

Maintaining Holiness in Relevance

Jerry Bridges

I. Introduction.

A. Text: 1 Peter 1:13ff.

B. One of the principle priorities that God expresses for us in the New Testament is for us to be holy.

C. In doing evangelism, our first priority is to be holy.

II. While we seek to be relevant to unbelievers in our evangelism, we should not compromise the biblical standard of holiness.

A. This means that we have a responsibility to determine what biblical holiness is, not cultural holiness.

B. Secular culture will resist being confronted with the Holy One of Israel.

1. Confronting people with the Holy One of Israel does not mean that we condemn their activities. It means that our lives should be that confrontation.

2. There will be tension between relating to a secular culture and the need to be holy.

C. Jesus perfectly maintained this balance by being holy in His lifestyle and being a friend of sinners. (Hebrews 7:26)

III. There are some principles we can use as we seek to live in the tension of being relevant and being holy.

A. We become all things to all men but within the boundaries of holiness. (1 Corinthians 9:22)

B. We must be careful of the deceitfulness of our own hearts but also willing to live according to our conscience in “disputable matters.” (Jeremiah 7:9; Ephesians 4:22; Galatians 5:13)

1. There are some matters that the Bible does not discuss and each of us must determine how to live in those areas before God.

2. We need to be careful that we do not allow our desire to relate to the lost become an indulgence of our sinful nature.

3. There are some principles to live by in this area. (1 Corinthians 6:12ff, 10:23, 31)

a) We must ask ourselves if what we are involved in is beneficial to ourselves or to others spiritually.

b) We must ask ourselves what has mastered us- not just addictive substances, but things that we are attached to that influence the rest of our lives.

c) We must ask ourselves if our freedom to pursue certain activities will be a hindrance to other people who struggle to be pure in those areas. We should not seek to pursue our own freedom at the expense of others.

d) All of our activities need to be done for the glory of God, not to assert our freedom in Christ.

1) In most cases, it is okay to enjoy our freedom in Christ, but we must be careful about our heart attitude in asserting it.

2) The exception for asserting our freedom in Christ is when we are faced with a legalist Christian trying to impose legalism on ourselves or others.

IV. God created the earth for us to enjoy and we should use that freedom to connect with secular people. However, we must not compromise biblical standards of holiness or allow our flesh to use that freedom to indulge in its own desires. (Genesis 2:9, 3:6)

Application questions:

1. Why do you think the New Testament emphasizes holiness more than it does evangelism? What are some ways that you can learn more about the biblical standard of holiness?

2. How can you determine whether a certain activity is spiritually beneficial and constructive to yourself or the people you are trying to reach? Is “constructive and beneficial” an absolute based on the activity itself or does it change depending on the specific relationship?

3. What are some ways that you can determine your own motives when it comes to “disputable matters”? What is evidence that your flesh is indulging itself when you consider the activities in your life? What is evidence that your heart is in line with God’s and with your conscience in activities or relationships?
