

The Shadow, The Reality & Beyond

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[0 : 00] I'm reading from Hebrews 10, starting at verse 1 through to verse 18. No longer have any consciousness of sin.

But in these sacrifices, there is a reminder of sin every year, for it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me.

In burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.

When he said above, You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings, these are offered according to the law. Then he added, Behold, I have come to do your will.

He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. And by that will, we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

[1 : 30] And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.

For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us. For after saying, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord, I will put my laws on their heart and write them on their minds.

Then he added, I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more. Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin. Good morning, church.

How are you all doing? Good. I'm very delighted and honored to have the opportunity to preach and share God's word today. Why don't we bow our heads and pray together?

Yeah. Our heavenly Father, it is your word that created the world and it's by your word and your son that we are sustained.

[2 : 47] We need you, Lord. So please help us to be excited about your word and above all to be excited about your son, Jesus. Help our minds and hearts turn to you and may your word change our lives.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Yeah. Yeah. So welcome to Hebrews chapter 10. Today is our 10th sermons on the series. Just wanted to ask, have you ever considered what life would be like if we could travel back in time to the first century, the time of the Roman Empire, when some of the apostles were still around, the New Testaments that are now in our hands are still being written and we were part of the early church.

What would we be struggling with as an early church, as a first century Christian? History says that, unlike us in 2025, the early church wasn't struggling with gender issues or US politics.

Or evangelicalism versus Pentecostalism or computer PowerPoint problems. They were a minority group of people, many of Jewish descent, who upon hearing the good news of Jesus Christ gave their life to him and gave up their Jewish way of life to follow Jesus.

Some suffered physical abuse. Others lost their properties, their jobs, their social status, pretty much everything. Following Jesus was very, very costly.

[4 : 26] And besides social economic changes, becoming Christian also meant forsaking all the daily seasonal rituals that they grew up with if they were a Jew. For example, circumcision ceremonies, cleansing rituals, temple sacrifice where their community is centered and all the feasts and that they celebrated throughout the year, all canceled.

It's like having all our electronic devices taken away, including the old television. Plus our birthdays, our Christmas, our Easter, which is coming up soon, our Labor Day, and even that King's birthday, all canceled at the same time.

Pretty devastating, isn't it? Just imagine that. In Mark chapter 8, Jesus said, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, carry the cross, and follow me.

For whoever would save his life would lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels would save it. Our Savior was not kidding. He expected his followers to pay a hefty price as a result of following him, and the earthly church experienced exactly what Jesus said to the full.

To get out of this hardship could be quite simple. You just go back to the old weight of life. Stop following Jesus. Stop being countercultural.

[5 : 51] And just be a normal Jew. Practice what Moses says. Follow everyone else. Denounce Jesus. This is the kind of stuff the early church leaders were up against, and that is why the Letters to the Hebrews, which was a sermon, was originally written.

The early local church needed a strong reminder that Jesus is better than the angels, bigger than Moses, far more superior than any priest in any sanctuary and any sacrifices.

So it should not make sense for anyone to give up on Jesus, no matter the cost. And today, as we look at the first half of chapter 10, we will see the author of Hebrews going a step further.

This one step further is a huge step further. Using the Old Testament, he argues that Jesus is better than even the Mosaic covenant, the law. And that Jesus had already replaced this law.

To us, it's like, so what? To the Jews, the law was what gave them their national identities. These people were originally slaves in Egypt for hundreds of years.

[7 : 00] But God rescued them and made a covenant with them and promised to make them his special people. Here is what the Lord said to Moses on Mount Sinai in Exodus chapter 19.

Thus, you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the people of Israel, you yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself.

Now, therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples. For all the earth is mine and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel. The law was what gave the Jews their identity according to God. Now, 20 years ago, Cindy and I had moved to London and we were working there and living there.

Everyone we met asked where we were from because people just move in and out of London. Nobody actually stays there, apparently. Yeah. And so we told them proudly, we're Australians.

[8 : 14] Now, 90% of the Brits would look at us with the weirdest look on their face. You're, what? How come you look Chinese? What's with the accent? You know, so after a while, we just gave up.

You know, we're just like, okay, forget about this. We're from Hong Kong. Much easier that way, right? To us, giving us our Australian national identity, although we're still patriotic, didn't seem like a huge deal.

But to the Jews, the Jewish Christians, that is totally something else. To give up on practicing God's law is to give up God's covenant promise, give up on being God's kingdom, people, and nation, and give up on their Jewish identity.

Basically, they're self-excommunicated. The stakes are super high. Why would anyone do that for anybody? Today, I'm going to share with you three reasons.

Following the text of Hebrews, chapter 10, verses 1 to 18, it'd be great if you can follow along, I will first discuss why it makes perfect sense for the Jewish Christians to give up on the law, which gave them their identities.

