

# The Holiness of God and the Judgment of Sin

By Jay Wegter

*We are scandalized by the doctrine of hell. We live in a society built upon the value of the individual and human rights. Therefore, in our carnal reasoning, the reality of eternal hell seems archaic and demented.* The eternal consequence of sin in perdition is characterized in Scripture as *constant, comprehensive, corporeal, conscience-directed, confining, condemning, cursed, claustrophobic, and crushing.* The reality of eternal judgment must be communicated in conjunction with the holiness of God. The created universe was made to display the moral majesty of the Creator. Mankind's creation in the image of God is also a moral likeness of God. But, because of the ruinous nature of the fall—sin has alienated us from our Maker and ruined our ability to reflect God morally. Fallen man is an idolater. Though we are made in the image of God, our object of worship, we worship the creature and the creation (Rom 1:25).

*A partial list of passages which state the reality of eternal hell are as follows:* Mt 3:12 (unquenchable fire); 5:22 (Gehenna, fiery hell); 5:29-30 (whole body thrown into hell); 8:12 (outer darkness, weeping, gnashing of teeth); 13:42, 50; 22:13; 25:30, 41, 46 (cursed, eternal fire, eternal punishment); Mk 9:48 (the worm that does not die, fire not quenched); 16:16 (condemnation, contempt); Lu 13:3, 5 (perish); 16:23-24, 28 (torment, agony); Jn 3:36 (abiding wrath); Rom 1:18 (wrath); 2:5; 2:8-9 (wrath, indignation, tribulation, distress); 2:12 (perish); 3:5; 9:22 (wrath, destruction); 12:19 (wrath); 2 Cor 2:15 (perishing); Eph 5:6 (wrath of God); Phil 3:19 (destruction); Phil 3:19 (destruction); 1 Thess 5:3 (destruction); 2 Thess 1:8-9 (retribution, eternal destruction); 2:12; Heb 10:30-31 (vengeance, repayment, terror); 10:39 (destruction); 2 Pet 2:3 (destruction); 2:17 (black darkness reserved forever); Jude 7 (punishment of eternal fire); Rev 6:17 (wrath and the wish for annihilation); 14:10-11 (torment, wrath, tormented by fire and brimstone forever and ever); 16:10 (gnawed their tongues in pain); 20:11 (no place was found for them); 20:15 (thrown into the lake of fire); 21:8 (the lake of fire which burns forever with fire and brimstone).

## No One can be Neutral concerning God's Holiness

*God's holiness is invasive, disturbing, fearful, and unsettling. It 'wakes up' all of the sin issues of conscience we have worked so hard to put to sleep.* God's holiness makes those sins rise from their dormancy. Like a huge bear stirring from hibernation, our past sins rise up like a beast and demand retribution. His holiness peers into every crevice of our lives. It shakes us to the core—reminding us that life is primarily moral.

God's holiness is a searching beam of light that exposes the innumerable compromises we have made—revealing the secret treaties we have made with coveting in every form (Rom 7:8). His holiness calls for strict justice. When faced with His holiness, it flushes us out of hiding and we stand publicly before the bar of God a mortified guilty sinner. Our natural response is to run to the trusted false refuges of our own making instead of to the arms of Christ. Our point is that divine holiness is traumatic because we are created to be moral image-bearers of our Creator's majesty, and we have fallen short of that glory.

*The Christians that have gone before us in previous generations have taken that falling short of God's glory much more seriously than we have.* In our culture of entertainment and amusements, we are offered a myriad of diversions to take our minds off of anything that would be upsetting. But, how often do we examine things from the authoritative vantage point of God's transcendent holiness? When we have the courage to do so, there is a host of things which rock our world and invade our false sense of security.

Here are just a few of those things which sinners block from their minds. These truths are deeply disturbing, and are only known by God's infallible Word:

**1.) *God's wrath is eternal—purgatory is a cruel hoax (Is 66:24). Impenitence results in storing up wrath for the day of wrath (Rom 2:5-9).*** Sinners flatter themselves with the self-deceptive thought that they will ultimately escape the retribution of God (Ps 10:3-4, 13). Scoffers offer themselves the false comfort that Almighty God is like them—and shares the same apathy about sin that they do (Ps 50:21).

