

Relational Holiness

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02-03-RH-Contributing/Core Notions

05/04/08

INTRODUCTION:

There are two things we need to know in order to answer our question, Is Holiness Relevant? We have already discussed who we want to apply the relevance of holiness too. We want to see if, and how, holiness is relevant to a contemporary society, a contemporary Christian life, and to you and I personally. The second thing we need to understand, to answer our question is, what is holiness?

Personal testimony: The first time I went to an altar to pray in a protestant church I had no idea what I was doing. I only knew that the Holy Spirit was drawing me to that altar to pray about my relationship with God. I had never prayed about my relationship with God like this, my experience was with the Catholic tradition of going to confession. Telling the priest my sins and then doing the penance that he gave me to do so my sins would be forgiven. This experience was different. I went to the altar and confessed my sins to God and asked for His forgiveness. I knew how to do this, I had done it nearly every week since I was about 8 years old. At this altar of prayer I felt no sense that I needed to do any kind of penance, I knew my sins were forgiven. Everyone else at the altar was still praying. I didn't know if I should go back to my seat or what. As I continued to pray I told God that I had been here a million times but I always fell again to the same temptations and I wanted to live my life for Him. I said, "God if you're out there will you help me to resist temptation". Things were different that next week, when temptation came, the power of the Holy Spirit was there to help me resist temptation.

A couple of months later I was in a revival service and heard a preacher preach about Entire Sanctification. Over the next 15 or 20 years I found myself in a tangle of definitions and descriptions of holiness that brought a great deal of confusion and guilt in my spiritual life. The problem was that different preachers, authors, and teachers were describing holiness in different ways using different Scripture passages. Some of the descriptions fit my experience and some of them did not. I was confused but never let go of the faith and relationship I had with God, it was like nothing I had ever experienced before. I did not understand all the details and theology, but praying at the altar that first time, I truly had come into a very different kind of relationship with God. I now know, that what I experienced at the altar that day was an entering into the experience of holiness. It is the misunderstandings of the diversity of the descriptions of holiness that discourages many people from seeking and living out this lifestyle. This diversity must be explained if holiness is to be understood, and sought, by a contemporary society and by contemporary Christians.

DIVERSITY IN THE SCRIPTURES:

In their book, Relational Holiness, Thomas Jay Oord and Michael Lodahl address this

very issue. Besides understanding and identifying with a relational Worldview, which we talked about last week, “there is another factor that contributes to the inability of holiness to seize contemporary imaginations. It is that diverse concepts of holiness exist.” (RH) Examples of this diversity are seen throughout the Scriptures, here are a few of them.

(RH pg 11)...

- Holiness is full consecration of ourselves to God.

Leviticus 20:7-8 (NASB)

[7] ‘You shall **consecrate** yourselves therefore and be **holy**, for I am the LORD your God. [8] ‘You shall **keep** My statutes and practice them; I am the LORD who **sanctifies** you.

- Holiness is being sanctified wholly.

John 17:19 (NASB)

[19] “For their sakes I **sanctify** Myself, that they themselves also may be **sanctified** in truth.

Acts 26:15-18 (NASB) Paul on the road to Damascus...

[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.’

- Holiness is being filled with the Spirit.

Ephesians 3:14-19 (NASB)

[14] For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, [15] from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, [16] that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, [17] so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, [18] may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, [19] and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be **filled** up to all the **fullness** of God.

Ephesians 5:15-18 (NASB)

[15] Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, [16] making the most of your time, because the days are evil. [17] So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. [18] And do not get

drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be **filled** with the Spirit,

- Holiness is a second definite work of grace.

Romans 6:1-2 (NASB)

[6:1] What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? [2] May it **never** be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?

Romans 6:17-19 (NASB)

[17] But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, [18] and having been **freed** from sin, you became **slaves** of righteousness. [19] I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in *further* lawlessness, so **now** present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in **sanctification**.

- Holiness is bearing the character of God in the world.
- Holiness is being made perfect in love.
- Holiness is being fully restored in the image of God.
- Holiness is being set apart for the purposes of God.
- Holiness is dying to self.
- Holiness is purity of heart and life.

1 Thessalonians 4:1-7 (NASB)

[4:1] Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you **excel** still more. [2] For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. [3] For this is the will of God, your **sanctification**; *that is*, that you **abstain** from sexual immorality; [4] that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in **sanctification** and honor, [5] not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; [6] and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you.[7] For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in **sanctification**.

- Holiness is loving God with our whole heart, soul, and mind, and our neighbors as ourselves.
- Holiness is wholeness in Christ.
- Holiness is Christlikeness.

This is just a sample of the many passages of Scripture that talk about the holy life a Christian is commanded to live in this present life. I do not mean to confuse you by

showing you these different passages of Scripture. I want to show you the diversity that exists. Diversity does not mean that one may pick and choose how they might serve God. Diversity does not mean that there are different ways one may come into the Kingdom of God or have relationship with God. This diversity shows important aspects of holiness that we will call contributing notions. These contributing notions are part of, and point to a core notion of holiness. The core of holiness is seen in some way, in every contributing notion of holiness.

