



The Holiness of God

R.C. Sproul

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Central to God's character is the quality of holiness. Yet, even so, most people are hard-pressed to define what God's holiness precisely is. Many preachers today avoid the topic altogether because people today don't quite know what to do with words like "awe" or "fear." 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.

The Holiness of God Details

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From Reader Review The Holiness of God for online ebook

Rex Blackburn says

Chapter 6, "Holy Justice," was superb. I'll definitely be re-reading that chapter when I can! God is never unjust in his dealings with men; He either shows mercy, or shows justice. But He so frequently shows mercy, that humans begin to demand His mercy, and scorn His justice. Chapter 6 is worth your time and attention.

Trice says

so I've read/listened and reread/relistened to bunches and bits of this multiple times as I've picked it up and put it down multiple times. And as many times as I've listened to parts, long and short, I think I've had that many impressions of it. I've had moments of awe and moments of great or small ah ha and moments of frustration. Some of these impressions are related to my mood rather than the content. But some of them, good and bad, are of course directly tied to the material.

At some point I'm sure I'll actually finish this - maybe even at some sooner rather than later time - but wanted to note an issue that I was surprised to hear and that has leaped to mind on just about every occasion I listened to this particular part.

I don't recall which chapter it is in, but there is a part during his discussion of the necessary distinction and frequent confusion people have between justice and mercy. In this part, Sproul recounts an early sermon he preached during a preaching class in seminary in which he talked about God's neverending grace or mercy. Following this sermon, his prof criticized this professed concept, asking Sproul where in scripture he found this mentioned. Sproul then goes on to say that it had resounded with him from a hymn, and he learned his lesson here, that nowhere in scripture - in God's Word to us - does it say that God's mercy is unending/eternal. And part of me says, "I get it," especially in contrast to some voices who would maintain that we are free to do whatever without consequence because of God's forgiveness (check out Romans 6 for a great response to this argument). But another part of me says, "Hey, wait a sec - what about Psalm 136?" in which literally every other line is "[God's] mercy/lovingkindness lasts forever." Now it's possible I'm missing a distinction in meaning in the original languages, but I would love to hear that addressed.

Anyway, this is but one point in the whole. I would say my moments of "wow" have come in Sproul's way of getting at the unfathomable greatness of the Creator of all things. My negative reactions have come at times because of what seemed some oversimplifications of concepts and some examples that to me seemed to go too far off track. But they've also come in that sometimes he seems to make it too hard or horrible for a person to come close to the greatness that is God. My own difficulties here are at this moment reminding me of Paul's heartcry at the end of Romans 7, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" although in some ways, this too goes off in another direction. But there is something else here too, and that is, truly, the love of God. We *do* need to be reminded of the true awesomeness of God and how far beyond us He is; but He also reminds us over and over of His love and grace and mercy throughout the Bible and through so many revelations in life.

Kells Next Read says

Actual Ratings: 4.5

Rick Davis says

This is a must-read for any Christian. I remember how formative it was for me, and I'm glad to have re-read it.

Natalie Vellacott says

I received this book free. Having read it I am surprised it is a classic.

The author covers various passages of Scripture to try and demonstrate the holiness of God. He makes some good points especially in relation to those who ask how a God of love can allow suffering/send people to Hell. He reminds us that we all deserve Hell due to our sin which is an affront to God's holiness and that it is only by God's grace that we are saved (through faith.) Although the book is biblically sound I found it hard going and a bit disjointed. Some of the chapters seemed to have been added randomly. The book just doesn't flow very well as a read-through but it might be useful for reference.

Recommended for Christian readers who want to understand God's holiness.

Jessica says

This "one sitting" book kept me turning the pages until wee hours of the morning. Few authors possess the keen ability to help readers come into a grasp of the nature of God's holiness, but through this book Dr. Sproul is able to help us better understand what God's holiness means and transport the reader into the presence of God.

We often hear many talk about how God is love, yet why do fewer ever speak of His holiness and justice? The Holiness of God reminds me yet again that my salvation (through Christ's propitiatory death) is an act of mercy and grace by God (not an obligation), since His absolute holiness demands only justice for my sins. Dr. Sproul helps readers dig deeper beneath a superficial surface of what it means that God is holy--bringing us into a deeper understanding and love of who God is, a greater awe for His absolute holiness, and reverence in worship. As the famous Reformed theologian Jonathan Edwards wrote over 200 years ago: "A true love of God must begin with a delight in his holiness, and not with a delight in any other attribute; for no other attribute is truly lovely without this."