**2.) *The sin barrier that separates man from God can only be penetrated from God's side. Without the diligent tutoring of the Law of God in the hands of the Holy Spirit (Gal 3:24), the natural man entertains the fantasy that he can undergo self-reformation and thereby be accepted by God.*** Natural men are blind to the condemning role of the law (Rom 3:19-20; 5:20). The law is needed to apply the 'death wound' to man's false optimism that he can repair himself for God. How humiliating and devastating it is to learn that human nature cannot be improved by morality and religion. It comes as a shock.

**3.) *God cannot be obligated, mollified, palliated, satisfied, or placated by anything that the sinner can do (Rom 11:33-36).*** The law is intended to morally bankrupt men so as to drive them to Christ (Rom 10:1-4). Our debt to God is hopeless apart from Christ our Substitute. Thus, it will either be the dereliction of the Son of God in our place (abandonment under wrath) OR, the dereliction of the sinner himself in eternal hell.

**4.) *Only those who despair of self-improvement for salvation shall be accepted by God through Christ. Therefore, blessed are those who are poor in spirit and who mourn (Mt 5:4).*** Why is that so? The reason that the poor in spirit are blessed is because they have seen that their sin is an effrontery to God and that all transgression demeans God's holiness. Therefore, they mourn over their sin and want to be delivered from their sin—they long to be holy like their Redeemer.

In our Christian churches today, the knowledge of God's essential holiness has been eclipsed by our devotion to programs, by our dismissive attitude toward theology, and by our preference for the therapeutic rather than biblical repentance. *The transcendent holiness of God is being systematically concealed in our Evangelical churches* (R. C. Sproul). Just as the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah thundered God's warnings to the apostate Judah, so also, we need to hear today that "the dread of God is not in us" (Is 8:12-14; Jer 2:19).

**5.) *The wrath of God only makes sense against the holiness of God. Our Creator dwells in unapproachable light (1 Tim 6:16). He must bring us to Himself through the way of approach which He Himself has determined.*** What is our conception of this unapproachable light? Do we really believe that He will, as a furnace, consume all that is not like Him in holiness (Heb 12:29)? Do we tremble at His Word (Is 66:1-2)? We must continually admit that He can only be known as He truly is through His infallible, inviolate Word—for God is transcendent, altogether 'other'. He is only known in the 'face of Christ' (2 Cor 4:6). The chasm which separates the defiled creature from the self-existent Holy One is infinite. Our faulty 'God concept' needs to be crushed by a renewed sight of His holiness.

**6.) *The holiness of God is prime reality; the ultimate reference point for all things true and real. Therefore, sin has eternal consequences, for everything is measured over and against the character of God Himself. All false religion—even if it goes by the name 'Christian'—is a radical dumbing down of the holiness of God by touting a humanly achievable righteousness.*** Consequently, false, humanly 'doable religion' constitutes a series of fortresses raised up against the true knowledge of God (2 Cor 10:3-5). We can only be accepted by God's transcendent holiness by a God-approved imputed righteousness through faith in the Person and work of Christ (2 Cor 5:21).

The doctrine of hell only makes sense against the backdrop of God's glory and holiness being the most important thing imaginable. But, as fallen sinners we don't take that perspective. Instead, we take the side of our fellow mortals—the side of the creature against the Creator. We can't bear the thought that we are so wrong and God is so right. We detest that God supervises us every moment. And, barring the miracle of the new birth, we will remain in love with our imagined autonomy and with created things.

**7.) *Hell is an offensive mystery to the sinner because the sinner suppresses the knowledge of God (Rom 1:18).*** God is transcendent, the source of all existence. He upholds the creation every moment (Heb 1:3). He is the constant ground of our being. The doctrine of God's transcendence as Creator and Sustainer 'anchors' our accountability to Him. But, impenitent sinners live their lives in denial of this central truth.

