upon Isaiah's confession, "Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongues from the altar and he touched my mouth and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin is atoned for'" (Isa 6:6-7). Motyer posits, "The initiative has been heaven's all along; revealing (2-3), excluding and condemning (4-5) and now sending the seraph to the one he has chosen to save."²⁵ In the confines of a dramatic vision to his prophet Isaiah, God reveals the essence of who himself, the Holy One of Israel. Motyer provides further insight into the complete picture: "In the Old Testament fire is not a cleansing agent but is symbolic of the wrath of God (Gn. 3:24; Nu. 11:1-3), his unapproachable holiness (Ex. 3:2-6; 19:18-25) and the context of his holy law (Dt. 4:12, 33, 36)."²⁶ Motyer concludes this picture: "The altar was the place where the holy God accepted and was satisfied by blood sacrifice (Lv. 17:11). It holds together the ideas of the atonement, propitiation and satisfaction required by God and of the forgiveness, cleansing and reconciliation needed

²⁴ Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, 28.

²⁵ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 77.

²⁶ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 77-78.

by his people . . . through substitutionary sacrifice and brought to Isaiah, encapsulated in the single symbol of the live coal.”²⁷

This vision presented to the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 6:1-7 reveals God’s holiness and the separation, wrath, and reconciliation that are all parts of God’s redemptive plan. The following passages will demonstrate specific elements of that plan through the holiness of God.

Genesis 6:5-8

Once Adam rebelled against God in the garden (Gen 3:1-7), all of mankind was doomed. The penalty for this rebellion was death and eternal separation from God; hence, Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden. In Genesis 4–5, the wickedness and corruption of man continues to grow. Genesis 6 continues that downward spiral, with grotesque sexual immorality and violence, which culminates in the announcement of judgment from God in Genesis 6:5-8.

This passage opens with the declaration that “The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5). This one sentence gives a revealing evaluation of man through the eyes of a holy God. First, God acknowledges that the sin birthed in the Garden of Eden was now “great wickedness.” John Calvin dissects the heart of this evaluation of man as Moses shared it, stating, “For by the word *saw*, he indicates long continued patience; as if he would say, that God had not proclaimed his sentence to destroy men, until after having well observed, and long considered, their case, he saw them to be past recovery.”²⁸ This wording and understanding is reminiscent of God’s judgment pronounced on Jerusalem during the rule of King Zedekiah from 597-586 BC as the Chronicler shared, “But they mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and

²⁷ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 78.

²⁸ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses, Calvin’s Commentaries*, trans. John King (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 217.

scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, until there was no remedy” (2 Chron 36:16). Throughout Scripture, one is able to witness God’s pattern of mercy and warning in dealing with man’s sin until ultimate judgment and wrath of a holy God are poured out on unholy and sinful men.

Next, one sees God not only viewing the sinful actions, but discerning the intentions of man’s heart, “and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5b). In their commentary on the book of Genesis, Bruce Waltke and Cathi Fredricks acknowledge the seriousness of this statement: “This is a vivid portrayal of the depth and comprehensiveness of human depravity. . . . The situation portends the end of history at the second coming of Christ.”²⁹ Calvin’s position is the same concerning man’s depravity as he posits concerning the continual evil intention of man’s thoughts. Aligning with Waltke and Fredricks, Calvin submits that this continuation of evilness speaks to the progression of sin throughout humanity: “But the more correct interpretation is , that the world had then become so hardened in its wickedness, and was so far from any amendment, or from entertaining any feeling of penitence, that it grew worse and worse as time advanced.”³⁰ Calvin continues this explanation as evidence of the biblical doctrine of the total depravity of man: “That is was not the folly of a few days, but the inveterate depravity which the children, having received, as by hereditary right, transmitted from their parents to their descendants. Nevertheless, though Moses here speaks of the wickedness which at that time prevailed in the world, the general doctrine is properly and consistently hence elicited.”³¹ This general doctrine of the total depravity of man is essential to a biblical understanding of the holiness of God. This depravity is the cause of the holy God separating himself from sinful man.

²⁹ Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 118.

³⁰ Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses*, 248.

³¹ Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses*, 248.

The following thoughts of God that Moses records in the remainder of this passage have been the subject of some controversy in the history of the church. Genesis 6:6 reads, “And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved his heart.” This verse contains two words whose meaning is essential to understand: regretted and grieved. As the *ESV Study Bible* relates, “The Hebrew verb rendered ‘regretted’ (Hb. *nakham*) is sometimes translated ‘repent’ and sometimes as ‘feels sorrow’ or ‘be grieved.’”³² This language as translated into English can sometimes be confusing and cause questions as to the nature of God. This stance is countered well by Berkhof by first defining the immutability of God: “The Immutability of God is a necessary concomitant of His aseity. It is that perfection of God by which He is devoid of change, in His Being, but also in His perfections, and His purposes and promises.”³³ This is a foundational biblical truth. If God is not immutable, then there is no certainty about his character and attributes. He in essence would be no different than man. Berkhof continues this explanation: “This immutability of God is clearly taught in such passages of Scripture as Ex. 3:14; Ps. 102:26-28; Isa. 41:4; 48:12; Mal. 3:6; Rom. 1:23; Heb. 1:11, 12; Jas. 1:17.”³⁴

Grudem concurs with this position and specifically addresses the questions raised in Genesis 6:6 as to God’s immutability. He explains that God relates to man in Scripture in terms that man can comprehend: “Using a more technical term, we can say that *all that Scripture says about God uses anthropomorphic language—that is, language that speaks of God in human terms.*”³⁵ Grudem also gives the origin of the term anthropomorphic: “Anthropomorphic comes from two Greek word, *anthrōpos*, ‘man,’ and *morphē*, ‘form.’ An anthropomorphic description of God describes God in human

³² Wayne Grudem et al., eds. *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 61.

³³ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 158.

³⁴ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 59.

³⁵ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 159, emphasis original.

forms or human terms.”³⁶ Specifically, this description of God in human terms provides understanding that God was so regretful, grieved, sorrowful, etc., by man’s sin that he was sorry that man existed in this condition. The case of Genesis 6:6 and others like it cause God short-term sorrow, but as Grudem submits, “But nonetheless in the long term would ultimately achieve his good purposes.”³⁷

Summarily, as previously stated by Berkhof, God’s being, perfections, purposes, nor promises change, but that Scripture reveals God presenting himself to some and hiding himself from others. His disposition and how he deals with man before and after conversion does change. Most certainly this is seen in judgment and wrath for the lost, and mercy, grace, and displaced wrath (given to Christ as opposed to the converted) as the most obvious change that occurs with God.³⁸ Even so, none of these change God’s nature, purpose, or plan, and this would ascribe to his holiness.

Ultimately, God reveals his final determination to deal with the evil and wickedness of man’s sin: “So the LORD said, ‘I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them’ (Gen 6:7). It is important to remember, that all God has created was “good, good” (Gen 1:31). This decision to destroy all of creation was not only because of man’s sin, but also because of God’s holiness. The separation had to occur. God cannot endure, tolerate, or in any way be a part of sin. As Vos emphatically claims, the root of the Hebrew word for “holy” “means ‘cut,’ ‘separate,’ and thus originally expresses being ‘set apart,’ ‘separated.’”³⁹ This necessity of having to be separated from sin is why God chose to destroy the earth and its occupants: his holy, righteous, and perfect nature

³⁶ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 159.

³⁷ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 159.

³⁸ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 59.

³⁹ Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, *Soteriology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2015), 184.

demanded it. The fact that God is unwavering in his decision to destroy all the earth and flesh on the earth is a testament to his unwavering nature. This exhibition of his unwavering nature demonstrates that God is not susceptible to favoritism, bargaining, or bribes. The actual language of “blot out” means a total destruction. God is completely holy and cannot tolerate less.

While God demonstrates his great power, judgment, and wrath in his plan for destruction, conversely, he exhibits his great mercy, grace, and love in saving a remnant. “But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD” (Gen 6:8). Just as Isaiah received God’s grace with a burning coal, Noah is the recipient of God’s favor. This favor of God is shown elsewhere with Abraham (Gen 18:3) and Moses (Exod 33:17). The same language is seen when the angel Gabriel greets the virgin Mary: “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you! . . . Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God” (Luke 1:28, 30). All these individuals finding favor with God seem to indicate his choosing them above others, indeed his call on their lives. In the case of Noah, this favor saves him and his family. The rest of humanity is “blotted out” in the flood (Gen 7:23). Again, the language of blotted out is used. Interestingly, God uses that same language when he announces to his children, his favored ones, what he does to their sin: “I, I am he who ‘blots out’ your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins” (Isa 43:25). In his *Systematic Theology*, John Frame eloquently addresses this idea of holiness and redemption: “Holiness, then, is a very rich concept. It speaks of God’s transcendence and separation from finite and sinful creatures. But it also speaks of how God draws them to himself, making them holy. Holiness marks God’s transcendence, but also his immanence, his presence to redeem us.”⁴⁰

Just as the gospel was exhibited through Isaiah’s vision of God’s glory and holiness and his subsequent redemption through a hot coal (Isa 6:1-7), the flood narrative shows God’s redemption of Noah based solely on his imputation of his righteousness of

⁴⁰ Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 279.

Noah. Like Isaiah, Noah was not exempt from sin, but only because of God's favor was he declared righteous and was the remnant God chose to save (Gen 6:5-9). In this favoring, God is in effect recognizing that one righteous, which like the glory of God bears similarities to the holiness of God. This explanation of righteous from Berkhof demonstrates the connection of God's righteousness to his holiness: "That perfection of God by which He maintains Himself over against every violation of His holiness, and shows in every respect that He is the Holy One."⁴¹

Ultimately, an even clearer picture of the transfer of this holiness or righteousness is seen in the New Testament, as the apostle Paul reminds the Corinthian church: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteous of God" (2 Cor 5:21). This righteousness of Christ, of course, is recognized in his sinless life, which is shown throughout Scripture in prophecy and reality (Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5; Isa 53:11; Ps 45:7). Because Christ is "the exact imprint of his nature" (Heb 1:3), Christ's holiness is demonstrated through his righteousness. In *The Pursuit of Holiness*, Jerry Bridges reminds the believer that because of that holiness in Christ, one can have the same assurance in Christ. In fact, the more one grows in holiness and recognizes the need for more holiness in his life, the more one understands the perfect righteousness of Christ that has been credited to those who he has redeemed.⁴²

Leviticus 10:1-3

The book of Leviticus was written immediately after the tabernacle was constructed. God was providing a way for his people to come together and offer him appropriate worship. The laws and practices given in the Levitical Law reinforced the holiness of God and provided a way for God's people to commune with him, even in their unholy state. More specifically, much of Leviticus deals with clean and unclean

⁴¹ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 74-75.

⁴² Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, 3rd ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 41-43.

laws determining what is acceptable in the presence of the holy God. Concerning the clean and unclean designation, God provided specific items and practices by which the priest should perform the sacrifices and lead worship.⁴³ Vos provides a helpful explanation concerning this clean and unclean status of objects:

Now the connection between these is such that all that is holy must at the same time also be clean, and all that is unholy is also unclean, but the opposite is not true. “Holy” means more than “clean.” There is a further determination. That something is set apart does not yet make it holy. It becomes holy because it is set apart for God and His use.⁴⁴

Instrumental to the Levitical Laws that God commanded were the priests. The priests were appointed from the tribe of Levi. God instituted the active priesthood with Aaron through this command to Moses: “Then bring near to you Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the people of Israel, to serve me as priests—Aaron and Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar” (Exod 28:1). The exegesis focuses on Aaron’s two oldest sons, Nadab and Abihu, and their encounter with the holy God. Gordon Wenham grants a useful preface to this account of Nadab and Abihu: “In many parts of the Church the biblical view of divine judgment is conveniently forgotten or supposed to be something that passed away with the OT. Heine’s famous last words, ‘God will forgive me. That’s his job,’ have become the unexpressed axiom of much modern theology.”⁴⁵ Wenham continues by providing a sober warning to theological liberals and conservatives alike: “This short story is therefore an affront to liberal thinkers. It should also challenge Bible-believing Christians whose theological attitudes are influenced by prevailing trends of thought more often than they realize.”⁴⁶

⁴³ Grudem et al., *The ESV Study Bible*, 102.

⁴⁴ Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 184.

⁴⁵ Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1979), 153.

⁴⁶ Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 153.

The setting and actual event that occurs in Leviticus 10:1-3 is abrupt and to the point. Just prior to this event, Aaron offered up the burnt offerings to God just as God had prescribed. The result from the congregation was one of awe: “They shouted and fell on their faces” (Lev 9:24b). Immediately following, “Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them” (Lev 10:1). The crucial words in this verse are “unauthorized” and the key phrase is “which he (God) had not commanded.” The Law, which God gave to his people, was for the purpose of setting them apart. This “setting apart” was to lead to their holiness. Ultimately, in God’s plan of redemption, that holiness cannot be achieved without the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Calvin explains the uselessness of the Law without Christ: “Because it would avail us nothing to know what God demands did not Christ come to the succor those who are laboring, and oppressed under an intolerable yoke and burden.”⁴⁷ Yet, while the sacrificial Law did foreshadow the coming Messiah, it also provided the means of true worship of God. Ignoring God’s command concerning worship is where Nadab and Abihu sinned with an “unauthorized fire.”

Moses describes the horror of what transpired after Nadab and Abihu committed their sin: “And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD” (Lev 10:2). While this encounter seems horrific, Calvin sheds light on the utter importance of obedience to God: “The Lord, in delivering a perfect rule of righteousness, has reduced it in all its part to his mere will, and in this way has shown that there is nothing more acceptable to him than obedience.”⁴⁸ The prophet Samuel makes this point with King Saul after he saved livestock from the capture of the Amalekites for a burnt offering, when God explicitly commanded him to kill all livestock: “And Samuel

⁴⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 2.7.2.

⁴⁸ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.8.5.

said, ‘has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams’ (1 Sam 22:15).

God commands specific ways to worship him. God is the only one who is holy; therefore, only he can describe acts of worship for himself. Moreover, God knows the heart of man. As he reminds through the prophet Jerimiah, “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jer 17:9). Calvin also discerns, “There is the more necessity for attending to this, because the human mind, in its wantonness, is ever and anon inventing different modes of worship as a means of gaining his favor.”⁴⁹ This is great insight concerning Nadab and Abihu, Calvin’s sixteenth century, and certainly the twenty-first century.

This chronicling of Nadab and Abihu’s death concludes with sobering words from the prophet Moses to his brother and High Priest, Aaron: “Then Moses said to Aaron, ‘This is what the LORD has said: ‘Among these who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.’ And Aaron held his peace” (Lev 10:3). The most significant intent of this entire passage of Leviticus 10:1-3 is for man to understand the utter holiness of God. This is most adequately displayed in God’s consumption of Nadab and Abihu in fire because of their disobedience. The typical response from the heart of man labels this act extreme and unnecessary. However, this is because, in and of himself, man cannot comprehend the extent of God’s holiness. Hence, the accounts of Isaiah, Noah, and now Nadab and Abihu shed a glimpse of the gravity of God’s holiness.

Second, the intent of this account, as previously mentioned, is to emphasize the necessity of obeying God’s commands. Man’s understanding of all aspects of those commands is not a prerequisite. Because the origin of the commands is the holy God of creation, no other explanation is required. As prior mention has already been made, this obedience surpasses sacrifice or any good work. The holy God of Israel demands

⁴⁹ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.8.5.

obedience. As this passage communicates, failure to provide that obedience results in dire consequences, even death.

Another important segment of this encounter of Nadab and Abihu is the importance of leadership in God's family. The fact that Nadab and Abihu held the office of priest is significant and should not be discounted. God prescribed that the office was only open to the Levite tribe of Israel, of whom Aaron was a descendant. Not only were Nadab and Abihu priests, but they were the first to serve under the first High Priest, their father Aaron. Given these circumstances, the disobedience of Nadab and Abihu concerning the fire from an unauthorized source was all the more profane. In the New Testament church, the apostle Paul understood the higher call of leadership, and in the case of elder he gave these instructions: "Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear" (1 Tim 5:19-20). Mark Rooker summarizes the gravity of this for all believers: "The seriousness of Nadab and Abihu's sin must not be minimized. The serious consequence of Nadab and Abihu's disobedience is a reminder of how resolutely important the worship of God is to be for a believer's life."⁵⁰

Lastly, one would be remiss to overlook Aaron's silence in this event. While the significance of God's holiness and the demand for obedience cannot be minimized, the human component questions a father's silence immediately following the consumption of his two eldest sons in fire caused by the God he is serving and worshipping. Concerning the parental aspect, Moses' words are chilling: "Then Moses said to Aaron, 'This is what the LORD has said: 'Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.' And Aaron held his peace" (Lev 10:3). In these words that God gave to Moses, the severity of the punishment is justified because the holy God was

⁵⁰ Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 3A (Nashville: B & H, 2000), 158.

offended. The aforementioned reasoning is clear here as God explains that he will be “sanctified by those near me,” meaning the priest.

An objection to the severity of this punishment could be raised that God did not immediately kill those in leadership for offenses that appeared more serious than these. Indeed, the apostle Peter denied the Christ three times in arguably the most precarious moment in history. His punishment—mercy, grace, and leadership in the bride of Christ. The answer to this and other scenarios that sinful man might raise is in the holiness of God, or even beyond, are entwined in that holiness, his providence. In his book by that name, pastor and author John Piper comments on these seemingly troubling occurrences in Scripture: “There are many such scenes in in the Bible, and I will argue that in them all, God is neither sinful nor capricious. If we are prone to be critical rather than be changed, we should put our hands on our mouths and listen. We are sinful and finite. God in infinite and holy.”⁵¹ As this exegesis is concluded, the clearest explanation of these complex questions springs from the holy mouth of God: “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” (Isa 55:8-9).

