

Sermon #19 — *Habakkuk Series*

Title:            **THE ONLY EXPLANATION**

Text:            Habakkuk 1:13

Subject:        *The Holiness of God*

Date:            Tuesday Evening—January 25, 2011

Tape #          *Habakkuk #19*

Readings:      *Joe Blakely and Larry Brown*

Introduction:

The title of my message tonight is **THE ONLY EXPLANATION**. Hear the broken hearted cries of the Lord Jesus Christ, as He hung upon the cursed tree, suffering all the horrid wrath of God in the place of poor, needy sinners. — “**My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?**” (Psalms 22:1) When the Lord Jesus Christ was made sin for us, He was forsaken by His Father. Imagine that. — At the apex of His obedience, He was forsaken.

(Lamentations 1:12-14) “[Is it] nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted [me] in the day of his fierce anger. 13 From

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above hath he sent fire into my bones, and it prevaieth against them: he hath spread a net for my feet, he hath turned me back: he hath made me desolate [and] faint all the day. 14 The yoke of my transgressions is bound by his hand: they are wreathed, [and] come up upon my neck: he hath made my strength to fall, the Lord hath delivered me into [their] hands, [from whom] I am not able to rise up.”

(Lamentations 3:1-6) “I [am] the man [that] hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. 2 He hath led me, and brought [me into] darkness, but not [into] light. 3 Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand [against me] all the day. 4 My flesh and my skin hath he made old; he hath broken my bones. 5 He hath builded against me, and compassed [me] with gall and travail. 6 He hath set me in dark places, as [they that be] dead of old.”

(Lamentations 3:8) “Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer.”

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There can be but one explanation for this. You will find it in the first chapter of Habakkuk (Habakkuk 1:13). The Lord God declared, by His prophet, Habakkuk, — “**Behold and wonder marvellously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you**” (Habakkuk 1:5). Then, he showed His prophet how He would use wicked men to execute His judgment. Yet, He assured Habakkuk, and assures us, that in the execution of His judgment by wicked men He goes forth for the salvation of His people (Habakkuk 3:13). This great work of redemption, grace, and salvation was, as you know, accomplished when wicked men compassed our dear Savior and nailed Him to the cross, when He suffered in our place by the hands of wicked men, according to the will of God, when He was made sin for us, forsaken by His Father, and put to death as our Substitute.

Do you ask, “How can this be? How could the Lord God abandon His Son and pour upon Him all the fury of His holy justice? Habakkuk 1:13 gives us the only explanation.

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(Habakkuk 1:13) “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?”

**It was the purity of God’s holy character as God, the very holiness of God that unleashed and executed all the fury of His justice upon His darling Son, when He was made sin for us.**

## **GLORIOUS IN HOLINESS**

God is “*glorious in holiness.*” That is to say, **the essence of God’s glory is His holiness.** Holiness is His nature. God is holiness. And holiness is God. Holiness is not one of God’s many attributes, like omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence. Holiness is the essence of all God’s attributes.

But what is holiness? Who can define it? I readily admit that I am in waters too deep for me when I begin even to think about the holiness of God, much

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less preach about it! Usually, we attach the idea of moral purity and perfection to the word holiness. And, certainly, anyone who is holy must be morally pure and perfect. But moral purity does not begin to describe the meaning of God's holiness.

**Holiness is the transcendence of God.** It is the supreme, absolute greatness of God, that which sets Him apart from and infinitely above all His creatures.

- **We see the solitariness of God in His eternity.** He alone is eternal. — “*Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die. O LORD, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction*” (Habakkuk 12).
- **We see the solitariness of God as God in His sovereign majesty.** He alone is sovereign. — “*But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him*” (Habakkuk 2:20).
- **And we see the solitariness of God in His holiness.** — “*Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the*

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*wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?” (Habakkuk 1:13) — “Thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.” (Psalms 22:3)*

I once heard **Pastor Scott Richardson** say, “Holiness has something to do with wholeness. The holiness of God is the whole perfection of His infinite Being.”

**Proposition:** The holiness of God is the whole perfection of His infinite Being.

I have no hope of explaining, or even adequately identifying, God’s holiness. When I have told you all that I know about it, I will have said very little. I only hope to say enough in this message to inspire our hearts to worship, honor, adore, love, and trust the great and holy Lord God, as He reveals Himself in Christ Jesus.