One of my favorite chapters carries an intriguing title: The Trauma of Holiness. Why and how does holiness invoke trauma? Many other religions have invented god(s) who brought only comfort. Even Sigmund Freud espoused the theory that people invent "god" to help them deal with scary things, to serve as a "crutch," so to speak. Dr. Sproul draws a contrast by demonstrating how the one and only true God has certain characteristics distinct from those that would normally be attributed by the common man. Our true God

possesses a uniqueness--an awesome "otherness". After Jesus miraculously calmed the storm in the Sea of Galilee, the disciples felt uncomfortable and terrified (yes, terrified) upon realizing that they, in their sinfulness, were in the presence of the Holy One. What a contrast to those popular man-made ideas of God invented only to bring comfort!

This book helps us to better see the God who is--who not only brings comfort in time of need, invokes our adoration and praise, but also in whose Holy presence drives us to our knees in reverential worship.

Bendick Ong says

“Jonathan Edwards once said that ‘nothing’ is what sleeping rocks dream about. That doesn’t help much. My son offered me a better definition of ‘nothing.’ When he was in junior high, I asked him when he came home from school, ‘what did you do today, son?’ The reply was the same every day: ‘nuthin.’ So the best explanation I can give of ‘nothing’ is ‘that which my son used to do every day in junior high.’”

A classic light-hearted moment in Sproul’s writings, even as he tackles something as incomprehensible as creation ex-nihilo – (God) creating something from nothing. R.C. Sproul is a scholar. His depth of knowledge is shown in excellent books like *The Consequence of Ideas*, defending the faith and his 3-volume set on *Westminster Confession of Faith* – yup! truths we confess. Yet he is also a good story-teller. I mean, imagine writing a book just on God’s holiness.

The first three chapters are introductory (though you may find many of the points familiar – think many preachers have referred to this classic book on holiness when they prepared their scripts) But I like the 4th chapter, “the trauma of holiness”, where examples in the Bible are quoted to show how a glimpse at God’s holiness can set us in trauma. We want to see God, but if we were to really catch a peek of God’s glory, it will most certainly set us in awe and fear. How does that work out? There are many biblical precedents. Read chapter 4 to find out.

Chapter 5 is a nice break even as we look into the “eccentric” life of Martin Luther. Erhm his wind-breaking episodes aside, how does an awareness of God’s presence essentially change this man’s worldview and conduct?

Chapter 6 is the best part even as Sproul looks at “the most difficult, most offensive passages we can find in the Old Testament and see if we can make any sense of them.” Why was Nadab and Abihu killed? Why was Uzzah struck dead? What about “the slaughter of women and children allegedly done under the orders of God”? Sproul warned that “this chapter is not for the weak of stomach or of heart.”

If you survive chapter 6, then the rest should be erhm many trolls in the park as he deals with (7) our struggles with God; (8) our growth on holiness; (9) our misunderstanding of God’s holiness; (10) our inability to see beyond what is sensual and okie this is perhaps one level up the bridge, (11) the relation of God with space and time.

Lots of quotes and stories from the Bible. Some relevant cross reference to worldly philosophies. And even once in a while, relevant literary illustrations.

And again, I like him for his many stories. Reflective, related, erhm dramatic!

John says

Holiness, as Sproul writes, is a difficult concept for humans to understand and define. It is best understood by experience or by story. Sproul does attempt to define it, but it is best truly understood by stories, anecdotes, and analogy.

To this end, most of the book is Sproul examining personal stories that demonstrate holiness, but more importantly, and more extensively, he looks at the Bible to show what Scripture has to say about holiness.

Early on he looks at the Lord's Prayer, and notes that when we say it we "...often confuse the words "hallowed be your name" with part of the address, as if the words were "hallowed is your name." In that case the words would merely be an ascription of praise to God. But that is not how Jesus said it. He uttered it as a petition, as the first petition. We should be praying that God's name be hallowed, that God be regarded as holy."

Yes, the Lord's name is holy, but the prayer is primarily a petition that God's name be treated as holy. This emphasis is significant in that it sets the whole tone of the book. The holiness of God is not something to be taken lightly or irreverently. As Sproul later shows, God is holy and his holiness is a consuming fire. Even Moses was too unholy to see more than the back of God through the crack of a rock. This is a shocking thing, when one ponders it.

Some of the most helpful parts of the book are Sproul's examination of the deaths of Nahab, Abihu, and Uzza. They all died because they broke the law of God in rebellious, public ways. God struck Nahab and Abihu dead for offering "strange fire." Sproul shows the true rebellious nature of their sin. He also shows the casual nature the ark of God was treated by Uzza and his throng as they transported it. Uzza's touching it was the culmination of a heinous sin, not a simple slip of his hand.

It is one thing to be shocked by these stories, but another to stand as God's judge because of them. These are shocking things because God is holy and we are not. We rarely understand the meaning of this. We must bow the knee and worship, not place ourselves as the judge of God's actions or character.