Exodus 33:17-23; 34:29-33

While Leviticus 10:1-3 revealed God’s demand for obedience from the priest in leading worship to the holy God of creation, Exodus 33:17-23 and Exodus 34:29-33 demonstrate God’s great love and protection of his servant when dealing with his holiness. Just prior to Exodus 33:17, Moses interceded for the children of Israel after the debacle of the golden calf that Aaron fashioned for the Israelites to worship while Moses was on Mount Sinai with the LORD (Exod 32:1-33:16). In Exodus 33:17, the LORD grants Moses’ petition of intercession. Specifically, God responded to Moses by saying “You

⁵¹ John Piper, *Providence* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 14.

have found favor in my sight and I know you by name” (Exod 33:17). This intimate and personal response prompts Moses to ask for more. “Moses said, ‘Please show me your glory’” (Exod 33:18). Philip Ryken posits that this was quite the request:

This request was not as abrupt as most translations make it sound. In Hebrew it comes across more like an entreaty. But it was still an audacious request. The prophet was asking to see the splendor and radiance of God. Glory is the weightiness of the divine being, and Moses wanted to see it for himself. So, with holy boldness, he said, ‘Please show me your glory.’⁵²

There is much speculation as to the origin of Moses’ request. It certainly was a bold request, but not one beyond the range of possibility given what Moses had been privy to, since God had called him to a burning bush that did not burn, the plagues placed on Pharaoh, crossing the Red Sea on dry land, the Passover, manna from heaven, water from a rock, and being given tablets written by God. Ryken comments, “What better way to know God than to see a total revelation of his glory?”⁵³

God’s response to Moses exhibits not only his holiness and glory but his love and compassion. Rather than recoil at the suggestion, God patiently reminds Moses to whom he is making the request and agrees to give Moses a greater glimpse of his nature. Ultimately, God’s response was protective: “And he said, ‘I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The LORD.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But,’ he said, ‘you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live’” (Exod 33:19-20). Indeed, this was a gracious response, as Ryken opines, “If Moses were to see a complete revelation of God in his eternal being, it would be so overwhelming that it would destroy him. God is absolute in his perfection. Moses was a finite, fallen creature, and as such he could not see God and live. No one can.”⁵⁴

⁵² Philip Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God’s Glory*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 979.

⁵³ Ryken, *Exodus*, 979.

⁵⁴ Ryken, *Exodus*, 980.

In addition to God's response, he does agree to make a provision for Moses to see his back after he passes by. The grandness of what the LORD describes in this instance should cause an awe of its own: "And the LORD said, 'Behold there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen'" (Exod 33:21-23). The staggering realization is that God was literally "passing by" Moses and covered up an entire man with his hand to protect him from the glory and holiness of his person. God then removed his hand and gave Moses a glimpse of his back or literally, his "hind parts."

The magnitude of what transpired was not realized until Moses descended the mountain, forty days later after receiving the Ten Commandments. Upon his descent with tablets in hand, Moses was unaware of any physical change due to his encounter with God's glory. His brother Aaron was first to see, as the Scripture recounts: "Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone and they were afraid to come near him" (Exod 34:30). The dramatic result of Moses encountering just a momentary small portion of God's glory and holy nature was a complete transformation of Moses' appearance. Ryken explains what actually appeared: "The Hebrew literally says, 'The skin of his face sent out horns. . . . But the phrase actually refers to rays of light. As a result of his face -to- face encounter with God, Moses had a halo of glory. Dazzling beams of light were shining out from his face.'"⁵⁵ This reference in the Hebrew language of the light shining from Moses' face "sending out horns" has significance beyond just the bright sheen emanating from Moses as a result of his encounter with God.

Victor Hamilton notes that the use of the very rare verb *qāran*, as opposed to the more common *ʿôr*, is intentional, so as to draw attention to the aforementioned incident of Aaron and the golden calf (Exod 32:1–33:16). Hamilton opines that this is God's way of connecting the two incidents: "Whom will God have to lead his people, the

⁵⁵ Ryken, *Exodus*, 1016.

horned calf or bull of chap. 32, or the ‘horned’ Moses of chap. 34? Will he go with the bovine of chap. 32 or with he-of-the-beaming-face of chap. 34?”⁵⁶ Indeed, the stark contrast is unavoidable—the filthy, dark, blackened horns of idolatry that result in a smoldering pile of ash compared to the glistening, bright, and pure face of Moses. An effect that is rendered by just a glimpse of the holiness of the almighty God.

Together, the aforementioned passages have exhibited the awe, beauty, and fear of seeing or realizing the glory of God. Through that awe, beauty, and fear, these passages also demonstrate the separation, wrath, reconciliation, and redemption foreshadowed in God’s glory, holiness, and righteousness. The following passages from the New Testament will reveal God’s holiness in the coming of Jesus Christ and how that brings God’s plan to completion.

Matthew 17:1-9

The transfiguration of Jesus is represented in all three synoptic Gospels, but this exegesis will focus on the account given by Matthew and how this event demonstrates God’s glory. Even though the two historical occurrences took place thousands of years apart, there are similarities to the previous passage of Moses seeing God’s glory and Jesus’ transfiguration. An obvious similarity is that geographic setting, with both taking place on a mountain. Joel Green notes, “Mountains generally serve as places of revelation and/or divine encounter, and this is true in Matthew (e.g., Mt. 5:1; 14:23; 15:29; 28:16).”⁵⁷ Green continues to specifically mention the Moses connection with the transfiguration: “Given Matthew’s wider interest in Moses typology, it is difficult not to find here one of a series of echoes of Moses’ encounter with God on the mountain (Ex 24:15-18) and the

⁵⁶ Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 589.

⁵⁷ Joel R. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2013), 967.

consequent transformation of Moses' countenance (Ex. 34:29-35)."⁵⁸ Green writes that the similarity continues between Moses and Matthew as

Matthew describes Jesus' transfiguration with a passive verb, presumably a so called divine or theological passive, *metemorphōthē* ("he was transformed," with God as the agent of his transformation), the result of which was that "his face shone like the sun and clothes became as white as light." Links to Moses are again visible. Ex. 34:29, 35).⁵⁹

The focus of the event, as Green mentioned, is the actual transformation of Jesus. David Platt inserts an important point: "The word 'transformed' in verse 2 is from the same word that Paul uses in 2 Corinthians 3:18 to describe how we are 'transformed' into the image of Christ. In both instances, this word refers to a change of form."⁶⁰ This attention given to the actual verb brings forth one of the main intents of the transfiguration: the glory of God and Jesus transforming man. As Platt notes, the word means a change of form. For the believer in Christ, his form is being changed into that of Christ, which will come to fruition in eternity.

While on the mountain, Jesus and his three disciples, Peter, James, and John, encounter Moses and Elijah. Platt posits the significance of their appearance: "Moses represented the law of God . . . significantly, this giving of the law took place on a mountain, Mount Sinai. . . Moses had reflected divine glory . . . Elijah had proclaimed divine glory."⁶¹ The picture revealed in this occurrence was glorious. The connection with Moses and Elijah has significant theological value. Just as well, the transformation of Jesus on the mountain and the transformation of believers because of Christ is equally valuable.

⁵⁸ Green, Brown, and Perrin, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 967.

⁵⁹ Green, Brown, and Perrin, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 967.

⁶⁰ David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary Series (Nashville: B & H, 2013), 224.

⁶¹ Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, 224-25.

In addition to these important intentions of the event, D. A. Carson interjects another: the identity of Jesus. Carson reminds the reader of Matthew's account of Jesus' baptism and God's voice, stating, "This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased" (Matt 3:17). Carson attest that this not only identifies Jesus as God's son but places him above Moses and Elijah. Carson then signifies that God utters these exact words immediately following Jesus' visible transformation, further imploring all to listen to him (Matt 17:5).⁶²

The disciples' response at this amazing display of God's glory being interposed on Jesus is appropriate: "When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified" (Matt 17:6). In fact, this certainly is like Isaiah's response in Isaiah 6:1-7. But immediately after this reaction, Jesus instructs the disciples to not be afraid and to rise up, and when they do, they only see Jesus (Matt 17:7-8). Craig Blomberg astutely gives great application to these two verses: "When the disciples look up again, Moses and Elijah have disappeared. *'They saw no one except Jesus' reads more literally, they did not see anyone but Jesus only.* The word only (*monos*) comes at the end of the sentence for emphasis. The disciples must focus on Christ alone. He will prove sufficient for their needs."⁶³ This is an appropriate application for the disciples and all followers of Christ in any age.

Hebrews 12:14

The following examination is of a single verse, Hebrews 12:14. The meaning and message of this verse is as shocking as it is brief. Like all passages dealing with the holiness of God, this passage demands a thoughtful and prayerful response. To correctly exegete and understand Hebrews 12:14, some context needs to be provided. In Hebrews

⁶² D. A. Carson, *Matthew Chapters 13-28*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 386-87.

⁶³ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: B & H, 1992), 264, emphasis original.

11, the author gives a listing of many of the patriarchs of God's family and what God accomplished through their faith. Ultimately, it is a testimony to God's grace and faithfulness. The writer of Hebrews begins chapter 12: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (v. 1). The race is the life of faith that each Christian is called to live. So, chapter 11 gives the believer moral support and earthly examples that have finished in the faith. Furthermore, chapter 12 provides practical instructions to help guide one in faithfulness.

Hebrews 12:5-13 provides encouragement for the believer to remain steadfast when God brings discipline. The author reminds the believer that being a child of God makes you the object of discipline. He provides the example of an earthly father who disciplines those he loves and makes the correlation that God only disciplines his children that they will remain faithful. The author concludes in verses 12-13 with a strong encouragement to respond to the discipline: "Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed." Then the writer pens these words, "Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord (v. 14). The focus of this exegesis will be on the second half of the verse concerning holiness.

In studying verse 12:14, it is necessary to review the motive behind Hebrews 12:10: "But he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness." The expressed purpose that God is disciplining his children is to make them holy. In his commentary, Tom Schreiner explains the process: "God is disciplining them just as a father disciplines his children. When God disciplines us, we are called upon to endure, to obtain the benefit of the discipline being meted out. Discipline isn't a sign of God's disfavor but his love. It is designed to produce holiness and righteousness in God's children."⁶⁴ God disciplines

⁶⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation (Nashville: B & H, 2015), 388.

his children when they are not pursuing or acting righteous. The crux of this verse is the understanding that holiness is not optional. The apostle Peter explains this in his first letter to the church: “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 Pet 1:15-16). As Peter cites Leviticus 11:44, it is made clear that holiness is not optional. The language God used in the original passage in Leviticus is a command, not a suggestion. God will no more ignore his child’s lack of striving for holiness than he ignored Nadab and Abihu ignoring the commands of worship and sacrifice.

This verse and the command to strive and pursue holiness demonstrates the connection between holiness and righteousness. While God imputes his righteousness on an individual when he is born again, that person is not instantly perfect or whole. There is a sanctification period whereby one grows in holiness and righteousness. In essence, the person becomes more like Christ. As previously mentioned in Matthew 17:1-8 and Jesus’ transformation, each believer goes through a transformation. Paul states, “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18). This transformation from one degree to another is how one pursues or strives for holiness, glory, or righteousness. Furthermore, one cannot pursue or strive if the righteousness or holiness has not already been given by God. This is the subject of Paul’s declaration in 2 Corinthians 5:21. As James Boice states, “This is a great biblical truth, namely, that the grace of God always comes before anything.”⁶⁵

Because of God’s gifting of saving grace, the author of Hebrews can state, “Without which no one can see the Lord” (Heb 12:14). R. Albert Mohler explains this pursuit: “This does not mean those who run are perfect or sinless, but it does mean those are fighting sin and living faithfully. No one will see the Lord without this holiness, which

⁶⁵ James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 1:321.

make the moral imperative to make straight paths for our feet eternally significant.”⁶⁶ Concerning the phrase “without which no one will see the Lord,” William Lane explains, “The phrase is a sober reminder that ‘holiness is that provision which alone allows one to come into the presence of God. Only those consecrated to God through the objective gift of Christ have access to God.’”⁶⁷

Revelation 4:8-11

The concluding passage in Revelation is a near replica of Isaiah’s vision in Isaiah 6:1-7. Instead of Isaiah being given a vision of God and his holiness, in Revelation 4:8-11, the apostle John is being given the revelation of Jesus Christ in a vision through an angel. John, then in turn, passes this revelatory message to the churches. For many in the church throughout all eras of the age, Revelation has been a confusing, somewhat mystical, and sometimes frightening part of Scripture. While much of Revelation rightly inspires awe and fear, it is written as an encouragement to the early church. Hence, a general overview of the book is prudent before specifically concentrating on the holiness of God in Revelation 4:8-11.

Schreiner gives valuable insight into this description: “Revelation has brilliance and beauty outshining any attempt to explain it. John wrote Revelation to churches facing persecution and being tempted to compromise with Roman imperial power and cave in to the social pressures of pagan society.”⁶⁸ After providing this information, Schreiner speaks to the application of the entire book: “Believers should rejoice despite persecution and discrimination from opponents, for they can be assured a place in the heavenly city

⁶⁶ R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Exalting Jesus in Hebrews*, Christ-Centered Exposition (Nashville: B & H, 2017), 203.

⁶⁷ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 450-51.

⁶⁸ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Revelation*, in *ESV Expository Commentary*, vol. 12, *Hebrews-Revelation* Edited by Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton, Jr., and Jay Sklar. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 527.

since they are washed clean by the blood of the Lamb.”⁶⁹ These truths add significant credibility to the aforementioned Hebrews 12:14. Schreiner concludes with the assurance the message of Revelation brings to the believer: “If they endure until the end, they will enjoy God and the Lamb forever. Ultimately, God will vindicate those who are his.”⁷⁰

Throughout this overview provided by Schreiner is the underlying theme of the deity of Jesus Christ. Along with God’s sovereignty, eternity, and holiness, the deity of Christ is a major focus of Revelation. This is the ultimate end of this project. As one increases knowledge of the holiness of God, the ultimate end is the recognition of that exact holiness in Jesus Christ. A thorough biblical theology draws a direct line from the holiness and glory that Noah, Moses, and Isaiah view to the transfiguration of Christ. The culmination of this truth is worked out in New Covenant believers “striving for holiness,” which finds its resting place in the Lamb of Revelation. This is borne out by Schreiner:

One the striking features in Revelation is its extraordinarily high Christology. It rivals the Gospel of John. . . . One parallel of the Gospel of John leaps out, for Jesus is called the “Word of God” (19:13), echoing the Gospel of John. . . . Jesus is also identified at the outset as the “ruler of kings on earth” (Rev. 1:5), showing he shares the same rule and sovereignty as God.⁷¹

Given this line of truth, God’s holiness is shared also with Jesus Christ as the following passage will demonstrate.

Revelation 4:8-11 begins with a description of the four living creatures that resemble the seraphim in Isaiah 6: “And the four living creatures , each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!’” (v. 8). About this glorious scene, G. K. Beale notes the specific praise being sung to the Lord: “The hymns make explicit the main point of the vision and the whole chapter: God is to

⁶⁹ Schreiner, *Revelation*, 527.

⁷⁰ Schreiner, *Revelation*, 527.

⁷¹ Schreiner, *Revelation*, 537-38.

be glorified because of his holiness and sovereignty.”⁷² Dennis Johnson concurs concerning the significance of this praise: “The first praise, offered by the four living creatures extols God’s perfect holiness, omnipotence, and eternity, ascribing to him glory and honor and thanks.”⁷³

Grant Osborne elaborates even more on this opening scene in Revelation 4: “They have no rest day or night, thus placing a double emphasis on the continuous activity of these heavenly beings. . . . Indeed, one of the major emphases of chapter 4 is this preparation for divine judgment via worship. The destruction of evil is necessary before eternity can begin.”⁷⁴ Osborne, in agreement with Schreiner’s view, notes that three key attributes are celebrated: his holiness, his omnipotence, and his eternality, beginning this celebration with the Trisagion, “holy, holy, holy.” This is the connection to Isaiah 6:3 and reiteration of the significance of the repeating of “holy” three times.⁷⁵ Osborne astutely notes,

His holiness leads naturally into his omnipotence. Isaiah 6:3 uses the divine title, “Lord Sabaoth” (Lord of Hosts). . . . John follows the general LXX translation of that title. . . . Lord Almighty . . . as stated in 1:8, this is one of John’s favorite titles for God (used nine times in the book), referring to his sovereign power and control over his created universe.⁷⁶

While there is a definite parallel between John’s vision and that of Isaiah, there is a varied manifestation of the holiness. Isaiah’s vision resulted in redemption when the seraphim came with the hot coal to atone for the sin. In this vision given to John, the Lord’s sovereignty, omnipotence, and eternal nature appear to be the emphasis of the holiness.

⁷² G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 2nd ed., The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2013), 332.

⁷³ Dennis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001), 102.

⁷⁴ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 236.

⁷⁵ Osborne, *Revelation*, 236.

⁷⁶ Osborne, *Revelation*, 237.

While the holiness recognized in both visions is the exact same, the picture in Revelation reveals a holiness in the finished work of Jesus Christ. In Revelation 4:1, there is evidence of this inference as John recounts the first voice saying to him, “Come up here and I will show you what must take place after this.” In addition, immediately following this passage in Revelation 5:1-10, the scene is only of the slain Lamb being worthy to open the seals after taking the scroll from God. Immediately the creatures and elders offer their praise to the Lamb.

As Revelation 4 continues, one of the major themes of the book is addressed: “And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever” (Rev 4:9). The eternity of the one whose holiness is being worshipped is again exalted. The description continues as the holiness and glory of the one on the throne solicits their worship: “The twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying” (Rev 4:10). This demonstrates the giving or sacrifice of worship as the elders cast their crowns to him. Again, the eternal nature is noted.

This passage concludes with a crescendo of worship from the twenty-four elders to God: “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things and by your will they existed and were created” (Rev 4:11). This worship results from a recognition of God as creator, which speaks to the other major theme of Revelation: God as omnipotent or sovereign over all the universe. This point is accentuated by the acknowledgement of God “willing” creation into existence. Schreiner gives an excellent summation to this passage:

Revelation 4 lifts our eyes to the most important being in the universe and summons us to behold our God. And this God is sitting on his throne. Despite the evil in the world, God reigns and rules. When we see God, we realize he is indescribably majestic, beautiful, lovely, and awesome. And we confess that the God we worship is infinitely holy.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Schreiner, *Revelation*, 603.

Conclusion

Indeed, the God worthy of worship is infinitely holy. The exegesis of the seven passages in this chapter have shown the significance of the holiness of God. This holiness is the very nature of God and must be understood in order for one to know God. This knowledge can only come from the revealed Word of the Holy One of Israel. While the seven passages are not exhaustive, they do provide sound biblical evidence of the holiness of God throughout the whole of Scripture.