Therefore, the sight of God to the lost sinner will be an unbearable sight (Rev 6:15-17). The unsaved will regard annihilation to be a mercy—rather than personally facing God's inescapable wrath (but annihilation is an impossibility). The natural man chooses not to retain God in his thoughts. He has formed a mental idol of God that is gentrified, domesticated—a gentleman who was 'above' wrath, ferocity, vengeance, and retribution (as if those expressions were beneath divinity). But this is God's very condemnation of them, "You thought I was just like you" (Ps 50:21). In other words, you thought up a deity made in your own image—a deity who is apathetic about idolatry (like you), a deity who is nothing but an infinitely benevolent version of yourself—but who is not transcendent in holiness.

## Blindness to God's Glory is Blindness to His Holiness

***Our fallen affections are 'hardwired' to worship created things—we are 'died in the wool' sensualists (operating by the senses, not by faith)—with eyes of the heart that are blind (2 Cor 4:4).*** Without regeneration we cannot love the unseen God of holiness. Our humanistic worldview forms a god in our own image who will serve as a divine bellhop to service our yearnings. We normalize our profane perspective, setting our minds on earthly things (Phil 3:18-19). Therefore, we cannot for the life of us come up with a clue why God has an eternal hell. Our sinful reaction to His holiness is to deny His transcendence and to opt for an idolatrous deity in His place—a manageable domesticated god who does not traumatize us.

***Here are some of the reasons that 21<sup>st</sup> C. people have no clue as to why God has an eternal hell:***

**a.) *Darwinism has replaced the biblical cosmology with 'scientific' explanations of our existence which exclude God's purposes and eliminate His relation to His creation.***

**b.) *Modern men cannot even conceive of the glory of God's moral majesty as the purpose for which the cosmos was created.***

**c.) *Men do not understand the reason for hell because they are willfully blind to what they owe God in terms of conformity to His holy law.***

**d.) *Unbelievers are oblivious to the purpose for hell because they do not know what a disaster sin is—and how it has shattered and ruined the image of God.***

**e.) *Natural men are ignorant of the purpose for hell because they do not define humans as the moral image of God created to reflect His character.*** We have no trouble figuring out something is seriously wrong if a lion cannot roar, or a kangaroo cannot hop, or an eagle cannot fly. Yet, we are slow to understand how serious it is that in our fallen state we cannot love a holy God and reflect His holiness.

***Sinful man does not merely deny God's holiness, he despises God's holiness (Col 1:21).*** The heart of man is filled with enmity toward God. This hostility is frequently carefully disguised as spiritual, moral, and religious talk (but during the tribulation, the enmity concealed within the heart of man will be uttered in open belligerent constant blasphemies—as also in hell—Revelation 16:21).

The book of Isaiah records how unsaved ‘religious man’ chooses a form of religion he can control (Is 29:13). So obstinate is the heart of man, that he would rather have error which he can manage than the truth of God (and the true God) which he cannot control (Is 48:4-11; 50:10-11). (See also, Ps 24:1; 89:11.)

***All false religion is idolatrous—it denies the foundational text of theology, “For from Him and to Him and through Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen” (Rom 11:36).*** God cannot be obligated, He does not form covenants which would allow men to have their imagined merit rewarded. In the ‘mystery’ of Christ and His cross, God propitiates His own wrath. Christ alone is mediator of the new covenant—He sovereignly dispenses the benefits He has purchased by His atoning work (Heb 8:6).

***The rejection of God’s holy character is behind all idolatry—religious or otherwise.*** Man cannot fit the character and attributes of God into a created category—we cannot contain Him in our thoughts. He is more wonderful and majestic than our imaginations can possibly picture. As creatures of dust, our experience is filled with finite categories, we cannot successfully liken God to anything in our created world. Nothing can be equated with Him. He is the foundation for all meaning and unity of purpose. He is our origin, and determiner of our destiny. That is why He told Moses, “I am who I am” (Ex 3:14).

