

INTRODUCTION

When I was growing up in L.A. (Lower Alabama) we usually had several pets around the house. By virtue of being the oldest child, my older sister, Judy, demanded the right to name all our pets. (First-born siblings can be control-freaks as the rest of us know). We had a dog that was part German Shepherd that Judy named Rex. While Rex was a ferocious looking dog, he was a big chicken at heart. He was scared of everything. None of our pets ever came inside; they were "yard pets." But once when it thundered, poor Rex was so frightened he broke through the screen door and came in and hid under the dining table!

His bark wasn't worse than his bite, because he seldom barked...and he never bit. However, there was one thing that could make Rex bark. Sometimes when a large bird or a flock of birds flew over on a sunny day, Rex would chase the shadows on the ground barking like crazy. I always laugh when I recall poor bird-brained Rex chasing those shadows.

Sadly, there are many well-meaning Christians who are doing the same thing. They are chasing shadows: They are still trying to please God by keeping religious rules and observing religious rituals. That's the point of the writer of Hebrews is making.

Hebrews 10:1-10. "The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: [Psalm 40] 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God.'"

[writer comments] "First he said, 'Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them'—(although the law required them to be made). Then he said, 'Here I am, I have come to do your will.' He sets aside the first [covenant] to establish the second [covenant]. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

These Hebrew Christians were getting it from both sides. The Romans persecuted them for being Jews. And the other Jews persecuted them for being Christians. So they were tempted to slip back into the rituals of temple worship. Hardly any of us come from a Jewish background, so our legalism looks different. Sometimes Christians replace the grace of God with activities and rituals that we think will make God love us more; and there are things we can do that could make God love us less. That's legalism. There is NOTHING we can do to make God love us any less or any more. Salvation is a gift of God that cannot be earned. That's the good news of the New Covenant. In this message I want to first touch on two points of theological truth and then talk about a couple of practical applications.

1. THEOLOGICAL TRUTH: Animal sacrifices were only a shadow; Jesus is the reality casting the shadow

We all know what shadows are, but have you ever considered the definition of a shadow? A shadow is a dark shape cast on the ground or object that occurs when a solid object intercepts a source of light. In order for a shadow to exist you need two things. You need a source of light and you need a solid object. You can go into a totally dark room, and you won't cast a shadow. If a solid object is not blocking the light, there's no shadow. So in this analogy, the source of light is God. The Bible says, "God is light; in him is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5) The solid substance is Jesus Christ. And the shadow is the Old Testament system. The New Covenant is about moving from shadow to substance. God gave the Jews the shadow of the Law hoping they would look toward His light and see Jesus.

Shadows are real, but they are dead. If I walked up to you to greet you and you tried to shake hands with my shadow I would infer one of two things: A) that you are probably crazy, or B) you like my shadow more than you like me. How the heart of Jesus must have been broken when some many of the Jewish people loved the shadow of legalism more than the substance of the Son of the Living God.

As long as you're trying to please God by following a set of rules or rituals, you are still in the shadow of legalism. Paul writes about this in Colossians 2. I've often said that you should never start reading the Bible when you see the word "therefore." Instead you have to back up a couple of verses to make sure you know what it's there for! "He made you alive with him and forgave us all our trespasses. He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it away by nailing it to the cross." (Colossians 2:13-14 CSV) "THEREFORE, don't let anyone judge you in regard to food and drink or in the matter of a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of what was to come; the substance is Christ." (Colossians 2:16-17 CSV)

Part of Jewish legalism had to do with a kosher diet. There's a long list of foods in Leviticus that were kosher, meaning clean, and those that are non-kosher. Those requirements were nailed to the cross. And today, we often condemn people by what they eat or drink.

Several years ago I met an Irish pastor. I love the sound of the Irish lilt. As we were talking, I asked him about his family. He said one of his brothers was a vegan kook. I started to agree and say, "Yeah, those vegans are all kooks." But before I put my foot in my mouth I realized he meant this brother was a cook at a vegan restaurant. I told him what I was about to say and we got a good laugh out of it. But we shouldn't judge or be judged by what people eat or drink.

The Jews had religious festivals based on their holy days. That's where we get the word holidays. And there are some people who are still living in the shadow of thinking that if they keep the Christian holidays that will make everything okay with God. A few weeks ago someone was using a realtor to look at our house near our church. The potential buyer told me that she asked about Green Acres. The realtor told her that she was a member of Green Acres—in fact, she was a CEO member. The potential buyer said, "What's a CEO member?" The realtor said,

"Christmas and Easter Only." A person that thinks like that needs to come out of the shadows of legalism and into the light of a relationship with Jesus.

And the Jews had a holy day they called the Shabbat (rest). It was given as a divine principle of the need for living in a healthy rhythm of work, rest, and worship. But even today, there are some people that believe and act like one day is more holy than another. Jesus nailed these old regulations to His cross. They are a shadow, but the substance is Jesus.

