

How can Women of Papua New Guinea be Effective in Communicating Holiness?

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Introduction

Do all cultures have the same definitions for holiness? How can holiness be perceived in each cultural context? What is the criterion for holiness in each culture? Does each culture use the same term or use a different term to connote holiness? These questions help us to see the perspectives of others so that we can be able to assist one another in our faith, even though we are from different backgrounds. Therefore, how can women of Papua New Guinea be effective in communicating the holiness message? First, holiness needs to be defined.

I. The definition of Holiness

In all societies, people have their definitions which relate to their cultural perspectives. The definitions according to their cultural spheres make the concept easy to understand. Yet, the term used may be different but implies holiness. The concept of holiness in each culture reveals a common idea which helps each culture to relate to one another.

However, looking at some of the definitions of the authors, we will be able to understand the concept. Samuel Logan stated that “holiness is perfect deliverance from sin.”³⁵² Christ is the channel to holy living. Through his blood, we are cleansed from all our sins. Our old lives have been crucified with him at the cross. He is God’s image in our lives.

William Greathouse presents holiness in threefold meaning. One of these threefold meaning explains holiness as separation.³⁵³ In fact, holiness

³⁵²Samuel Logan Brengle, *Helps to Holiness* (Ohio: Schmull Publishers, 1984), 1.

³⁵³William M. Greathouse, *Wholeness in Christ: Toward a Biblical Theology of Holiness* (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1998), 18.

is total separation from sin. Our lives present holiness only when we are in relationship with God. If disobedience occurs in our lives, holiness is not present. Sin predominates our lives.

J. I. Paker explains that ... “holiness is separated and set apart for God, consecrated and made over to Him.”³⁵⁴ To begin with holiness, all lives need holiness to the divine moral law and need Jesus as model. The application of holiness reveals total devotion and total assimilation. Our devotion to God is in a sense of living a life of service, we serve God and others. Our assimilation to God is in a sense of limiting Christ and conforming to his standard.

With all these definitions, Papua New Guinea presents holiness in three fold meaning. Holiness is define as “pulap long Holi Spirit,” which means being filled with the Holy Spirit. God is the focus of our worship. By the fruit of the Holy Spirit, Christlikeness is revealed.

Next, holiness is “klinpela bel,” which connotes a pure heart. Holiness must begin with us getting right with God. Our relationship with God is established by His moral quality. The rebel must cease. Sinners now enter into covenant relationship with God. Our inward religion reveals Christlikeness.

The third fold meaning is holiness as “stretpela,” which is righteousness. Holiness begins with our obedience to God. His instruction directs our path. Our devotion to Him is to serve with loyalty. Our service to Him is centered around loving God and loving others.

Looking at these definitions of Papua New Guinea, the first two are commonly used in Christian arena. Both definitions focus on Christlikeness. However, the third definition is for the general group, both Christians and non-Christians. The term righteousness does not mean the same in Christians and non-Christians world. But, the concept of holiness is there.

³⁵⁴J. I. Paker, *Rediscovering Holiness* (Michigan: Servant Publication, 1992), 19.

Righteousness is mainly based on right relationship which begins with our total obedience in our service to God and others which exhibits that our service is centered around loving God and loving others through our loyalty in our commitment.

Understanding the cultural definitions, how can the women be effective in their ministry? To be effective in communicating the holiness message, the cultural framework and the biblical framework need to be considered.

II. Cultural Framework

The struggle in ministry seems to be a burden hindering women to pursue for effectiveness. They have heart to do God's work, yet there are pressures behind suppressing them. How can they communicate this holy message? They have to understand the background of the context they are living so that they can be able to communicate the message.

Surveying the context, the society is male dominated and community oriented. Women are seen as second class beings. They become the non participants of men's activities. Their purpose is to serve their husband, family, and the communities. In their service, the main aim that stands out is to build prestige and fame for their husbands. If the aim is not being met, the family receives dishonor, especially the husband.

However, since the society is patriarchal, the expectations for the women are high. They are to meet their responsibilities without complaining. Though the pressures are in front of them, they have to submissively serve. Their loyalty and commitment have to be manifested in their services. Obedience must take root in their lives. Through obedience, righteousness is visualized. Then, people understand the concept of holiness better.