[9 : 28] Along the way, I'll try to relate this to us. And the question I would like us to think about and consider today is, why should we give up on whatever it is that defines us and follow Jesus instead?

Now, here there are three headings, and they're in your bulletins. First, the practice that never made perfect. Second, the propitiation that is perfect.

Third, and last point, the promise of complete transformation. So, are we ready for this? No? Just want to check that you're still here.

All right, let's go. First, the practice that never made perfect. Now, practice makes perfect is a widely accepted saying, isn't it? But if we were to keep practicing something that deviates just slightly from the right way, whether in sport or music or your studies or your skincare routine, chances are you

will achieve something that is anything but perfect.

Hebrews, chapter 10, verse 1 says, For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come, instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

[10:46] Every Jewish person in the first century knew that Yahweh, that God, is supremely holy, and that he is highly sensitive to sin because they grew up memorizing large parts of their Hebrew scriptures.

Not that God gets sick, but he is a bit like someone with nut allergies. God's level of tolerance for presence of sin, it's zero.

Zilch. Now, some schools in Australia have signs saying, we are a nut-free school. I suppose that helps people enroll and help them with the numbers, right?

Because some kids could get really, really sick from the presence of nuts without even touching them. In a similar way, God's temple, which symbolizes his earthly presence, has dozens of signs that says, I'm a sin-free God.

Not written signs on plastics, but signs that involves real people, real sacrifices like animals and actions. Leviticus 16 says that, besides the tent of meeting, which more people can access and touch, which needed blood atonement, even the holy place, which is further in, and the altar and areas restricted only to the priest, also needed blood atonement.

[12:05] All because of the uncleanness and sins of the Israeli people. So sin is like airborne contamination. And on top of that, they had all the clothes changing and rituals of washing and everything.

It's quite like us during COVID, isn't it? We were putting alcohol disinfectants everywhere. You know, even on grocery shopping bags, we like spraying them, you know, to avoid contagion.

A lot more washing and frequent washing of clothes too during that time for us. And that is how sensitive God is to sin. Zero tolerance. Every Jew knew that because their law said so.

But what they didn't know was that all these animal sacrifices that had been offered yearly for thousands of years did not actually make perfect the priests or the worshippers they were representing so that they could all draw near to the real presence of their God who has zero tolerance for sin.

That is why the Hebrew authors had to break the bad news to them. What a bummer. And of course, this wasn't the only bad news. Earlier in Hebrews chapter 9, the author also said that the earthly tent or tabernacle was just a copy of God's presence, not the real deal.

[13:27] And that the animal blood was only a copy of Christ's blood, which symbolically cleansed only the outside, but not the inside. It's like they were living in Legoland.

You know, everything were grand and fascinating, but they were just copies of everything from Harbour Bridge to Notre Dame with fake people, fake grass, fake animals. And the harsh reality is hammered home with a logical argument today in Hebrews chapter 10, verse 2.

And I paraphrase. If the practice of offering repeated sacrifices annually cleansed only the worshippers' conscience, that is, making them perfect or complete in God's eyes, wouldn't they have stopped the practice?

Or to use an analogy, if the bleaching worked and the linen is already white as snow, why would anyone keep washing it?

So, although the Jews have been obediently following God's given law for centuries, it was all futile, useless, wasted.

[14:34] Yes, the law had given them their identity. And without the law, there is no order, no holy nation, and no priestly kingdoms. But what they practiced year after year for almost 1,500 years could not actually qualify the high priest or the people they represented actual access to God.

And instead of a clean conscience, Hebrews chapter 10, verse 3, and if you take a look here, it says all they got from practicing the law was a reminder of sins every single year.

An annual reminder of separation. It's like those of us who are doing or having tried long-distance relationship. You were connected via letters in the old days, phone calls that you have to keep paying money if it's really long-distance.

You're sending tapes and things like that. Some of these younger guys have no idea what I'm talking about. Now, if you're Gen Z or something, you're dating via texting and IG or Zoom or something like that, aren't you?

You can't hold hands. You're not watching movies in the cinema together. You can't even have a meal together. You are not truly enjoying each other. Every call is like a reminder of separation. [15:53] You're connecting, kind of, but your heart is crying out, this can't be it forever, right? That is why the Jewish Christians must give up on practicing their law clean and clear.

It does not make them perfect as access to the real God requires. Should they choose to remain with the law or the shadow that we heard about during kids' time in verse 1, they will just be stuck with their consciousness of sin and never arrive at enjoying God's real presence.

A pretty hopeless outcome for this life and also beyond. So what does this all mean to us who are not born under the law of Moses? I have a few thoughts that come to mind.

I just want to share this with you. First, from this passage, we saw that the removal of inward sin seems to be what the author was preoccupied with.

