R. C. Sproul, in this classic work, puts the holiness of God in its proper and central place in the Christian life. He paints an awe-inspiring vision of God that encourages Christian to become holy just as God is holy. Once you encounter the holiness of God, your life will never be the same.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. R. C. Sproul (1939 – 2017) was the founder of Ligonier Ministries, a Reformed Christian organization that exists to proclaim, teach, and defend the holiness of God to millions of people around the world.

He also served as founding pastor of Saint Andrew’s Chapel in Sanford, Florida, the first president of Reformation Bible College, and as executive editor of Tabletalk magazine. His radio broadcast, Renewing Your Mind, continues to air daily on hundreds of radio stations around the world and can be heard online.

A prolific writer, Sproul authored more than a hundred books, including The Holiness of God, Chosen by God, and Pleasing God, and contributed dozens of articles to national evangelical publications. Sproul was a beloved theologian and speaker, appearing at conferences, churches, colleges, and seminars around the world. He also served as general editor of the Reformation Study Bible.
God is not love, love, love. Nor is He merciful, merciful, merciful. Rather, He is holy, holy, holy. Holiness is the one characteristic of God thrice named. How often do we reflect on the holiness of God? How often do God’s people corporately meditate on His holiness? A poor understanding of His Holiness is detrimental to our understanding of who He really is and who we, on a creaturely level, really are.

How we view God affects everything. It is integral to our walk as Christians, to our understanding of Scripture, and to our daily lives. It is far too easy to gloss over this much neglected portion of God’s character. However, by doing so we are dishonoring Him and doing the Church a great disservice.

How should we live and respond in light of His holiness? How does our understanding of His holiness affect our worship privately and corporately?

As the idea that justification by faith alone, on the merits of Christ alone, is so central to the gospel, so too, is the proper understanding of the holiness of God.

The glory of God fills the whole earth. Why, then, would we be content to huddle in the darkest of caves to ascertain the character of God from mere shadows?

This classic book, The Holiness of God, serves to define what is meant by the holiness of God and bring readers to a clearer understanding of who God really is. By knowing the true nature of God, we are able to rightly understand ourselves in view of His holiness.
The God we worship stands alone. He is outside of time. He alone can create things. He alone has the power of being. By the power of his command, He can call words into being. His power is overwhelming. Such a God is worthy of respect and humble adoration.

God’s holiness is central to biblical teaching. His name is holy because He is holy. Yet the world tramples His name as if he were nothing. There is no honor or respect. There is no fear before their eyes.

God is both Creator and LORD of the universe. There is not one square inch that he doesn’t proclaim ownership of. There are no areas of life outside His lordship. He is inescapable. And He is inescapably holy.

There are moments when we find ourselves alone with Him. A holy, awesome God. A God who can fill us with terror one moment and peace in the next. These are the times we can feel Him pressing against our souls, illuminating the sin we know we should daily be mortifying but toy with just a little longer.

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INSIGHTGRAPHIC #1

There is no place on Earth where we can hide from the Holy
In Scripture, we see the word Lord used two ways. These are actually two separate words. Lord is not the name of God, but the supreme title given to Him in the Old Testament. Translated Adonai, it means “sovereign one.”

In the Old Testament, the sacred name of God — the name by which God revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush — is indicated by the word LORD, as translated from the Hebrew Jahweh.

The title Adonai is reserved for God. It is the title given to Jesus in the New Testament. He is called the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, a title previously reserved for God the Father, the supreme Sovereign of heaven and earth.

Moses inquired of the Lord on the mountain, “Let me see your face. Show me your glory.” But no person can see God and live.

God permitted Moses to look upon His backside as He passed and when he returned from the mount, the people were terrified and shrank away from him in horror! This was but a reflection of the glory of God.

If people are so terrified at this sight, how can anyone stand to look upon God? Yet we, as Christians, are promised that we shall see Him as He is!

To come into the presence of the holy, we are undone. We perceive the holiness of God and catch a glimpse of understanding of who He really is and who we, as sinful creatures, really are.