Another very helpful passage was Sproul's treatment of the Rich Young Ruler who claims to have kept all the laws of God. Jesus tells him to "go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

As Sproul notes, this is a frequently misunderstood passage. Many use it as an example to show that we should "get rid of all private property." Many others show rather, that the Rich Young Ruler is unwilling to give up an idol--his riches. This is true, but Sproul helpfully frames this in the context of the Ten Commandments. He writes:

"If we speculate and try to get into the secret recesses of Jesus' mind, we can imagine a thought process that went something like this: Oh, you have kept all the commandments since you were a child. Well, let's see. What is the first commandment? Oh, yes, "You shall have no other gods before me." Let's see how you do with that one. Jesus put him to the test. If anything in the rich man's life came before God, it was his money. Jesus set the challenge precisely at this point, at the point of the man's obedience to commandment number one: "Go, sell all that you have...." What did the man do? How did he handle his only blemish? He walked

away sorrowfully, for he had great possessions. The man was put to the test of the Ten Commandments, and he flunked out after the first question. The point of this narrative is not to lay down a law that a Christian must get rid of all private property. The point is for us to understand what obedience is and what goodness actually requires. Jesus called the man's bluff, and the man folded."

I suppose this is not a radical insight, but it is one that I'd missed in my reading. This is the kind of thing found throughout the book. I highly recommend it--particularly to young readers, as it is not a difficult to understand book, but it is often difficult to read as it puts man in his place.

Mike (the Paladin) says

Good read, Dr. Sproul knows the scripture and teaches it. While I don't agree with him on everything (and woe be to me if he heard that as I've listened to him and he doesn't appreciate that kind of thing) this is a good and worthwhile read.

I think his view of God puts Him at too much of a distance. The picture in God's Holiness is true but I think not complete here as God has made provision through Jesus and the Holy Spirit for man to approach Him. Still like I said...good read and a lot to teach.

Dr. Sproul's knowledge of scripture is impressive, even daunting and he's always a worthwhile read and someone to listen to.

Victoria says

Love his writing style and "hearing" it in his distinctive, half-laughing voice.

Ryan Gossett says

Awesome book by Sproul!! Great use of biblical stories and modern day analogies to show and explain the Holiness of God! Strongly encourage everyone to read!

Dana says

This is a classic I have had on my bookshelf for quite awhile and just now got around to reading. I chose to read it at this time because next month I am going to the Ligonier Ministries National Conference and the conference theme this year is the Holiness of God. This was an excellent book- though a heavy topic this book was well written, easy to comprehend, and a joy to read. My copy included study questions at the end of each chapter that would be good to journal or good to use in a group study. This book is a must read and I would highly recommend it to all Christians- baby Christians as well as those more mature in their faith and understanding.

Stephen says

After the Bible, this book should be the first read by any new Christian.

Connie Couto says

R. C. Sproul is becoming one of my favorite authors. This book is filled with wisdom. If you haven't read it you should.

Andrew says

Sproul goes over key texts on the Holiness of God such as Isaiah 6 as well as some biographical information on key figures in Christianity who have been influenced by a proper understanding of the Holiness of God, such as Sproul's discussion of Martin Luther's conversion in chapter 5 and an overview of Jonathan Edward's famous sermon, Sinner's in the hands of an Angry God, in chapter 9, where Sproul also discusses a similar sermon that Jonathan Edwards preached, which is not as well known: Men Naturally God's Enemies. In Sproul's first chapter he explains the importance of a proper understanding of who God is for the entire Christian life and Sproul makes the piercing observation that zeal without knowledge can be dangerous, we must know the attributes of the God whom we believe in,

"But there was something missing in my early Christian life. There was zeal abundant, but it was marked by a shallowness, a kind of simplicity that was making me a one-dimensional person. I was a Unitarian of sorts, a Unitarian of the second person of the Trinity. I knew who Jesus was, but God the Father was shrouded in mystery. He was hidden, an enigma to my mind and a stranger to my soul. A dark veil covered His face" (pg. 7).

Sproul explains that it was during his philosophy class in his undergraduate studies that he was introduced to the early church father Augustine who changed Sproul's view of God with his explanation of God's creation of the world ex nihilo by divine fiat, without any external aid. Sproul focuses in on the attribute of God's holiness as central to all of scripture, only God's attribute of holiness is repeated three times in a single verse giving it a superlative function setting apart God's holiness from that of creation providing the essential foundation for the creator-creation distinction, God is God and we are not nor can be on the same ontological plane as God because we are mere creatures .