CHAPTER 3

JOHN CALVIN ON THE PREACHING AND TEACHING OF THE HOLINESS OF GOD

Since its inception, God has blessed the church with gifted men to equip believers through the faithful preaching of Scripture. The sixteenth century in Europe was a critical time in church history, as the practice of expository preaching was recovered and prized during the Reformation. This recovery was due in large part to the preaching of John Calvin during his pastorate in Geneva. This chapter argues that John Calvin's preaching on the holiness of God provides an exceptional historic basis by which the members of GPBC can increase their knowledge of the holiness of God. Specifically, this chapter posits that Calvin's personal piety and pastoral ministry provide an excellent model of pursuing God's holiness to know him more completely. This will be demonstrated through an examination of Calvin's *Institutes*, tracts and letters, commentaries, and sermons written during his pastoral ministry.

John Calvin's Early Life

In an effort to make certain his life did not detract from the glory of God, John Calvin wrote little concerning himself. In all of Calvin's writings, there are only three occurrences in which Calvin refers to himself: his *Reply to Sadoletto* (1539); in the preface to *Commentary on the Psalms* (1557); and on his deathbed to fellow ministers of Geneva (April 28, 1564).¹ While personal biographic information is not exhaustive, it is established that John Calvin (Jean Cauvin) was born on July 10, 1509, in Noyon, France, to Girard and Jeanne. At that time, Noyon was a cathedral town in the Picardy region of France, some

¹ Joel R. Beeke, ed., *The Soul of Life: The Piety of John Calvin*, Profiles in Reformed Spirituality (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2009), 1.

sixty miles north of Paris.² Calvin's father, Girard, had achieved bourgeois status in the area by 1497, and married the daughter of a local innkeeper named Jeanne Le Franc. Jeanne died in 1515, when John was only six years old. Nevertheless, Girard secured John's education through the provision of the de Hangest family, which proved to be a significant event in Calvin's life.³

Complying with his father's wishes, Calvin departed for Paris. There is much dispute, as to the exact year Calvin departed for Paris. Biographer Bruce Gordon concludes that there is no definitive evidence as to when Calvin embarked on his journey, or even if he began his study of theology in that city.⁴ Joel Beeke states Calvin went to Paris to study for the priesthood in 1520 or 1521 and this plan changed five years later as Calvin's father, a lawyer, came to the realization that the law was more profitable than the priesthood. Also, there were legal accusations concerning Girard Calvin and the church, which eventually led to his excommunication.⁵ Even so, while attending the University of Orléans to study law, Calvin was introduced to the study of Greek and his first venture into Reformation teaching, by his tutor Melchior Wolmar. These events proved significant for young Calvin and laid the groundwork for his ultimate decision to dedicate his life to pastoral ministry.⁶

The exact date of John Calvin's conversion is widely disputed. Much debate has occurred between several scholars of the Reformation on this subject. In his biography on Calvin, T. H. L. Parker makes the case for an early conversion around 1529-1530.⁷ Even

² Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2009), 1.

³ Gordon, *Calvin*, 4-5.

⁴ Gordon, *Calvin*, 22, 26.

⁵ Beeke, *The Soul of Life*, 2.

⁶ Beeke, *The Soul of Life*, 3.

⁷ T. H. L. Parker, *John Calvin: A Biography* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 40, 199-203.

so, most scholars defer to a later date of 1533 or early in 1534.⁸ While he provides no dates, the clearest description Calvin provides of his conversion is recorded in “The Author’s Preface” of his *Commentary on the Book of the Psalms*:

To this pursuit I endeavored faithfully to apply myself, in obedience to the will of my father; but God, by the secret guidance of his providence, at length gave a different direction to my course. And first, since I was too obstinately devoted to the superstitions of Popery to be easily extricated from so profound an abyss of mire, God by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame, which was more hardened in such matters than might have been expected from one at my early period of life. Having thus received some taste and knowledge of true godliness, I was immediately inflamed with so intense a desire to make progress therein, that although I did not altogether leave off other studies, I yet pursued them with less ardour.⁹

In this recounting of his conversion Calvin further describes that within a year he became a tutor to many in the faith, even though he was still considered a novice.¹⁰ This devotion to the study of God and his Word above all other pursuits was evident as Calvin grew in knowledge and piety.

Calvin’s Ministry in Geneva

A clear understanding of John Calvin and his pastoral ministry is seen in the context of his Genevan ministry, between 1536 and 1564, with the exception of exile to Strasbourg in 1538-1541. In January of 1535, Calvin left France for Basil to escape persecution for his teaching of the evangelical doctrines of the Reformed faith. Calvin briefly returned to his native France by way of Italy, but was forced to leave due to his opposition to the Edict of Lyons (1536). Calvin then made the decision to go to Strasbourg.¹¹

⁸ Beeke, *The Soul of Life*, 3.

⁹ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Psalms, Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 4, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), xli.

¹⁰ Calvin, *Book of the Psalms*, xli.

¹¹ Parker, *John Calvin*, 73-75.

Upon arriving in Strasbourg, Calvin was met by William Farel, another French reformer some twenty years older than Calvin, who also was pastoring in Geneva. This meeting of Calvin and Farel ultimately resulted in Calvin surrendering to the pastoral ministry. Calvin, who offered his plan to pursue scholarly studies to Farel, saw this night in Geneva as nothing more than a detour. However, Farel, who perceived the great impact Calvin could have on the church in Geneva and throughout Europe, would not relent. Calvin shares the intensity of the encounter in the preface to his commentary on Psalms:

And after having learned that my heart was set upon devoting myself to private studies, for which I wished to keep myself free from other pursuits, and finding that he gained nothing by entreaties, he proceeded to utter an imprecation that God would curse my retirement, and the tranquility of the studies which I sought, if I should withdraw and refuse to give assistance, when the necessity was so urgent. By this imprecation I was so stricken with terror, that I desisted from the journey which I had undertaken;¹²

This agreement with Farel to stay in Geneva ultimately began Calvin's pastoral ministry to the church. John Piper comments "From then on, every page of the forty-eight volumes of books and tracts and sermons and commentaries and letters that he wrote would be hammered out on the anvil of pastoral responsibility."¹³ The remainder of this chapter will specifically examine Calvin's preaching and teaching about the holiness of God in the context of his pastoral ministry.

The Knowledge of God's Holiness

Calvin begins his *Institutes* by stating, "Our wisdom, insofar as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves."¹⁴ This wisdom and the effects of such wisdom are revealed

¹² Calvin, *Book of the Psalms*, xlii-xliii.

¹³ John Piper, *John Calvin and His Passion for the Majesty of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 32.

¹⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 1.1.1.

throughout Scripture, as Calvin demonstrates. More directly, once man understands the God revealed in Scripture, he understands the vast chasm that exists between God and man. Furthermore, the chief effect of this knowledge exposes that, apart from God, man has no viable solution for this problem. While God possesses many attributes, none accentuates this great difference between God and man as the perfect holy nature of God. This knowledge of God's holiness contrasted to man's impurity creates a great tension. Calvin continues by explaining that this tension initiated by the knowledge of God and of oneself enlightens the believer to a new reality: "So long as we do not look beyond the earth, we are quite pleased with our righteousness, wisdom, and virtue; we address ourselves in the most flattering terms and seem only less than demigods."¹⁵ This near demigod status can only exist in man's ignorance. Calvin explains that the ultimate effect of man obtaining this knowledge of God and all his perfection, righteousness, and holiness results in realizing that this is the standard to which one is bound and what had formerly delighted the human now is an engine of disgust.¹⁶ Calvin concludes this section noting that this acquired wisdom brings man to the realization that even his most admirable qualities will be completely impotent when exposed to the holiness and purity of God.¹⁷

In revealing God's holiness, Scripture instinctively exposes the divide between God and man's unholy nature. Calvin provides explanation about this gap between God's holiness and man's unholiness in commenting on the apostle Paul's discourse in Romans 1:18-21 which states,

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been

¹⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.1.2.

¹⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.1.2.

¹⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.1.2.

clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made, so they are without excuse.

From this passage, Calvin deduces that all men are condemned and the only righteousness for man is through salvation, the significance of which is addressed later in the next session. Concerning the ultimate effect of man's knowledge of God's holiness and righteousness, Calvin states, "Their unrighteousness was this—they quickly choked by their own depravity the seed of right knowledge, before it grew up to ripeness."¹⁸ This succinct statement gives a vivid expression as to man's inability to fill this chasm between the holy and unholy.

This innate righteousness of God is apparent in Genesis 18. In 18:22-33, Abraham pleads the case of the possible righteous souls in Sodom. This pleading in Genesis 18:25 prompts Calvin to explain, "But he reasons from the nature of God, that is impossible for Him to intend anything unjust."¹⁹ Even as Abraham wonders about this total destruction of Sodom amid the possibility of some good men, Abraham knows, as Calvin states, the truth of God's nature: "He yet retains this principle, that it was impossible for God, who is the Judge of the world, and by nature loves equity, yea, whose will is the law of justice and rectitude, should in the least degree swerve from righteousness."²⁰ Even in this brief yet complete explanation of Genesis 18:25, Calvin emphatically proclaims the core nature of God as holy, righteous, and just, so much so that he cannot in the least "swerve" from this nature.

Using Jeremiah 9:24, "but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD," Calvin asserts that this is

¹⁸ John Calvin, *Commentary on Romans, Calvin's Commentaries*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 73.

¹⁹ John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis, Calvin's Commentaries*, trans. John King (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 489.

²⁰ Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, 489.

how man knows God. While he is good and loving, he also is just, which reveals that God is the one who doles out judgement and punishment to all the world. Yet, even in this, God is still righteous and holy. Because of this truth, Calvin determines from Jeremiah 9:24 the most necessary attributes to know of God are his steadfast love, his justice, and most importantly his righteousness.²¹ This righteousness or holiness of God is essential for man to know God. Calvin points to this holiness or this righteousness as the key to man beginning to understand God because it creates the dread and amazement that occur in Scripture when sinful man is put in the presence of God.²² Calvin concludes this thought by stating, “The inference to be drawn is that men are never duly touched and impressed with a conviction of their insignificance, until they have contrasted themselves with the majesty of God.”²³ Unfortunately, Scripture demonstrates where this conviction is lacking, man incurs the wrath that brings justice from a holy and righteous God. One of the earliest examples of this is the flood narrative recounted in Genesis 6-8.

Calvin preached seven sermons on this passage to his flock in Geneva between November 17 and December 15, in 1559, stressing the significance of holiness.²⁴ These sermons demonstrate Calvin’s attention to the chasm between man and a holy and righteous God. Considering the context of God’s announcement of the coming flood, Calvin notes that Moses stresses the wickedness of man was so great and “that men coming from their mother’s womb perverse and wicked, had so abandoned themselves to evil that it was like a flood of sins before the flood of waters came.”²⁵ This descriptive language to emphasize a critical doctrine, such as man’s sin or God’s holiness, was a

²¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.10.2.

²² Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.1.3.

²³ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.1.3.

²⁴ John Calvin, *Sermons on Genesis: Chapters 1-11*, trans. Rob Roy McGregor (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), vii-viii.

²⁵ Calvin, *Sermons on Genesis: Chapters 1-11*, 560.

Calvin trademark. Calvin devotes time to make much of the gap between a holy and righteous God and sinful, corrupt, and polluted man. This is not done to simply berate his flock; Calvin stresses the sinful nature of man to ensure that his flock will know their need for the Savior stating, “But he shows that all that is corrupted in us and infected by sin, so much so that God has to apply his hand to change us.”²⁶ Concerning Genesis 6:5, “and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually,” Calvin states, “For here is the source of evil: those thoughts which are fashioned in our heart. That, then, is the source of all vices, all iniquities.”²⁷ This continual emphasis on man’s sin and depravity contributes to some perceiving Calvin as mean or hateful, but it actually flows from a deep-rooted love for his flock. A love for the flock to always know that God’s holiness reveals man’s void of anything holy. Furthermore, this lack of holiness and man’s depraved and sinful nature create an eternal separation from God apart from God’s grace.

God’s Holiness and Man’s Need

This great void that is realized in man upon the knowledge of God’s holiness is essential. This realization presents man with the reality of the separation between God and man, which can only be resolved by God. The epitome of this realization in Scripture is recorded in Isaiah 6, when the prophet Isaiah encounters God and his holiness in the temple. In his commentary on Isaiah, Calvin provides great insight into this dramatic moment. Concerning verse 2, the author describes the seraphim using one set of their wings to hide their face, presumably because of the sheer brightness of God’s glory. Calvin shares this belief and comments further as to the meaning for man: “Let men learn, therefore, that they are far distant from a perfect knowledge of God, since they cannot even reach to the angels.”²⁸ The next verse, Isaiah 6:3, “And one called to another

²⁶ Calvin, *Sermons on Genesis: Chapters 1-11*, 560-61.

²⁷ Calvin, *Sermons on Genesis: Chapters 1-11*, 561.

²⁸ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Prophet Isaiah, Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 1, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 204.

and said, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!’” is the most prominent verbal representation of God’s holiness in Scripture. As Isaiah enters the temple, God appears on a throne with six-winged seraphim repeatedly declaring his holiness. While much has been written about this section of Scripture, Calvin draws an astute fact that hones in on man’s great need in view of God’s holiness. Calvin first states the truth that man is, and should be, alarmed by the great and dreadful majesty of God.²⁹ Then Calvin explains the reaction of angels in view of God’s holiness: “He who now came forth to public view is God, at the sight of whom the very angels tremble, whose praises they continually and loudly utter, and whom, in a word, they serve and obey.”³⁰ This observation sets the basis to expose man’s great need in light of God’s holiness.

Calvin is demonstrating that angels, while not God, are still not stained by sin. Yet, even in this sinless condition, they tremble in the presence of this holy God. Not only are they fearful, but they continually praise God, serve him, and obey. Calvin establishes this truth from Isaiah 6:3 to demonstrate the great contrast of man in his fallen, sinful, and unholy state. He concludes the comparison with this sharp word: “But men, whom he had been pleased to adopt as his children, obstinately and rebelliously opposed him.”³¹ This comparison powerfully demonstrates the great chasm between God and man created by sin. This great need of man in his fallen state is further highlighted as God’s holiness engulfs Isaiah in the temple.

Isaiah 6:4 reports the physical reactions that occur in the temple due to the presence of God and his holiness. Isaiah 6:4 records that “the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called.” Calvin notes that no human voice could bring such reaction, and the essential reason for this powerful voice is to be clear that man

²⁹ Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 204.

³⁰ Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 204.

³¹ Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 204.

should always “obey his word in a holy and reverent manner.”³² In Isaiah 6:5, the prophet shares the result of any man when encountering the holiness of God: “Woe is me! For I am lost, for 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!” This verse reveals the awful reality everyone endures when encountering the holiness of God. The only response is, as the prophet says, “Woe is to me! For I am lost” (Isa 6:5). Calvin elaborates on Isaiah’s response: “It was customary with the godly fathers, whenever they saw God, to break out into these words: *I am gone; I am utterly undone* (Jud xii. 22).”³³ Calvin continues to explain this important transition in Isaiah’s life because it serves as a model for all men. Again, Calvin is pointing to the great benefit of God revealing his holiness to man to emphasize man’s inability in himself to correct the problem or fill the chasm. This is accentuated by Isaiah pronouncing “woe” on himself, meaning he is “undone,” “dead,” or “without any options.” Ultimately, every man God has created must come to this “woe is me” moment, if he is ever to enjoy relationship with God. Calvin knew this, and this great need of redemption echoed throughout his preaching and teaching.

In his commentary on Isaiah 6:5, Calvin stresses, “Death is within us; but we do not perceive it, unless when it is compared with the life of God.”³⁴ Calvin explores this further as he comments on why Isaiah limited the uncleanness to his lips: “The Prophet mentions that which he regarded as the most valuable, his tongue, which was consecrated to God; for God had appointed him to be a Prophet.”³⁵ God appointing Isaiah a prophet did not exempt Isaiah from sin in the other parts of his life, it simply emphasizes the importance and sacredness of the position, a Prophet, to which he had been called by God. Calvin explains, “Because the office which he held was holy, this part of his body

³² Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 206.

³³ Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 208, emphasis original.

³⁴ Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 208.

³⁵ Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 208.

was sacred; and as it does not correspond to the divine holiness, he confesses that, even in that part which in itself is more holy, he is *polluted*.”³⁶ This comment gives one a great appreciation of the effort Calvin extends in distinguishing God’s holiness from any sense of holiness or purity in man. Calvin’s insistence of this in his ministry demonstrates his great understanding of God’s holiness and his desire to impart that to those he pastored.

This critical passage in Isaiah 6 concludes with verses 6 and 7, describing one of the seraphim applying a burning coal, taken from the altar in the temple, to Isaiah’s lips. As the seraph applies the burning coal to Isaiah’s lips, he says, “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin is atoned for” (Isa 6:7). In one sense, this act symbolizes the redemption that will be applied through Christ’s blood in the reconciliation of God with his chosen people. God indeed makes atonement for man’s sin through the shed blood of Jesus Christ on the cross, but this atonement of Isaiah’s lips is of a different type. As Calvin explains, “the cleansing which is now added is greater; for it has its enlargements and addition, which no man can obtain all at once.”³⁷ Calvin continues by explaining the meaning of this “cleansing” of Isaiah’s lips: “It was because the Lord intended to enlarge and extend his favour towards him, and to raise him to higher dignity, that he might have greater influence over the people; and this was rendered necessary by the character of the times.”³⁸ Ultimately, Calvin’s clarification of this passage makes clear that this cleansing is a work of God and not a coal or an angel: “For it is God alone, who can cleanse our pollution, in whatever part it exists.”³⁹ This understanding that only God can make right what is profane and polluted in man is central to the Christian faith; thus, it became central to Calvin in his pastoral ministry. The means by which man can be reconciled by God and share in his holiness is necessary in order to possess a full

³⁶ Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 209, emphasis original.

³⁷ Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 210.

³⁸ Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 210.

³⁹ Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 210.

understanding of obedience. Calvin provides this understanding through his exegesis of one critical verse.