**Divisions:** I am going to make five statements about God’s holiness and briefly comment on them. Then I

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will send you home to worship our god in the beauty of holiness.

1. God alone is essentially holy.
2. God requires all men to be holy, even as he is holy.
3. God alone can make unholy men and women to be perfectly holy.
4. The supreme revelation of God's holiness is the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.
5. Every sinner who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ is perfectly holy.

## **ESSENTIALLY HOLY**

*First, **God alone is essentially holy**.* The angels of God are holy angels; and His saints are holy, but not essentially holy. Angels, though fallen, are still angels, and men, though fallen, are still men, though they have no holiness. Their holiness and ours is derived holiness. God's is not. **God would not be God were He not holy**. Holiness is essential to His Being. God is "*The Holy One*" (Isaiah 40:25; Hosea 11:9; 1 Samuel 2:2; Revelation 15:4).

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*“To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One.”* (Isaiah 40:25) — *“I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee.”* (Hosea 11:9) — *“There is none holy as the LORD: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God.”* (1 Samuel 2:2) — *“Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy.”* (Revelation 15:4) — *“Holy and reverend is his name.”* (Psalm 111:9)

**John Gill** wrote, “God only is essentially, originally, underivatively, perfectly, and immutably holy.” The puritan, **Thomas Brooks**, said, “Holiness in angels and saints is but a quality, but in God it is His essence...God’s holiness and His nature are not two things. They are but one. God’s holiness is His nature, and God’s nature is His holiness.”

Holiness is the luster, glory, and harmony of God’s nature and attributes. It is “**the beauty of the LORD**” (Psalm 27:4). What is wisdom and knowledge without holiness, but craft and cunning? What is power without holiness, but tyranny, oppression, and



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cruelty? The Lord our God is “**glorious in holiness.**” Holiness is the glory of His Being and the beauty of His nature. **All that God is is holy.**

**This is one evidence of the Divine origin of Holy Scripture.** We know that the Bible is God’s inspired Word because **it reveals a perfectly holy God.** Such a God as this is not the invention of man’s depraved mind. (Psalm 50:21). The god who is acknowledged by the vast majority of religious people who call themselves Christians is little more than an indulgent old man who has no personal sin, but is tolerant of sin in others and so full of mercy that he is willing to compromise truth and righteousness to rescue men and women from the consequences of their sins, even if he cannot rescue them from sin itself. **The God of the Bible is not an indulgent old man.** He is omnipotent; and He is holy. He will by no means clear the guilty. This One who truly is God will either remove your guilt, or He will remove you.

## **ALL HIS WORKS**

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All that God is is holy and all that God does is holy. Every work of God's hand has the stamp of holiness upon it, reflecting in some way the character of God himself. — “**The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works**” (Psalm 145:17).

**In creation** He stamped upon the consciences of all men a sense of moral righteousness (His law); so that all men by nature know good from evil and are condemned by their evil deeds (Romans 2:14-15).

**In providence** God often displays His anger with man's sin in acts of judgment. The AIDS epidemic is as manifestly an act of providential judgment upon our perverse society as the fire and brimstone rained upon Sodom in Lot's day.

- Floods
- Hurricanes
- Tornadoes

**Our redemption** by the blood of Christ, above all else, shows forth the holiness and justice of God's character (Romans 3:24-26). **God is so perfectly holy that He would not and could not forgive the**

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**sins of His elect apart from the satisfaction of His justice by the blood of His own dear Son**, the Lord Jesus Christ, our blessed Savior.

God is holy in creation, in providence, in redemption, and **in the exercise of His grace**. We are born-again by His Holy Spirit, made new creatures in Christ, “*partakers of the Divine nature,*” created new “*in righteousness and true holiness.*”

**And He is holy in all His acts of judgment**. When He sits upon the Great White Throne of judgment in the last day, when all men are gathered before Him, He will grant eternal life to His elect in Christ and sentence the wicked to eternal death in hell upon the grounds of strict holiness, justice, and truth. **Unless we stand before Him washed in the blood of Christ and robed in His righteousness**, we will be damned forever. Justice demands it. **But if we are washed in Christ’s blood and robed in his righteousness**, we shall enter into everlasting glory. Justice demands it (Revelation 20:12; 22:11).

