

Biblical Teaching on Holiness and its Social Significance in Contemporary Society

¹Adesegun, A.A. and ²Ogunewu, M.

¹*Department of History and International Studies,
Babcock University, Ilisan-Remo, Nigeria*

²*Faculty of Theological Studies,
Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, Nigeria*

E-mail: abiodunadesegun@gmail.com

Abstract

The contemporary significance of the biblical message is subject to controversy in many quarters. While some believes that the lessons they teach are relevant in a postmodern world, there are others who contend that they are outdated and so has no implications for societies such as ours. This article examines the Holiness message, one of the moral teachings of the Bible and states emphatically that just as the social teachings of the Bible and the standard of ethics they represent were relevant to the social needs of their time, so also are they relevant today and will continue to be relevant in the foreseeable future. It gave an analysis of the lessons and highlights its social significance emphasizing that any community which adhere to this teaching will enjoy a great deal of peace and quiet.

Keywords: Holiness Teaching, Contemporary Social Significance

Introduction

Holiness as a virtue expected in someone professing godliness is a key factor in Christianity. Consequently, the issue has been one of great concern to many within classical and contemporary Christianity. Virtually all denominations of the Church lay serious emphasis on the issue and Christian leaders who have had the privilege of writing on the subject are unanimous in their opinion that the practice of holiness is a vital and integral part of Christianity, reiterating that the message is on every page of the Bible. This no doubt was because of the social and spiritual significance of this tenet.

Historically, holiness has been a biblical injunction right from the beginning. Genesis the first book of the Bible presents us with the account of man's initial contact with God (Clark 1985). But since God's revelation to mankind has been progressive, we are not to expect, in these early times of man's contact with God, a

distinct and elaborate teaching on the subject of holiness, which we find in other parts of the Bible. This notwithstanding, the concept was practiced by all the generations of men who sought and had meaningful and rewarding relationship with God. The biblical records attested to the exemplary lives of such men as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Joseph. These men lived uprightly, were approved of God, and are therefore practical examples of holy living to every generation of men (Roberts 1983).

However, from Exodus, the second book of the Bible, the emphasis on holiness became more exposed, expounded and constantly stressed. From the time of Moses, the Mosaic Law, especially the Ten Commandments, served as the yardstick for measuring ethical standards and therefore the basis for holiness teaching in the Bible. All the leaders of Israel (Judges and Prophets) taught and preached the content of the law. Whenever, the people were accused of acts of ungodliness, what was usually emphasized was a deviation from the law (Freeman 1983). This was the situation until the advent of Christ. Christ in his teaching made it clear to His audience that He had not come to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them, that is to give full meaning to their teachings. In his prominent teaching, the 'Sermon of the Mount', he taught the law, emphasizing all the principles and the interpretation as it would apply to His time (the New Dispensation) and to His followers after him and these are the Christians. This implied that Christ automatically transferred the holiness teaching from the Old Testament Scriptures into Christianity.

In the course of history, the holiness teaching characterized the modern period of Church history. It was especially prominent during the era of the Great Awakening (18th Century) and more pronounced in the teaching of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. Wesley taught a host of Christian virtues which he vehemently emphasized are expected to characterize the life of a Christian. He taught such virtues as love both to God and mankind, stewardship, self-denial, temperance, honesty in conduct of business, true courtesy, the prudent use of riches, the choice of a career, leisure and pleasure, and cheerfulness (Watson 1984). These according to him are the hallmark of scriptural holiness.

Interestingly, it is on record that Wesley's teaching was of immense benefit to the English society of his time, in that it saved England from the kind of revolution which the French experienced at the end of the 18th Century (Hanks 1989). One of

the greatest revolutions of modern times came to France in 1789, and its effect was felt far and wide. There were fears that it might have a spill-over effect on England also, but Methodism, springing out of the Church of England, taught obedience to the powers that be, and Methodists were the most loyal of all citizens to the British Crown. They prayed regularly for the king and his government, so much so that peace and orderliness was sustained in the England of the time (Houghton 1980). Therefore, it could be said that the Holiness message benefited both the Church and the society of the Wesleyan era.

In this contemporary period however, there is a need for a rediscovery and understanding of the Holiness teaching because observably this teaching has suffered much setback and misunderstanding in Christendom. It is the assertion in certain quarters that it has not exerted much influence specifically on the church and generally on the society in this contemporary period, hence vices of various types and magnitude characterizes our world. This misunderstanding could be attributed to a few factors. First, is the life of the church, the institution saddled with the responsibility of disseminating this teaching to the world. One of the greatest criticisms of the church in recent times is that Christ's followers are often inconsistent, hypocritical and worldly. Too many Christians, the clergy and laity alike, preach one thing and do the opposite (Assemblies of God 1996). The rate at which both the clergy and the laity are getting involved in unwholesome (unethical) practices is never to the credit of the Christian faith. As pointed out by Auch *et al.*, vices of various descriptions are rising at such an alarming rate among Christians that it won't be long before the Saints are rivaling the world's expertise at sin (Auch and Cronce 1990). If then the teaching does not positively influence the life of the church which is its main custodian then the setback earlier mentioned is obvious. , the tendency is there for it to be misunderstood by the outside world.