The closing verse of 2 Corinthians 5 may well be the most concise explanation of the gospel in Scripture. It states, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” From this verse, Calvin made the bold claim, “For these two things are equivalent—that we are acceptable to God, and that we are regarded by him as righteous.”⁴⁰ The “we,” of course, is the believer, those who have been regenerated by God. These are the ones who are truly in the church, because Paul is addressing this letter to the church in Corinth. This is the reason Calvin was emphatic about each member of the body living in obedience to God’s command, “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 Pet 1:15-16). This holiness or righteousness, as expressed in 2 Corinthians 5:21, is key for one to live a holy life.

Calvin explains, “*Righteousness*, here, is not taken to denote a quality or habit, but by way of imputation, on the ground of Christ’s righteousness being reckoned to have been received by us.”⁴¹ This imputation of righteousness enables one to pursue the practice of holiness in life. Calvin continues by distinguishing further the specifics of this righteousness, “the *righteousness of God* is taken here to denote—not that which is given us by God, but that which is approved of by him.”⁴² Then, referencing Romans 6:23, Calvin argues that falling short of God’s glory means mankind, apart from God, possesses no way to glorify God. Emphatically, Calvin relates this righteousness back to God’s acceptance: “For it is no very difficult matter to appear righteous before men, but it is a mere delusive appearance of righteousness, which becomes at last the ground of perdition.

⁴⁰ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, Calvin’s *Commentaries*, vol. 1, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 241.

⁴¹ Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, 242, emphasis original.

⁴² Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, 242, emphasis original.

Hence *that* is the only true righteousness, which is acceptable to God.”⁴³ Calvin puts this critical truth together concluding where he began, contrasting righteousness and sin: “How are we righteous in the sight of God? It is assuredly in the same respect in which Christ was a sinner.”⁴⁴ By this Calvin explains that just as Christ was punished because of man’s sin, men are righteous because of God’s righteousness and it has been placed or imputed on man through faith, just as man’s sin was imputed on Christ.⁴⁵ This is the glorious gospel of salvation that God grants to all believers. This reality of man being approved before God leads believers to the necessity of living a holy life that declares the holiness that has been gifted to them.

God Demands Obedience to Holiness

Calvin’s zealously for one to grow in the knowledge of God’s holiness was only exceeded by his zeal to teach his flock to obey God’s command to holy living. All of Calvin’s preaching and teaching on holiness was predicated on his understanding that Christians were to obey the commands of Scripture. While this obedience to holiness does not supersede other commands of Scripture, pursuing this holiness is the foundation of a faithful Christian life, which results in a more pure and holy church.

While Calvin pastored in the relative insignificant city of Geneva, he understood his influence to be far more reaching. Biographer Bruce Gordon states, “But Calvin understood his destiny to extend far beyond Geneva’s walls: he was a man of the Church and its unity was his deepest passion.”⁴⁶ This passion and zealously of Calvin has been perceived by many as cold, harsh, and even hateful, and his theological opponents

⁴³ Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, 242, emphasis original.

⁴⁴ Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, 242.

⁴⁵ Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, 242.

⁴⁶ Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2009), viii.

believed he embodied all those adjectives and worse.⁴⁷ Even so, a truer reading of his ministry proves otherwise. Joel Beeke correctly states, “Calvin believed the church would become more disciplined under the Word of God and that the church needed the authority to excommunicate immoral people so that the purity of the church might be maintained.”⁴⁸ This explains Calvin’s heart and his desire for purity and holiness of the church.

This doctrine of individual holiness and church purity was essential to Calvin’s ministry in Geneva and to his writing and teaching. The paradigm for this teaching was based on Calvin’s understanding that once one is regenerated, he is no longer his own, his life belongs to Christ (Rom 14:8; 1 Cor 6:20). Calvin expresses this in *Institutes*: “We are not our own, to follow whatever course passion dictates, but are bound to obey him implicitly, and to acquiesce entirely in his good pleasure.”⁴⁹ Calvin connects the truth that the regenerate belong to God, and because of this fact, they must obey the command to be holy: “Our whole life must be spent in the cultivation of righteousness. For if we manifest becoming reverence only when we prefer his will to our own, it follows, that the only legitimate service to him is the practice of justice, purity and holiness.”⁵⁰ Such powerful language as “cultivation of righteousness” provides a realistic picture as to how one should be growing in the holiness of God. Calvin continuously links righteousness or holiness with obedience. This was the theme in Calvin’s preaching and teaching: the holiness (righteousness) that God imputes to the sinner demands a life lived in obedience to that holiness. Calvin consistently emphasized that God’s holiness was the standard: “We cannot be permitted to measure the glory of God by our ability; whatever we may be, he ever remains like himself, the friend of righteousness, the enemy of unrighteousness, and

⁴⁷ Gordon’s *Calvin*, 215-32.

⁴⁸ Beeke, *The Soul of Life*, 12.

⁴⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.8.2.

⁵⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.8.2.

whatever his demands from us may be, as he can only require what is right, we are necessarily under a natural obligation to obey.”⁵¹

One of Calvin’s foremost expositions on holiness is from Psalms 15:1. Calvin provides an excellent summary, relating the context of the Psalm: “This Psalm teaches us upon what condition God made choice of the Jews to be his people, and placed his sanctuary in the midst of them. This condition was, that they should show themselves to be a peculiar and holy people, by leading a just and upright life.”⁵² In this explanation, Calvin is not implying that the Jews were chosen by God because of their holiness and uprightness. Indeed, the inverse is true. *Because* God chose the Jews, they would lead a holy life and he would dwell in the midst of them. Calvin is not reversing the significance of holiness that he has preached in other passages. Rather, he is teaching the necessity of those who have been chosen by God to lead a holy life.

Calvin addresses the Abrahamic covenant by way of answering David’s initial question, “O LORD, who shall dwell in your tent (tabernacle)?” Calvin explains, “No doubt, he adopted Abraham freely, but, at the same time, he stipulated with him that he should live a holy and upright life.”⁵³ Calvin reminds the reader that this holy living is the general rule from the beginning that God has given the church.⁵⁴ This continual emphasis on the people of God being pure, blameless, and holy so that God’s church would be purer was a distinctive in Calvin’s ministry.

Calvin states three main purposes of this doctrine expressed in Psalm 15:1 that are foundational for followers of Christ to understand in any age. The first purpose is, “If we really wish to be reckoned among the number of the children of God, the Holy Ghost

⁵¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.8.2.

⁵² John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Psalms, Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 4, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 203.

⁵³ Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 203.

⁵⁴ Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 203.

teaches us, that we must show ourselves to be such by a holy and an upright life.”⁵⁵ As he so often preached, Calvin reiterates here that holiness is not an option. It is God’s command to all believers. Second, Calvin states, “To prevent us from stumbling at what appears so offensive, a distinction is made between those who are permanent citizens of the Church, and strangers who are mingled among them only for a time.”⁵⁶ Here, Calvin draws a clear and definitive line between those who are members of the bride of Christ and those who are only pretending. By many this is referred to as the visible and invisible church. Regardless of the nomenclature, Calvin makes clear that aside from God causing men to be born again, the discriminating quality is the life that one leads. Is it a life where holiness and purity are practiced, or one identified by vileness and corruptness? In Calvin’s estimation, this is the litmus test.

The third purpose of this doctrine flows from the second: “God’s sacred barn-floor will not be perfectly cleansed before the last day, when Christ at his coming will cast out the chaff; but he has already begun to do this by the doctrine of his gospel, which on this account he terms a fan.”⁵⁷ In the third purpose of this doctrine, Calvin makes clear the scriptural truth that all those who claim to be of God are not, and true believers must be on guard to this reality, as not to be influence by their lack of understanding. Calvin concludes with this summary of Psalm 15:1: “The meaning of his discourse, to express it in a few words, is this, that those only have access to God who are his genuine servants, and who live a holy life.”⁵⁸ Throughout this exegesis of Psalm 15:1, Calvin continually exhorts the people of God, by the Word of God, to walk in holiness. This rhythm of preaching the holiness of God followed by the preaching of God’s command to the church to be holy is characteristic of Calvin’s ministry.

⁵⁵ Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 204.

⁵⁶ Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 204-5.

⁵⁷ Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 205.

⁵⁸ Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 205.

In the *Institutes*, Calvin refers to God’s method of training by adjoining a perfect rule of conduct with the Law: “The leading principle in this method is, that it is the duty of believers to present their ‘bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is their reasonable service’ (Rom 12:1).”⁵⁹ This thought gives great insight into Calvin’s understanding of God’s command to his children to be holy. The idea of presenting one’s body as holy being a duty is not common to most given the reality that this is an unattainable goal in our earthly state. Calvin chooses to focus on the duty of this obligation and not the difficulty associated with it. He continues drawing from Paul’s exhortation to “be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that yea may prove what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God” (Rom 12:2), by noting, “The great point, then, is, that we are consecrated and dedicated to God, and therefore should not henceforth think, speak, design, or act, without a view to his glory.”⁶⁰ This thought is evidence of how Scripture truly dictated to Calvin his expected behavior. Furthermore, just as Scripture called all Christians to the same standard, Calvin preached with the expectation that the believer would value God’s Word above all else. While this standard is appropriate and correct, it was not the norm for the church in Geneva, hence causing much frustration for Calvin as he worked to strengthen the holiness of God’s church.

An example of Calvin’s heart for the pure church is one chapter from Calvin’s 1539 edition of the *Institutes* is entitled “De Vita Hominis Christiani” (On the Life of a Christian Man). This chapter addresses the great significance holiness and purity play in the life of a Christian. Speaking on adoption as sons of God, Calvin notes, “That in our lives we should mirror Christ who is the bond of our adoption. And truly, unless we are devoted—even addicted—to righteousness, we will faithlessly abandon our Creator and

⁵⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.7.1.

⁶⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.7.1.

disown Him as our Savior.”⁶¹ Elaborating more on this “addiction to righteousness,” Calvin states, “It would be inappropriate, therefore, for us to defile ourselves with fresh filthiness (1 Cor 6:11; Eph 5:26; Heb 10:10; 1 Pet 1:15,19).⁶² This is more evidence of the faithfulness by which Calvin exhorted his parishioners with the Word of God. He did not rely on his own preferences or convictions but persistently fed the truth of the Word of God to his congregation. In this excerpt from the *Institutes*, he again encourages the reader to live in a holy life: “We, therefore, who are His members must be especially careful not to fling mud or filthiness on the body of Christ.”⁶³

This faithful pastoral element of Calvin’s writing, teaching, and preaching is often overlooked due to his accompanying desire for the people of God to pursue this purity based on correct theology and sound doctrine, and not just emotions or feelings. Michael Horton states, “Even those who consult Calvin on theological or exegetical questions may be inclined to look elsewhere for spiritual direction. I suspect that a principal reason for this oversight has to do with what we mean by ‘spirituality.’”⁶⁴ Horton continues this thought by distinguishing between the Reformers’ understanding of piety and the diminished understanding in modernity of spirituality: “Piety (*pietas*), not spirituality, is the Reformer’s all-encompassing term Christian faith and practice. Even this term has lost its value in modernity. We’ve learned to draw a line between doctrine and life, with ‘piety’ (like ‘spirituality’) falling on the ‘life’ side of the ledger.”⁶⁵ Calvin summarizes this by referring to the “fruits of repentance; i.e., offices of piety toward God, and love toward men, general holiness and purity of life. In short, the more a man studies

⁶¹ John Calvin, *A Little Book on the Christian Life*, ed. Aaron Clay and Buck Parsons (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2017), 9.

⁶² Calvin, *A Little Book on the Christian Life*, 10.

⁶³ Calvin, *A Little Book on the Christian Life*, 10.

⁶⁴ Michael Horton, *Calvin on the Christian Life: Glorifying and Enjoying God Forever*, Theologians on the Christian Life (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 4:13.

⁶⁵ Horton, *Calvin on the Christian Life*, 13.

to conform his life to the standard of the divine law, the surer signs he gives of his repentance.”⁶⁶ This idea of sound doctrine governing one’s practice (doctrine and life) was the essence of Calvin’s preaching. The idea of knowing the holiness (perfection, godliness, glory, goodness, etc.) of God through Scripture and living that piety out in day-to-day life was the goal of his teaching and preaching.

Just as Calvin valued the significance of sound doctrine governing an individual’s obedience to the command to be holy, he also placed a high value on upholding the holiness of the doctrine of the church. One example that will suffice is Calvin guarding the practice of the Lord’s Supper. This became a difficult challenge for Calvin when dealing with the Libertines in Geneva. Henry Henderson described the Libertines this way: “Under the plea of the right of private judgment they claimed liberty to determine what acts were and what were not immoral.”⁶⁷ The Libertines argued their claim under the guise of Christian liberty, totally ignoring the overarching theme throughout Scripture of God’s command of holiness for his people (Lev 11:44; 1 Pet 1:15-16). This belief was fostered in the civil code of Geneva, which allowed a man to have one mistress and still partake of the Lord’s Supper.⁶⁸ The Libertines reveled in their mockery of being called into holiness. Henderson writes,

By the communion of saints, they understood the common possession of goods, houses, bodies, and wives. They had the audacity to carry their principles in to practice. They practiced adultery and indulged in sexual promiscuity, while at the same time they held up an unabashed countenance in the church, and claimed the right to sit at the Lord’s table.⁶⁹

By 1553, the situation concerning the Libertines and their mocking of the holiness of the Lord’s Supper reached an impasse. Calvin laments this situation in a correspondence to Viret on September 4, 1553: “When Berthelier, a year and a half ago,

⁶⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.3.16.

⁶⁷ Henry F. Henderson, *Calvin in His Letters* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1996), 75.

⁶⁸ T. H. L. Parker, *Portrait of John Calvin* (Vancouver: Read Books, 2010), 29.

⁶⁹ Henderson, *Calvin in His Letters*, 75.

was interdicted the privilege of the Supper, he complained to the senate, and we, to please the scoundrel, were summoned before the assembly.”⁷⁰ This matter was thought to be resolved with the senate supporting Calvin and the church with the right to prohibit the Supper from one in open and unconfessed sin, but as Calvin relates to Viret, this was not the case: “During my absence, however, and unknown to the Consistory, an opportunity was afforded him of receiving the Supper.”⁷¹ Understandably Calvin was outraged and broken. By this time, Calvin had pastored in Geneva for nearly fifteen years, striving ardently to uphold the holy demands of Scripture against much opposition. Again, to Viret he laments, “I even took an oath, that I resolved rather to meet death than profane so shamefully the holy Supper of the Lord; for that nothing was more intolerable than that individual, mocking and insulting the Church of God by his contumacy.”⁷²

Even after being betrayed by the senate and civil authorities, Calvin refused to submit and disobey what he deemed was clearly taught in God’s Word. The purity of the church would not be disparaged under his care. Calvin’s successor and fellow pastor in Geneva, Theodore Béza, recounts the dramatic scene of serving the Lord’s Supper when Calvin was personally and publicly challenged:

Raising his voice and his hand in the course of his sermon, after he had spoken at some length of the despisers of sacred mysteries, exclaimed, in the words of Chrysostom, “I will die sooner than this hand shall stretch forth the sacred things of the Lord to those who have been judged despisers.” These words, strange to say, had such an effect upon these men, however lawless, that Perrin secretly advised Bertelier not to come forward to the Table. The sacrament was celebrated with extraordinary silence, not without some degree of trembling, as if the Deity himself were actually present.⁷³

⁷⁰ John Calvin, *John Calvin Tracts and Letters Volume 5: Letters, Part 2 1545-1553*, ed. Jules Bonnet, trans. David Constable (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 5:424.

⁷¹ Calvin, *John Calvin Letters and Tracts*, 5:424.

⁷² Calvin, *John Calvin Letters and Tracts*, 5:424.

⁷³ Theodore De Béza, *The Life of John Calvin*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1909), 63-64.

This provides an example of great courage. Courage that most pastors then and now may find hard to muster. However, more than courage, this account demonstrates a pastor who refused, even in the face of great opposition—he refused to profane the holiness of the Lord’s Table. While this was a dramatic scene, John Calvin provided decades of faithful pastoral ministry preaching, teaching, and defending the holiness of God in a culture of continual opposition.

Conclusion

John Calvin labored for the better part of twenty-eight years as a writer, teacher, professor, and ultimately, a pastor, who understood the power of the correctly preached Word of God. While many of his contemporaries were critical of Calvin, one in particular was not. John Knox (1514-1572), the great Scottish theologian, described Calvin’s Geneva as “the most perfect school of Christ that ever was in the earth since the days of the Apostles.”⁷⁴

Knox’s description of Calvin’s Geneva is evidence of the depth of Calvin’s pastoral ministry. In addition to his efforts of preaching on the holiness of God, he had a particular burden to raise up qualified pastors for the church. Many of those pastors he had mentored and labored with gathered around Calvin on April 28, 1564, as he spoke to them for the last time. In that final address, Calvin recounted a summary of his time in Geneva and closed with these thoughts about doctrine: “As to my doctrine, I have taught faithfully, and God has given me grace to write what I have written as faithfully as it was in my power. I have not falsified a single passage of the Scriptures; nor given it a wrong interpretation to the best of my knowledge.”⁷⁵ Calvin continued concerning his thoughts on his intended purpose of his life: “I have written nothing out of hatred to any one, but I

⁷⁴ David Lang, *The Works of John Knox*, vol. 4, *Writings from Frankfurt and Geneva* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2004) 4:240.

⁷⁵ Calvin, *John Calvin Tracts and Letters*, 7:375.

have always faithfully propounded what I esteemed to be for the glory of God.”⁷⁶ Nearly 500 years later, renowned twentieth century theologian, J. I. Packer, summarizes Calvin in much the same way: “He lived as he preached and wrote, for the glory of God. Good theologians are not always good men, nor vice versa, but Calvin’s life and theology were all of a piece. Consistency was his hallmark, both as a thinker and as a man.”⁷⁷ No better words could summarize a life faithfully committed to the preaching and teaching of the holiness of God, as was John Calvin.

⁷⁶ Calvin, *John Calvin Tracts and Letters*, 7:375.

⁷⁷ J. I. Packer, *Honouring the People of God: Collected Shorter Writings on Christian Leaders and Theologians* vol. 4, (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2008), 4:163.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT

This chapter describes the development and implementation of the sermon series, “The Holiness of God,” preached at Green Pond Baptist Church (GPBC). The goals of this project were to assess GPBC members’ knowledge of God in relation to his holiness, prepare a six-week sermons series on the holiness of God, and increase the members’ knowledge of God’s holiness through the preaching of the prepared sermons. A description and timeline of the development of the project will be given followed by a summary of each of the six sermons in the series. The results and an evaluation of the project will be provided in chapter 5.

