

## Relational Holiness

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### INTRODUCTION:

Probably one of the most exciting events in the history of the Nation of Israel is the crossing of the Red Sea and the events that preceded it. The plagues, the charging Egyptian army, the dividing of the Red Sea, and finally the destruction of the Egyptian army as the walls of water fell in on them. God had miraculously delivered Israel. They were now free for the first time in more than three centuries. Sometimes it is hard to understand how Israel could move in and out of favor with God so often after those extraordinary events. Most of us look at those events and ask the question; "How could they ever question God?" Yet time after time they rebelled against God. This Old Testament event was a model or a foreshadow of the deliverance of all people from their sins by the actions of Jesus' death and resurrection. And yet with those extraordinary New Testament events, people still rebel against God. In both cases this rebellion is a holiness issue. This morning we will look at how Jesus used an illustration from the Old Testament to help a man understand the core notion of holiness.

#### Numbers 21:4-9 (NASB)

[4] Then they set out from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the people became impatient because of the journey. [5] The people spoke against God and Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food." [6] The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. [7] So the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us." And Moses interceded for the people. [8] Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery *serpent*, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live." [9] And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived.

It would seem on surface that sending fiery serpents to kill the people in the wilderness is a mean and sadistic thing to do. But when you know the whole story you know that God used those fiery serpents to get the people's attention and turn them back to Himself. What seemed like a cruel act was actually an act of love. God's holy character and nature demands His children to be holy and that holiness is based on His love for mankind.

Last week we talked about five contributing notions of holiness, they included...

#### ***Contributing Notions:***

1. Following rules and ethical codes, in other words, holiness as rules and regulations
2. Being pure, clean and without blemish, holiness as purity
3. Being set apart, holiness as separation
4. Total devotion or complete commitment, holiness as dedication
5. Being perfect, holiness as perfection

Now certainly all of these contributing notions are important, for each of them are contained in the Scriptures as demands that God makes on His people. But these do not seem to inspire a contemporary society who sees things from a relational world view. This lack of inspiration is

evident in the lack of interest in holy living even among contemporary Christians.

So! What is it that inspires a society that views the world from the perspective of relationships or as we have observed from a relational world view? In their book, *Relational Holiness (RH)*, Thomas Jay Oord and Michael Lodahl propose that the core notion of holiness is love. "We propose that love functions well as the core notion of holiness. Love provides the foundation and framework for faith. God's love for us and our love in return, as well as our love for our neighbors and ourselves, resides at the core of Christianity. Love provides holiness with the foundation it needs to flourish as the theological distinctive of the Holiness tradition."

*John Wesley agreed with the connection between love and the core of holiness. He said that Holiness is nothing more than the Love of God. Listen to his words: "The heaven of heavens is love. There is nothing higher in religion; there is, in effect, nothing else; If you look for anything but more love, you are looking wide of the mark, you are getting out of the royal way. And when you are asking others, 'Have you received this or that blessing?' if you mean anything but more love, you mean wrong; you are leading them out of the way, and putting them upon a false scent. Settle it then in your heart, that from the moment God has saved you from all sin, you are to aim at nothing more, but more of that love described in the thirteenth of the Corinthians. You can go no higher than this, till you are carried into Abraham's bosom." (ALE)*

A key phrase in these statements about love is that "God loves us". That brings us face to face with something we have a hard time understanding sometimes; God.

## I. The Doctrine of God:

### A. God's Demand for Holiness:

Who is God? Wow! What a question to answer. It is important to consider this because the demand for holiness comes from God. Who is God that He should demand holiness of me?

#### 1. Who is God?

John does a good job of pinpointing who God is but he also addresses who Jesus is in light of who God is. He goes all the way back to the beginning, creation itself. Then He shows this holy God in the light of His utmost act of love. God becomes flesh.

#### John 1:1-5 (NASB)

[Jn 1:1] In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was in the beginning with God. [3] All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. [4] In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. [5] The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

#### John 1:14 (NASB)

[14] And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Who is God? He is creator and sustainer of the universe. He is the life of men. Becoming a man He came to earth to take care of the sin problem, literally to deliver men from the bondage of sin and its tyranny.

#### 2. What is the basis for God's demand for holiness?

God can demand holiness because He is holy. So out of His holiness, which is evident primarily in His love for mankind, God demands holiness of those He loves. In other words, because I love you, you should love me in return, you should love each other, and you should love yourself.

#### Leviticus 11:44-45 (NASB)

[44] 'For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any of the swarming things that swarm on the earth. [45] 'For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy.'"

### 1 Peter 1:14-16 (NASB)

[14] As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, [15] but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; [16] because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."

You will notice that God's demand for holiness is made on the basis that He is holy. But that is not very inspirational because who on earth can be holy like God is holy? This daunting task brings humans to say, "no way". So has God made an impossible demand on us or have we misunderstood what He expects of us. When we look at the contributing notions alone, it would seem impossible for us to be able to live a holy life. But God does not set us up for failure so there must be some other explanation and indeed there is. The explanation is understood in the character of God.

### ***B. God's Character:***

God's demand for holiness must be understood through His character and His character is love. We will see that God's demand for keeping His commandments, being pure, set apart, completely committed, and ultimately perfect can only be understood in light of His love. Now don't let the word perfect scare you, it means to be perfect in the sense that you are fulfilling God's purpose and will for your life here on earth. So how does God show love? Listen to what the disciple John said about the love of God.

### 1 John 4:15; Titus 1:15-16 (NASB)

[15] Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. (This confession is a matter of deeds not just something that comes from the mouth. For example in... **Titus 1:15-16 (NASB)** To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. [16] They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed. Confession is not just something we say. Real confession in Jesus is a catalyst for change. Confession is a lifestyle.)