Second, in Nigeria, our national life is another contributory factor. Although the church is expanding numerically, as various denominations of the Christian Churches are springing up within the nook and crannies of the nation. But its influence cannot be said to be felt within our national life as moral laxity, atrocities of various dimension and sophisticated crimes pervades the life of the nation. It is observed in some quarters that the apostasy of the medieval church is with us once again and that the church is in need of another Evangelical Awakening.

Third, the churches are at variance over the issue as diverse versions and interpretations of the teaching emanates from the pulpits, one version antagonizing the other, thus leaving the innocent members in confusion as to what to believe or reject. A new dimension appeared to have been introduced into the controversy with the emergence of the Neo-Pentecostal Churches some of which have made the "Holiness Theology" one of the hallmarks of their doctrines. Speaking specifically from the Nigerian perspective, these new movements see themselves as being superior to the mainline Churches in this matter and often refer to them as "worldly Churches". They are thus referred to because they are considered as having compromised the biblical stance on holy living. Worldliness, they maintained has become their hallmark and their purity as churches of Christ is therefore in doubt. The fact remains that if this teaching is to achieve its true objective within the framework of Christianity, it must be properly understood by the leaders and diligently taught to all believers.

As a way of rediscovering this vital teaching within Christianity and the larger society, this article explores and explains the teaching from the biblical perspective. It attempts a clarification of the concept; traces its origin and development; investigates the theological presuppositions and social implications of the concept in our contemporary period, its main aim being to create awareness and foster its understanding within Christendom, so as to enhance its practice. It is believed that if practiced in the true sense of it, its practice could lead to transformation particularly in the church and generally in the world.

Clarification of Concept

The issue of holiness within classical and contemporary Christian circle is one general issue which has been of great concern to the average Christian. There are probably two reasons for this. First is the fact that the word "holiness" or "holy" is an ancient word, which had attracted variations in meaning down through the ages. Second is the problem of misunderstanding. This concept is no doubt understood and taught differently by the various church denominations and so its practice by individual Christian also varies. Therefore, in order to have a deeper understanding of what holiness is all about, it is important to observe this subject matter from various perspectives.

The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary seems to give an explicit explanation on the issue. It says:-

The word "Holiness" or "Holy" is usually translated from two root words, one from Hebrew and the other from Greek. The Hebrew is "qadash" and the Greek is hag-. The basic meaning of "qadash" is separateness, withdrawal. It is first applied to God and is early associated with ideas of purity and righteousness. Long before the prophetic period, the ethical content is plain. Greek hag- is an equivalent of qadash and its history is similar. Beginning as an attribute of deity (God) the hag- family of words developed two stems, one meaning "holy", the other "pure". The use of words of this family resulted in a great development of their ethical sense, which was never clear in classical Greek. What became increasingly evident in the Old Testament is overwhelmingly explicit in the New Testament: that holiness means the pure, loving nature of God, separated from evil, aggressively seeking to universalize itself; that this character inheres in places, times and institutions intimately associated with worship; and that it is to characterize human beings who have entered into personal relations with God (Tenney 1967).

Another similar explanation is to be found in the Bridge Bible Directory. It goes thus:

The Hebrew word usually translated "holy" had a much wider meaning than the English word "holy". To most English-Speaking people 'holiness' usually indicates some ethical quality such as sinlessness or purity. To the Hebrews the word originally indicated the state or condition of a person or thing as being separated from the common affairs of life and consecrated wholly to God (Fleming 1990).

From these two explanations, particularly from the first, three ideas of holiness could be formed. These are Holiness as an Attribute of God; Holiness as Separation or Consecration to God; and Holiness as a Virtue in Mankind. Holiness is an essential attribute of God, and in fact, the sum total of His attributes and that which makes it essentially possible for Him to be called God. It signifies God's unblemished righteousness as well as his singular and radiant majesty. It is in God alone that absolute purity is found. He has no propensity to sin. In fact, He is impeccable and everything connected with Him is holy (Ojo 2002). Therefore, it might be ideal to conclude that, the idea of holiness originates in the revealed

character of God, and is communicated to things, places, times and persons engaged in His service (Tenney 1967).

The idea of holiness as separation to God arises from the fact that God is considered holy, because he is separate from man, and indeed from all created things. (Exodus 15:11-12). Israel was holy, because it belonged to God and was cut off from the religions and customs of the surrounding nations. (Exodus 19:6). The Sabbath and other religious days were holy, because they were separated from the common days of the world (Exodus 31:15). People who were removed from secular life and consecrated to the service of God were holy (Lev. 21:6-8). Places and land withdrawn from common use and set apart for sacred use or given to God were holy. The relation of a person or thing to God therefore determines its holiness or otherwise (Fleming 1990).