Therefore, reverential fear and humility are required if we are to know Him—there is no knowledge of God without this fear (Prov 1:6-7). We must be willing to be small, to be terribly wrong. We must be willing to regard all of our religious and moral aspirations as absurd compared to the gift of righteousness we may have by gospel faith (Phil 3:9). All of this works against our desire for security through control. Religious idolatry is man’s paltry attempt to protect himself, and to control the divine through religion.

***God is infinitely exalted above His creation—He is light and there is no darkness in Him (1 Jn 1:6-7). We are full of the love of darkness—our minds gravitate to futility (Jn 3:19-21; Eph 4:17-19). We cannot control what is infinite and incomprehensible.*** Our existence if compared to His would be like a candle flame compared to the sun—but even that is woefully inadequate, for both are created. When Jesus calmed the Sea of Galilee, His power exerted became a greater cause of alarm than the stormy sea itself, for the disciples had no category for the transcendent God in the flesh, in a boat controlling the elements. The character of God is far more terrible than the raging elements. God repeatedly describes Himself as the Holy One of Israel (26 times in Isaiah). When we sin with impunity, it is clear evidence that we have lost sight of His majestic-ness, His holiness (Jerry Bridges).

***In our fallen nature we can only desire a god that is not transcendent in holiness—a false deity. In order to love God, it requires the regenerating grace of God (planting a new nature in us) (Titus 3:4-7).*** Otherwise, we will still be repelled by His holiness, and we will settle for an idol. In so doing, God is trivialized—there is no reverence and awe. In our increasingly liberal churches today there is a tendency to reduce God to pure immanence (His presence and not His transcendence). But, by focusing solely upon His communicable attributes, we are denying His transcendence and in danger of crossing over into pure pantheism (in which a humanly manageable god is not totally dissimilar to us) (David Wells).

Closely associated with this error of a humanly manageable god is religious synergism (God’s efforts combine with ours to produce salvation). The false god who saves by synergism upholds human ability, allowing men to obligate him (winning his acceptance). The god of synergism is approached by our ability, and on our terms and timetable. The cross of Christ opposes all carnal thoughts and carnally conceived ways of approaching God such as human ability. Only God’s free and sovereign grace can utterly obligate the believer to a life of consecration, holiness, and surrender.

***In our natural state, the holiness of God is alien and foreign to us. There is an aversion built into the heart of fallen man against anything holy.*** Even Peter’s response after the draught of fish miracle was,

“depart from me for I am a sinful man” (Lu 5:8). The Son of God never negotiated any aspect of the concept of divine holiness in order to be popular (preachers take note). In fact, Jesus was not crucified because He said, “consider the lilies.” No, He was crucified because He said consider the thieves how they steal, and consider the religious hypocrites how they deceive, and consider the covetous how they throw away their souls (Mk 8:36-38). As the Holy One of Israel in the flesh, Jesus was not safe among the Sanhedrin. His burning purity shone like a spotlight on their religious hypocrisy. Nothing exposes the counterfeit like the genuine. The Holy One of Israel made the demons tremble.

## Our Ministries must boldly proclaim the Holiness of God

***In the interest of growing numbers and gaining popularity, countless pastors today tend to conceal the holy nature of God.*** We want a blessing so we want a weak Jesus, a domesticated Jesus; not a dangerous Jesus who inspires reverential fear and awe and submission and worship. We must grow past simply loving Him for His benefits and begin to love Him for what and who He is. How many Christians can say that God’s holiness is beautiful to them and actually mean it (R. C. Sproul)?

The eyes of Christ are as a flame of fire in their omniscient searching ability to see into the recesses of our hearts. This is the Holy One with whom we have to do (Heb 4:12-13; Rev 1:14). Our proper response to Christ must be ongoing repentance. God’s holiness is stirred against sin—this ought to give us a glimpse into the horrors of hell. The eyes of God cannot tolerate evil (Hab 1:13). When we choose to sin, we are opposing who God is, and we are setting our will against God’s will.