He is holy, holy, holy. Yet he redeems and heals by means of holy fire. And then he sends. From broken to purposed. Such is the work of God Almighty.
INSIGHTGRAPHIC #2

In Scripture, the word Lord is used in **TWO** different ways

**Lord**
- Translated: *Adonai*
- Not the name of God
- "Sovereign one"

**LORD**
- Translated: *Yahweh*
- Sacred name of God
- "I AM"
We tend to not think about the holiness of God. It becomes just another attribute of His character and is easily glossed over. Love, grace, and mercy are the usual refrain of a sinful people seeking to make an idol of the One True God. But when we come into contact with the holy, we become undone.

The presence of the holy makes us deeply uncomfortable. We are presented with the transcendent standard of all righteousness and purity. What can we do but flee?

People admire moral excellence as long as it is far removed from them. They find in themselves great moral character, denying the standard of Christ. But presented with true, pure morality, they are apt to decry his holiness, recoiling from any semblance of His presence.

Christ is safe if He is bound in space and time, but a present Christ terrifies. We are met with our unrighteousness and presented with the stain of every sin. We can no longer judge outsiders. We can no longer judge God according to our own standards. We are faced with the reality of our fallen creatureliness.

God is holy, holy, holy. He calls us to be holy, as He is holy. To do so, we must know him aright. We must know ourselves aright. We must know the standard of righteousness and cultivate the fruit of the spirit. And we must approach the holiness of God through faith in Christ alone. It is the perfection of Christ that keeps us from utter destruction in the face of God’s holiness.

In Christ, what once terrified us will comfort us as we boldly grow the Kingdom of God. The just shall live by faith indeed.
It is the **perfection of Christ** that keeps us from utter destruction in the face of God’s holiness.
The holiness of God is basic to our whole understanding of Him and of Christianity. We cannot expect spiritual growth if we fail to grasp this core truth. He is inescapable. He permeates every sphere.

His holy character speaks to all areas of life. It defines our goal as Christians as we are commanded to be holy, as He is holy. In order to reach that goal, we must first understand what holiness is.

This understanding of the person and character of God will affect every aspect of our lives. The world has little honor or respect for Him. However, our priority as Christians should be otherwise.

“Not only does he penetrate every aspect of our lives, but He penetrates it in His majestic holiness. Therefore we must seek to understand what the holy is. We dare not seek to avoid it. There can be no worship, no spiritual growth, no true obedience without it. It defines our goal as Christians.” (p. 13)

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- Was there a time when you were overcome with God’s holiness?
- How should your understanding of the person and character of God affect every aspect of your life?

CHAPTER 2: HOLY, HOLY, HOLY

Our God is thrice named holy. This repetition is a form of emphasis. As such, it should immediately call our attention to its importance. God is the ultimate standard and if we should find ourselves in the presence of the holy, like Isaiah, we would become undone.

When presented with the holiness of God, we will truly begin to understand who God is and who we really are.
We will comprehend the heinousness of sin, recognizing the depth of our own corruption and our need for a Savior.

Yet the promise of God is that we shall see Him as He is. Not merely in reflection, but face to face! Purified and sanctified, we will enter into His presence.

What an extraordinary thought! A thought that should deepen our hunger to learn more of His holiness and create in us a desire to taste of His majesty.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- What does it mean that the only characteristic of God repeated three times is Holy?
- How does your understanding of the holiness of God affect how you view yourself?

CHAPTER 3: THE FEARFUL MYSTERY

God is transcendentally separate. In His holy presence we experience a sense of creatureliness that shatters the myth of our own importance. In His presence we are filled with a kind of dread. At once we are both attracted and repulsed. We are drawn close, yet feel the desire to flee. We yearn for the holy, yet in part despise it.

We fear God because He is holy. He is too great. He is too awesome. He makes difficult demands and threatens our security.

Holy is a foreign word to many of us, but to reflect on it is to ponder the majesty of the Almighty God who has separated us from the commonplace and consecrated us to the Lord and to His service.

QUOTES

- “LORD is the name of God; Lord is His title.” (p. 19)
- “Here is the promise of God: We shall see Him as He is. Theologians call this future expectation the beatific vision.” (p. 21)
- “The problem is not with our eyes; it is with our hearts.” (p. 22)
- “Only once in sacred Scripture is an attribute of God elevated to the third degree. Only once is a characteristic of God mentioned three times in succession. The Bible says that God is holy, holy, holy. Not that He is merely holy, or even holy, holy. He is holy, holy, holy.” (p. 25)
CHAPTER 4: THE TRAUMA OF HOLINESS

When we meet Christ, we find ourselves in the presence of the holy. For the unbeliever, this is exceedingly frightful. Moral excellence is commendable when it is far removed. Jesus is admirable as a concept and as an idol of our own making.