Because holiness signified separation from all that was common, the word naturally developed a wider meaning that included ideas of excellence and perfection. God's holiness meant that he was separated not only from the common everyday world but, above all, from sin. As a result "holiness" developed the association with ethical qualities (Fleming 1990). Simultaneous too as a communicable attribute of God, it became a virtue that is expected to characterize the lives of His people. Since God is absolutely holy, His demand from His worshippers to be holy is to be expected, for God would not have been morally justified to require holiness from anyone, if He were not holy. Basically therefore, holiness is godliness or living a godly lifestyle which cannot be divorced from moral uprightness or ethical quality of behaviour. Hence it might be ideal to agree with (Watkins 1992) which defines holiness as the state or quality of being holy; purity or integrity of moral character.

In this article, however, the third explanation is taken as an ideal working definition. Holiness therefore whenever it is referred to in this article means moral uprightness, right quality of behaviour or virtues as it is expected to be visible in the life of a person who proclaims to be religious at least from the Christian perspective or maintain an intimate relationship with God. Fleming explains that the people of God should always endeavour to exemplify in the practice of holiness because it is so commanded them by God. The holiness of God is to be reflected in his people in lives of purity, uprightness and moral goodness (Fleming 1990).

Rationale for Holy Living

Holiness is indispensable within Christianity because God has not and will not change His standard. God's word and standard remain fixed. While the Psalmist says that God's word is forever settled in heaven (Psalm 119:89), Jesus Himself says that heaven and earth shall pass away, a jot of the word of God will never go unfulfilled (Matt.5:18), so all of God's pronouncements in the scriptures as they relate to holiness stand. William Hill vehemently disagreed with those who might be of the opinion that the New Testament believer has a lesser responsibility to God than his Old Testament counterpart because of the issue of grace. He maintained that the moral law of God for man has never been done away with. The idea that everyone can do his or her "thing" and get away with it because we are under grace is a gross misconception (Hill 1986).

Ojo (2002) speaking in the same vein emphasized that while attempting to explore the doctrine of holiness, it should be noted that God has not changed His mind. He says:-

He (God) has never lowered or compromised His standards. The requirements of God are still very high. He demands very high ethical standards even today. This is because the Bible is not an out-dated book, but still very relevant today. A journey through the entire scriptures reveals God as holy. He is absolutely holy without any flaw. His demand from His followers to emulate Him in His state of purity is borne out of genuine love for them. He wants His people to be like Him in all ramifications. In order to relate to Him in a more intimate way, then it behoves His followers to pursue and strive after holiness. In contemporary times, holiness is not an option: it is a mandate for all especially those who aspire to see God (Hebrews 12:14).

Kumuyi (1996) in his own contribution described Holiness as the "Immutable Requirement." He is of the opinion that some people might have forgotten that heaven and earth may pass away but this condition of holiness as a prerequisite to seeing the Lord will never pass away. He maintains that kingdom may rise and wane, denominations and churches may change their life-style, modify their doctrines, but this demand for personal holiness and heart purity will never be cancelled from the word of God. It will never change.

Next, holiness is a prerequisite for a meaningful and rewarding relationship with God. Bridges (1990) is of the opinion that God's nature demands holiness in the life of a Christian. When God calls us to salvation, He calls us to fellowship with Himself and His Son Jesus Christ. But God is light; in him is no darkness at all. He then wonders how we can have fellowship with God and continue to walk in darkness simultaneously. This he affirms is utterly impossible. Holiness is required for a fellowship with God. It is quite indispensable in our walk with God. He warned that what the writer of Hebrews is telling us is to take seriously the necessity of personal, practical holiness. Hence the affirmation, that without holiness, no one will see the Lord. (Hebrews 12:14).

Another rationale for holy living is that holiness is a greater proof of Christianity. A life of holiness characterized by the keeping of God's word is the supreme distinguishing feature which marks out the disciple of Christ from the rest of the world. This is the assertion of Prince (1986). He emphasized that living one's life according to the scripture, which is a mark of practical holiness is the proof of true Christianity and discipleship. This view is equally shared by Ryle (1994) who maintains that one of the reasons why holiness of life is necessary is that it is the only sound evidence that we are true children of God. We must show by our holy life that we belong to the family of a holy God. We must let men see by our good conversation that we are indeed the children of the Holy one, or our sonship is but an empty name. Bridges (1990) corroborating the views of the two authors earlier mentioned declares that the only safe evidence that we are in Christ is a holy life. He is of the opinion that those who know nothing of holiness only flatter themselves that they are Christians. The only evidence of genuine Christianity is practical holiness.