### 1 John 4:15-21 (NASB)

[15] Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. [16] We have come to know and have believed the **love** which God has for us. God is **love**, and the one who abides in **love** abides in God, and God abides in him. [17] By this, **love** is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. [18] There is no fear in **love**; but perfect **love** casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in **love**. [19] We **love**, because He first **loved** us. [20] If someone says, "I **love** God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not **love** his brother whom he has seen, cannot **love** God whom he has not seen. [21] And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who **loves** God should **love** his brother also.

Now the most quoted portion of this passage is the phrase, "God is love", but what does that really mean. Let's see if the context of these verses can tell us how God is love.

- Look at the phrase, "whoever confesses": Is God's love limited to only those who confess? No it is not, for He loved us while we were yet sinners. God truly is love.
- Look at the phrase, "confidence in the day of judgment": Why does God who is love have to

judge anyone? God's judgment comes out of the fact that He is a just God. But God's justice is different in that God does not judge in the sense that we think of judgment. God sets in eternity the consequences for good and evil. He presents the opportunity for us to choose between good and evil, but the consequences are set. Then with all of His power and resources He loves us by providing everything we need to make the choice for good in our lives. God truly is love.

- Look at the phrase, "if you don't love your brother you don't love God": How can one love his brother especially when that brother is an enemy? On our own we cannot but with the indwelling presence of God through the Holy Spirit we can love just like He loves because it is Him loving through us.

There is a key phrase in this passage that brings everything into context. It is the phrase, "because He first love us". That brings this passage into the context of the entire Scriptures from beginning to end, and the context of all Scripture is that God loves us. Here is a familiar example.

### **John 3:16-17 (NASB)**

[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.

From the very account of creation in the book of Genesis to John's proclamation that Jesus is coming soon in the book of Revelation, the declaration is that God is love. He acts in love toward man, the crown of His creation even though they have rebelled against Him. God is love, is a statement of the character of God. If love is the character of God, then every demand He makes, including His call to holiness is grounded in His love for mankind.

That brings us to another important point. What is love?

**II. Love Defined:** In Relational Holiness, Thomas Jay Oord and Michael Lodahl define love...

*(RH) Definition:* To love is to act intentionally, in response to God and others, to promote well-being. (In order to understand their technical definition we need to see how they break it down to explain it.)

- First, to love, is to act. Love is a verb; love is something you do. Furthermore, loving actions are intentional, which means that they are deliberate. This means that love has an intellectual dimension. It means that love cannot be coerced.
- Second, love involves response. Love as response means that love usually involves some degree of emotion. Love entails, as psychologists might put it, a degree of affect.
- Well-being is the third element in our definition... Perhaps the most common synonym for well-being is "happiness". Love generates happiness.

*To love is to act intentionally, in response to God and others, to promote well-being.*

So how is this definition of love seen in the light of the Scriptures? In John 3 Jesus uses the incident of Moses lifting up the snake in the wilderness as an illustration of love and He ties that love to the love God will show when He is lifted up on a cross for the sins of mankind.

### **John 3:1-15 (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.” (Jesus makes it clear to Nicodemus right from the beginning that the topic at hand is the kingdom of God. Jesus would make it clear to Nicodemus also that the Kingdom of God is all about eternal life and eternal life is based on the love 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.

Jesus’ comment about the serpent in the wilderness taken from (Numbers 21:4-9) is not just a statement about how Christ would die, being lifted up on a cross. It also has to do with the love God had for his rebellious people. He had delivered them from Egyptian slavery and then time after time they complain and rebel against God and Moses. But time after time God loves them and forgives them and heals and delivers them. This is the very act of Jesus being lifted up on the cross. The cross is God’s ultimate expression of love toward a sinful and rebellious people. Then Jesus brings Nicodemus face to face with this love of God.

### John 3:16-17 (NASB)

[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.

Think about it for a moment.

- God gave his son, self sacrifice.
- God gives eternal life, the most prized possession.
- God did not send Jesus to condemn the world but to save it, He does not condemn anyone but rather allows us to choose what our eternity will be like.

Now that’s inspirational love. I don’t know about you but that is the kind of love that promotes well-being and happiness in every way and in every circumstance. This is what the core of holiness is all about – God’s love for us and our love for Him in return.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthian church he wanted them to understand this love of God. Look closely and you will see that the 5 contributing notions of holiness are alluded to in the first three verses of 1Cor 13.

### 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (NASB)

[13:1] If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, (separation) but do not have **love**, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. [2] If I have *the gift of prophecy*, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; (regulations) and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, (perfection) but do not have **love**, I am nothing. [3] And if I give all my possessions to feed *the*

*poor*, (**devotion**) and if I surrender my body to be burned, (**purity**) but do not have **love**, it profits me nothing.

[4] **Love** is patient, **love** is kind *and* is not jealous; **love** does not brag *and* is not arrogant, [5] does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*, [6] does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; [7] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

[8] **Love** never fails; but if *there are gifts of prophecy*, they will be done away; if *there are tongues*, they will cease; if *there is knowledge*, it will be done away. [9] For we know in part and we prophesy in part; [10] but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. [11] When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. [12] For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. [13] But now faith, hope, **love**, abide these three; **but the greatest of these is love**.

Sum it up. If you want to understand God – if you want to understand holiness – if you want to understand God’s demand for your holiness you must understand it in the little four letter word LOVE. God is love, and God loves you. When you respond to God’s love you are living out the holiness that God demands of you. Now that is inspiring. That is something I can live and die for.

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(Show how God’s love is important in the 5 contributing notions.)

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