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(Revelation 20:12) “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.”

(Revelation 22:11) “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.”

## BECAUSE GOD IS HOLY

Because God is holy, he hates all sin. Yes, God hates “all workers of iniquity” (Psalm 5:5). He is “angry with the wicked every day” (Psalm 7:11). You cannot separate God’s hatred of sin from his hatred of sinners. Every sinner outside Christ is under the wrath of God because God is holy. — “The froward is an abomination to the Lord” (Proverbs 3:32). — “The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord” (Proverbs 15:26). — Even

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“*the plowing of the wicked is sin*” (Proverbs 21:14). This gloriously holy God punishes sin. He must punish sin because He is holy.

- Blessed be his name, God does forgive sin! “**He delighteth in mercy!**”
- But **God will not forgive sin at the expense of His holiness**. He will not forgive sin without blood atonement (Hebrews 9:22).

**Because God is holy, acceptance with Him on the ground of our own works is impossible** (Isaiah 64:6; Romans 3:19-20).

(Isaiah 64:6) “We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.”

(Romans 3:19-20) “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. 20 Therefore by the deeds of the law

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there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law [is] the knowledge of sin.”

As **A. W. Pink** put it, — “A fallen creature could sooner create a world than produce that which would meet the approval of infinite purity.”

**Because God is holy, all who approach Him must do so with reverence and godly fear.** He says, “*I will be sanctified of them that come nigh me, and before all the people will I be glorified*” (Leviticus 10:3 — Exodus 3:5; Psalms 89:7; 99:5; Ecclesiastes 5:1-2).

(Exodus 3:5) “And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.”

(Psalms 89:7) “God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him.”

(Psalms 99:5) “Exalt ye the LORD our God, and worship at his footstool; for he is holy.”

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(**Ecclesiastes 5:1-2**) “Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. 2 Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter [any] thing before God: for God [is] in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.”

**Perfect holiness will be the glory and delight of heaven.** — “*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure*” (1 John 3:2-3).

## **HOLINESS REQUIRED**

*Second, **God requires all men and women to be holy, even as He is holy.** God who is “glorious in holiness,” demands holiness in us. He cannot and will not accept anything less than perfect, pure, flawless*

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holiness. God will not accept sincerity, works of benevolence, repentance, sacrifices, moral reformation, or even faith as a substitute for holiness. God demands holiness (Matthew 5:20; Hebrews 12:14; Leviticus 11:44-45; 1 Peter 1:16).

(Matthew 5:20) “For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

(Hebrews 12:14) “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:”

(Leviticus 11:44-45) “For I [am] the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I [am] holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. 45 For I [am] the LORD that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I [am] holy.”



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(1 Peter 1:16) “Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.”

**God says, “Walk before me, and be thou perfect”** (Genesis 17:1). The slightest deviation from perfect holiness ignites the fire of God’s wrath against His creatures. **It was deviation from perfect holiness that:**

- Drove Lucifer from heaven.
- Drove the angels into darkness.
- Drove Adam from the Garden.
- And drives sinners into hell.

**Hear what God says.** Carefully consider these things. — It will take something more than a walk down a church aisle, a few tears, a prayer, and a decision of your imaginary freewill to get you into heaven. **If you would enter heaven’s glory and live forever with God, you must be as good as God. You must be perfectly holy!** That means that salvation by the will of man, the works of man, or even the worship of man is an utter impossibility, because you cannot make yourself holy!

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### **GOD'S WORK**

*Third, **God alone can make unholy, sinful men and women perfectly holy.** Holiness is more than moral reformation, purity of life, and uprightness of heart. **Holiness is nothing less than the complete restoration of manhood to the image and likeness of God. Holiness is the complete, not partial, but complete conformity of man to the image of God in Christ.***

Just today I read a review of a new book with a shocking title: — “**The Doctrine and Practice of Holiness.**” Men love to talk about what they call “practical holiness,” about “living holy lives,” and of “being holy.” **And that is all right as long as you understand that holiness is not something you produce. It is something God gives. Not even faith in Christ produces holiness.**

- Faith receives holiness.
- Faith embraces holiness.
- Faith loves holiness.
- And faith seeks holiness.

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- But faith cannot produce holiness. Holiness is the work of God alone.