The Prerequisites

Holy living is godly living. It is therefore not possible except the conditions set for it by God is strictly adhered to by those who desire it. Holiness is an attribute of God and to be holy is to share this attribute with Him. To share this attribute with Him, there is need for one to enter into an intimate relationship with Him. From the biblical perspective however this relationship starts with the individual repenting of his sins. This is known among Christian denominations as the "born again" experience or the New Birth. This according to many Christian writers is the starting point for a life of holiness.

Prince (1986) emphasized that repentance is the first move that any individual must make who desires to enter into any meaningful relationship with God. He described repentance as:

....an inner change of mind resulting in an outward turning back or turning around to face and to move in a completely new direction. The basic significance of repentance is not mere emotion but rather it is the taking of a firm decision to move in a completely new direction. In this context, it is turning away from a life of sinfulness and vices towards a life of partaking in the divine nature of God.

Yocum (1981) in his opinion also stressed that everyone who desires a life of holiness must first experience the regeneration of life which comes through genuine repentance. It is not enough to have an academic knowledge of doctrines; holiness is an experience and a life provided by God and so all necessary conditions must be met. Kumuyi (1988) in his own contribution declared that Holiness is for the Church. Holiness is not commanded for the unconverted or sinners, rather sinners are commanded to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ so as to be saved. It is to the Christians (believers) that God commanded holiness or sanctification.

After repentance and conversion, there must be steadfastness and continuance in the faith on the part of the individual before a life of holiness is attainable. Daoud (1977) affirms that although holiness begins in the heart and life at conversion, it is imperative that the new spiritual life must be maintained. If the conversion or decision to serve the Lord is light, it is not long until the devil returns and tries to tempt the new convert and lead him back to the "old life". So after conversion, he emphasized, the Christian must press through to a full surrender of his will and life in implicit obedience to God.

One other condition for a life of holiness is that the seeker must yearn for it. God gives His people the privilege to ask from Him whatever they need. In this context therefore, a Christian who saw himself in need of holiness of life must earnestly desire and seek after it. He must make it his pursuit from time to time and continually ask God for it. John Wesley, speaking on this issue emphasized the fact that a believer who felt the need for holiness of life should approach God, conscious of this fact and groan for full deliverance, for it is God who is mighty to

save. Those who are convinced of the deep corruption of their heart should show concern for it and desire total cleansing from God (Wesley 1850).

Characteristics of Holiness

Holiness as a concept is practical in nature. It is both attainable and practicable in this world. It is not mere knowledge, zeal or mere ideology, but practical living on a daily basis. It consists of virtues that could be observed in the individual. These are practical attributes which distinguishes what holy living is, from what it is not. J.C. Ryle discussed twelve (12) of such characteristics, but in the end cautioned that this list should not be seen or considered by anyone as a yardstick for measuring holy living or a standard outline of it, but rather a fair attempt at the issue. His view can be summarized in the following words: holiness is hating what God hates; abstaining from every known sin, being selfless and humble, ability to use the tongue positively at all times, self discipline; yearning after purity of heart and action; having the fear of God; being faithful and honest in all issues of life (Ryle 1994). Kumuyi (1986) speaking in the same vein of the practical nature of holiness emphasized that true holiness is love, which is loving God and loving believers irrespective of their denominational or group affiliation; loving the undeserved; sacrificing for them and doing good unto them. It consists in breaking away from the life of sin. It is being cleansed and cleansing oneself from all defilement such as evil thoughts, covetousness, gossip and like vices.

According to Fomum (1993), a new life in Christ produces a change of heart in the individual and produced holiness of heart which is manifested to the outside world in the demonstration of some virtues. He listed about eighty of such virtues, but due to lack of space, we would only mention a few. These are:- (i) hatred for sins and fleeing from it; contentment with what one has; a loving desire to be helpful to others; sin is completely forsaken; sorrow is felt over sins committed; interest in all worldly tastes lost; deep fulfillment found in spiritual things and selfish ambition abandoned. He went further to say that the change of heart which results from the grace of holiness creates a burning desire in the individual to invest all its time, money, wealth, gifts, possessions, talents, opportunities, priviledges, and all else, into the service of the Lord.

Holiness is a divine disposition. It is in no way natural to be holy. The ability or disposition to live holy comes from God. It is neither innate, nor inherited by children from their parents. It cannot be conferred on anyone by the church. It is

an attitude of life which develops out of a relationship with the "Divine". Ryle (1994) is of the opinion that holiness is God's special gift to His believing people. It is a divine work He carries on in their hearts by His Spirit. Holiness comes not of blood: parents cannot pass it to their children. It is not of the will of the flesh, so man cannot produce it, neither is it yet of the will of any man, and so no minister can confer or give it to members of his congregation. Holiness comes from God. It is the result of a vital union with Him. Kumuyi (1996) expresses the same opinion on the issue. Sanctification (holiness) he asserted comes from Christ and Him alone. It does not come from a pastor, education, personal effort or struggle, human improvement, enlightenment or regular church attendance.