Project Overview

This project was birthed out of a pastoral desire for the GPBC flock to know God in a deeper, more intimate way. As J. I. Packer so adeptly states in *Knowing God*, “Knowing God is more than knowing about him”¹ This statement articulates the essence of that pastoral desire for the GPBC flock. The initial focus of the project, a sermon series on the attributes of God, proved to be too large and did not allow for adequate theological depth. Hence, the focus was narrowed to a series on the defining attribute of God, his holiness. Final approval for the project proposal was given by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in May 2021.

From June of 2021 until August of 2022, the biblical, theological, and historical research was conducted for the project. Also, during this time period pre- and post-surveys²

¹ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2018), 39.

² See appendix 1.

were formed and subsequently approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary faculty. Additionally, a sermon rubric, and the Holiness of God Sermon Evaluation Tool³ were prepared for evaluation of the sermons before the sermons were preached.

Holiness of God Surveys were passed out to the GPBC membership on September 11, 2022. By September 21 2021, thirty-five of the surveys had been completed and returned. On Monday, September 12, 2022, a detailed outline of all six sermons were given to the two members of the expert panel for review. The panel consisted of an ordained local pastor with a doctoral degree from one of the six Southern Baptist seminaries, who was in his fortieth year of pastoring local Southern Baptist churches in Texas and South Carolina. The other member actively serves as a deacon in GPBC. He has been a member of GPBC for over forty years and has served in leadership and teaching for the last twenty years. By September 21, 2022, the expert panel had reviewed and returned their evaluations of each of the six sermons. All the suggested revisions from the expert panel were completed by September 23. On September 25, 2022, the first sermon was preached to the GPBC congregation at the weekly Sunday morning gathering. Over the next five weeks, the remaining sermons were preached, concluding the series on October 30, 2022.

Preaching the Sermons

The six-sermon series was preached at the weekly Sunday morning gathering of GPBC beginning on September 25, 2022 and concluding on October 30, 2022. The first sermon served as an introduction to the attribute of holiness as well as an expository sermon on Isaiah 6:1-7, stressing the magnitude of the holiness of God. Sermon 2, based on Genesis 6:5-8, centered on the problem man's depravity had caused due to the holiness of God. The third sermon was from Leviticus 10:1-3 and focused on correct worship of a holy God. The fourth week's text was from various verses from Exodus 33 and 34, and

³ See appendix 2.

examined the relationship between Moses and the holy God, and what results it can produce in one's life. Week 5 studied the transfiguration text of Matthew 17:1-8 and God's holiness in relation to Jesus the Son. The series concluded with Hebrews 12:14 and the necessity of consistent holiness in one's life. The following is a detailed summary of each of the six sermons.

Sermon 1: Isaiah 6:1-7

As this sermon also included an introduction to the entire series, a brief explanation about the significance of God's holiness in order to know God in a deeper more intimate way was provided. The focus of the introduction was to explain the comprehensive nature of the holiness of God. Evidence from noted theologians was given to establish this fact. Louis Berkhof, Rudolph Otto, R. L. Dabney, and Thomas Watson were all cited in giving credence to this truth.⁴

The sermon focused on three truths concerning God's holiness, as given in Isaiah 6:1-7. The first truth stressed the magnitude of God's holiness. This realization is demonstrated as Isaiah reveals the vision of God in the temple. Second was the truth that God's holiness exposes man's unholiness. When Isaiah is given a glimpse of the true holy, pure, righteous God, he realizes the utter depravity of himself, of which he cannot remedy. The intensity of this moment comes to light in Isaiah's pronouncement of woe on himself in Isaiah 6:5. Also in this verse he acknowledges his lostness in view of God's holiness. This point is critical to all mankind, as each one must come to an "Isaiah 6" moment to be redeemed. This harsh reality that man has no hope of redemption in himself is made so

⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, new combined ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 73; Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino, 2010), 10-14; R. L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology: Syllabus and Notes of the Course of Systematic and Polemic Theology Taught in Union Theological Seminary, Virginia*, 3rd ed. (Ashbury Park, NJ: Presbyterian, 1885), accessed September 20, 2021, https://www.google.com/books/edition/Syllabus_and_Notes_of_the_Course_of_Syst/JqYVY-kIlq0C?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=dabney%22systematic+theology%22+syllabus+and+notes+of+the+course+of+Systematic+and+Polemic+theology+taught+in+Union+Theological+seminary+virginia&pg=PA440&printsec=frontcover; Thomas Watson, *Body of Divinity* (New Your City: Scriptura, 2015), 65-66.

palpable in Isaiah 6:5. This horrible truth is essential to understand if one is ever to be genuinely saved.

The dark reality of sinful man's standing before a completely holy and righteous God presents the case for the third truth of this sermon: the significance of holiness in the gospel. Isaiah realized that he nor any other human can make themselves right with God. God's holiness is so extreme and perfect that man can never obtain it except through Christ and his shed blood. Isaiah 6:6-7 reveals that one of the seraphim takes a hot coal and touches Isaiah's lips upon his confession of being a man of unclean lips (Isa 6:5). In verse 7, the seraph announces that Isaiah's "guilt is taken away and his sin is atoned for." This momentous occasion is one of many in Scripture where God provides a foreshadowing of Christ and his great work on the cross. This is the realization that apart from the blood of Christ man cannot have relationship with the holy God of Israel. Yet, when one is awakened to the gospel by God, and repents and believes, he receives the very righteousness, or holiness, of God. The apostle Paul articulates this great truth this way, "For our sake he made him to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). This passage in Isaiah so beautifully explains the necessity of God's perfect holiness and righteousness in the gift of salvation.

Sermon 2: Genesis 6:5-8

In the second sermon, the focal passage was Genesis 6:5-8, where God announces his intention to blot out man and all creation, and save Noah and his family. This destruction is due to the total evil and wickedness of man, since the fall of mankind recorded in Genesis 3. The three truths revealed in this passage deal with man's depravity and lack of holiness. The first truth explains that man's depravity is total and affects each part of him. This doctrinal understanding is completely necessary in understanding the gospel of Jesus Christ. If one believes there is some measure of goodness or that one is only sick from sin and not dead, this defies the doctrine of original sin. Paul states in Ephesians 2:1, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins." This doctrinal truth is foundational

to the Christian faith and cannot be overstated. As Dane Ortlund explains in *Gentle and Lowly*, “If sin were the color blue, we do not occasionally say or do something blue; all that we say, do, and think has some taint of blue.”⁵

In this text from Genesis, God makes the totality of this sin nature clear: “Every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (6:5). This same truth is echoed in Jerimiah 17:9: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” This definite condition of man is due to our heritage in Adam and his sin. As Paul explains in Romans 5:12, “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.” This is the nature of man—sin.

The second truth in this text explains the result of this sin and man’s depravity. Sin demands judgment and separation from a holy God. God explains throughout Scripture that the penalty for sin is death and separation from God. This is observed in Genesis 3:23-24, when God exiled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden because of their sin. Romans 6:23 states, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” All of this is the result of God’s complete holy and righteous nature. His nature cannot coexist with sin and unholiness. Furthermore, in this depraved and sinful condition, man does not even desire to commune with God. As Paul quotes from Psalm 14, “As it is written, ‘None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God’” (Rom 3:10-11). Because of this complete rebellion, God must punish and separate himself from sinful man. This text in Genesis makes this abundantly clear. Genesis 6:7 states, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.” While the phrase “for I am sorry that I have made them,” causes some to stumble, it is important to remember that, throughout Scripture, the various writers use

⁵ Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 47.

anthropopathic terms in an attempt to describe an infinite God to finite man. These anthropopathic terms are simply a literary technique whereby human feelings and emotions are given to something other than a human being, in this case, God. Louis Berkhof reminds of God's immutable nature: "God is devoid of change in his Being, his perfections, his purposes and his promises."⁶ This phrase should not be a distraction to the realization that God must punish sin and unholiness.

Amid the troubling truth of God's necessity to punish sin and separate himself from sinful man, Genesis 6:8 reminds of the hope of the gospel: "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD." This is the third truth focused on in the text. What a sense of hope this sentence brings. It serves as a great reminder that regardless of one's sin and helplessness, God determines man's righteousness and holiness. It is not dependent upon man's ability or lack thereof. Throughout Scripture, the reader is reminded of God's great will in saving his elect. In Genesis 18-19, the troubling story of Lot, Abraham's nephew is recorded. Even in all the evidence of sin in Lot's life, God's great mercy is declaring him righteous (2 Pet 2:7). Whether it is God finding favor with Noah or declaring Lot righteous, this truth is observed throughout all the Bible. The apostle Paul reminds the church of this in Ephesians 2. After making clear man's separation and being under God's wrath in Ephesians 2:1-3, Paul gives these beautiful words, "But God" in Ephesians 2:4. Also one is reminded in Ephesians 1:4-5 that God has chosen his elect before the foundations of the earth and chosen them for adoption as sons. Just as Noah realized the great news of the gospel at the brink of death, the same is true for all mankind. All men have been summoned to death, due to their sin. Yet, in God's infinite mercy and grace, he as planned the way that sinful man can be forgiven and obtain God's holiness and righteousness through Jesus Christ.

⁶ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 46.

Sermon 3: Leviticus 10:1-3

While the first two weeks of the sermon series revealed the magnitude of God's holiness and man's separation from that holiness due to sin and depravity, the third sermon focused on the type of worship God's holiness requires. The sermon text was Leviticus 10:1-3 and revealed three truths concerning God's holiness and man's worship of him. The first truth that is learned in this troubling text is that God's holiness demands holiness in worship.

Leviticus was written after the building of the tabernacle and implements the Levitical Law, which reinforced God's holy nature and provided a way for sinful man to commune with the holy God. A key component to this communion with, or worship of, God was the priesthood, which was delegated to the tribe of Levi, which included Aaron and his sons (Exod 28:1). The priests were responsible for conducting the necessary sacrifices by which the people were made clean and acceptable in worship and received atonement for sin. This sacrificial system in the Levitical Law was a foreshadowing of the coming perfect sacrifice of Christ, which provided complete and perfect atonement for man's sin, through his blood.

In this text, God gave specific items and practices for the priest to use in worship. Because God is holy, the worship and the worshipper must be holy. This similar context is shown in Genesis 4:5, when God rejected Cain's offering because of an apparent lack of holiness in the sacrifice and giving of his sacrifice.

The second truth gleaned from this text is closely related to the first. While God demands holiness in worship, he also demands obedience. In the preceding chapter of Leviticus, the correct worship is exhibited, "And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces" (Lev 9:24). This was the proper execution of worship that God had prescribed. When Aaron conducted it correctly, proper worship occurred as the people fell on their faces in awe of the power and glory of God, which is the essence of worship.

Conversely, the failure or disobedience of conducting proper worship results in quite the opposite effect. In Leviticus 10:1, one finds that Aaron's two sons, Nadab and Abihu, who are priests, offer unauthorized fire to God. Scripture does not give the details as to what is meant by "unauthorized," but states that it was not what God had commanded; thus, it was an act of disobedience. Leviticus 10:2 directly and poignantly describes the result of this disobedient act of worship: "And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD." This shocking and awesome display of God's power demonstrates God's unyielding demand for obedience in worship, as well as holiness.

Lastly, this text gives an excellent picture of the proper response to God's holiness, even in discipline. Leviticus 10:3 frames the scene immediately after Nadab and Abihu are consumed by the LORD's fire. Moses gives his brother, Aaron, the words of God immediately after his sons' death, "Among those who are near to me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified." Upon receiving this message, Aaron, who has just witnessed his two sons burned to death, as a result of disobedient worship, gave this reply as recorded in Leviticus 10:3, "And Aaron held his peace." What an unbelievable response. Aaron offered no outburst, no pleading, no questioning. He simply received the reasoning of God, which was that he would not compromise his glory or his worship in anyway. Regardless of his innermost angst at the time, Aaron understood the necessity of holiness and obedience that God demands in worship.

Sermon 4: Exodus 33:17-23; 34:29-33

Week 4 of the series focused specifically on what the believer can learn from Moses and his relationship with God, in terms of holiness. These two passages in Exodus reveal three truths modern day believers can learn from two conversations between God and Moses. The first truth reveals Moses's sincere desire concerning his relationship with God. Preceding this encounter of Moses and God in Exodus 32:1-35, the reader is made aware of Aaron's horrendous failure in succumbing to the Israelites' earthly appetites and

their fashioning a golden calf for the people to worship. The idol worship was a great travesty to God and revealed the Israelites tainted hearts and brokenness. After Moses comes down from the mountain from his fellowship with God, He sees the ugliness in full display. After dealing with the sin of the people, Moses begins his trek up Mount Sinai to attempt to make atonement for their sin (Exod 32:30).

In Exodus 33:18, Moses has successfully interceded for the people and now expresses his deepest desire to God: “Please show me your glory.” Given the eternal, holy, righteous nature of God, this request seems a bit out of place. Philip Ryken brings some clarity to this request in his explanation: “This request was not as abrupt as most translations make it sound. In Hebrew it comes across more like an entreaty. But it was still an audacious request. The prophet was asking to see the splendor and radiance of God. Glory is the weightiness of the divine being, and Moses wanted to see it for himself.”⁷ While this was an “audacious request” to some degree, this request gives a measure of the depth of Moses’s relationship with God. Given all that Moses had been privy to in his role thus far as God’s deliverer, it was not a completely out of place request. Even more, this bold request must give any believer in the modern world pause to ask, “Do I have this type of relationship with God?” Or, the opposite view being one of disinterest. Ortlund describes, “Confessing Christ with our lips but generally avoiding deep fellowship with him, out of a muted understanding of his heart.”⁸

The second truth revealed in this passage is God’s desire for Moses. In Exodus 33:19, God gives a window into his great compassion for Moses as he complies with his request: “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name, ‘the LORD.’” This demonstrates God’s great desire to show and share his glory and holiness with Moses. Even so, God also shows his compassion by protecting Moses, as

⁷ Philip Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God’s Glory*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 979.

⁸ Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly*, 22.

he explains man cannot see God's face and live (Exod 33:20). Again, the depth and purity of God's great holiness is revealed. While man is still in his earthly shell, God's pure holiness is too much for man to absorb in his sinful state. Exodus 33:22 demonstrates God's great fatherly love for Moses and ultimately all his children. In an effort to grant Moses's desire to see God's glory yet protect him, God says, "And while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by." This shows God's gentle care coupled with his great and powerful holiness.

The last truth of this passage reveals the result of being exposed to God's magnificent glory and holiness. In Exodus 34:30, the result is apparent: "Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him." The visual appearance of his countenance was changed because of his exposure to God's glory. In the same way for the believer today, the "countenance" of his heart and life is changed when one seeks to see all of God's glory through spending time with God in his Word. This is God's desire for his children: to show them all his glory and holiness that he has revealed about himself in his Word.

Sermon 5: Matthew 17:1-8

Week 5 of the series explored Matthew's account of the transfiguration in Matthew 17:1-8. This passage demonstrates two truths about God's holiness being revealed in Jesus Christ. The first truth is that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law and the prophets. At the outset of the passage, the reader is again reminded of the power of God's glory and holiness. Matthew 17:2 reads, "And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became whist as light." This startling event takes place on a high mountain (probably Mt. Hermon outside of Galilee, 9,166 feet above sea level), with Jesus and his inner circle, Peter, James, and John. This image resembles that of the aforementioned passage of Moses seeing a "glimpse of God's glory" in Exodus 34:30. The difference was that this was not one of God's earthly children asking to see his glory; this was God the Son having the true glory and holiness of God revealed in his earthly

image. Immediately after this transfiguration occurs, Moses and Elijah appear and are talking to Jesus. This is the fulfillment of Malachi 4:5: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.” God is revealing that Jesus is the fulfillment of all the prophets. He is the perfect prophet of which all others were a type.

The appearance of Moses is God revealing that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law. The Law is not just the Jewish Law, Levitical Law or the Pentateuch, the law is the entire Word of God. Hence, God is showing the disciples that Jesus is the fulfillment of all God has revealed in his Word. As John 1:1 declares, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” God reveals to Peter, James, and John that Christ is who he claims to be: the Son of God. This is one of the foundational principles of the Christian faith.

The second truth revealed in this great event is God demonstrating his eternal glory in Jesus Christ. Matthew 17:5 pronounces, “He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.’” This was God revealing, in an audible voice, the truth of all Scripture. God had used the same words in Matthew 3:17 at the baptism of Jesus. All of this was proving that Jesus, God the Son, possessed the same eternal glory as God the Father. Jesus Christ was indeed who he said he was. The great application of these truths is that while man is separated from God’s glory and holiness, the atonement of Jesus Christ provides the way to share in that holiness. As 2 Corinthians 3:18 proclaims, “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

Sermon 6: Hebrews 12:14

The final week of the series focused on one of the six “warning passages” found in the book of Hebrews, Hebrews 12:14. More specifically, the sermon emphasized the

second part of verse 14: “Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” This verse served as the culmination of the message and application of the entire series. Particularly, two main truths were explored in this sermon. The first truth, the one requirement to see God, is essential to the Christian faith. While most professing Christians can parrot the line that Christianity is a faith-based religion, practical experience proves otherwise. Many professing Christians facing death often state that they hope they have done enough when speaking of spending eternity with God in heaven. Certainly, a Christian’s good works are part of the spiritual life, but they are not the saving part of that life. The apostle Paul says in Ephesians 2:10, “For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” This verse follows Paul’s direct decree of how one is saved in Ephesians 2:8-9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (vv. 8-9).