Ranjini Rebere presented in her article about the story of Ruth and Naomi (Ruth chp. 1-4). She stressed on the point of faithfulness and commitment of these women in the male dominated society and stated that women have to assume the traditional role which is the source of their value

to their husbands.³⁵⁵ In fact, faithfulness and commitment uphold the cultural standard. Women need these virtues to maintain their identity. On the other hand, what is the cultural norm that stands between the relationship of men and women, and women to the society?

The cultural norm that affirms the relationship is the responsibility of both men and women. Their responsibility to one another, to their family, and to their community is valued more for it approves their identity. For the father as the head of the family, his responsibility is to take care of his family in terms of security and family's needs with respect for his wife and respect for his community. His respect is demonstrated through words of exaltation to his wife, acknowledging her service. To the community, his respect is demonstrated through his service.

For the women, their responsibilities are to submit to their husbands, take care of the family, and submit to the community. Their submission is manifested through their service to men and others. And through their service, prestige and fame are built which show that their service glorifies men's name. When men's name is being glorified, women's identity stands out for they have fulfilled their task. However, exaltation of men's name does not mean that women are worshiping men by investing their labor. Rather, women are simply fulfilling their duties.

When both responsibilities are being met, relationship of both men and women are in good terms. Their loyalty in their commitment for one another approves their righteous deeds which witness to others a life of righteousness which implies holiness. Holiness is embodied through the relationship.

Yet, wrong mentality of both men and women have infested in and ruined the cultural norm. Men tend to see their responsibilities as they are more superior than women, thinking that they have power to rule instead of feeling responsible to take care. Women tend to count too much on their

³⁵⁵Ranjini Rebere, .Naomi, Ruth and the Women of Bethlehem: Faithfulness in Commitment, Pacific Journal of Theology 15 (1996): 32.

services toward men. They felt much of enslavement thinking that they are being treated low, being seen as second class beings. In reality, this is the problem occurring within the context due to the selfcenteredness. Since men are stronger than women, they override women where women's rights are abused, and inequality comes into play. How can the women strive for righteousness and communicate effectively the message of holiness to this male dominated society?

To address this dilemma, cultural standard needs to be upheld. All levels of people have their codes to observe. For women to submit, they are to serve under men through obedience in their service. Their obedience exposes their love for their husbands and the people. No matter what the circumstances are, their loyalty is required. People see righteousness in the lives of those who obey. Through seeing righteous lives, people could listen or value what they say.

Again, Ranjini Rebera mentioned that women can transform culture through the means of obeying traditional roles which is the source of their value to their husbands.³⁵⁶ Indeed, transforming culture is base on our faithfulness and our commitment. These important virtues will lead us to take risk as well as to find strategies to overcome the restrictions of a patriarchal society. Our strength and our ability to control our lives and make choices for ourselves is centered in faithfulness to our commitment which allows us to function within communities which are bound by patriarchal customs and culture. With these remarks, what does the biblical framework say?

III. Biblical Framework

“The Scripture traces the source of human culture back to God Himself for our distinctive capacities as creatures made in the image of God

³⁵⁶Rebera, 38.

are the basic source of human culture.”³⁵⁷ Actually, the human culture shows that moving from within our cultural horizon to hear with authenticity, the message of God spoken within the culture horizon of the biblical world. We may go in turn to present the message with the equal authenticity within the cultural horizon. Yet, the power to grasp the depths of the biblical meaning is not available to isolate the believers. We need each other to adequately understand Scripture if we are to grasp the fullness of God’s Word. Therefore, we need to look into the text to address the issue.

In Genesis 2:18-25, the companionship of man and woman is revealed. Both male and female are equal beings. Yet, their equality is not the guarantee to balance the position between them. Rather, equality signifies their identities through their given roles. Since they are created as dependent creatures, their mutual respect should stand out reflecting God’s holiness through their services in their respective places of ministry.

Their companionship requires total dependency with God and with one another. Though the Creator has taken the risk of allowing a choice to be made...,³⁵⁸ the choice does not allow us to be independent but be dependent on God. Therefore, the passage conveys the importance of total dependency.