Demands of the Teaching

The teaching is highly demanding. For instance, the Ten Commandments which is one of sources of this teaching reflect spiritual and moral principles upon which the hundreds of laws in the Mosaic Law Code rest. It was Israel's moral code and teaches moral lessons intended to regulate man's attitude both 'Godward' and 'manward'.

The first group comprises the first four commandments (Exodus 20:3-11). These first four stressed man's relationship to God and direct man's attention to Him. They can be said to be the pillar upon which the rest of the commandments are built. They form the underlying principles upon which the entire laws revolved. These have to do with man's responsibility to God, his maker. It is believed that, a man who is able to fulfill his obligation to God whom he does not see would not find it difficult to fulfill same to his fellowmen whom he sees from time to time (Carlson 1995). The second group consists of the rest six commandments and outlines man's responsibilities to his fellowmen. These are a series of principles and not a body of detailed rules and regulations. They do not attempt to give to man a series of rules ready-made to apply to any situation. What they do give to man is a certain attitude to God and his fellowmen (Barclay 1973). It only teaches a man to give to his fellowmen the type of treatment and consideration he would expect to receive from them. It is only a lesson to everyone to produce within his immediate and remote community the exact type of behaviour he would want prevalent within those communities.

People were to be faithful to their family responsibilities and in doing so would help towards a healthy staple society and ensure for themselves a long and happy life.

Each person was to act with love and consideration towards his fellows, by refraining from murder, maintaining purity in sexual relationships, respecting other people's rights to their own possessions, refusing to make false accusations, and avoiding even the desire for anything belonging to another person - Ex.20:12-17 (Fleming 1990).

Jesus teaching is an extension of the law. When he came, he made it clear to his audience that he had not come to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them, that is to give full meaning to their teachings - Matthew 5: 17-19. In his teachings in the "Sermon on the Mount", he emphasized on the contents of the law, teaching all the principles and the interpretation as it would apply to his time, (the New Dispensation) and to his followers after him (Pink 1997). The first part of the Sermon on the Mount is what is today known as "The Beatitudes". The Beatitudes introduces the Sermon the Mount and each of its parts speaks to a particular human condition and the benefits related to it. Christ started this portion by pronouncing blessedness on as many as would demonstrate some specific virtues in their lives. He mentioned such virtues as gentleness, a hunger for righteousness, mercy, purity of heart, the promotion of peace among men and standing for the truth at all times (Fleming 1989).

In furtherance of his teaching, Christ turned the searchlight towards another aspect of practical holiness as he expects it to be visibly seen in the lives of his followers. He told those who might be aspiring to be His disciples that they are the 'salt of the Earth", and the light of the world. The idea of comparing them to salt is to emphasize the fact that they are expected to perform on earth the dual purpose role which the salt performs in the food, that of preservation and seasoning. Christians are expected to be the salt of society. Just as salt preserves food from corruption, and seasons it, thus making it wholesome and acceptable, so also the followers of Christ are to purify the society in which they live, setting a good example and counteracting every corrupt tendency (Dummelow 1991). As the salt of the earth, they are expected to make life happier for others through their exemplary Christian living and thus become an agent in bringing others to the true knowledge of God.

Simultaneously, they are to be the light of the world, being the representatives of him who is the world's true light. As light of the world, they are to illuminate and give spiritual light to others. Spiritually, the world is in darkness. The Apostle

Peter described salvation of Christ as coming out of darkness into the marvelous light of God - 1st Pet. 3:9. Christ's disciples are therefore to live by the spiritual light which they have received. As beneficiaries of the gospel which is the word of God, they should let that word be a light unto their path and a lamp unto their feet - Psalm 119:105. The Apostle Paul occupies a prominent place in Christianity today. It has been said by some scholars that if you remove Christ from Christianity, what you will have left is nothing but "Paulinity". This is so because Paul had the great privilege of explaining, interpreting, expounding and developing most of the teachings of Christ into a coherent system of theology as they are presently understood by the Church today.

In the Epistle to the Romans, Paul describes the kind of life and conduct expected of those who have by faith accepted the gospel. This of course can summarily be referred to as "Practical and Consistent Christian Living. To live practically as a Christian however, involves the fulfillment of certain religious and social responsibilities. First Christians must be sincere and straight forward in everything they do. They must in particular have a loving care for those who are fellow members of Christ's body. Besides being spiritually enthusiastic, they must work hard at developing qualities of perseverance and prayerfulness. They must also be generous in giving practical help to their fellowmen (Fleming 1990). Next they are told to obey the state authorities, because no authority exists without God's permission, and the existing authorities have been put there by God. They are to exercise submission to the state by obedience and payment of taxes. In another portion, of the Bible, Christians are told to pray for those who govern them, because God desires people to live in peace and contentment - 1st Timothy 2:1-2. Christians should also have good relations with their fellow citizen, again not just because the law tells them to, but because Christian love has changed them within. God requires love not only for one's fellow Christians and friends, but also for humanity in general and even those that hate and despised them. Responsibilities to ones fellowmen include the payment of debts, and avoidance of adultery, murder, theft and covetousness (Gundry 1981).