With all these different descriptions, how does one get a simple definition that captures the essence and core of what holiness is? The key word in that question is CORE. What is the core of holiness? In other words when we use any of the descriptions of what holiness is, what is it about any of them that is the same? If I say, "holiness is full consecration of ourselves to God", how is that the same as saying, "holiness is made perfect in love?" How are these the same as saying that holiness is a "definite second work of grace?" What is the unchangeable core in these diverse statements about what holiness is? When we discover the core notion of holiness we will see its relevance to a contemporary society, and a contemporary Christian life. We need to understand contributing and core notions.

CORE AND CONTRIBUTING NOTIONS:

Sometimes when we describe something we describe it from our point of view which can cause problems when that same thing is looked at from a different point of view and through a different set of eyes. There is a good illustration of this in the book Relational Holiness.

(RH pg 36-39) Nearly 3000 years ago, the earliest Western philosophers wondered what the most fundamental or basic unit of existence might be.

Contributing Notions: Candidates for a core, different points of view

- Water (Thales said it was water because all of life depends on water and water can be found in almost everything.)
- Air (A few generations later Anaximenes suggested air because water was partially comprised of air, and air can be found in almost everything.)
- Fire (Heraclitus suggested that the most basic unit of existence was fire because fire was more basic than either air or water for it reveals that existence has both stability and change.)
- Dirt (Other philosophers suggested that the most basic element was dirt because we come from dust and will return to dust.)

These four elements – water, air, fire, and dirt – vied for the role of ultimate explanation for everything. Each pointed to some important truth evident to common experience. But none of the four encompassed the truths of the others. When any one element was suggested to be the most basic, it became apparent that it was woefully inadequate at encompassing the truths expressed by the other three. (While each of these elements expressed some aspect or view of all that existed it became vague or unclear when existence was viewed from a different position. This is part of the problem in understanding holiness. When holiness is viewed from

different perspectives it is explained in different ways. We even saw this in the scriptures we looked at earlier. **dgb)**

The Core Notion: There must be a core notion that gives a full explanation that dissipates the confusion.

- Atoms (Democritus argued that existence is fundamentally composed of atoms. Water, air, fire, and dirt are all made up of these atoms. His atomic theory incorporated the truths expressed by those who had come before. (He had come up with a core notion that was seen in every viewpoint that looked to explain the most fundamental or basic unit of existence. **dgb)**

This is what we seek to do in our quest to understand holiness. Perhaps if we can discover a core notion that explains holiness from any angle or viewpoint it will capture our imaginations, and the imaginations of a contemporary society and contemporary Christian lives.

There are six major contributing notions that compete for the role of the ultimate explanation for holiness.

Contributing Notions:

- Following rules and ethical codes, holiness as rules and regulations:
- Being pure, clean and without blemish, the purity concern:
- Being set apart, separation:
- Total devotion or complete commitment
- Perfection, being perfect:
- Love:

Holiness as Rules and Regulations:

Scripture Passage:

Matthew 5:17-20 (NASB)

[17] "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. [18] "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. [19] "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others *to do* the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. [20] "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Positive Aspects: of holiness as rules & regulations

- A clear path and target
- A sense of assurance

- A sense of fulfillment and accomplishment
- A sense thankfulness for a kindness received in God's salvation

Negative Aspects: of holiness as rules & regulations

- Performance replaces faith & relationship
- Legalism
- A sense of superiority
- A watering down of the meaning of sin
- Justification for a lack of love
- Feelings of failure and frustration
- The misconception that salvation is earned

Holiness as Purity:

Scripture Passage:

Matthew 5:8 (NASB)

[8] "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

2 Timothy 2:20-22 (NASB)

[20] Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor.
 [21] Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these *things*, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.
 [22] Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love *and* peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

Positive Aspects: of holiness as purity

- Feeling clean and acceptable before God

Negative Aspects: of holiness as purity

- Viewing the unclean as totally unapproachable and unacceptable to associate with

Holiness as Separation:

Scripture Passage:

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 (NASB)

[14] Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?
 [15] Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? [16] Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL

BE MY PEOPLE. [17] "Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord. "AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAR; And I will welcome you. [18] "And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me," Says the Lord Almighty.

Positive Aspects: of separation

- From sin, old habits, and old associations that are ungodly and destructive to the personal life and to our families.
- Separation from the ungodly influence of the world and it's pressure to fit the Godly into an ungodly mold.

Negative Aspects: of separation

- Separation from the world so much so that you do not befriend them to win them to Christ. Jesus was friendly to almost everyone

Holiness as Total Devotion, Complete Commitment:

Scripture Passage:

Matthew 6:24 (NASB)

[24] "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

Positive Aspects: devotion & commitment

Negative Aspects: devotion & commitment

Holiness as Perfection:

Scripture Passage:

Romans 12:1-2 (NASB)

[12:1] Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. [2] And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

2 Corinthians 7:1 (NASB)

[7:1] Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Positive Aspects: perfection

Negative Aspects: perfection

A Call to Holiness:

All of these call us in some way to holiness of heart and life. All of them have both positive and negative aspects to them. Any single approach to holiness can be taken

to a wrong extreme which destroys something that was meant to assure holiness. There can be wrong conclusions that twist and distort God's will for holiness. Surely there must be a core notion to these different aspects or views of holiness that can capture the imagination.

There is one other Contributing Notion that competes for the position of the core notion of holiness and we will look at it next week.

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