Therefore, one’s salvation is God’s gift to man as God gives the gift of faith through his grace, which enables a dead man to be awakened to the gospel and repent and believe. This is why Jesus told Nicodemus in their nighttime meeting that one must be born again in order to see the kingdom of God (John 3:3). Paul speaks to the essence of this verse, Hebrews 12:14, in 2 Corinthians 5:21: “For our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” This verse is one of the most explicit articulations of the gospel in Scripture. When one is saved from God’s wrath, God gives him his own righteousness or holiness. Hence, a depraved, sinful human who has been separated from God due to his sin can now have relationship with the one true holy, righteous God. All this is possible because of God’s gift of his righteousness or holiness. When a person is justified or born again, he is given a positional holiness by which he is freed from the *bondage* of sin (Rom 6:6). Then, a new believer obtains a progressive holiness by which he is saved from *practice* of sin. The apostle John makes this clear in his first letter to the church: “No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for

God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God" (1 John 3:9). Ultimately, all those whom God has saved are granted a perfect holiness when they are glorified and are eternally saved from the presence of sin. Paul summarizes the progression to ensure believers that all those God has predestined he has called, justified, and glorified (Rom 8:28-30).

So, the one requirement to see the Lord is holiness. The second truth from Hebrews 12:14 reveals how one obtains that requirement. As previously stated, man's holiness is nothing more than God's holiness granted to persons he chooses to save. This begs the question, "Why, then, does the writer of Hebrews command man to *strive* for holiness?" This striving sounds like a works-based faith, but that is incorrect. This warning that one must strive for holiness does not imply that one can lose the salvation God has granted, but it does correctly state that if one claims he has been born again, that evidence of their striving for more of God's holiness will be the practice of their life. Given this knowledge, one must ask, "What does this striving look like?"

In the preceding verses Hebrews 12, the author speaks of how God disciplines those who are his children. In comparing God's discipline to an earthly father's discipline, the author makes the distinction that God disciplines his children so that they may share in his holiness (vv. 7-10). This is a crucial identifying mark of the Christian: God will discipline those he loves so that they will share in his holiness. Otherwise, as Hebrews 12:14 states, "without which no one will see the Lord." New Testament scholar Tom Schreiner explains it this way: "When God disciplines us, we are called upon to endure, to obtain the benefit of the discipline being meted out. Discipline isn't a sign of God's disfavor but his love. It is designed to produce holiness and righteousness in God's children"⁹ In essence, this enduring of the discipline is part of the process of striving for holiness.

⁹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation (Nashville: B & H, 2015), 388.

Another key element to that striving and the progressive sanctification process is the practice of spiritual disciplines. While God changes one's desires when he causes them to be born again, the individual still has the responsibility to pursue those new desires. The practice of spiritual disciplines is foundational to that pursuit. In writing to his protégé in his waning years, the apostle Paul gives this directive to Timothy: "Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness" (1 Tim 4:7). This most definitely is the spirit of the directive from the writer in Hebrews, when he says to "strive for holiness." The warning—that without this holiness no one will see the Lord—serves as a reminder and encouragement for the believer not to forget or neglect the practice of those disciplines that train the believer for godliness. This reminder of striving does not in any way discount or change the truth that one's salvation is a product of God's great gift of grace. James Montgomery Boice echoes this truth: "This is a great biblical truth, namely, that the grace of God always comes before anything."¹⁰

Conclusion

This project was conducted over a fifteen-week period, and included administering surveys, sermon preparation, approval of the sermons, and preaching the sermons. The informal feedback from various members of the GPBC membership has been favorable. The congregation as a whole has seemed to embrace the connection of knowing God more deeply through learning more about his holiness. From a pastoral perspective, there has been a noticeable increase in the desire for God's Word in the immediate weeks following the implementation of the project. The research data in chapter 5 demonstrates some of these results. My prayer is that these results and increased desires will continue to grow in GPBC, and that GPBC will be more obedient to God's command to grow in Christ and share the great gospel message to those around us.

¹⁰ James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 1:321.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT

This final chapter evaluates the purpose, goals, strengths, and weaknesses of the ministry project. This final chapter ultimately assesses the overall performance of the ministry project. Also included are ways in which the development and implementation of the project could have been improved, and theological and personal reflections regarding the project. The following analysis and evaluation show that this project made a significant statistically difference in the lives of GPBC members and their knowledge of God and his holiness.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to use expository preaching about the holiness of God to increase the GPBC members' knowledge of God and his holiness. The premise for this purpose was established after three and a half years of pastoring the flock of GPBC in Woodruff, South Carolina. While the core of this membership demonstrated a love for God and each other, there was a void of significant knowledge of soteriology, ecclesiology, or any other foundational doctrines of the Christian faith. Most apparent was the lack of an intimate knowledge of God, especially concerning specific truths of God's nature. This void was largely due to almost two decades of weak pastoral leadership.

The basis of this project was two foundational truths. Both truths are a result of the biblical, theological and practical training I have received. The first truth, being the most potent tool available to fill any void of knowledge concerning God, is the correct preaching of the God's Word. Second, after much research as to which attribute of God most succinctly encapsulated the fullness of God's nature, I decided to preach on God's

holiness. While no one attribute adequately describes God, it was determined that his holiness, which is closely tied to righteousness and glory, gives the best basis for knowing God in a deeply intimate way.

Biblically, the primary task of a pastor is to “equip the saints to do the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12). Therefore, correctly preaching God’s Word about his holiness seemed the most effective and obedient way to increase GPBC’s knowledge of God. As the apostle Paul instructs Timothy, “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Tim 4:16), the primacy of preaching is essential to the pastor and to those whom he shepherds. Ultimately, this increased knowledge of God’s holiness will serve as the basis for increased sanctification of the members of GPBC. Jesus relates this point in his high priestly prayer when praying for his disciples: “Sanctify them in truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17).

Evaluation of the Project Goals

Correct alignment of the project’s purpose with measurable goals was necessary to ensure GPBC was effectively equipped to have an increased knowledge of the holiness of God. The project consisted of three goals: (1) assess the GPBC members’ knowledge of God in relation to his holiness; (2) Prepare a six-week sermon series on the holiness of God; and (3) increase GPBC members’ knowledge of God’s holiness by preaching the series on God’s holiness.

Goal 1: Knowledge of God’s Holiness

The first goal of the project was to assess the GPBC members’ knowledge of God in relation to his holiness. To measure this goal, a pre-test survey was prepared that gathered data concerning the membership’s knowledge of God and his holiness.¹ A minimum of thirty surveys were needed in order to have a sufficient sample. This goal

¹ See appendix 1.

was met as thirty-five surveys were returned. Two surveys were not correctly completed, but a sufficient sample was acquired with thirty-three correctly completed surveys. Each survey was anonymous, as the results would be a group sample and not individual.

One response that was surprising was to item 1. All but three members “agreed somewhat,” “agreed,” or “strongly agreed” to the statement, “I meditate on the holiness of God each day.” While surprising, the response was encouraging from a pastoral view. In our most recent Wednesday evening EQUIP class, GPBC had completed a twelve-week on *Praying the Bible* by Donald Whitney. In this study we took time to differentiate the spiritual discipline of meditation versus the secular understanding of meditation. The survey responses proved at least a minimal knowledge of this spiritual discipline had been retained.

The item of the pre-test survey that produced the lowest score was item 9: “Man’s holiness is obtained through God’s holiness.” This item resulted in an average score of 2.24 out of a possible 6.0 points. Of the thirty-three participants, only three “strongly agreed” to the statement. While this information was not completely surprising, it provided critical information for sermon preparation on this truth.

On the pre-test survey, the item which received the highest average score, 5.78 of a possible 6.0, was item 3, “Knowing more about God’s holiness and applying that knowledge to our lives changes me as a disciple of Christ.” Of the thirty-three participants, thirty-two either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with that statement. Even as this may have been the simplest question on the pre-test survey, it was encouraging that the participants understood that knowledge of God’s holiness was applicable and useful in their daily lives.

The final item in the pre-test survey that was of particular interest was item 5, “Only holy worship is acceptable to God.” This item produced the fourth highest average, 5.4 on the pre-test survey, which was encouraging since just prior to the holiness of God series I preached an eight-week series on ecclesiology. In that series, one week was

devoted to corporate worship and the necessity of holiness in worship. The 5.45 average was evidence of the Word of God taking root in the lives of the GPBC membership. While these statistics do not reflect great numerical growth in the church, they do demonstrate the people of God being sanctified by the ordinary means of grace.

Goal 2: Sermon Preparation

The second goal of this project was to prepare a six-week sermon series on the holiness of God. While all parts of this project were important, sermon preparation was the most crucial. If the sermons were not earnestly prepared and correctly preached, then the purpose of the project would fail. This project specifically designated expository preaching. Brian Chapell defines expository preaching this way: “The technical definition of an expository sermon requires that it expound Scripture by deriving from a specific text main points and subpoints that disclose the thought of the author, cover the scope of the passage, and are applied to the lives of listeners.”²

Most pastors who practice expository preaching would agree that preaching through one book of the Bible verse-by-verse is the simplest way to correctly adhere to the aforementioned definition of expository preaching. Preaching in this way minimizes the likelihood of a pastor misunderstanding the context or the original intent of the passage. This practice also forces the preacher to preach difficult passages and the whole counsel of Scripture. Ultimately, this provides the listener with more in-depth explanation of God’s Word, which gives a better application of Scripture to one’s life. Given the time constraints of this project, the preliminary preparation deemed it most beneficial to preach from six different passages as opposed to just one passage.

To strengthen the biblical and theological content of this series, a two-person team was formed to critique and offer suggestions to each of the six sermons based on a

² Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 23.

rubric designed specifically for this project,³ which was based on the foundational components of the Christian Preaching department of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The two-member team was compromised of a pastor beginning his fortieth year of service, pastoring Southern Baptist churches in Texas and South Carolina. He holds a master and doctoral degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, in Fort Worth, Texas. The second member is actively serving as a deacon in GPBC. He has been a member of GPBC for over forty years and has served in leadership and teaching for the last twenty years. The rubric was a four-point scale with the following levels assigned: 1=insufficient, 2=requires attention, 3=sufficient, 4=exemplary. A detailed outlined of each sermon⁴ was submitted and evaluated on six criteria: Exegetical Accuracy, Doctrinal Substance, Clear Structure, Appropriate Illustrations/Biblical support, Clear Thesis/Main Idea, and Useful Application. The combined results of the evaluation for each sermon are listed in the following tables.

Table 1. Sermon 1—Isaiah 6:1-7 evaluation results

Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Exegetical Accuracy				2	
Doctrinal Substance				2	
Clear Structure				2	
Appropriate Illustrations/Biblical Support			1	1	
Clear Thesis				2	
Useful Application			1	1	

³ See appendix 2.

⁴ See appendix 3.

Table 2. Sermon 2—Genesis 6:5-8 evaluation results

Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Exegetical Accuracy				2	
Doctrinal Substance				2	
Clear Structure				2	
Appropriate Illustrations/Biblical Support				2	
Clear Thesis				2	
Useful Application			1	1	

Table 3. Sermon 3—Leviticus 10:1-3 evaluation results

Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Exegetical Accuracy				2	
Doctrinal Substance				2	
Clear Structure				2	
Appropriate Illustrations/Biblical Support				2	
Clear Thesis				2	
Useful Application			1	1	Specific worship of GPBC or my personal life?

Table 4. Sermon 4—Exodus 33:17-29; 34:29-35 evaluation results

Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Exegetical Accuracy				2	
Doctrinal Substance				2	Solid doctrinal points
Clear Structure				2	Excellent
Appropriate Illustrations/Biblical Support			1	1	Good biblical support of main points
Clear Thesis				2	Excellent outline and clarity of thought
Useful Application				2	

Table 5. Sermon 5—Matthew 17:1-8 evaluation results

Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Exegetical Accuracy				2	
Doctrinal Substance				2	
Clear Structure			1	1	
Appropriate Illustrations/Biblical Support				2	
Clear Thesis				2	
Useful Application				2	Most appropriate for this passage

Table 6. Sermon 6—Hebrews 12:14 evaluation results

Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Exegetical Accuracy				2	
Doctrinal Substance				2	
Clear Structure				2	
Appropriate Illustrations/Biblical Support				1	
Clear Thesis				2	
Useful Application			1	1	What does striving for holiness look like?

The combined evaluations resulted in 88.88 percent of the criteria being given an “exemplary” (4) rating, while 1.12 percent of the criteria resulted in a “sufficient” (3) rating. Of the criteria rated sufficient, all but one dealt with illustrations or application. Appropriately, these evaluations were completed and returned with time available to consider the recommendations and revise the final copy of each sermon accordingly.

Goal 3: Increased Knowledge

The final goal of the project was to increase GPBC members’ knowledge of God’s holiness by preaching the sermon on the holiness of God. This goal was measured by administering the Holiness of God Pre-Test Survey prior to the preaching of the sermon series. Thirty-five surveys were returned. Each name of the Thirty-five participants was recorded. Upon completion of the six-week sermon series on October 30, 2022, each of the Thirty-five participants completed a post-test survey. Seven participants viewed sermons on the website, which they had missed and then returned their completed surveys. By November 6, 2022, all completed surveys had been returned. Two pre-test surveys and two post-test surveys were filled out incorrectly and were discarded.

Upon receiving the thirty-three completed post-test surveys, the results were tallied and computed in a *t*-test: two-sample assuming unequal variances. This test indicated that a change in the knowledge of the holiness of God had occurred. The *t*-test demonstrated a significant positive difference between the pre-test and post-test survey

responses:

$t_{(59)} = -4.487061188$, $p=0.000017001$. The hypotheses that the preaching would make a difference was confirmed by the t -test results. Specifically, the mean score increased 5.97 points from the pre-test survey to the post-test survey. Second, the absolute value of t -stat score (4.487) was significantly larger than the t -Critical one tail score (1.671093032). Lastly, the $P(T \leq t)$ one-tail (0.000017001) was significantly lower than 0.05. All of these factors indicate that the preaching series made a significant positive change (see table 7).

Table 7: t -test: two-sample assuming unequal variances

	Pre-Test Total	Post-Test Total
Mean	48.84848485	54.81818182
Variance	37.32007576	21.09090909
Observations	33	33
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	59	
t Stat	-4.487061188	
$P(T \leq t)$ one-tail	0.000017001	
t Critical one-tail	1.671093032	
$P(T \leq t)$ two-tail	0.000034001	
t Critical two-tail	2.000995378	

As the surveys and t -test demonstrated, the average increase of knowledge of the holiness of God increased 5.97 points from 48.84 to 54.81. The smallest increase was noted on item 5 of the pre and post-test survey, “Only holy worship is acceptable to God.” On this one item there was neither an increase nor decrease. The greatest change reflected in the pre- and post-test survey was noted in item 9, “Man’s holiness is obtained through God’s holiness.” From the average of all participants, the increase was 1.92 points. The average of the scores for each question from the pre and post-test survey are shown in table 8.

Table 8: Pre-test and post-test survey change

Survey Questions	Pre-Test Average	Post-Test Average	Change
1. I think deeply on the holiness of God every day	4.96	5.21	+0.25
2. Daily Bible study is essential to holiness.	5.60	5.84	+0.24
3. Knowing more about God's holiness and applying that knowledge to our lives changes us as disciples of Christ.	5.78	5.90	+0.12
4. God's holiness in the Old Testament is the same as his holiness in the New Testament.	4.60	5.57	+0.97
5. Only holy worship is acceptable to God.	5.45	5.45	0.00
6. God demands holiness from his children.	5.60	5.81	+0.21
7. God's demands holiness from all mankind.	4.54	5.21	+0.67
8. Holiness is necessary to one's salvation.	4.93	5.66	+0.73
9. Man's holiness is obtained through God's holiness.	2.24	4.21	+1.97
10. Knowledge of God's holiness is necessary to understanding the depth of man's sin.	5.12	5.90	+0.78

Strengths of the Project

The greatest strength of this project was the focus on the Word of God in the sermon series. This is not a new phenomenon, as Scripture is always the sole focus in any preaching at GPBC. Yet, the intense focus on holiness and seeing this attribute continuously in every Scripture passage did much to enhance the members' respect for Scripture. This focus on one topic, the holiness of God, for six continuous weeks, demonstrated expository preaching remains the same whether it is preaching through one book verse-by-verse, or several different passages on the same theme. Regardless, the focus of the preaching is the original intent and meaning of the text. The benefits from this strength will be long lasting for GPBC.

A second strength of this project was listening to informal conversations between members of GPBC about the passages that were preached. Some admitted to being unfamiliar with a few of the passages, such as Leviticus 10:1-3, while others admitted they had never thought deeply about the sheer power and might of God's holiness, as revealed in Isaiah 6:1-7. While preaching on such a weighty topic as the holiness of God, it was encouraging to see that the heaviness of such a topic stirred great desire for and understanding of God. Furthermore, these types of conversations were the

result of much focus on one topic for an extended period of time, and these conversations led to a depth in their spiritual relationships not known before. Also, this type of acquired knowledge increased GPBC's understanding of the authority, sufficiency, and necessity of Scripture in the believer's life.

The final strength of this project, and possibly the most important, was the actual spiritual growth that became evident in many of the GPBC members. Many informal conversations that I had with an individual member or a small group of members revealed actual heart changes in their lives. Several individuals expressed a desire to be more holy because Scripture had convicted them. Some cited specific sins in their life that needed to be confessed. These sins would not be considered heinous by the twenty-first-century church culture in the West, by many churches they would not even be called sin; yet, because of Scripture, these individuals had a clearer understanding of the holiness God demands of his children, because he is holy. All of this was the result of God's people hearing God's Word and submitting to it in a new way. For a pastor this is extremely encouraging. Adding to that encouragement is real data from the project that not only supports these changes, but indicates that significant changes should be expected.

Weaknesses of the Project

Three weaknesses were obvious to me in this project, all of which are directly or indirectly related to time. The first timing issue was the sudden death of our two-year-old granddaughter. This tragic event occurred just three weeks before I had planned to begin the sermon series. Because this death was totally unexpected, much time was needed to arrange funeral details, plan travel across multiple regions of the country, and a plethora of other smaller issues. Due to the funeral, travel, and sickness in my immediate family, I was away or unengaged for three weeks. When I returned to my work at GPBC, I realized my grief was on two levels, for our granddaughter and also for our daughter, son-in-law, and grandsons (four siblings of the deceased). My struggle to focus and complete sermon details delayed the project and imposed a time crunch that affected my planning and

preaching in a negative way. Amid this struggle, God's grace abounded more and more as he equipped GPBC to love and minister to our family in a way that brought glory to his name and his church.

The second weakness of this project was in the number of passages preached. Due to our granddaughter's death and the aforementioned timing issues, I determined to cut the project back to six sermons to properly prepare and stay on schedule. In my mind, there was a constant struggle between preaching six or eight sermons, the six passages that were approved and preached were sufficient, but I feel I fell short of presenting the project in its entirety.