On the subject of holiness, Peter is of the same view with Paul. His holiness teachings started from the very first chapter of his first epistle. From the onset Peter reminds his readers that they serve a holy God who also demands holiness from as many as would have fellowship with Him. True faith is expected to produce qualities of holiness in their live, as Christ's followers. Christians he emphasized

has the responsibility to maintain good conduct in society, even when people in general are against them. Likewise in the home and in the church, they must work towards peace and harmony (Fleming 1990). James in his Epistle cautions that holiness consists in pure religion. God expects clean and undiluted service from as many as desires to enjoy a lasting fellowship with him. This pure religion implies practical Christian living which involves the following, consistent study of the Bible, sincerity of purpose, wholesome Christian service, sound speech (the positive use of the tongue), impartiality, love and respect to all men irrespective of class, self-sacrifice, steadfastness, soul-winning and a life of consistent faith and prayer (Wilmington 1988).

Biblical Models of Holy Living

Holiness as earlier explained is not just a concept, but a practical aspect of a life of godliness. There are practical examples of people who attained to holiness of life and whose exemplary lives of holiness are both a challenge and an encouragement to contemporary Christians. Most Christian writers are unanimous on their opinion and assessment of the lives of certain Old Testament characters. They are of the opinion that such men as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Job and Daniel lived exemplary lives.

Roberts (1983) opines that in all ages, there have been those who have experienced the blessing of holiness in their hearts and exemplified it in their lives. He mentioned such men as Abel, Enoch, Noah and Job. According to him, Noah lived a holy life for six hundred years. He was just, devout and consistent in his relationship with God. As to the character of Job, God himself testified to his uprightness. (Kumuyi (1986) referring to the biblical record attested to the life of such men as Abraham, Moses, Joseph and David. He testified to their lives of meekness which is an aspect of holiness. In the same vein, he made mention of Noah, Job and Daniel as the three holy men, the holiness of life to whom God testified to - Ezekiel 14:14 & 20 (1976).

Holiness was not only exemplified in the Old Testament, it was also demonstrated in the New. The Lord Jesus Christ is the supreme example of holiness in the New Testament. His life of holiness therefore is the necessary criteria for the Christians too to be holy. Since the Christian is a follower of Christ and Christ expects His followers to be like him, the Christian has no option but to emulate Christ on the issue. In the words of Moore (1952), Christ is the "Christ" of the

sinless life, because the claim is made over and over again that He committed no sin. He lived a life, not only of refraining from willful transgression of the law of God, but of the very essence of purity, and of sinlessness, to which God himself bore witness. Clark (1980) supporting this view reiterated that Jesus was holy in all area of His life. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of Him as "holy, harmless, undefiled and separated from sinners. Peter said, "He did no sin, neither was any guile found on his lips". (1st Peter 2:22). He was free from any sort of sin. He was absolutely holy in heart, in life, in words and in acts. If Christ as the Divine Founder of the Church was thus holy, it is no wonder that God requires holiness from those who desire to be called by His name.

The teachings of the Apostles as recorded in the various epistles are a pointer to the fact that the Apostles of Christ exemplified in the practice of holiness. For example, Peter admonished his readers to be holy, for God too is holy (1st Peter 1:15-16). Paul, in all his epistles also explained that holiness is a pre-requisite for walking with God. The word "holiness" when used in a general sense however, includes everything that is connected with the Christian life (Daoud 1977).

Challenges

Just as it is with other practices of a theological nature, the practice of holiness too has its peculiar problems. Definitely, there are some difficulties that confront Christians especially in their quest to live a holy life. According to Ojo (2002), the difficulties confronting Christians in their quest to lead holy lives can be traced to various sources. The first is the activities of Satan and his cohorts - the demons. The world, he asserts, is demon-filled with their sinister tendencies. Their activities consequently expose the average Christian to series of temptations, and the arising difficulties can almost make the pursuit of holiness a mirage. Many Christian have been injured by the devil's attacks with many falling victims. Some have made a shipwreck of their faith through the canister of materialism, compromise and worldliness rolled out by Satan.

Unger (1971) shared the same view. He is of the opinion that Satan and demons subject man to temptations. They produce a deadly indifference to the word of God, prayer, worship and spiritual life in general. This could even result in a violent opposition to God and could inevitably result in complete apostasy. There is no denying these facts. The world is filled with demonic powers whose activities constitute problems to the practice of holiness. A Christian minister once

remarked that immediately God gives anyone a task to accomplish, or one set out to achieve a spiritual goal, from that time Satan is equally set to work to see to his downfall. Demonic activities no doubt pose a serious threat to the practice of holiness and even often make it impossible.

