

# Are We Worried about Holiness or How We Look?

**Dr. David M. Doran**

Senior Pastor, Inter-City Baptist Church  
President, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary

## **Introduction:**

1. Why this workshop?
2. The biblical basis for my concern is the combined emphasis of texts like John 7:24 and 8:15 alongside of Ephesians 5:10 and Hebrews 5:13-14.

## **I. The Contemporary Challenge**

A. As culture changes, we must make fresh application of biblical truth.

1. What is culture?

- a. “Culture is the integrated system of learned patterns of ideas, values, behavior, products, and institutions characteristic of a society” (Van Rhee, *Missions: Biblical Foundations & Contemporary Strategies*, p. 81).
- b. “Culture is everything that is a part of one’s everyday life experience. It includes: (1) Tangibles such as food, shelter, clothing, literature, art, music, etc. (2) Intangibles such as hopes, dreams, values, rules, space relationships, language, body movements, etc.” (Mayers, *Christianity Confronts Culture: A Strategy for Crosscultural Evangelism*, p. xi).
- c. David Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*:
  - i. Technological—“includes artifacts and activities designed to manipulate the material world”
  - ii. Sociological—“includes those patterns of relationship and behavior that govern interaction between individuals and groups”
  - iii. Ideological—“includes the knowledge, beliefs, worldview, and values of a people”

2. Why must we make fresh applications?

- a. This is grounded in the distinction between the timeless, trans-cultural nature of biblical principles and applications as time and culture sensitive.

- i. Some applications are inherent in the biblical command, cf. 1 Ths 4:3.
  - ii. Some contemporary applications are legitimate extensions of a clear biblical command, cf. Eph 4:28.
  - iii. Some contemporary applications are efforts to show the implications of the biblical command in one specific culture at a given point in time, cf. Eph 6:1; Deut 22:5; or 1 Tim 2:9.
- b. As cultural norms and expressions change, we must evaluate these changes by the Scriptures, seeking to learn what is pleasing to the Lord (Eph 5:10) and discern between good and evil (Heb 5:14).
- c. Failure to make fresh applications often springs from a poor handling of the Scriptures and hinders effective ministry.
  - i. It tends to treat an application as if it is the biblical principle, confusing the difference between what is an absolute and what is relative.
  - ii. By failing to make contemporary applications, we do not help believers develop the spiritual and moral discernment needed to avoid worldliness while living in the world.
  - iii. By failing to confront the contemporary culture, it tends to perpetuate the applications that fit a previous cultural context.

B. As we make fresh application of biblical truth, it can produce disequilibrium.

- 1. A basic principle of change is that *the status quo is dynamic*. There are forces holding the present state of things in place. Churches not only exist within a culture, they have their own sub-culture as well.
- 2. During the application process, divergent viewpoints can emerge and potentially lead to tension (even conflict).
  - a. We must distinguish differences regarding principles from differences regarding applications.
  - b. We must grant room for differences on the matter of application.

3. Those who have held former applications can swing to opposite ends of the pendulum.
  - a. Some become unnerved by the changes and may be inclined to associate change with compromise.
  - b. Others move from a tradition-bound position to an anti-tradition mindset—it's good because it's new, different, or more contemporary.
4. Pastors have the responsibility to wisely shepherd their congregations toward biblical obedience throughout this process.
  - a. The controlling principle must be faithfulness to the Scriptures, not our image with other pastors and leaders.
  - b. Your local church exists within a particular time and place, so the applications that you make will be distinctive to that time and place. This applies to both the congregation and to the community in which it exists.

## **II. Potential Signs of Judging According to Appearance**

- A. Carelessly equating popular, fashionable, and contemporary with worldly.
- B. Maintaining an unchanging list of applications regardless of changes in the culture around the church.
- C. Forming and maintaining the list of applications based on acceptance with a certain circle of peers.
- D. Subjectively or arbitrarily applying the association argument in the definition of worldliness or disobedience.