But when the transcendent standard of all righteous and all purity blazes before our eyes, we are undone. The wicked will flee when no one pursues.

Christ represents the truth in a world of lies. His authentic holiness condemns and exposes the counterfeit. But the world cannot abide in the presence of the holy. The trauma of God’s holiness touches us all.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- In what ways is God a fearful mystery to you?
- Does this comfort or frighten you?
- When have you experienced an overpowering and overwhelming sense of creatureliness?

QUOTES

- “The primary meaning of holy is ‘separate’.” (p. 36)
- “When we speak of the transcendence of God, we are talking about that sense in which God is above and beyond us.” (p. 36)
- “The holy fills us with a kind of dread.” (p. 41)
- “Death reminds us that we are creatures. Yet as fearsome as death is, it is nothing compared with meeting a holy God. When we encounter Him, the totality of our creatureliness breaks upon and shatters the myth that we have believed about ourselves, the myth that we are demigods, junior-grade deities who will try to live forever.” (p. 44)

- “Sinful people are not comfortable in the presence of the holy.” (p. 55-56)
- “People have an appreciation for moral excellence, as long as it is removed a safe distance from them. The Jews honored the prophets, from a distance. The world honors Christ, from a distance.” (p. 58)
“The presence of Jesus represented the presence of the genuine in the midst of the bogus.” (p. 64)

“The world could tolerate Jesus; they could love Him, but only at a distance. Christ is safe for us if securely bound by space and time. But a present Christ could not survive in a world of hostile men.” (p. 71)

The just shall live by faith. Justification by faith alone, by the merits of Christ alone, was understood by Luther as being so central to the gospel that he called it, “the article upon which the church stands or falls.”

CHAPTER 5: THE INSANITY OF LUTHER

Martin Luther felt the burning coal on his lips as he came to understand who God was. He was shattered by the reflection of a holy and just God. Presented with the truth of the seriousness of his sin, like Isaiah before him, he became completely undone.

How can a just God accept an unjust man? This is the question that plagued Luther. But once he understood Romans, that God is both just and the justifier, he finally comprehended the gospel for the first time.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

• In what ways is God’s holiness traumatic?
• How has God’s holiness comforted you?

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

• “The presence of Jesus represented the presence of the genuine in the midst of the bogus.” (p. 64)

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QUOTES

• “‘Love God? Sometimes I hate Him.’ This is a strange quote to hear from the lips of a man as respected for his religious zeal as Luther. But he said it.” (p. 73)

• “Two things separated Luther from the rest of men: First, he knew who God was. Second, he understood the demands of God’s law.” (p. 92)

• “Like Isaiah before him, Luther felt the burning coal on his lips. He knew what it meant to be undone. He was shattered by the mirror of a holy God.” (p. 94)

• “Once Luther grasped Paul’s teaching in Romans, he was reborn. The burden of his guilt was lifted. The crazed torment was ended. This meant so much to the man that he was able to stand against pope and council, prince and emperor, and, if necessary, the whole world. He had walked through the gates of paradise, and no one was going to drag him back. Luther was a Protestant who knew what he was protesting.” (p. 94)
God is the Supreme Judge of the universe and as His image bearers, we receive either justice or mercy from His hand, but never injustice.

The world recoils at the holiness of God, imagining in themselves that they are more just than He. They stand in judgment of His holy character and decry His actions.

Neither they nor we understand what it means to be holy. We do not understand what justice is. Nor sin. Nor grace.

But the justice of God is an expression of His holy character. What He does is always consistent with who He is. His internal righteousness is rooted in His absolute purity.

As a holy God, He cannot act against His own nature. The Judge of all the earth will do right.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- How do you view yourself in light of God’s holiness?
- What does “the just shall live by faith” mean to you?