Next is the problem of misunderstanding. People have various conceptions and understanding of what holiness is all about. What constitutes genuine holiness to one church denomination might be different from that of another. This invariably has led to the concept being taught differently by the churches and therefore consequently being understood and practiced differently by Christians. The confusion which arises from this misunderstanding has even led some Christians to the conclusion that a life of holiness as long as man remains in his mortal body is nothing but mere illusion. Kumuyi (1983) remarked that the idea that man can be holy in this present mortal life had been a matter of serious contention and confusion. The teaching on holiness is one that makes Christians young and old to shrink and shiver. The cause of this is the unfortunate misconceptions or experiences they have been exposed to from all sorts of sources, even from people who themselves profess holiness. Speaking further, Kumuyi (1986) mentioned two extremes into which people fall due to their misconception of the holiness teaching.

First, are those who do all sorts of things in the external to show that they are seeking holiness from God; second in the extreme are those who believe that a believer's holiness is God's business; that the believer himself does not have to do anything. But he stresses that, the truth is not in either of these extremes. Both God and man have their part to play on this issue. While God makes the grace of being holy available to every Christian, it is the responsibility of the individual Christian to desire and yearn for the life of holiness by cleansing himself from every defilement of body and spirit. In other words, the believer must realize that it is his own responsibility to abstain (keep off) from vices. It is cooperation with the plan of God that makes a life of holiness a possibility.

There is always a price to be paid for the achievement of any goal. Even Christ taught his disciples that they have a price to pay for being His disciples. Their service to Him must cost them something. Matt.16:24. However, the unwillingness or inability on the part of some Christians to pay the price for holy living had removed this virtue far away from their reach. Fomum (1990) is of the opinion that

maintaining holiness of life demands a life of continuous obedience to God's words and directives. Another price which the Christian must pay for holy living is to make it a point of duty to resist (fight back at) Satan and his demon on a continuous basis, through prayers and a serious involvement in other spiritual activities. He must fight against every idea, temptation, and against everything that will stop him from sustaining the holiness experience (Kumuyi 1993). Holiness must cost the real Christian something, for there would always be enemies to be overcome, battles to be fought, sacrifices to be made, a cross to be carried, and a race to run (Ryle 1994).

Another challenge facing the average believer in this realm of the faith has to do with the conflict between the spirit and the flesh. This touches on the dual nature of the Christian as explained in the scriptures. Every Christian possesses within him the corrupt nature of the flesh and synchronously the indwelling Holy Spirit. These two natures being inseparable usually culminate in both forces of good and evil struggling simultaneously to take control of men's heart. The hearts of men thus become a battle field between these two forces and it is only the grace of God that can continuously see the believer through this dilemma (Ojo 2002).

Potentials and Contemporary Significance

In spite of all these observable challenges associated with holy living, the fact remains that this teaching has bright prospect both within contemporary Christian circle and the entire human communities. It is also observed that if the teaching is well taught by the churches, caught and practiced by the members, the gains to the nation will be very enormous. It will result in total well-being within the human communities. From a brief overview of the Ten Commandments, certain points are observable. Among these is that the commandments are 'Godward', 'Manward' and 'Selfward'. The first four places a responsibility on man of an attitude of reverence and devotion towards God, while the rest enjoin respect and love towards others. Of these actions however, man reaps a great deal of benefit.

This notwithstanding, there are those today who believed that the Bible message belongs to the very ancient times, and so cannot be said to be relevant to our contemporary period in any way. Among these critics are philosophers and theologians as Albert Schweitzer, Alfred Loisy and Harvey Cox, all of which offered one reason or the other in support of their argument. While some of them asserts that the message of the Bible were never intended for a contemporary society

such as ours, others are of the opinion that they were basically spiritual and were solely intended for the spiritual well being of the society.

However, these assertions cannot be said to be correct, because just as the teachings of the Bible and the standard of ethics which they represents were relevant to the social needs of their time, so also are they relevant today and will continue to be relevant for as long as humankind would exist on earth. This is so because these teachings were intended to reform both the human nature and mind, all of which had remained the same down through the ages. Human nature which is prone to indiscipline had been the same from time immemorial. This reflected in the message of John the Baptist. His message was precise and directed at the heart of his audience. These people were not called upon to change the style or structure of their buildings, neither were they told to effect a change in their mode of transportation, dressing or any technology whatsoever, but rather were told to have a change of heart and amend positively on their manner of living.

All the three groups who came to John were instructed purely on how to bring about social order within their environment. First to call on John were the multitude. His sermon to them was for them to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance - Luke 3:7-8. The problem they had was of the heart and so all they needed to do was to have a change of heart. John encouraged them to stop all acts of inhumanity to man, but rather be involved in positive actions which are capable of improving their lot and which will make for a peaceful co-existence within their communities. The people of John's time were no more or less inhuman than us today. Man inhumanity to his fellowmen pervades all areas of our contemporary life. It is there in the home, school, offices, market and other public places. Therefore, if there is anytime the biblical message can be said to be quite and indispensably relevant, it is now.