***God cannot turn a blind eye to idolatry—His opposition to sin is joined to His commitment to His holy Name.*** To our carnal sense, the vindictive justice of God will appear strict, exact, and terrible. But idolatry is deadly in its consequences; it mars the image of God and demeans and defies who God is. We need to hear these truths thundered in our churches again that God’s holy character is the standard of what He requires of us. What a startling thought—hell is inseparable from the fact that God is true to His Name. The book of Ezekiel is filled with the language of God making Himself known in the death, misery, and damnation of reprobates—but what a way to find out about His character (Ez 35:10-15)!

Unpunished sin would say that God doesn’t mind His glory being second to an idol—and that He does not care if the idol is exalted above Him. He cannot allow this, and at the same time be true to His Name. God is a God of retribution. Hell is inflicted by God Himself. There is no mercy or pity in hell (Ez 8:18). God knows that sinners cannot uphold under his wrath—they will despair—all thought of an unconquerable soul will instantly wither away the moment the spark of divine wrath is ignited in the soul. God abhors those who are in hell (Ps 5:5; Is 63:3; Prov 1:26; Heb 10:31; Luke 12:47-48; Rom 2:5; Rev 16:5-7). If the holiness of God in judgment is foreign to us, we won’t understand the boundless thrill of His grace.

***The holiness of God is the attribute of attributes (S. Lewis Johnson). The Song of Israel, about their holy God, was sung after the drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea. Holy is the most oft-used attribute of God. God delights in His own attributes because of their excellence.*** Holiness is how God defines Himself (Is 40:25; Hos 11:9). Jesus describes Himself as holy (Rev 3:7). God swears by His holiness (Ps 89:35; Amos 4:2). Holiness is the splendor of every other attribute of God.

Holy living is the saint’s response to God’s holiness. We are to be holy because He is holy (Lev 11:44-45; 19:2; 1 Pet 1:16). This is not a bogus claim; there must be a recognizable echo of holiness in the redeemed creature. He is holy in Himself—we are holy only by derivation. His holiness is absolute exalted transcendence and supreme moral majesty. In that sense, holiness is not really a moral attribute among other attributes. For, Isaiah 6 says that what Isaiah saw was a vision of glory—an expression of the glory of His

holiness (holiness uniqueness, set apart, wholly other, unapproachable, incomprehensible, majestic). Absolute transcendence, supreme majesty is the first consideration of holiness. Infinite ethical purity is the second consideration.

## The Fear of Man keeps Pulpits mute concerning God's Holiness

***The forgotten holiness of God is seen in the inability of America's top seminaries to instill the concept of divine holiness in their pastoral students. These seminaries are not imparting a vision of God's holiness to their students says Carl Truman.*** There is a different feel and content when these seminary graduates preach—but when I read the divines there is an emphasis on God's holiness I don't see today.

In today's pulpits there is the real problem of practical atheism—church life and preaching reveals we are living as if one or more of God's attributes does not exist. The preaching is didactic, informative, and instructive; but not designed to give a conscience-crushing, convicting vision of God's holiness. According to Carl Truman, you are a practical atheist by 17<sup>th</sup> Century standards. The holiness of God permeates the Old Testament, producing in the penitent, awe, fear, and dread of God. Does that response to divine holiness permeate your life? If it does not run through your Christian experience—if the concept of holiness does not pervade your mind and life, then you can expect these consequences in your life and ministry:

**1.) *You will sit in judgment on the Word of God (determining where it is severe and harsh, and what should be underemphasized, and what would offend a religious consumer, etc.).***

**2.) *Without a transforming vision of God's holiness, you will take yourself too seriously—your own honor, recognition, and influence will consume you.*** Only if you are controlled by the concept of holiness, will you be able to say along with Luther that compared to the overwhelming majesty of God's holiness, I and my enemies are absurd. Thus, I can laugh at all my enemies and myself—I don't take myself too seriously.