2. THEOLOGICAL TRUTH: Animal sacrifices had no choice; Jesus chose to offer His body

Every animal sacrifice was a shadow teaching of a truth full of light, that someone has to suffer for sin. Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. But think of those animals that were killed by the priests. How many of them do you think volunteered for the job? Can you imagine the priest looking at a flock of sheep and asking, "Okay, who wants to be sacrificed today? Step forward." And they all stand there with a sheepish look on their faces. I know that's pretty baaaaad.

But Jesus was fully aware of the cost of redemption. He lived His entire life knowing that His earthly life would end on a rugged cross. They didn't take His life; He gave it. In John 10 Jesus said, "The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father." (John 10:17-18)

I must be honest and tell you that I've read through the Bible many times, and even compiled dozens of Old Testament scriptures that are Messianic Prophecies. This list of Messianic Prophecies appears in the back of my novel, *The Jerusalem Protocol*. But here's one I missed. It wasn't until I was studying Hebrews 10 to prepare for this message that I made the connection between Psalm 40 and the life of Jesus. The writer of Hebrews tells us it was Jesus who said to God, "You have given me a body." And, "I have come to do your will." That's what we celebrate at Christmas. Jesus took on human flesh in order to live among us. He needed a real body in to live, think, reason and choose. And He needed a body in order to die.

My friend and mentor Ray Stedman made this observation: "When Christ came to earth He paused on the threshold of heaven and said, 'A body you prepared for me.' There in the womb of the virgin, a human body was being formed. It was a body with nerve, muscle, sinew, hair and eyes. Growing through all the stages of a normal human embryo. Within that body was a human soul with the capacity to reason, feel, and to choose—a will, in other words."

Our passage reveals that Jesus offering is superior because it took away sin once for all. The Jews had to keep on sacrificing day after day, year after year, decade after decade, century after century but Jesus only died once for all.

I got a funny email this week about a man who was in a linguistics competition. He was asked to explain the difference between the words "complete" and the words "finished." He gave a

brilliant answer. He said, "When a man marries the right woman, he is complete. But if he marries the wrong woman, he is finished. And when the right woman catches him with the wrong one, he is completely finished!"

But Jesus shows us the meanings of both complete and finished. When He died on the cross He said, "It is finished!" And at that moment our redemption was complete!

To put it terms of the theatre, the Old Testament could represent all the rehearsals before a big play. During rehearsals the actors discover their mistakes. But there was only one main event—and it was when Jesus died on the cross. After that, the show is over; there are no repeat performances. Jesus is one and done!

That's the theological truth, so what is the practical truth? We discover who we are in Christ. This passage announces that we have been made holy. The Bible says, "We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (Hebrews 10:10)

Holiness is a concept that is greatly misunderstood. People throw the word "holy" around without having any idea of what it means. People say, "Holy Cow, Holy Mackerel, Holy Smoke, and Holy Moses." Of those, only Moses was holy.

In fact, if you remember the Batman television series from the 1960s, Batman's trusty sidekick was always saying, "Holy [exclamation], Batman." Someone with a lot of time on their hands has compiled a list of 367 different things that Robin called holy in the television series. They're all G-rated because this was 1960s daytime television. They range from, "Holy Agility, Batman" to "Holy Zorro, Batman." In fact, by calling so many things holy, Robin communicated the total opposite meaning of the word.

The word holy carries the idea of being totally unique. God is holy, because there's no one like Him in the universe. This is a holy book, because it's totally unique among all the books ever written. And we are made holy because we are different than those who don't follow Jesus Christ. In Hebrews 12 we are told to "pursue holiness, for without it, no person will see God."

One of the greatest Christian authors of our time was Jerry Bridges. And the amazing thing is that he was born right here in Tyler, Texas. Jerry was born in 1929 in a four-room house over here on South Oakland Avenue not far from the railroad tracks that pass behind Stanley's Barbecue. He struggled with health issues most of his life. His mother died when he was only 14. He attended a Baptist church in downtown and walked the aisle several times, but never had any sense of security of his salvation. He joined the Navy and listened to the testimony of a man who exhibited the joy of the Lord. That night in bed, Jerry gave his life to Christ. He graduated from the University of Oklahoma and went into the Navy where he got involved in Bible Studies sponsored by the Navigators. After working at an aircraft factory in California, he started working with the Navigators. Although he wasn't a brilliant public speaker, he was a deeply committed believer who began writing about his search for holiness. It became an obsession. He wrote a powerful book that has sold over a million copies called *The Pursuit of Holiness*.

Here are a couple of quotes from his book: "I have sought to emphasize that holiness is a process, something we never completely attain in this life. That is why we will always be pursuing—as opposed to attaining—holiness in this life. The word 'pursue' means two things: First, it requires diligence and second, it is a lifelong task."

