

The meaning of holiness

Written by Bill Perkins

When Isaiah beheld God sitting on his throne, high and exalted, with his robe filling the temple, angels flew around him and said to one another, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isaiah 6:3). The angels didn't say the Lord is powerful, pure, loving, just, or merciful. They said he is holy. The word describes the sum of all of God's moral excellence.

Brightness Is to the Sun

If I were asked to describe the sun I would say, "The sun is bright." Why? Because brightness describes the essence of all of the sun's characteristics: hot, burning, gaseous, and explosive. Brightness is to the sun what holiness is to God. While the word holy describes the essence of all of God's attributes, the primary meaning of holy is "separate." Not separate in the sense of being "apart from" but in the sense of possessing a "superior excellence."

We might say that an excellent diamond, sports car, or team is set apart. It's in a class of its own. But God's holiness is more than just separate; it's also transcendent. Webster tells us the word transcendent means "going beyond ordinary limits, surpassing, exceeding." God is above and beyond all of his creation. The more we focus on God, the more everything else fades away, like the frame around a picture.

No Black Beam of Darkness

So how does the holiness of God relate to evil? Remember, we're engaged in a war between good and evil, between a holy God and an unholy army of demons, between servants and enemies of God. Nobody is neutral in this conflict. Nobody. Because God is intrinsically holy, evil can no more invade his person than darkness can infiltrate light. Who ever heard of a black beam of darkness shooting across a brightly lit room? Because God is light he lives unpolluted by evil. He possesses eternal innocence in his nature and in his deeds.

No wonder the apostle John wrote, "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). He sees evil all around him in his fallen creation but dispels it as light does darkness. God is not only separate from evil, he hates sin in all of its manifestations. I've often wondered what that must be like.

I Hate Liver

There are foods I hate and refuse to taste, like liver. I don't care if it's fried with onions or marinated in the most delicious French sauce, I hate liver and refuse to take a single bite of it. But that illustration breaks down because it's not just that God hates the taste of sin, it's the opposite of his nature. God is light and evil is darkness.

Or to put it differently, he repels evil like the positive ends of two magnets repel each other. If we don't hate evil, and find ourselves attracted it, the solution is to seek God more diligently. The more we pursue God, the more we'll not only hate evil, but repel it. (*Adapted from Six Battles Every Man Must Win*, p. 55).