Lastly, the deadlines and timing were a constant struggle throughout the entire process. I am aware that this is common for most anyone pursuing a doctoral degree, but at certain times I allowed the deadlines or time constraints to take precedent over my personal devotion time. As course 80911-Biblical Spiritual Disciplines in the Minister's Life, with Donald Whitney, taught, the pastor cannot make a practice of omitting the spiritual disciplines of Scripture. First Timothy 4:16 states, "Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers." As the preparation for the project drew nigh, there were times when I failed at keeping a close watch on myself, in order to meet a deadline. I grieve these cases of weakness and how they possibly limited the effectiveness of my presentation of God's Word.

What I Would Do Differently

If I were to implement this project again there are two additions I would make. First, as noted in the previous section concerning weaknesses of the project, I would insert at least two more passages to preach. The first passage would be Ephesians 1:3-4: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him." In preaching this series

on holiness, this verse came to my attention in other reading. I was struck by the language of God “choosing us” to be holy. While the doctrines of adoption, predestination, and election serve as a great assurance in understanding salvation, the idea of God’s planned election of our holiness provides an even greater appreciation of the gift of salvation.

Coupled with this passage from Ephesians, I would also add the more familiar 1 Peter 1:13-15. This passage provides great insight not only to God commanding his children to be holy, but also that this holiness is enhanced as believers live as obedient children. This passage parallels closely to the Hebrews 12:14 passage used in the project, that commands believers to “strive for holiness.” This idea of striving, or obedience, has been either overlooked or taught incorrectly as legalism. Understandably, these actions of obeying or striving can easily be directed in a way that supports a works-based salvation. This, of course, is completely false. A deep study of these two passages would enhance the overall application of how important holiness is to the believer, not only in eternity but also as one is being sanctified on earth.

In addition to adding passages to preach in the series, I would add a step in the results portion of the project. Upon completion of the sermon series, a gathering to discuss the series would be affirming for all members. This could be done during the normal evening gathering on Sunday, or Wednesday in a more informal setting, followed by a time with food and fellowship. The purpose of the gathering would be to allow members to ask questions about a specific passage, comment on their favorite passage, offer some new doctrinal truth that was learned, or share personal application of one of the sermons in their life. GPBC participated in this type of activity last year, upon the completion of preaching through the book of Genesis. It provided a good atmosphere whereby members could learn from each other. It also provided an informal forum that encouraged spiritual conversations to encourage one another. Undoubtedly, this type of forum could only aid GPBC in deepening their knowledge of the holiness of God.

Theological Reflection

This doctoral pursuit has been overwhelming, encouraging, frustrating, humbling, and many other conflicting emotions. Yet, it has never been a theologically light endeavor. It has, at every juncture, been a theological challenge. I entered this process at odds about the specific content or subject of my project, but I was certain that I desired for it to be based on preaching. My certainty was due to two reasons. The first reason being that I was ultimately called to pastor in the local church. In my understanding of a pastor, shepherd, elder, or overseer, the sum of that office is to lead, feed, protect, and care for the flock God has entrusted (1 Tim 3:2-7; Titus 1:6-9; 1 Pet 5:1-3).

In each of these roles, Scripture is the necessary tool and teaching or preaching is the distinguishing gift of the pastor, elder, shepherd, overseer (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:9). While “leading” a flock includes living out the truths of Scripture, it also demands leading by correctly teaching the truths of Scripture. The same can be said for “caring for” a flock. This certainly means visiting the sick, praying for the sick, and even sometimes taking food or medicine to the sick. But, ultimately, pastors “care for” the spiritual health of the flock through Scripture. The remaining two roles, “feeding and protecting” are entirely based upon correctly preaching and teaching God’s Word, in order that the flock grows in truth and that no false teaching penetrates the flock. While a pastor (elder, shepherd, overseer) has many roles and responsibilities, it is my conviction according to Scripture that the most important role of one called to pastor is to preach and teach God’s Word correctly to the flock entrusted to him. Therefore, I desired that my continued theological education be based on preaching. Looking back at the whole of my experience, I am grateful for what I have learned.

Specifically, chapter 2 of this project was a tremendous growth experience for me. The task of exegeting seven theologically deep passages on God’s holiness was a challenge. Now on the other side of that work, I can unequivocally proclaim that the long hours involved in that task enhanced my knowledge of Scripture and the exegetical process. While I still have much to learn, I am grateful for God’s grace in blessing me with

this opportunity to learn and grow. Chapter 2, and the entire project, also did much to improve my writing about Scripture and theology. This was made possible by exceptional teaching and also through reading great theological writings. The ultimate reward being that learning to write more efficiently also improves one's preaching.

Just as in chapter 2, the work required in chapter 3, "John Calvin's Preaching and Teaching on the Holiness of God," also challenged me intellectually and theologically. Ultimately, reading just portions of Calvin's theological writings and sermons increased my understanding of God and his holiness. Additionally, this exposure gave me a greater hunger to learn from and learn more about the great saints of the church, throughout history. Furthermore, this study solidified my belief in the strength of Scripture. In reading Calvin, one has a clear understanding that this is where he grounded his theological views. This belief in the sufficiency of Scripture encourages me, especially when I see that this view has been trumpeted by the great church fathers from Augustine to Calvin and beyond. This is the great advantage of spending time studying a theologian from the past. As many in the modern western church believe that gimmicks and marketing are what will attract the lost, it is strengthening to see that the gospel and the unchanging doctrinal truths of Scripture are sufficient to save and sustain one's faith today or any day. This is the great truth I gleaned in studying Calvin in chapter 3.

Lastly, the core seminars of the Professional Doctoral Studies program provided an excellent environment for me to grow theologically. The four core seminars on campus, while challenging, equip the student with an unmatched arsenal of theological weapons. The pedagogical excellence was evident in each class. All the professors have different specialties, yet all extended great effort in making certain that all learning outcomes were mastered. Coupled with the exceptional teaching of each class was a brilliant exposure to the best theological writings from each period in church history. Indeed, the amount and the denseness of reading was at times overwhelming, but in each case, it proved beneficial in my personal growth and for the growth of GPBC.

Personal Reflections

My personal path to vocational ministry has been different from most. I submitted to a call to pastoral ministry and began seminary at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary at the conclusion of a twenty-nine year career in public education. I knew some theological education was necessary, but I was not enthused about committing to a ninety-hour MDiv program. Once I had completed my first semester, my attitude changed. After spending years pursuing graduate degrees in education, I was finally experiencing education that was useful and applicable. After one semester in seminary, I began to realize the great void of theological depth in my life.

Upon completion of my MDiv degree, I came to an information seminar about the Professional Doctoral Studies program at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The fact that the doctoral work would be specifically about one's current ministry context intrigued me. The time factor of pursuing another degree, while serving as the only pastor to a church that needed much attention, was a concern. The idea and reality that most of the academic work overlapped with many of my pastoral duties made the possibility more inviting. Once I began the program, this proved true in most cases. More importantly, I have seen the results of my doctoral work have a positive impact on the individuals of GPBC and GPBC as a whole. The ministry project and all the work involved in the process indeed is for the good of the local church and the glory of God.

The excellent teaching I have received has been a gift. The wealth of theological resources I have been exposed to will serve me throughout my ministry and beyond. The raw knowledge and experience I gained far outweighs the cost of this degree. But beyond all these hallmarks, the gift of the relationship with many fellow pastors and professors who are also laboring in the kingdom has been an unspeakable encouragement. While many different ministry contexts have been represented, there has been a common love of the local church and the desire to see it flourish. The ability to learn from and have relationships with gifted theological and spiritually humble professors has been a wonderful grace of God to me and my ministry.

Conclusion

The purpose of this ministry project was to use expository preaching about the holiness of God to increase the GPBC members' knowledge of God and his holiness. Through much prayer, research, wise counsel, and God's grace, a project was developed and implemented, which produced measurable change in the lives of the membership of GPBC. The statistical and practical evidence of this change will always serve as a great reminder of God's kindness and favor to this small part of his universal church. Even more, it will serve as a continuous reminder that "so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it" (Isa 55:11).

May I and all of GPBC ever remember the power of God's holy Word preached correctly. As long as our God tarries, may we be faithful to trust his Word and his timing for all of his purposes, which he will surely accomplish.

APPENDIX 1

HOLINESS OF GOD PRE- AND POST-TEST SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding and practices of teaching the Bible of the participant. This research is being conducted by Craig Turnbull at Hope Bible Church in Oakville, Ontario for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses.

Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Part 1

Directions: Answer the following multiple-choice questions by placing an 'X' next to your answer.

1. To what age group do you belong?
 A. 10-20
 B. 21-40
 C. 41-60
 D. 61-70
 E. 71+
2. What is your gender?
 A. Male
 B. Female
3. How long have you been a Christian?
 A. 1-5 years
 B. 6-10 years
 C. 11-20 years
 D. 21+ years
4. How long have you been attending Green Pond Baptist Church in Woodruff, SC?
 A. 1-5 years
 B. 6-10 years
 C. 11-15 years
 D. 15+ years

Part 2

Directions: Respond the statements by giving your opinion using the following scale:

SD strongly disagree
D disagree
DS disagree somewhat
AS agree somewhat
A agree
SA strongly agree

Please circle the appropriate answer.

1. I meditate on the holiness of God every day.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
2. Daily Bible study is essential to holiness.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
3. Knowing more about God's holiness and applying that knowledge to our lives changes me as a disciple of Christ.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
4. God's holiness in the Old Testament is the same as his holiness in the New Testament.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
5. Only holy worship is acceptable to God.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6. God demands holiness from his children.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
7. God's demands holiness from all mankind.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
8. Holiness is necessary to one's salvation	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
9. Man's holiness is obtained through God's holiness.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
10. Knowledge of God's holiness is necessary to understanding the depth of man's sin.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

APPENDIX 2

HOLINESS OF GOD SERMON EVALUATION TOOL

The curriculum evaluation rubric assessed the exegetical merit of the proposed pedagogical principles, biblical faithfulness to both biblical and systematic theology, appropriateness of pedagogical method, and contextual fit for the preaching model advanced within Green Pond Baptist Church. This rubric was also aligned with the dominant themes of expository preaching supported by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Holiness of God Sermon Evaluation Tool					
The Holiness of God: (Wk. #)			Text:		
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Exegetical Accuracy					
(Faithful to the text)					
Doctrinal Substance					
(Sound biblical Doctrine)					
Clear Structure					
(Introduction, Body, Conclusion)					
Appropriate Illustrations and/or Biblical support					
(Clear illustrations, quotes, or biblical support)					
Clear Thesis					
Main points clearly stated					

APPENDIX 3
SERMON OUTLINES

Sermon 1: Isaiah 6:1-7

I Introduction to Holiness of God Series

- A. Why the Holiness of God?
 - 1. A desire for GPBC to know God in a deeper more intimate relationship
 - 2. To know God better, we must know his character or his attributes
 - 3. It is not feasible to preach a 6-8 week series on God’s attributes, so the scope of the series was narrowed to one attribute that most comprehensibly describes God, his holiness.
- B. Without knowing the depth of the holiness of God’s nature, man cannot adequately understand his need for a Savior.
- C. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, “Ignorance of God—ignorance of both his ways and of the practice of communion with him—lies at the root of much of the church’s weakness today.”¹
- D. Packer attributes this ignorance to two modern trends: Too much space given to the great thoughts of man, leaving only minimal space for thoughts of God. And secondly, the influence of modern skepticism influencing Christian minds to call all foundational scriptural truths into question.²
- E. Purposes of this series on the *Holiness of God*
 - 1. To know and understand the meaning of holiness
 - a. “God’s holiness means that he is separated from sin and devoted to seeking his own honor.”³
 - b. The word holy is used to describe both parts of the tabernacle, for example. The tabernacle itself was a place separate from the evil and sin of the world, and the first room in it was called the “holy place.”⁴
 - c. But then God commanded that there be a veil, “And the veil shall separate for you the Holy Place from the Most Holy” (*Exod 26:33*)⁵. The most holy place, where the ark of the covenant was kept, was the

¹ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2018), 12.

² Packer, *Knowing God*, 12-13.

³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 240.

⁴ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 241.

⁵ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 241.

place most separated from evil and sin and the most fully devoted to God's service."⁶

2. To understand that the way one knows more about the holiness of God is through his revealed Word
 - a. "Holy One of Israel" (*Ps 71:22; 78:41; 89:18; Isa 1:4; 5:19, et al.*)
 - b. "It does not seem proper to speak of one attribute of God as being more central and fundamental than another; but . . . the Scriptural emphasis on the holiness of God would seem to justify its selection."⁷
 3. To understand that an increased knowledge of God's results in an increased desire for a life of obedience to this holy God and his revealed Word.
- F. The significance of holiness amid the other attributes of God
1. Rudolf Otto designates holiness as what is most significant about God, which he terms the "numinous," which in the Latin refers to "arousing mysterious or religious emotion, mysterious or awe inspiring." Otto concludes that this holiness cannot be understood conceptually and includes ideas such as "absolute overpoweringness" or "aweful majesty."⁸
 2. R. L. Dabney, a nineteenth century Southern Presbyterian pastor agrees with this significance of holiness. In his *Systematic Theology* (notes from his class lectures at Union Seminary in Richmond, VA), Dabney declares, "His moral attributes are t special crown; His intelligence and will are the brow that wears it. His holiness is the collective and consummate glory of His nature as an infinite, morally pure, active and intelligent Spirit."⁹
 3. The Puritan, Thomas Watson, agrees with this sentiment in his *Body of Divinity*: "Holiness is the most sparkling jewel of his crown; it is the name by which God is known . . . His power makes him mighty, his holiness make him glorious. God's. holiness consists in the perfect love of righteousness, and abhorrence of evil."¹⁰
 4. Watson equates holiness to God's very being, "But holiness in God is his essence, he is all over holy, and he can as well lose his Godhead as his

⁶ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 241.

⁷ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, new combined ed. (Grand Rapids: Williams B. Eerdmans, 1996), 73.

⁸ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino, 2010), 10-14.

⁹ R. L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology: Syllabus and Notes of the Course of Systematic and Polemic theology Taught in Union Theological Seminary, Virginia*, 3rd ed. (Ashbury Park, NJ: Presbyterian, 1885), accessed September 20, 2021, https://www.google.com/books/edition/Syllabus_and_Notes_of_the_Course_of_Syst/JqYVY-kIlq0C?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=dabney%22systematic+theology%22+syllabus+and+notes+of+the+course+of+Systematic+and+Polemic+theology+taught+in+Union+Theological+seminary+virginia&pg=PA440&printsec=frontcover.

¹⁰ Thomas Watson, *Body of Divinity* (New York City: Scriptura, 2015), 65.

holiness.”¹¹

II. Isaiah 6:1-7

- A. Today, our focus is on three critical truths revealed Isaiah 6:1-7:
1. The magnitude of God’s holiness
 2. The unholiness of man
 3. The significance of holiness in the gospel

III. Magnitude of God’s Holiness

- A. **6:1**> Setting/Context:
1. Year of King Uzziah’s death
 2. Isaiah given a vision of God in the temple
 3. The “throne,” robe,” and “high and lifted up” are indicators of God’s power.
 4. A. Motyer> *no description given> glory & holiness beyond description.*¹²
- B. **6:2**> Seraphim’s six wings
1. R. C. Sproul notes, “*The seraphim are not sinful humans burdened with impure hearts. Yet as angelic beings, they are still creatures, and even in their lofty status as consorts of heavenly host it is necessary for them to shield their eyes from a direct gaze on the face of God.*”¹³
 2. The setting and the emphasis on the seraphim’s six wings set the stage for what is about to happen.
- C. **6:3**> “Holy, holy, holy . . .”> arguably the most poignant phrase in Scripture of God’s holiness
1. Hebrew language repeats phrases for emphasis, as opposed to adverbs, italics, etc.
 2. “**Holy**”> only attribute of God repeated three times in all of Scripture
 3. Sproul explains, “the song is called the *Trisagion*, which means simply ‘the three times holy.’”¹⁴
- D. **6:4**> “Foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called . . . smoke”
1. Motyer comments on the significance of the doorposts and smoke, “Concentrated on *doorposts and thresholds* it specifically prohibits Isaiah’s entry to the divine presence, just as *smoke* forbids him to see God. The divine nature as such is an active force of exclusion.”¹⁵

¹¹ Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 66.

¹² J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 75.

¹³ R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, 2nd ed. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 1998), 22.

¹⁴ Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, 23.

¹⁵ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 77.

2. This exclusivity, mentioned by Motyer, is the ultimate truth about the holiness of God.
 - **The magnitude and depth of God’s holiness is beyond our understanding.**

IV. Unholiness of Man

- A. Isaiah’s encounter with the holiness of God produces a specific result> ***His unholiness (sinfulness) and the unholiness (sinfulness) of all men***
- B. **6:5**> “Woe is me!”> A pronouncement of “woe” on himself; Isaiah has no answers
- C. “I am lost . . . unclean lips, midst of unclean people”> The reality of sin> NO HOPE
 1. Sproul uses the KJV of **6:5**> “Woe is me I am undone!”> He states that it is a truer indication of man being awakened to a holy God: “As long as Isaiah could compare himself to other mortals he was able to sustain a lofty opinion of his own character. The instant he measured himself by the ultimate standard, he was destroyed –morally and spiritually annihilated. He was undone. He came apart. His sense of integrity collapsed.”¹⁶
 2. Sproul continues, “Isaiah use of woe was extraordinary. When he saw the Lord, he pronounced the judgment of God upon himself. ‘Woe to me!’ he cried, call down the curse of God, the utter anathema of judgment and doom upon his own head.”
 3. “Unclean lips”> it was not just his lips that were unclean; this was the manifestation of his unclean heart (**Luke 6:45**)
- D. When God’s holiness is revealed to man, this is the result, utter hopelessness.
 - ***Apart from God’s grace and Christ’s atoning death, all mankind is without hope!***

V. Holiness in the Gospel

- A. The realization of God’s holiness presents the reality of man’s relationship with God
- B. We cannot be in his presence> Holiness and sinfulness cannot coexist.
- C. Man’s sinful state cannot approach God; His wrath will consume him (**Exod 19:18**)
- D. **But God** . . . has provided a way out, a rescue, a deliverance, atonement
- E. **6:6-7**> “burning coal from the altar; on his lips; ‘your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.’”
 1. The hot coal immediately was applied to Isaiah’s lips upon his confession. A representation of the gospel
 2. Motyer remarks, “*The initiative has been heaven’s all along; revealing (6:2-3), excluding and condemning (6:4-5) and now sending the seraph to*

¹⁶ Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, 28.