**3.) *If the concept of divine holiness is not the backbone of your life and meditations, then you will fear men and women (your hunger for honor will overshadow your calling to proclaim God's holiness (Jn 5:44).*** That is a sad thing to be so forgetful of the sovereign difference of God, His transcendence and otherness, that we should regard a person as fearsome. The fear of offending likens a man in the ministry to a false prophet who does not assiduously warn his flock (Jer 23:16-18). Our culture's 'new tolerance' makes it taboo to talk about a person living in sin—there is a resultant loss of the sense of God's holiness—all deteriorates into what is 'helpful'—to a sense of taste and opinion. Because of our innate hatred of holiness, 'taste' will win out over the concept of God's holiness.

By contrast, God's Word in the mouth of a man who fears the God of holiness will be proclaimed as the standard which comes from God's immutable character. It is a standard that demands change from us. We must change; He does not change, we are a vapor, the time is short, there must be urgency in this matter! The man of God will have moments when he has to stand against everyone—only a reverential fear of God's holiness will enable him to do so (so as not to be controlled by the fear of man). It is a fearsome thing to cross God rather than crossing the people around you.

**4.) *Without a transforming ongoing vision of God's holiness, you will absolutize yourself—making God in your own image. You will absolutize your relationship to those around you. Self's wellbeing will be your integration point.*** We are created to worship the Holy One—worship of self is slow spiritual suicide. And tragically, the longer one stays in that mindset, the greater temptation to normalize it. Layers of self-absorption insulate a man from the knowledge of the Holy One. Everything gets adjusted to self-focus. Then, if a man truly is saved, God will mercifully break into his world of impenitent egoism and

startle him. God's holiness is invasive, traumatic—it devastates us afresh. Like Isaiah, we will have a degree of horror and self-loathing. We see in the mirror of divine holiness our own defilement. We are alarmed that we have been narcissistically in orbit around ourselves.

By a fresh Spirit-enabled encounter with God's holiness we are given a horrific portrait of the insanity of self-love. We are stunned that we have made a manageable god in our own image which lets us worship self. The cross is the only cure—it obtains the death to self we cannot produce—for only by co-crucifixion can we be delivered from egoism's fatal cocoon of self. The lower your view of divine holiness, the higher your view of self. The higher your view of God's holiness, the lower will be your view of self.

***Our distaste for the subject of eternal perdition has caused us to forget what hell is. Hell is eternal ferocity (Grk. “orge” for wrath) an ‘orgy’ of divine wrath streaming forever from the throne of God like searing white hot lava (Dan 7:9-10) (R. C. Sproul).*** Carl Truman notes, “When was the last time your pastor ripped into the congregation about sin and the need of repentance and spoke of the horrors of hell?” When was the last time the pastor labored to give the flock the vision of God as awesome, terribly holy, coming in the flaming fire of judgment, wonder, awe, glorious in judgment and vengeance (2 Thess 1:7-19)?

The problem is we are unfamiliar with the God of Scripture who can't abide with evil and sin, and all too familiar with the emasculated god of 'Christian culture' —we have confined him to a benign cultural 'box' which fits the profile of only sweetness and light demanded by religious consumers. We have used the doctrines of His grace and fatherly love as an excuse for triviality. Our consistent neglect of God's holiness and our absence of preaching repentance has produced casual familiarity and presumption in our approach to God—these attitudes are the foul 'lesions' on our ministries today.

***We have steered clear of anything about him that could instill trauma in us. We have praised our feel-good pastors because in their systematic neglect of the holiness of God, they have ostensibly pronounced us spiritually well (when actually in our impenitence, we are sick and terminal).*** Our knowledge of God is being lost. Why not preach on that topic? Spiritual 'consumers' have been lulled to sleep by an extensive drought—a famine in the hearing of the majestic holiness of God. We have no concept of what we owe God. Christ is viewed as having taken the danger out of sin—as if grace were a pile of 'get out of jail free' cards. There is a cost to retaining the knowledge of God who is transcendent in holiness. We will have to deal with who He really is—and that will involve the trauma of ongoing repentance. There is no other way to retain the knowledge of the Holy One. We cannot live a dichotomized life view. Either we are changing by ongoing repentance and deepening our love of the truth, OR, we are in détente with our sin and losing our grasp and love of the truth.