Furthermore, Ephesians 5:22- 33 also encourages the kind of attitude both husband and wife should have for one another because this is what Christ requires for the church. Their responsibilities show how they should be faithful and be committed to one another as they serve in their place of ministry. In their responsibilities, their total commitment with love and submission to one another reflects God’s holiness and allows total obedience to take charge over them. They become more presentable before God so that He can use them for His purpose.

³⁵⁷John M. Hitchen, „Culture and the Bible- The Question of Contextualization,„Melanesian Journal of Theology 8 (April, 1992): 33.

³⁵⁸Greathouse, 41.

Another text in Genesis 3:16c stated, “yet your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you.” The power to rule over you is not a prove for man to govern above women. Nor, the proof for the women to see themselves as a failure and be suppressed. The Scripture reminds us about our loyalty and commitment to one another in our service. Men should feel responsible and take care over what God has entrusted to them. For women, their subjection to men is to be contended and to be submissive. So, holiness in this text is seen as sacrificial love. Each one lays down their lives for one another in their services to God as their lives are centered toward God.

The Word of God informs us that humans are created as dependent beings. They need to depend on God and depend on one another. Therefore, their loyalty in their commitment is more vital. Relationship is built through their loyal commitment for one another which affirm their faith in God. For women to explore holiness and communicate holiness to others, the Scripture needs to be carefully researched and understood well before it is delivered.

Certainly, “man is in the culture but under God, and by God, his culture is judged.”³⁵⁹ We are not to overlook the culture. Through the culture, God will use us to witness to the people. However, culture should not be the center of holiness but just an aid to understand the concept. The Bible directs us to the real truth which transforms lives. Can we say that there is a balance? What is the critical analysis for these frameworks?

IV. Critical Analysis

Looking at biblical framework, the purpose is for God’s glory. God’s standard is to be upheld which is based upon total thrust of the Scripture. We are not directed to our own will but to the will of God. We are totally

³⁵⁹Richard S. Taylor, *A Return to Christian Culture: Christian Ideals in a Sagging Society* (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1973), 41.

depending on God. Our total dependency reflects the holiness of God. Our lives are transformed into Christlikeness. However, one thing that stands out in these frameworks is the call to serve in your place of ministry. The culture is calling women to serve in their place of ministry so as the Bible. Both calls are to serve with submission. Culture sees it as inequality due to the wrong mentality which imposes pride in men and low self-esteem in women, while the Bible sees it as equality in terms of total dependency on God and to one another. We are created as dependent beings. We need each one in our service to God and to one another to build our community. A Samoan female author stated,

“...women in ministry have their own struggle.... When they fight for justice and equity over women issue, they are often seen as white feminists. But when they fight for justice and equity over racial issues with fellow clergy men, they are often viewed as one of the boys.”³⁶⁰

In deed, it is a struggle. On the other hand, it is a consideration for effective ministry. If you fight for justice and equity, the problem still stays there for human strength cannot solve the issue. Therefore, looking carefully into these struggles, the complaint of others is simply informing the women to submissively serve in their place. Surely, we know that getting things changed over night is impossible. We have to conform to their standard to get the message into their hearts.

Conclusion

Holiness is embodied through relationship. We present holiness when we have right relationship with God. Christ is the means to our holy living. His blood cleanses us from all our sins and transforms us into his likeness for holiness is God’s standard. He says, “without holiness no man shall see

³⁶⁰Feiloa Taule.ale.ausumai, “Herstory: The Struggle of Pacific Women in Ministry,” *Pacific Journal of Theology* 7 (1992) :32.

Him (Heb 12:14),”so holiness is separation from sin. Looking at the two frameworks, the cultural framework is self-centered. The biblical framework is Theo centric. The definition of holiness is not the same, yet the concept connotes the meaning of holiness. People understand holiness through their cultural perspectives. With these concepts of holiness, how can the ministry of women be effective? Their effectiveness comes through their submission as they obey the instructions and serve. Therefore, to be effective in the ministry, let God to guide you through as you obey and submit to His will in serving Him as well as serving others around you. Holiness is seen through loving God and loving others as you demonstrate through your service with loyalty and commitment.

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