*the one he has chosen to save.*¹⁷

3. Motyer concludes this symbolic picture of atonement through a single coal, “The altar was the place where the holy God accepted and was satisfied by blood sacrifice (Lev 17:11). It holds together the ideas of the atonement, propitiation and satisfaction required by God and of the forgiveness, cleansing and reconciliation needed by his people . . . through substitutionary sacrifice and brought to Isaiah, encapsulated in the single symbol of the live coal.”¹⁸
- ***Understanding God’s holiness is necessary in understanding the vileness of our sin and our need for a Savior. Man must know he is undone and without hope, apart from Christ.***

VII. Conclusion/Application

- A. One must understand the magnitude of God’s holiness, in order to understand the depth of our unholiness
 - B. This knowledge affords the proper understanding of our eternal separation from God
 - C. Which, shows our need for a Savior, which cultivates our appreciation of Christ’s atoning sacrifice
- ***Ultimately, this knowledge of the holiness of God leads the believer to a greater desire to live a life of obedience that glorifies our holy God.***

¹⁷ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 77.

¹⁸ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 78.

Sermon 2: Genesis 6:5-8

Introduction

- “Opposites attract” is a cultural lie.
- People with different personalities may be drawn to each other, but b/c they are both human, they have more similarities than differences.
- Truth> Opposite forces repel each other; they cannot coexist.
- Hence, A holy God cannot be in union with unholy man

TODAY: Genesis 6:5-8 reveals three truths about man concerning God’s holiness:

- 1.) Man’s depravity affects each part of us
- 2.) Man’s depravity (sin), demands judgement and separation from a holy God
- 3.) Man’s righteousness is determined by God

I. Total Depravity of Man

- A. **Gen 6:5**> “wickedness of man . . .”> man’s depravity (*Gen 3:1-19*)
- B. **6:5**> “every intention”> **ALL** of us (*Rom 5:12; Jer 17:9*)
- C. *“The word in the original, which we translate desperately wicked, signifies a mortal, incurable disease; a disease which, seizing on the vitals, affects and threatens the whole frame; and which no remedy can reach... the heart is deceitful—that is, it deceives and fails us in every instance.”*¹⁹ John Newton
- D. *Dane Ortlund*> *“If sin were the color blue, we do not occasionally say or do something blue; all that we say, do , and think has some taint of blue.”*²⁰
- E. “Free will”> spiritually dead cannot choose life>>>> without hope!
- F. John Calvin dissects the heart of this evaluation of man stating, *“For by the word saw, he indicates long continued patience; as if he would say, that God had not proclaimed his sentence to destroy men, until after having well observed, and long considered, their case, he saw them to be past recovery.”*²¹ Progressive nature of sin> we are getting worse
- G. This sin/depravity separate us from God
- *Because of Adam’s sin, each part of every man’s nature is depraved. We are spiritually dead in every way.*

II. Separation and Judgment

- A. **6:6**> This sin/depravity separate us from God (*Gen 3; Rom 3:10,23*)
- B. **6:6**> **“LORD regretted (CSB), repented (KJV), sorry (NASB)> Anthropopathic>**

¹⁹ John Newton, *The Works of John Newton* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2019), 2:107.

²⁰ Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 47.

²¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses, Calvin’s Commentaries*, trans. John King (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 217.

Giving human feelings and emotions to something other than a human being; namely God.

- C. **6:6**> *God did not change his mind*> *Immutability of God*
- D. Louis Berkhof **“God IS DEVOID of change in his Being, his Perfections, his Purposes and his Promises.”**²²
- E. **6:7**> **“blot out . . .”**> *God holy; man sinful*> *cannot coexist (Gen.3:24; Rm. 6:23)*
 - *Our sin and depravity demand separation and judgment from a holy and righteous God.*

III. God determines Man’s Righteousness

- A. **6:8**> **“But”**> *Show contrast*> *But God (Eph 2:4)*
- B. **6:8**> **“found favor”**> *God deemed Noah righteous*> *Lot (Gen 18-19; 2 Pet 2:7)*
- C. God determines the righteousness of all men. We are saved just as Lot and Noah were . . . It is completely an act of God’s grace! (*John 6:35-40; Rom 8:28-30*)
- D. *Martin Luther states, “Without the Holy Spirit and without grace man can do nothing but sin and so goes on endlessly from sin to sin. But this knowledge of our sin is the beginning of our salvation in that we completely despair of ourselves and give to God alone the glory of our righteousness.”*²³
- E. **Seeming dichotomy of God:** *Just as he BLOTS out man in Genesis 6; He blots out his chosen one’s sin!*
(*Isa 43:24-25*)
 - *Understanding God’s holiness is necessary in understanding the vileness of our sin and our need for a Savior. Man must know he is undone and without hope, apart from Christ.*

V. Conclusion/Application

- D. Even in the midst of his greatest show of judgment and anger, our holy God displays in equal measure his loving grace to his children.
- E. This powerful show of God’s holiness, judgment and grace should cause us all to desire to know this God more intimately and sing of his amazing grace.

Ephesians 2:8-9

⁸ *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,* ⁹ *not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

²² Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 46.

²³ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 2, *Genesis Chapters 6-14*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Daniel E. Poellot (St. Louis: Concordia, 1960), 43.

Sermon 3: Leviticus 10:1-3

Introduction

- Review God's nature as holy (Isa 6) and why man was separated from God (Gen 3)
- Why Leviticus was written> Tabernacle and worship
- **Today: Leviticus 10:1-3** reveals three truths concerning God's holiness and worship: 1.) God's holiness demands holiness in Worship
- 2.) God's holiness demands obedience in Worship
- 3.) God's holiness demands a proper response to his discipline

I. Background to Leviticus

- A. Written immediately after building of Tabernacle
- B. Levitical law reinforced God's holiness and provided a way for the people to commune with God (Holy – sinful> separation)
- C. Priesthood> tribe of Levi> Aaron and his sons (Nadab and Abihu) (*Exod 28:1*)

II. God's Holiness Demands Holiness in Worship

- A. Clean and unclean designation
 1. God gave specific items for priest to use in the sacrificial system
 2. God gave specific practices for priest to use in the sacrificial system
 3. Both of these commands were given so God would be worshiped correctly²⁴
- B. Vos provides explanation concerning this clean and unclean status of objects: *"Now the connection between these is such that all that is holy must at the same time also be clean, and all that is unholy is also unclean, but the opposite is not true. 'Holy' means more than 'clean.' There is a further determination. That something is set apart does not yet make it holy. It becomes holy because it is set apart for God and His use".*²⁵
- C. The Levitical system provided atonement and foreshadowed the complete atonement coming in Christ.
- D. It also provided an understanding of the holiness that is required as one enters into worship. The *worshiper* and the *worship* must be holy to be accepted by God. *Cain/Abel (Gen. 4:5)*
- E. Mark Rooker summarizes the gravity of this for all believers:

²⁴ Wayne Grudem et al., *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL, Crossway, 2008), 102.

²⁵ Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, *Soteriology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2015), 184.

“The seriousness of Nadab and Abihu’s sin must not be minimize. The serious consequence of Nadab and Abihu’s disobedience is a reminder of how resolutely important the worship of God is to be for a believer’s life.”²⁶

III. God’s Holiness Demands Obedience in Worship

- A. **9:24**> Aaron performs sacrifice correctly> true worship
- B. **Lev. 10:1**> **“Unauthorized; which God had not commanded”**>

Acting (worshipping) contrary to God’s command!

- C. **10:2**> **Result**> **“Consumed and died”**> Nadab and Abihu were killed by God immediately; Moses intentionally writes this in the narrative for reason.
- D. Calvin states, *“The Lord, in delivering a perfect rule of righteousness, has reduced it in all its part to his mere will, and in this way has shown that there is nothing more acceptable to him than obedience.”²⁷*

IV. God’s Holiness Demands a proper Response to his discipline

- A. **10:3**> **“What the LORD has said”**> Moses gives Aaron God’s reasoning
- B. **“I will be sanctified by those near”**> The priest, leaders
- C. **“and glorified by all”**> Stresses the singular significance of God’s holiness!
- D. **“And Aaron held his peace”**> How?! An understanding of who God is
 - o God “setting the tone” for worship in the tabernacle

V. Conclusion/Application

- *Objection to God’s severity?*
- John Piper responds, *“There are many such scenes in in the Bible, and I will argue that in them all, God is neither sinful nor capricious. If we are prone to be critical rather than be changed, we should put our hands on our mouths and listen. We are sinful and finite. God in infinite and holy.”²⁸*
- *Not normative? (Acts 5)*

Isaiah 55:8-9

⁸*For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.*

⁹*For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

²⁶ Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 3A (Nashville: B & H, 2000), 158.

²⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 2.7.2.

²⁸ John Piper, *Providence* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 14.

Sermon 4: Exodus 32-33

Introduction

- Celebrity culture: Desire to know & Have relationship them, Trust given to celebs

Moses desired this of God

- **Today:** A conversation between God and Moses in **Exodus 33:17-23; 34:29-33**, reveals 1.) Moses' desire concerning his relationship with God, 2.) God's desire concerning his relationship with Moses and, 3.) the result of growing in knowledge of God's holiness

I. Background to Exodus 33-34

- A. **Exodus 32**> Aaron and the Golden Calf
- B. Moses sees the idol worship; breaks the tablets; God removes his presence
- C. Moses ascends again to the mountain (Mt. Sinai)
- D. Moses asks God to reconsider; God response with favor to Moses
- E. **33:17**> God agrees not to desert Moses and the people

II. Moses' Desire

- A. **Exod 33:18**> "**show me your glory**"> *Depth of relationship to make such a request*
- B. Philip Ryken posits, "*This request was not as abrupt as most translations make it sound. In Hebrew it comes across more like an entreaty. But it was still an audacious request. The prophet was asking to see the splendor and radiance of God. Glory is the weightiness of the divine being, and Moses wanted to see it for himself. So, with holy boldness, he said, 'Please show me you glory.'*"²⁹
- C. **Nature of the request**> There is much speculation as to the origin of Moses' request. It certainly was a bold request, but not one beyond the range of possibility given what Moses had been privy to, since God had called him to a burning bush that did not burn, the plagues placed on Pharaoh, crossing the Red Sea on dry land, the Passover, mana from heaven, water from a rock, and being given tablets written by God.
- D. **Application**> "Do you have that type of desire for God's holiness . . . for all of his glory to be revealed to you; or, are you content "knowing about God" and living like the world? (*Gentle and Lowly*, 22.)

III. God's Desire

- A. **33:19-23**> God's response reveals not only exhibits his holiness and glory, but also his love and compassion for Moses and all his children.
- B. **33:19**> God agrees to show Moses "a glimpse" of his glory
- C. **33:19**> God then **reminds** Moses who he is> "The LORD"<He is the giver of all grace and all mercy, which are doled out according to his

²⁹ Philip Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 979.

sovereign will (*Rom 9:15*)

- D. **33:20-23**> God then shows the compassion of a loving Father. He hides Moses in the cleft of the rock to protect him, because no one can see God and live.

IV. Result of Knowing God's Holiness

- A. **34:29**> Moses' countenance was visibly changed due to view of God's glory and holiness, and the 40 days he spent receiving the Ten Commandments **Application**> We cannot **KNOW** GOD without spending time with Him (Word)
- B. **34:30**> Knowing God creates an awe and reverence
- C. The dramatic result of Moses encountering just a momentary small portion of God's glory and holy nature was a complete transformation of Moses' appearance.
- D. **34:33-34**> Moses countenance was so intense, he had to put a veil over his face when speaking to the people.
- E. Ryken explains what actually appeared: *"The Hebrew literally says, 'The skin of his face sent out horns. . . . But the phrase actually refers to rays of light. As a result of his face -to- face encounter with God, Moses had a halo of glory. Dazzling beams of light were shining out form his face.'"*³⁰
- F. Victor Hamilton provides further explanation differentiating between the Hebrew word *qāran* and *ôr* both meaning horns. *"Whom will God have to lead his people, the horned calf or bull of chap.32, or the 'horned' Moses of chap. 34? Will he go with the bovine of chap. 32 or with the-of-the-beaming-face of chap. 34?"*³¹

V. Conclusion/Application

- *God desires for us to know him more intimately, just as Moses did*
- *Once God has saved us we MUST pursue him with all that is in us*

James 4:7-8

⁷ *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*

⁸ *Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

³⁰ Ryken, *Exodus*, 980.

³¹ Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 589.

Sermon 5: Matthew 17:1-8

Introduction

- Children attempting to push the boundaries parents have set; parental response varies
- **Today:** Matthew 17:1-8, demonstrates two truths about God's holiness being revealed in Jesus: 1.) Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law and the prophets, and 2.) the eternal glory in Jesus Christ.

I. Context of the Transfiguration

- A. Jesus had just foretold his death, resurrection, and the cost of following him
- B. The importance of the Law and the prophets
- C. Mt. Hermon > outside of Galilee > 9,166 feet above sea level
- D. Only Peter, James and John were allowed to witness the transfiguration

II. Jesus is the Fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets

- A. **Matt 17:2**> Jesus transfigured> face was like the sun and clothes were white as light (*Exod. 34:30*)
- B. **17:3-4**> Moses and Elijah appeared talking with Jesus (*Mal 4:5*)
- C. **17:5**> God acknowledges Jesus' glory to the disciples, and Moses and Elijah are gone. Only Christ in his glory is there. (*Matt 3:17*); (*Matt. 5:17*)

III. Eternal Glory in Jesus Christ

- E. **17:6**> When hearing God's proclamation of Christ's deity, the disciples fell in fear (*Exod 34:30*)
- F. All of God's glory and holiness has been manifested in Jesus the Son > Trinity
- G. **Application:** *God's glory, holiness, righteousness is only possible for us through Jesus Christ. . . the hope of glory (Col 1:27); (Col 3:1-4)*

IV. Conclusion

- *Our sin has separated us from the holiness of God*
- *Christ's atonement enables us to share in that holiness*
- *Justification gives us a positional holiness, Glorification provides complete holiness*
- *Sanctification is the present struggle we are in to become more holy*

2 Corinthians 3:18

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Sermon 6: Hebrews 12:14

Introduction

- Review of *Holiness of God* series: See & fear, separation, punishment, holiness in Christ
- **Today:** In **Hebrews 12:14** two truths: 1.) the one requirement to see God 2.) how to obtain the requirement

I. Context of Hebrews 12:14

- A. **Hebrews 11**> list of patriarchs of God's family and their accomplishments through faith. Ultimately is a testimony to God's grace and faithfulness.
- B. **12:1**> Reminder that believers share in the faith of those patriarchs
- C. **Hebrews 11**> provides us with the moral support and earthly examples of those who have finished in the faith
- D. **Hebrews 12**> provides the practical instruction to guide one in faithfulness.
- E. **Hebrews 12:5-13**> gives instruction to the believer about God's discipline, its purpose, and the proper response to God's discipline

II. One Requirement to see God

- A. **12:14**> “. . . strive for the *holiness*, without which no one will see the Lord.”
- B. **The Holiness> Types of Holiness**
 - **Positional**> occurs when we are born again, justified (*2 Cor 5:21*)
Saved from penalty and bondage of sin
 - **Perfect**> occurs when we die physical death; glorification
Saved from presence of sin
 - **Progressive**> begins with justified; ends with glorification,
Saved from practice of sin (Rom 6:6-7, 11); (Col 3:1-4); (1 Tim 4:7)

III. Obtaining the Requirement> Holiness

- A. **Heb.12:10**> Discipline> contrast of earthly fathers' discipline & God's discipline
 - **Earthly fathers**> as seemed right to them; short time
 - **God**> for our good; *Share in His Holiness*
 - Tom Schreiner> “*God is disciplining them just as a father disciplines his children. When God disciplines us, we are called upon to endure, to obtain the benefit of the discipline being meted out. Discipline isn't a sign of God's disfavor but his love. It is designed to produce holiness and righteousness in God's children.*”³²

³² Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation (Nashville: B & H, 2015), 388.

- B. *If God indeed saves us, he will complete the work of our holiness (Phil 1:6)*
- C. *The transformation in our lives is our pursuit of holiness because of God's grace (2 Cor. 3:18)*
- D. *James Boice* > “This is a great biblical truth, namely, that the grace of God always comes before anything.”³³
- E. *If God dwells in us, we will pursue his holiness. (Rom 8:1-8); (1 John 3:9)*

V. Conclusion

- *God will accomplish his purposes*
- *If God justifies us he will continue his work in us which gives us the holiness that will enable us to see him in eternity.*

Ephesians 1:11-14

¹¹ *In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, ¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it,^[b] to the praise of his glory.*

³³ James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 1:321.

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ABSTRACT

USING EXPOSITORY PREACHING TO INCREASE THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S HOLINESS AT GREEN POND BAPTIST CHURCH IN WOODRUFF, SOUTH CAROLINA

Francis Richard Williams Jr.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Michael E. Pohlman

This Doctorate of Educational Ministry Project is designed to increase the knowledge of and affection for God in the members of Green Pond Baptist Church in Woodruff, South Carolina, through expository preaching on the holiness of God. Chapter 1 gives the context, rationale, purpose, goals and research methodology for the project. Chapter 2 posits that the correct teaching and preaching of Scripture is essential for one's understanding of God's holiness to increase. Chapter 3 argues that preachers today can learn from faithful men in the past who have preached on the holiness of God and pressed this truth into their lives. Chapter 4 describes the details and implementation of the project. Chapter 5 gives a review of the data and the results of the project.

VITA

Francis Richard Williams Jr.

EDUCATION

BA, Presbyterian College, 1984

MEd, Clemson University, 2008

MDiv, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Associate Pastor, North Side Baptist Church, Greenwood, South Carolina,
2014-2017

Senior Pastor, Green Pond Baptist Church, Woodruff, South Carolina, 2018-