**The whole purpose of God in the scheme of redemption and grace is to make his people holy, perfectly holy, for the glory of His own great name. Salvation is neither more nor less than God taking that which is common and unclean and making it holy** (Ephesians 1:3-6; 5:25-27).

(Ephesians 1:3-6) “Blessed [be] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly [places] in Christ: 4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: 5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.”

(Ephesians 5:25-27) “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and

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gave himself for it; 26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”

**There cannot be degrees of holiness.** We are either holy or unholy. It is impossible to be partially holy.

**Illustration:** *My conversation with the preacher in Grand Rapids, Michigan*

God makes his elect holy by three distinct works of grace:

1. We have been made **positionally holy** before the law of God in free justification by the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to us (Romans 5:19; 2 Corinthians 5:21).
2. We have been made **experimentally holy** in regeneration and sanctification by the imparting of Christ’s nature to us (2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 3:4-9).

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We do not become more and more holy by our works in progressive sanctification. We grow in grace, but not in holiness. Our sanctification (holiness) is the free gift of God's grace in salvation. The doctrine of "*progressive holiness*" is nothing but progressive delusion (Hebrews 10:10-14).

(Hebrews 10:9-14) "Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. 10 By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once [for all]. 11 And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: 12 But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; 13 From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. 14 For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified."

3. And we shall be made **absolutely holy** in glorification by the miraculous conformity of our nature (body, soul, and spirit) to Christ in

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the resurrection (Romans 8:29; 1 Corinthians 15:51-58; 1 John 3:2).

## **HOLINESS REVEALED**

*Fourth, the supreme revelation of God's holiness is the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 3:24-26). Here, and here alone, "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Psalm 85:10). There is no explanation for the cross of Christ but the holiness and justice of God.*

(Romans 3:24-26) "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: 25 Whom God hath set forth [to be] a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; 26 To declare, [I say], at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

When I see the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, with my sin upon Him, with my sin made His,

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suffering the horrible wrath of God, without mercy, I see that God is indeed holy, so holy that He will not allow even His own darling Son to go unpunished when He is “*made sin for us,*” so holy that He will sacrifice His only begotten, well-beloved Son to save sinners before He will sacrifice His character! No wonder the seraphim, looking upon the mercy-seat (The Old Testament Picture of Christ’s Blood Atonement) cried continually, “**Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts!**”

What is holiness? If even you discover the meaning of substitutionary atonement, you will find out the meaning of holiness!

**Illustration:** *The Chief and the Chicken Thief*

Why did Christ die? Why was the fury of God’s holy wrath awakened against His darling Son when He was made sin for us? Habakkuk gives us the answer. — “**Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity!**”

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*Fifth, every sinner who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ is perfectly holy before the thrice holy Jehovah, the Lord of Hosts (Colossians 2:9-10).*

(Colossians 2:9-10) “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. 10 And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:”

With His spotless garments on  
I am as holy as God’s own Son!

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Near, so very near to God,  
Nearer I cannot be,  
For in the Person of His Son  
I am as near as He.

Yes, dear, so very dear to God,  
Dearer I cannot be,  
For in the Person of His Son,  
I am as dear as He!



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Believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, by faith in him, we fulfil all the law of God (Romans 3:28). By faith in Christ we give what God demands from us, complete satisfaction for all our sins and perfect holiness. **In Christ every believer stands before God's holy law in perfect holiness by Divine imputation** (Romans 5:19; 2 Corinthians 5:21), with **a holy nature imparted** to him in regeneration (2 Peter 1:4), **in hope of a holy life** with Christ forever in eternal glory (1 John 3:2). As we behold the wonders of God's salvation, let our hearts sing with Moses, "**Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?**"

All hail! Atoning Lamb,  
Whose off'ring once for all,  
Appointed by the great I AM,  
Redeemed us from the fall.

Your efficacious blood,  
By pow'r Divine applied,  
Makes perfect all the Church of God, —

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By free grace sanctified.

No condemnation now,  
Against the chosen race,  
Perfect, forever, Lord we bow,  
And triumph in Your grace.

Here then my soul shall rest,  
With Jesus' blood applied,  
Redeemed and perfect, ever blest,  
In Him I'm satisfied.

So I will make my boast  
In Jesus crucified: —  
Perfect in Jesus' holiness,  
I shall be glorified!

Amen.