***It can be premature to give endless discourses about divine love and mercy to a new believer if there has been little in the way of glimpses of the holiness of God. The depths of mercy are only understood against the depths of God's holiness (C. J. Mahaney).*** God never adjusts to sin—He hates it and is determined to punish it. You are used to sin—you have grown up a sinner. Therefore, it is a work of sovereign grace for you to take God's perspective of sin, and then operate from that perspective as your own. And, only in taking God's perspective of sin, will you begin to understand something about His holiness. God's grace will sound like leniency to us if we do not know who God is in His essential holy nature. We must learn that the cause of grace is in God Himself—this is foreign to all of our natural religious intuition.

***How we need His transforming grace in order to die to our Adamic man—for the heart of man is an idol factory (self-love and self-worship are at the core of our idolatry).*** As the creatures made in His image, our faculties (thought, sight, hearing, speech, bodily members) have been given to us by God to serve Him and His purposes. Since God has 'planted' these faculties of sense, reason, and communication for His

purposes, it is reasonable that He requires we use them for His glory (Ps 94:9). In fact, human rebellion is epitomized in the statement, “our lips are our own” (Ps 12:4). Our Creator, who made us out of nothing has the absolute right to reclaim those faculties and require an accounting from us as to how they were used.

## What is Man and why was He Created?

***Our human faculties were given so that we might hear the truth, love the truth, be of the truth, meditate on the truth, do the truth, and speak the truth.*** This is only possible if we see our faculties as granted to us by God to receive His divine revelation, the Scriptures. But because of the entrance of sin, man behaves as if these faculties belong solely to himself. This is the satanic lie of personal autonomy. In view of this lie which in so many ways reveals the human condition, death and bodily decay in the grave is a kind of sermon, or parable exposing the idiocy and absurdity of autonomy.

The lifeless grin of a human skull mocks the lying sentiment that our faculties of body and soul belong solely to us. Look at a human skull. The ‘sites’ of the faculties are still there: a set of teeth guarding a mouth but the tongue and lips and organs of speech have rotted away. And, on the sides of the head, are holes where ears and eardrums once listened. The most noticeable voids are the empty sockets that once housed the person’s eyes. The worms of the soil have eaten away the faculties—only the empty bony sites remain. Can’t we understand that death is a sermon to us to overturn our imagined autonomy? The evil misuse of the faculties is spelled out in the seven abominations described in Proverbs 6:16-19.

***No wonder we need a Savior so desperately! Our faculties of body and soul have been sold out to sin as slaves. Our record of service is to iniquity.*** Only a massive moral transformation can avail—the new birth. Then and only then will we gladly yield our members to the rule and governance of God Almighty. Jesus said that the light of the body is the eye (Mt 6:22). The ‘filter’ of discernment for all we take in through the eye gate must be the truth of God’s Word.

***The Day of the Lord decisively kills the autonomy view of self. The public nature of judgment will be a moral object lesson to the rational universe. God will hang error on the gallows forever.*** Every false refuge will be revealed as foolishness and impotence (Is 28:14-18). On that Day, the illusory self-centered universe of the sinner will implode in an instant. Think of it—billions of little self-made human ‘gods’ will become eternal object lessons as vessels of wrath (Rom 9:22).

Pastors, be sobered by this—we have been hiding from our parishioners the fact that God has determined to demonstrate His wrath. We have chosen a god that fits our religious ‘PR’ (public relations)—a god who would never dream of vindicating His honor by means of the eternal torment and misery of billions of reprobates. We have made God into a kindly old man who would not entertain the principle of contempt toward the lost. We have never told our congregations that God abhors the damned—pouring out His settled anger on them forever (Is 66:24).

***Because of willful neglect of this truth, the fear of God is at an all time low in our land. We have fashioned a god after our own desires who exists for our perceived needs.*** We have flattered ourselves that we are far too important to Him—that He needs our religious expressions, our sensuous bombastic feel good praise ‘worship’. We think we have obligated Him thereby and now He is bound to take us to heaven no matter how we live. We have adjusted our religion to self (the lowest common denominator) until the church itself has replaced God (David Wells). As a result, today’s objectified institutionalized church does not exist to unfold the true knowledge of the Holy One.