CHAPTER 6: HOLY JUSTICE

“God’s grace is not infinite. God is infinite, and God is gracious. We experience the grace of an infinite God, but grace is not infinite. God sets limits to His patience and forbearance. He warns us over and over again that someday the ax will fall and His judgment will be poured out.” (p. 129-130)
CHAPTER 7: WAR AND PEACE WITH A HOLY GOD

As unbelievers, our struggle with God is rooted in the war between God’s righteousness and our unrighteousness. This causes fear, hostility, and anger within us toward Him.

Our desire is to flee from His presence. To suppress the truth in unrighteousness. To deceive ourselves into believing there is peace.

But there is no peace. The struggle remains as we kick against the goads. There is only one way we’ll ever be comfortable in the presence of the holy.

Our struggle with God ceases when we are justified by faith. We can find true, lasting peace and have access to the throne of God.

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QUOTES

• “The struggle we have with a holy God is rooted in the conflict between God’s righteousness and our righteousness.” (p. 147)

• “The first fruit of our justification is peace with God.” (p. 147)

• “Our peace with God is not fragile; it is stable. When we sin, God is displeased, and He will move to correct us and convict us of our sin. But He does not go to war against us. His bow is no longer bent, and the arrows of His wrath are no longer aimed at our hearts. He does not rattle His sword every time we break the treaty.” (p. 150)

• “For the Christian the holy war is over; the peace has been established. Access to the Father is ours. But we still must tremble before our God. He is still holy. Our trembling is the tremor of awe and veneration, not the trembling of the coward or the pagan frightened by the rustling of a leaf.” (p. 153)

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

• When have you struggled with and challenged God in your life?

• What did He reveal to you in response?
**CHAPTER 8: BE HOLY BECAUSE I AM HOLY**

We are called to be holy, as God is holy, presenting ourselves as walking, breathing, living sacrifices. True faith produces conformity to Christ and our goal is righteousness.

Created in the image of God, we were made to mirror and reflect God’s character. We are the city on the hill, created to express to the world the holiness of God. This is our chief end. To glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

As we are set apart, our attitude and behavior should be like that of Christ. We are not merely called to nonconformity, but to be transformed.

We must have the mind of Christ. This is unattainable without the mastery of His word. Our growth as Christians is dependent on in-depth Christian education.

True faith is a living faith. It is a faith that brings forth repentance and righteousness.

- “Our problem is that we have been called to be holy, and we are not holy.” (p. 158)
- “To be spiritual has only one real purpose. It is a means to an end, not the end itself. The goal of all spiritual exercise must be the goal of righteousness. God calls us to be holy. Christ sets the priority of the Christian life: ‘But seek first His kingdom and righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well (Matt. 6:33). The goal is righteousness.” (p. 166)
- “To yield the fruit of the Spirit, we must practice the fruit of the Spirit.” (p. 170)

**APPLICATION QUESTIONS**

- What does it mean to be holy and to live a holy life?
- What evidence of growth in holiness have you seen in your life?
- What areas are in need of pruning?

**QUOTES**

- “The saints of Scripture were called saints not because they were already pure but because they were people who were set apart and called to purity.” (p. 156)
CHAPTER 9: GOD IN THE HANDS OF ANGRY SINNERS

Our God is a holy God and will one day pour out His wrath on the wicked. If we shrink at such a thought then we have not understood Him rightly and have made Him into our own idol, surely as if He were made of stone.

It should grieve us to realize that daily we violate His holiness, insult His justice, and make light of His grace. Our casual indifference should give us pause.

His wrath is divine, fierce, and everlasting. How we must hate Him to treat Him with such contempt!

Our coldness toward Him at times is a vestige of our fallen nature which we must struggle with every day. As we grow in our knowledge of Him, we will gain a deeper love for His purity and a deeper dependence on His grace.

sober teaching on this subject, we continue to be at ease about the future punishment of the wicked. If God is to be believed at all, we must face the awful truth that someday His furious wrath will be poured out.” (p. 175)

- “If we hate the wrath of God it is because we hate God himself.” (p. 176)

- “We reveal our natural hostility for God by the low esteem we have for Him. We consider Him unworthy of our total devotion. We take no delight in contemplating Him. Even for the Christian, worship is often difficult and prayer a burdensome duty. Our natural tendency is to flee as far as possible from His presence.” (p. 177)

- “When we understand the character of God, when we grasp something of His holiness, then we begin to understand the radical character of our sin and helplessness. Helpless sinners can survive only by grace. Our strength is futile in itself, we are spiritually impotent without the assistance of a merciful God.” (p. 179-180)

QUOTES

- “Ours is an upbeat generation with the accent on self-improvement and a broad minded view of sin.” (p. 172)

- “The tragedy for us is that in spite of the clear warnings of Scripture and of Jesus’

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- How does your understanding of God’s wrath move you to honor Him as a holy God?