Sproul does an excellent job tracing the theme of God's holiness from the Old Testament into the New Testament. He begins with Isaiah 6, Isaiah's vision of Yahweh, giving a verse by verse exposition, one observation that stood out to me was Sproul's explanation of why the seraphim covered their feet with their wings, which is done because feet represent feet of clay, distinguishing creation from the creator, so the angels covered their feet to acknowledge that they are still mere creatures before the perfect presence of God's holiness . Sproul also observes an often neglected attestation to God's holiness, the use of woe to deny that man is holy, specifically in Isaiah 6, coupled with the affirmation of God's holiness both proclaim God's holiness with the proper ascription to God as holy, and separates man from God with the use of woe, often used in condemnations or curses, and which is utilized by Christ in the New Testament to condemn the

Pharisees and those with a façade of self-righteousness and claim to their holiness. God's holiness is qualitatively different from man, not merely quantitatively different where there isn't a scale of holiness with God at 100% on the scale as we progress towards 100% in our sanctification since God is on a different ontological plane from man, and God's holiness sets God apart from man in all of his attributes, he is completely other, distinct, set apart from man and his creation in all of his attributes.

Sproul also gives an exposition of Leviticus 10 and God's execution of Nadab and Abihu for offering strange fire on the altar, and God's execution of Uzzah for trying to prevent the ark of the covenant from falling, and in both of these instances of God's holy justice demonstrated Sproul gives 4 concepts crucial to understanding God's holiness that must be understood to have a proper understanding of God, otherwise we may be tempted to view these events as unjust and cruel: holiness, justice, sin, and grace . Sproul shatters the false accusation that the God of the Old Testament is harsh and cruel in comparison to the God of the New Testament, it is a false statement because it neglects man's depravity and God's holiness, Sproul then focuses on the crucial event in history that is more harsh than any other in history, the cross, "The false conflict between the two testaments may be seen in the most brutal act of divine vengeance ever recorded in Scripture. It is not found in the Old Testament but in the New Testament. The most violent expression of God's wrath and justice is seen in the cross. If ever a person had room to complain of injustice it was Jesus. He was the only innocent man ever to be punished by God " (Pg. 185).

Sproul doesn't view the Holiness of God as an attribute of God that is only prominent in the Old Testament, he also examines several key events recorded in the New Testament which highlight the Holiness of God such as Christ calming the storm (Mark 4:35-41), the Lord's prayer (Matthew 6:9-13), Christ's crucifixion (Matthew 27:32-56), and the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-13). Sproul also discusses the importance of the title of saints for believers in the Bible, and how this relates to God's holiness. Sproul gives two basic reasons for why Christians are called saints in the Bible: 1. Christians have been sanctified, set apart to a different life that is not in conformity to the world, and 2. Because Christians are in the process of sanctification, we are to daily pursue growing in holiness as believers . In the last chapter before Sproul examines Jonathan Edward's sermon: Sinner's in the hands of an Angry God, he compares pre and post-enlightenment sermons on hell and makes the biblical argument that Jonathan Edward's did not preach on hell based on a scare tactic, but out of a genuine compassion for the lost. Sproul makes the bold, yet biblical statement about God's holiness and wrath which is often denied by many evangelicals, "We may say emphatically, "No, it is not God I hate; it is Edwards that I hate. God is altogether sweet to me. My God is a God of love." But a God of love who has no wrath is no God. He is an idol of our own making as much as if we carved Him out of stone " (Pg. 269-270).

The first strength of Sproul's book is that it gives a useful systematic and exposition overview of the holiness of God in the Old and New Testament. Sproul also incorporates Biblical examples of men who have encountered the holiness of God such as Job and Saul, along with the biographical account of Martin Luther and Jonathan Edward's famous sermon on God's holiness and just wrath against sinners. Second, Sproul's use of application concerning God's holiness is biblically based, not taking verses out of context, as he connects related themes to God's holiness such as the fear of God that demonstrate how the holiness of God is significant for the sanctification of believers.

The only weakness that I observed was in the first chapter where Sproul asserted his presupposition(s) concerning apologetics, which contradicts his book on the Holiness of God since a Holy God is not approached by building a bridge via philosophical arguments towards God, since that would deny God's holiness and the noetic effects of sin and its significance for fallen man's ability to reason. God must be the starting point for apologetics, not the conclusion we start from God as He has revealed himself in Scripture and demonstrate that the unbeliever is suppressing the truth of the God they know exists in unrighteousness

(Romans 1:18) and we graciously confront them with the fact that they have to borrow from the Christian worldview to make sense of reality i.e. morality, logic, and the uniformity of nature; all apologetic arguments are based on God's immutable attributes rather than chance and not philosophical arguments dependent on general revelation as their source of authority.
