

## Relational Holiness

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### INTRODUCTION:

#### *Contributing Notions of Holiness:*

1. Holiness as following rules and ethical codes, regulations
2. Holiness as being pure, clean and without blemish, purity
3. Holiness as being set apart, separation
4. Holiness as total devotion or complete commitment, dedication
5. Holiness as being perfect, perfection

#### **I. The Doctrine of God:**

Last week we talked about the doctrine of God. We talked about how God's Demand for Holiness is based on who He is, it is based on His character and His character is seen most vividly in His love. That brings us to another important question. What is love?

#### **II. Love Defined:**

##### **A. The Technical Definition:**

In Relational Holiness, Thomas Jay Oord and Michael Lodahl give us a technical definition of love.

*(RH) Definition:* To love is to act intentionally, in response to God and others, to promote well-being. (Then they go on to break that technical definition into smaller pieces so we understand it better.)

- 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.*

Think about that for a moment. We could say that God acts intentionally, in response to man's sin, to promote man's well-being by dying on the cross. Dying on the cross He pays the penalty for sin, and delivers man from the power of sin. Then, being raised from the dead, He gives man the possibility of eternal life. And finally,

to secure the possibility of holy living, He sends man the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit. This well-being is not forced on mankind, it is only offered freely so that man can be a free being, making his or her own choice about their relationship with God.

Let's look at that with a little more care. It is ok to come up with a definition of love that fits the educated understanding of reasonable people, but does this definition hold true in the light of the Scriptures? In John 3 Jesus uses the incident of Moses lifting up a bronze serpent in the wilderness as an illustration of love, and He ties that love to the love God will show when He (Jesus) is lifted up on a cross for the sins of mankind. First let's look at the incident in the Old Testament so we are familiar with it.

### **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." (*manna*) [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." (Notice that the people wanted God to take the fiery serpents away. God does intercede for them but in a different way. The serpents are still there, they are still biting the people and they are suffering. But God provides a way for them to live but they still suffer the pain of being bitten.) [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.

Now let's see how Jesus uses this to help Nicodemus understand love. The first three verses set the stage for us.

### **John 3:1-15 (NASB)**

[3:1] Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; (This first verse tells us that Nicodemus was a prominent member of the religious leadership that stood in opposition to Jesus.) [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." (He recognizes that Jesus is different, a man from God. But could He really be who He claims to be?) [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 not the signs and wonders that Jesus is doing. Jesus would also make it clear to Nicodemus 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.

When Moses made that bronze serpent and lifted it up on a staff, anyone who looked at it was saved from the deadly venom of the serpents that were biting them. This was a symbol of Jesus being lifted up on a cross and anyone who looked to Him or believed in Him would be saved from the penalty and power of sin. But Jesus' comment about the serpent in the wilderness 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, divine self sacrifice.
- God gives eternal life, the most prized possession.
- God did not send Jesus to judge the world but to save it. He does not condemn anyone but rather allows everyone to choose what their 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.

*“To love is to act intentionally, in response to God and others, to promote well-being.” (RH)*

When Paul wrote to the Corinthian church he wanted them to understand the love of God and how it is evident in the lives of those who truly believe in the Son 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, then Paul goes on to give a beautiful picture of what love looks like. I believe this is one of the greatest holiness passages in the New Testament.

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

[13:1] If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, 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; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have **love**, I am nothing. [3] And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, 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.**

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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