

American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont, MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org

Encouraging Christians to guard their hearts

May 2010

God as Holy



... [W]ithout his holiness God is reduced to being kind, amiable, approachable, and harmless, but for all his likability he is incapable of dealing with evil in the world. The perspective of the Bible, by contrast, is that God's patience and forbearance will one day run out. The time will come when he acts in judgment because of his holiness. And when he does, he will place truth forever on the throne and evil forever on the scaffold. All that has broken and defiled life will be finally, and irrevocably, overthrown.

This doctrine of God's judgment should not be an embarrassment to the church. It is not simply a negative doctrine. It is profoundly positive.

It is this doctrine that carries in it the church's hope. For

in this world evil often triumphs, often goes unpunished, and what is good and righteous is often dismissed or even penalized. However, this applies only to this interim period. In the end evil is judged, the world is cleansed, and the church is finally redeemed. This is why Christians have hope. All the injustices, the upside-down nature of things morally will be set right. God's holiness will descend upon the rebel creation. ...

... God's love is his holiness reaching out to sinners; grace is but the price that his love pays to his holiness; the cross is but its victory over sin and death; and faith is but the way in which we bring our worship to him who is holy.

Such is the holiness of God. What would the church be like if it saw this more clearly? What would it be like if its preachers and teachers took the Word of God more seriously so that God's holiness could be understood more fully? What would it be like if individual Christians took more seriously their study of Scripture's truth for

their homes and places of work?

We may never know, for holiness is slipping from the grasp of American born-againers today! The evangelical movement is simply at sea when it comes to matters of holiness. In fact, according to a Barna study in 2006, there is very little difference between the born-again and the non-born-again in understanding what holiness is. Of the wider American public, only 35 percent believes that God expects people to be holy, and within this category young people are less well represented than those who are older. ...

When asked to describe what holiness is, only 7 percent of Americans rooted this in the character of God. Although 72 percent said they had made a commitment to Christ, and 71 percent said their faith was "very important" to them, ... only 16 percent said their faith was the highest priority in their lives.

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Barna's conclusion was that most Americans like the security of being able to think of themselves as "Christian," but most also resist the biblical responsibilities that go along with that claim. For the great majority, he says, being identified as a Christian is more about image than about substance. It is a cultural thing. It is all about creating a pleasing self-image.

We probably did not need Barna to roll out this revelation. It is there to be seen everywhere in America today. ... What many [churches] are producing are so-called followers of Christ who are in it for their own spiritual comfort but who are at sea when it comes to understanding the significance of God's holiness for their Christian lives. ...

Our situation today is not that different from what pertained in much of Israel's history.

The Old Testament people of God were religious, but

often their religion made little difference. This, apparently, is exactly what we have in the born-again sector in America today. The ancient Israelites' religion was not an impediment to idol worship or to a whole assortment of pagan practices. They had the written law and the temple worship. They had all they needed to please God, but so often they would not listen. They would not reckon with his holy will. They became careless, living as if he were not there, living as if their ways were nothing more than a lifestyle choice, always hearing but never understanding, seeing but remaining blind - hearts hard, ears deaf, eyes blind. And the problem? The problem was that again and again, with monotonous repetition, they lost sight of the holiness of God. And they paid the painful consequences for this, again and again.

Is this really so different from what we have now in the West? We have enough Bibles for every household in America a couple of times over. We have churches galore; religious organizations; educational institutions; religious

presses that never stop pouring forth books, Sunday school materials, and religious curricula; and unparalleled financial resources. What don't we have? All too often we don't have what the Old Testament people didn't have. A due and weighty sense of the greatness and holiness of God, a sense that will reach into our lives, wrench them around, lift our vision, fill our hearts, make us courageous for what is right, and over time leave behind its beautiful residue of Christ-like character. ...

Let us not mince words. If we could see more clearly God in the full blaze of his burning purity, we would not be on easy terms with all the sins that now infect our souls and breed easy compromises with the spirit of the postmodern age. This is what leads to the casual ways in which we live our lives with their blatantly wrong priorities. If we could see this more clearly, the church would be filled with much more repentance and, in consequence, much more joy, and much more authenticity.

[Taken from *The Courage to Be Protestant*, by David F. Wells. William B. Eerdmans Publishing]

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(Continued)



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