According to the Declaration of Independence, some of the rights God has given us are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. But if you pursue happiness, you probably won't find it. But if you pursue holiness, you'll find something better; you'll find the joy of the Lord. It was a lifelong pursuit for Jerry Bridges. In March of 2016, he ended his pursuit when he went to be with his Lord. Tyler, Texas should celebrate having launched such an influential author.

Holiness is not about being sinless. It is about a desire to sin less. Jerry Bridges wrote: "God does not require a perfect, sinless life to have fellowship with Him, but He does require that we be serious about holiness, that we grieve over sin in our lives instead of justifying it, and that we earnestly pursue holiness as a way of life."

Let me give you two desires you will possess when you pursue holiness. Jesus spoke about His will and His body in this passage. Those two are the key to pursuing holiness.

3. PRACTICAL TRUTH: Because I am holy I surrender my will to God's purpose

Jesus revealed the cost of discipleship when He said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9:23)

Someone said it doesn't take much of a man or woman to be a Christian, but it takes *all* that he or she is. Total surrender is better than continually rededicating yourself to God. Through the years I've been asked a few times, "Pastor, I notice in our church when you give the invitation, you don't ask for people to come down and rededicate their lives. Why don't you do that, because sometimes I want to rededicate my life?" I have a deep feeling that we do a disservice to people by telling them that all they have to do is rededicate.

In one of my churches in Alabama, every time I gave the invitation, a lady came down the aisle, Boom! She was the first one out, running down to the front to shake my hand. "I just want to rededicate my life to Jesus." I said, "Bless you darling." She would go back every single Sunday. I know some people who have worn their own little private pathway in the carpet of the aisle of the church going down to rededicate. If you are dedicated, you don't have to keep rededicating.

A couple of weeks ago we had a special dinner for couples in our church married over fifty years. I had the joy of leading dozens of those couples in renewing their wedding vows. It was a beautiful sight. It's good for couples to renew their vows occasionally. But rededicating your life to the Lord over and over would be like renewing your wedding vows every week; it would no longer be special.

Will you surrender your will to God? It's okay to say, "Lord this is what I really want." But then be sure to say, "But not my will but YOURS be done."

4. PRACTICAL TRUTH: Because I am holy I offer my body for God's service

Look at Romans 12:1 since it begins with "therefore" we've got to look at the previous verses: For from him and through him and for him are all things. "To him be the glory forever! Amen." (Romans 11:36) "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship." (Romans 12:1)

There is still a sacrifice God desires. He asks us to sacrifice our bodies for Him. But thank God, these aren't sacrifices that are slaughtered. He wants a LIVING sacrifice. He wants our bodies to be available to Him for service. Paul wrote this during the time of the philosophy of Greek dualism. The popular thought was that as long as you kept a pure mind and heart, you could do anything you wanted to with your body. The mind was supreme and the body was not important. This terrible philosophy still abounds today. People say, "It's my body I can do with it what I want—as long as I have a good heart." But Paul attacked that stinking thinking by teaching, "your body is the Temple of Holy Spirit!" God wants you to sacrifice your bodies for His service.

Believers, holiness involved saying, "God I'm yours. My body is yours. Use my hands as your hands. Use my feet as your feet. Use my mouth as your mouth."

CONCLUSION

The Pursuit of Holiness involves a daily and sometimes hourly surrender of your will to the will of God. It requires a continual process of making our bodies available to God.

Preachers often talk about giving God your time, your talents, and your treasures. But God doesn't want your money; He doesn't want your time; He doesn't want your talents. He wants you. If you give Him you, all those other things come along.

A college student who was in a worship service felt God was calling him. The offering plate was being passed and he had absolutely no money to give that night. When the offering plate came to him, he picked it up, stepped out into the aisle. He placed the offering plate down on the floor, and then stepped into the plate. Then he lifted his hands and said, "Here I am, Lord, I'm all yours."

It's time for some of you, not to step up to the plate, but to step into the offering plate and say, "Here I am, Lord! Use me!" If you do that you'll be living in the light instead of stumbling around in the shadows.

OUTLINE

THEOLOGICAL TRUTH

1. Animal sacrifices were only a shadow; Jesus is the reality casting the shadow

"He made you alive with him and forgave us all our trespasses. He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it away by nailing it to the cross." *Colossians 2:13-14* CSV "THEREFORE, don't let anyone judge you in regard to food and drink or in the matter of a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of what was to come; the substance is Christ." *Colossians 2:16-17* CSV

2. Animal sacrifices had no choice; Jesus chose to offer His body

"The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father." *John 10:17-18*

PRACTICAL TRUTH

"We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."
Hebrews 10:10

3. Because I am holy I surrender my will to God's purpose

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." *Luke 9:23*

4. Because I am holy I offer my body for God's service

"To him be the glory forever! Amen." *Romans 11:36* "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship." *Romans 12:1*

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



*David O. Dykes, Pastor
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