The things about God that make us uneasy have been hidden—therefore, the knowledge of God has been diminished in His church. We have honored ourselves concerning our imagined religious importance



while we ‘play church’. We would be shocked to discover from the Word that God cannot be used—we don’t use Him—He uses people for His own purposes. Wicked Pharaoh was raised up by God so that through Pharaoh’s obstinate behavior, God might proclaim His Name through the whole earth (Rom 9:17).

***The God of Holy Scripture is to be feared—our sin does nothing to Him (Job 35:5-8). He will still get the glory for all He has made—His sovereignty extends over all—He cannot be thwarted one iota.*** We bow in disbelief at the extent of His power—for the wrath of man shall praise Him (Ps 76:10). We must ask, what is at the bottom of our religion? Is it reverential awe and love of His holiness, or is it merely self-interest (Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections*)? The culture of self has crept through the backdoor of the church. “Be true to yourself” is the religion of humanist psychology. Self is the new “Holy of Holies.” Only a devastating glorious vision of God’s holiness can knock self off of its iron pedestal.

***A true knowledge of the Holy One cannot fail to produce ongoing repentance. Repentance is the reaction of a saved person to the holiness of God.*** The true believer is never an ‘end user’ in these matters. A truly converted individual will expend himself helping other saints stay ‘vertically aligned’. He will study the language of love for God—in other words, he is diligent in his ambition to be pleasing to God. He lives for God’s approval. He knows something of the reverence and consecration needed to walk with the Holy One. He dares to draw near to the One who walks among the lamp stands (Rev 1:12-20). He knows that Christ’s invasive holiness searches our hearts (Heb 4:12).

***Our pulpits and church life must return in repentance to our God whose searching penetrating holiness is always calling for the destruction of our idols; the rearranging of our lives; and the proper use of our God-given faculties (which are on loan).*** To bow before Christ’s lordship is to have our imagined sovereignty slain in an instant. The granting of a heart of flesh opens blind eyes to see what sin really is in a moral universe (Ez 36:26-27).

Sin contains so much of its own punishment. In a moral universe, apart from sovereign grace, we will serve our sinful choices as slaves bound by great chains. In a moral universe, God’s holy justice energizes the sowing and reaping principle (Gal 6:7-8). Our sin fashions chains to hold us fast, a cell to confine us, and a thousand teeth to gnaw the conscience forever.

***In a moral universe, sin is sowing, building, and ultimately harvesting.*** Our brief life is like a huge field entrusted to us. Its produce at harvest (judgment day) will be ours to experience forever. Thus, we see the unspeakable folly of sowing thorns. Do we fear God? If so we will flee to Christ. For only our sovereign merciful Savior can interrupt the ineffable sowing and reaping principle by His atoning work. Otherwise we will harvest thorns as far as the eye can see—and we will lie down in misery in that harvest of thorns pierced forever by our own transgressions (Jer 12:13). Yes, this is a moral universe because its Governor is majestic in holiness. In light of this the grace of Christ will be seen as a treasure beyond calculation. Those truly released from their sins by the blood of Christ view the cost to following Christ as nothing. They readily die daily to what remains of their natural desires, intuitions, and inclinations. Salvation is only for those who deny themselves and who follow Christ—for He alone can bring us all the way to God (Lu 9:23-26; Jn 12:24-26; Mt 7:13-14; Rom 10:9-10).

***Christ’s Kingship over the church and the cosmos is grounded in His essential holiness.*** He is rightful King—He has loved righteousness and hated lawlessness (Heb 1:9). His Person, His redeeming work, and His offices of Prophet, Priest, and King, all put God’s holiness on display. Christ is the exact representation of God—the very nature of God on ‘human canvas’ (Heb 1:1-3). The saint marvels at the meekness and dignity of his Savior, that the King of kings and Lord of lords went to the cross to redeem him from the penalty, power, and presence of sin (Phil 2:5-11).