- How do you depend on God to help you love Him?
CHAPTER 10: LOOKING BEYOND THE SHADOWS

Through nature, God’s holiness is on display for all to see. Unbelievers distort this truth and create for themselves an idol, worshiping the creation rather than the Creator.

It is not that we fail to know God but that we refuse to believe what we know to be true. All idolatry is rooted in this fundamental dishonesty. In sin, God is not honored as God.

Our lives are lived in shadows, turning our backs to the glory of God all around us. Though the world is the theater of divine majesty, we fail to acknowledge the outward manifestation of His most perfect being.

Truth, goodness, and beauty all reflect and point to the holiness of God. All that is good, true, and beautiful flows from His character.

the flowers, but we also fail to notice the glory of the flowers’ Maker.” (p. 191)

• “His glory is the outward manifestation of His most perfect being.” (p. 192)

• “Just as all goodness finds its definition in the ground of God’s goodness, so all truth is judged according to the standard of the truth of God. He is the supreme Author of truth. All that is true not only flows from Him, but it also reflects His character.” (p. 195)

• “God’s love, His wrath, His mercy — all that He is — is perfect. Not only is He perfect, but He is eternally and immutably so.” (p. 198)

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

• In what ways do things that are good, true, and beautiful reflect God’s holiness?

• How do you see these in your own life?

QUOTES

• “Once we refuse to honor God as God, our whole view of life and the world becomes distorted.” (p. 189)

• “We are creatures who prefer life in the cave to the full light of the blazing sun. The glory of God is all around us. We cannot miss it. However, we not only fail to stop and smell
CHAPTER 11: HOLY SPACE AND HOLY TIME

Humanity longs for holy space but it is to be found only in God’s presence. Despite the aching void, the vain search for the transcendent apart from God, we cannot reach the holy of ourselves. We must be met with God’s appearance.

This contact is not merely an encounter with a dimension of reality. It is the meeting with Absolute Reality. It is the meeting with a Person. God is at the center of human experience. He defines our entire life and worldview.

His holiness meets us in space and time. Biblical faith is rooted and grounded in real history – redemptive history with redemptive significance.

It is in this sacred space and time Christians find the presence of the holy.

- “God’s holiness touches not only space but also time.” (p. 211)
- “In sacred space and sacred time Christians find the presence of the holy. The bars that seek to shut out the transcendent are shattered, and the present time becomes defined by the intrusion of the holy. When we erect barriers to these intrusions, dikes to keep them from flooding our souls, we exchange the holy for the profane and rob both God of His glory and ourselves of grace.” (p. 216)

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- Where do you sense God’s presence and holiness in your life?
- How can you cultivate more of the same?

QUOTES

- “We feel an aching void that screams to be filled by the holy. We long for holy space.” (p. 203)
- “Our contact with the holy is not merely an encounter with a different dimension of reality; it is the meeting with Absolute Reality.” (p. 208)
CONCLUSION

The holiness of God is an integral part of our understanding of the nature and character of God, but the silence from the pulpits and the cold indifference to the study of God has impacted our faith in a negative way.

We have not rightly understood who we are in light of His holiness. We have not grasped the seriousness of our sin. We have lost sight of the beauty of the gospel. We have failed in our obedience to walk in His ways.

R. C. Sproul, in The Holiness of God, gently prods us to refocus our hearts on this much-neglected aspect of God’s character. To know God and to dig into the depths of his holiness is central to Christianity. We cannot know Him or ourselves aright otherwise.

To this end, the author has revealed these important concepts:

- **God is Holy**: God is inescapable and He is inescapably holy.

- **Name of God**: We should revere God’s name and behold His glory.

- **Meeting the Holy**: When we are confronted with the holy, it terrifies us.

CLOSING THOUGHT

The holiness of God. Have you given it much thought? Is it a word that passes from your lips without awe or reverence?
ACCELERATE

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