

## Relational Holiness

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**Introduction:** Is Holiness Relevant? Before we answer this question about the relevance of holiness we need to know who we will apply it to. So let's ask this same question with more specific details.

1. Is Holiness relevant to a contemporary society?
2. Is Holiness relevant to a contemporary Christian Life?
3. Is Holiness relevant to you and I?

Let's start with a few definitions. It is important to understand a term or word in common as we consider it together. I mean if I talk about a topic and all of us understand that topic as something different our discussion would be garbled. One would hear one thing and someone else would hear another thing. The application of the teaching would be faulty because all of us would be applying it with a completely different understanding of the topic. Results would be confusing and unity in understanding would be almost impossible. We want to understand if, and how, holiness is relevant to a contemporary society and how it is relevant to a contemporary Christian life. So let's start with a clear understanding of the terms we will be using. Then, when we understand to whom we want to apply the relevance of holiness we will then look at what is meant by holiness. Understanding who we want to apply relevance of holiness to, and understanding what holiness is will allow us to answer our questions. Is holiness relevant today? I mean is it relevant to a contemporary society? Is Holiness relevant to a contemporary Christian Life? Is Holiness relevant to you and I?

### Relevance:

Define relevant:

**(DICT)** Relevant: **1a:** having significant and demonstrable bearing on the matter at hand **b:** affording evidence tending to prove or disprove the matter at issue or under discussion <testimony> **c:** having social relevance. RELEVANT implies a traceable, significant, logical connection <she found material relevant to her case>. **syn** GERMANE may additionally imply a fitness for or appropriateness to the situation or occasion...

To clarify the question before us it could be stated as such: We want to know if HOLINESS has significant and demonstrable bearing on contemporary society, contemporary Christian life, and to each of us personally. Is HOLINESS an appropriate phenomenon for today?

### A Contemporary Society:

Define CONTEMPORARY:

**(DICT)** Contemporary<sup>1</sup>: **1**: happening, existing, living, or coming into being during the same period of time **2a**: simultaneous **b**: marked by characteristics of the present period: modern, current CONTEMPORARY is likely to apply to people and what relates to them <Abraham Lincoln was a *contemporary* with Charles Darwin>.

Contemporary<sup>2</sup>: **1**: one that is contemporary with another **2**: one of the same or nearly the same age as another

Generally when the word contemporary is used today it refers to something or someone, "marked by characteristics of the present period: modern, current". The way things are done, the way things are perceived, and the way things are changing are all contributors to what is contemporary in our society today.

Define SOCIETY:

**(DICT)** Society<sup>1</sup>: **1**: companionship or association with one's fellows: company **2**: a voluntary association of individuals for a common ends: **3a**: and enduring and cooperating social group whose members developed organized patterns of relationships through interaction with one another **b**: a community, nation, or broad grouping of people having common traditions, institutions, and collective activities and interests.

So our question as it applies to contemporary society could be stated as such: Does HOLINESS hold any significant and demonstrable bearing on the characteristics of the present modern and current society "whose members *have* developed organized patterns of relationships through interaction with one another"? How do we tap into those organized patterns of relationships and interactions to interact with our contemporary society to bring them the Good News?

It is interesting to me that as younger Christians are trying to tap into that contemporary society in a way that will successfully communicate the Good News, older generations have written them off as liberal, unsanctified, and even unchristian.

Let's look at some examples of contemporary societies set in Biblical times.

### **Old Testament**

Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and Daniel all lived and fit into their societies at the time and place they lived.

Israel wanting a king like the contemporary societies around them (1Sam 10:17-27; 11:1...; 12:1...)

### **1 Samuel 8:4-5 (NASB)**

[4] Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah;  
[5] and they said to him, "Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations."

Israel wanted to fit in to the contemporary societies around them..

## New Testament

### John 3:1 (NASB)

[3:1] Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews;

Nicodemus fit right into the mainstream of his society. A Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews. Here are a few of the many passages that help us to understand what a Pharisee was and what they believed.

- **Acts 15.5** – they believed that when anyone became a Christian that individual must also become a Jew, being circumcised and obeying the law.
- **Mt 15.9** – their perception of the law went way beyond the 10 commandments, it even went beyond the detailed explanation of the law as given by Moses when the children of Israel were in the wilderness. Their perception of the law that must be kept included the more than 600 laws that had come about by the interpretations of man over the centuries.
- **Acts 23.6-8** – they believed in the resurrection, angels, and spirits, unlike the Sadducees who were another ruling party of the Jews.
- **Mt 9.11-13** – they did not associate in any way with sinners
- **Mt 9.14** – the seriousness of their religion was evident by their fasting, in fact they even forced that outward sign of their religion on others.
- **Lk 18.10-13** – one example showed how they felt, they fasted twice a week, paid tithes on all that they received, and they never associated with sinners. They had an attitude of superiority.
- **Mt 15.1-2** – they washed their hands ceremonially before they ate bread, which by their own admission was a tradition of the elders.

Nicodemus does seem to be very honest though. He also seems to have less an attitude of superiority. He wanted to do things with justice, unwilling to do something illegal even to bring someone who went against all he thought to be right.

### John 7:28-32 (NASB)

[28] Then Jesus cried out in the temple, teaching and saying, "You both know Me and know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. [29] "I know Him, because I am from Him, and He sent Me." [30] So they were seeking to seize Him; and no man laid his hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come. [31] But many of the crowd believed in Him; and they were saying, "When the Christ comes, He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?"

[32] The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about Him, and the chief priests and the Pharisees sent officers to seize Him.

### John 7:40-53 (NASB)

[40] Some of the people therefore, when they heard these words, were saying, "This certainly is the Prophet." [41] Others were saying, "This is the Christ." Still others were saying, "Surely the Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is He? [42] "Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" [43] So a division occurred in the crowd because of Him. [44] Some of them wanted to seize Him, but no one laid hands on Him.