The next to visit John were the publicans. These were the tax collectors of the time. They were usually representatives of the Roman government. They collect tax on behalf of the government and in the process, are usually in the habit of over-taxing them. They would normally charge more than instructed and the excess goes to their purse. John addressed this anomaly in his message. Within our contemporary times, we are equally faced with the issue of over-taxation. In 1999, during the beginning of the new democratic endeavour, one of the promises of one of the contestants for the governorship of Lagos State, Nigeria (Senator Bola

Tinubu) was that he would address the issue of multiple taxations. This was because he saw it as a problem. This then tells us that our world is facing the same problem that the ancient world of John and Jesus faced. Any commandment that worked at that time would definitely be relevant to us today. The soldiers were the last group to come to John. According to John's message, their problem was causing violence, hence he advised them to do violence to no-one - Luke 3:14. This however is an indication that violence has been a pre-occupation of the military right from ancient times and not peculiar to our time. The soldiers of John's time were no doubt quite violent as their counterparts of today. Any message which was capable of arresting the military violence of the time will also be of high social significance today.

Ethical systems have their day and cease to be, but the biblical message remains. Whatever may be thought of them, they remain the basis of any system of ethics. For that reason, they have to be re-interpreted in every age. Every generation has once again to work out their implications and to reconsider their demands. There is a particular necessity to do this in this generation. In the name of freedom this generation resents discipline. It does not like commandments which are also prohibitions. It does not like to be told not to do anything. Unlimited freedom and unrestricted permission to experiment are the contemporary demands. In a situation such as this, liberty can very easily become license, and the right to experiment can become right to wreck one's own life and the lives of others. It is therefore well and good that our generation be confronted with the uncompromising demands of the Christian message.

Scholars are unanimous in their assessment of the Ten Commandments as a body of instructions which are of high social significance in our time. According to Dzurgha (1987), these bodies of teaching have many social dimensions. Its social dimensions are relevant to our contemporary needs in the world in general and Nigeria in particular. It has social implications for us today. For as long as man would exist on earth, he is of a firm opinion that the Christian message of holiness would continue to be a source for our contemporary ethical requirements. For example, within the framework of the holiness teaching, there is reverence for human lives. The sixth commandment condemns murder, which is the deliberate, malicious and unlawful taking of human life, and teaches us the sanctity of human life. It also sets out to eliminate all forms of unlawful killings within our society. These would include issues such as abortion, killings through armed robbery, hired killings, suicide, and

even killings through communal and religious clashes. Barclay (1973) speaking in the same vein remarked that "The Ten Commandments" which is the basis of the holiness teaching are timeless truths for today's moral issues. They are basic commandments which apart from being a necessary part of the biblical messages are also a necessary part of any agreement to live together peacefully. They are part of the foundations of any society, and without obedience to them any society would be impossible. This is because each of the Ten Commandments speaks to a particular human condition, sets out to correct an anomaly and thereby address ethical issues within the society.

It is adjudged the most important document ever written for the purpose of regulating relationship within the community of men. It is the code which may be said to be the foundation of all social ethics. Its influence upon nations and societies could never be measured; indeed its importance can never be over-emphasized. It had influenced the world and the civil laws of nations more than any other document ever written. Any nation that is being formed or has been formed who will use it as the basis for its laws, will no doubt grow into one of the most blessed communities upon earth. If the Ten Commandment is implicitly obeyed, it is capable of bringing into existence, a just, orderly, compassionate, egalitarian and law abiding society, a society that is strong, both in growth and development (Leadership n. d.).

Conclusion

This article discussed the social relevance and significance of the biblical teaching on holiness within our contemporary setting. In the process, the timelessness of the Christian message was vividly discussed, the teaching properly analyzed and its appropriateness to our time was highlighted. At times, the problems of violence and insecurity seem insurmountable in our world. Humanly speaking there seems to be no answer to the problems of society as everything appears hopeless. However, the good news the creator of the world has a plan for orderliness in his world. The solution for such a world as ours which has gone berserk does not lie with men. Thousand of years ago, God gave humanity a plan for orderliness within societies. It was a plan for morality and ethics that was to guide man down through the ages; a plan that will work today as much as it would have worked in ancient history, if it will be strict adhered to. It is our considered opinion therefore that if all within the framework of any contemporary society would embrace this teaching of the

Christian Faith as taught in the Bible, societies around the world would perpetually enjoy a time of peace and quiet.

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Biographical Note: Dr. Abiodun Adesegun graduated with a PhD in Church History from the University of Ibadan in 2009. He is a Senior Lecturer and the current Head of Department of History and International Studies at Babcock University, Ilisan Remo, Ogun State.

Biographical Note: Dr. Leke Ogunewu graduated with a PhD in Church History from the University of Ibadan in 2008. He is a lecturer at the Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomosho in Oyo State.