[45] The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, and they said to them, "Why did you not bring Him?" [46] The officers answered, "Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks." [47] The Pharisees then answered them, "You have not also been led astray, have you? [48] "No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in Him, has he? [49] "But this crowd which does not know the Law is accursed." [50] **Nicodemus** (he who came to Him before, being one of them) said to them, [51] "Our Law does not judge a man unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it?" [52] They answered him, "You are not also from Galilee, are you? Search, and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee." [53] [Everyone went to his home. (Nicodemus was certainly part of of the contemporary Jewish society of his day.)

## **A Contemporary Christian Life:**

Review definition of contemporary:

Define Christian life: There is so much written that defines what a Christian life looks like that we could not possibly begin to touch on all the available sources. However the one true and reliable source, the Word of God, is where one must start. Now admittedly there are many things in the Word that we could look at to satisfy our quest for a definition of a Christian life but I choose to read through **Acts 26**. I choose this passage because it not only gives us an explanation of the theology of a Christian life, it gives us an example of the Christian life being live out in Paul's life at this very moment.

### **Acts 26 (NASB)**

[26:1] Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and proceeded to make his defense:

[2] "In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today; [3] especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

[4] "So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem; [5] since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion. [6] "And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; [7] the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve God night and day. And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews. [8] "Why is it considered

incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?

[9] "So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. [10] "And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. [11] "And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.

[12] "While so engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, [13] at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. [14] "And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' [15] "And I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. [16] 'But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; [17] rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, [18] to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'

[19] "So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, [20] but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance. [21] "For this reason some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death. [22] "So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; [23] that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles."

[24] While Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad." [25] But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth. [26] "For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner. [27] "King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do." [28] Agrippa replied to Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a **Christian**." [29] And Paul said, "I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains."

[30] The king stood up and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting

with them, [31] and when they had gone aside, they began talking to one another, saying, "This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment." [32] And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

Paul admits he is a sinner who even persecuted the church. Then he is confronted by the Spirit of the Living God, Jesus Spirit after His resurrection and ascension into heaven. Paul believes in Christ and changes his life. Now he is doing the opposite of what he was doing in persecuting the Body of Christ. Now he is serving the King of kings by building up the Body of Christ.

In this is the outline for what is meant by a Christian life:

- Sinner
- Confronted by God
- Belief in God and His remedy for sin
- A changed life, a life that is now lived in service to the King of kings

NOTE: The term *Christian Life* is a contemporary term that describes someone who is living out the will of God in their lifetime. As such in its traditional meaning it can be applied to individuals in the Old Testament as we look for examples in history.

Examples: of contemporary Christians in Biblical times:

#### **Old Testament:**

Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and Daniel all lived and fit into their societies at the time they lived. But each of these men, and many other men and women like them, choose to serve the King of kings within the contemporary societies that they lived in. They made service to their King the priority of their lives. If they had been living at the time of Christ or later they would be considered Christian.

#### **New Testament:**

Nicodemus seeks the truth which is the first step in the pursuit of a Christian life.

#### **John 3:1-21 (NASB)**

[3:1] Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; [2] this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God *as* a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." [3] Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

[4] Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" [5] Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. [6] "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. [7] "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' [8] "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the

sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

[9] Nicodemus said to Him, “How can these things be?” [10] Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? [11] “Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. [12] “If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? [13] “No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man. [14] “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; [15] so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. [16] “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. [17] “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. [18] “He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. [19] “This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. [20] “For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. [21] “But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.”

Then after seeking the truth, Nicodemus gives evidence that he has come to believe and live a Christian life.

### **John 19:38-42 (NASB)**

[38] After these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret *one* for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. So he came and took away His body. [39] Nicodemus, who had first come to Him by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds *weight*. [40] So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. [41] Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. [42] Therefore because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Nicodemus stands in stark contrast to the ones who had just put Jesus to death. He steps forward with Joseph of Arimathea to claim and bury the body of Jesus with love and dignity. Nicodemus is never mentioned again in the Bible but he is a good example of a man who was immersed in the contemporary society of his time and culture. Yet something happened when he met with and talked to Jesus. This strange discussion about being born again brought Nicodemus to question, and eventually change his thinking about God and His will for mankind. He defends Jesus literally at the risk of his life, and then throwing all prejudice aside he walks side by side with Joseph, up to the cross to claim the body of the criminal Jesus. Nicodemus choose to step out of the contemporary culture of his

day and embrace the teachings of a carpenter from Galilee.

This is what a Christian life is like. It is giving one's self to the cause of Jesus Christ no matter what it might cost.

Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Daniel, Nicodemus and many other men and women were part of their contemporary societies but something happened to cause them to make it a priority of life to serve the King of kings. Contemporary people in contemporary societies, living contemporary christian lives.

### **You:**

Who are you? What are you all about? How do you define your life? How do others see your life?

### **Conclusion:**

Now, knowing what a contemporary society is, and knowing what a contemporary Christian life is, and having faced who we are and what we are about as individuals we can move on to understand what holiness is and how it is relevant to the contemporary. It is important to note that God has tried to get involved in every contemporary society and if allowed He wants to get involved in every contemporary Christian life. He even wants to be involved in your personal life if you will let Him.

### **Fast-Forward:**

Understanding holiness and how it is relevant will help us to name distinctions that identify real differences that comprise the holiness tradition. If we fail to do this the holiness tradition may as well fade into mainstream Evangelicalism. Holiness will then become a curious historical footnote.

"Because societies around the world change, the core Christian message – holiness – must be presented in new ways with new language so as to seize our hearts and imaginations. The Christian gospel must be contextualized for the present age without compromising its core." (RH)

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