This can never remove sin. This can never do away with sin. Do we share the same preoccupation in our daily lives? How often do we think about sins that's inside?

[17:03] If God who gave Israel the law with all the sacrifices and all this requirement of purifications and he promised to set them apart as a holy nation, but then that could only get them to draw near to a copy but not actual of his presence, where do we Gentiles who had none of those things belong?

With respect to God's presence. Where do we actually belong apart from Jesus? Third, practicing God's law gave Israel their identity, but it did not make them perfect or take away sins because outside-in cleansing never worked.

If that's the case, what would the little subcultural laws that we follow achieve with respect to our relationship with God? Now here's some of the subcultural things that I just picked up in this past year that since we came back to Australia that you might be familiar with.

For example, and I heard this at a restaurant yesterday, there's nothing more important than health. Another one. Sport obsession equals masculinity.

Another one. Google says, so, it must be true. Another one is, you do you. Don't tell me what to do. [18:31] And we have this cancelled culture, don't we? Like, let's unfriend this guy. Another one is, I have, there's nothing political here, I have the right to have a voice. And another one that's kind of older is, there's this better home and garden culture that's around.

Everyone's just spending poor fortune in Bunnings, you know. What recession? You know, Bunnings full. There's all these other ones as well, and we can all think about it.

These are these mini laws that the world has given us. That, you know, sometimes, perhaps sometimes we might just indiscriminately follow. Do they give us true hope in this life and beyond? Now, don't get me wrong here. Not all cultural laws are inherently bad. But they all strive to give us some sort of identity, don't they? An image to portray. The question is, are they really worth practicing if they fall short of making us perfect?

Or, are they worth really practicing if they point us to some hope that is other than Jesus? If God's law given to Israel never made perfect anyone, then no other law in this world does.

[19:52] But what God requires, he provides. So in the next couple of verses, we will find that God has provided the propitiation that is perfect. That's point two on our bulletins.

First, what is propitiation? To propitiate means to offer a sacrifice that appeases God's righteous wrath against sin, which we are full of.

The propitiator, then, is the one who offers. And the propitiation is the sacrifice. If God's wrath is like a fire, then propitiation is something or someone that quenches that fire.

So how did God feel when the Jews following the law offered up their propitiation? In Hebrews 10, verse 5, the author, paraphrasing Psalms 40, verse 6-8, positions the passage as Christ's own words and says that it is Jesus' understanding, not his own, that God hath taken no pleasure in any of the offerings.

Ouch! What a disappointment. Those offerings cost a fortune, you know. The propitiation done, according to the law, just wasn't the right stuff that appeased God.

[21:09] And the reason? It is in verse 11 here. Please take a look. Every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sin.

Never is a strong word. Not once, not for a nanosecond, did any of the costly offering actually work. God has serial tolerance for sin, and sin is what fuels God's wrath, even though it grieves him at the same time.

So until sin is effectively dealt with, God is not going to be appeased. In other words, unless we are sanctified, God cannot be satisfied.

The perfect propitiation, then, must be one that sanctifies our sins. Earlier, in Hebrews 2, 17, the author already introduced the idea that Jesus is our propitiator and also our propitiation.

Jesus is both the offering mediator and the sacrifice. He threw himself into the fire of God's wrath. Wrath, sorry. It's American there.

[22 : 18] But how does Jesus sanctify us? Let's hear what Jesus says in Hebrews chapter 10. First, let's take a look here in verse 5. First, Jesus became fully human according to God's provision.

Second half of verse 5 says, a body you, God, have prepared for me, Jesus. And then Jesus, fully human, following God's word, carries out God's will with delightful obedience.

That's how he sanctifies us. Again, the author is paraphrasing Psalms 40. He in Hebrews chapter 10, verse 7. So he's kind of shortened the original a bit if you compare the two.

His audience probably knew Psalm 40 already, like we know Amazing Grace because it was a song written for the temple choir. And here are the original lyrics from the Old Testament. And I'm quoting from Psalm 40 here.

Then I said, Behold, I come in the scroll of the book. It is written of me. I delight to do your will. Oh my God, your law is within my heart. This is the second step of how Jesus sanctified us, delightfully fulfilling what God says his will is as a human.

[23 : 27] And the third step of sanctification, Hebrews chapter 10, verse 10 explains, it is by this will that Jesus offered his body once for all so that it is through his sacrifice that we have been sanctified.

Jesus lived the life that we ought to have lived with delightful obedience to God and died a death that we ought to have died, slaughtered like an animal to sanctify us, to make us whole and set us apart to be in mutually loving relationship, self-giving relationship with God and with one another. we can have atonement or atonement with God not because of our obedience and sacrifices but because of his sons. Jesus went from being the creator universe, the lord of hosts of all the angelic beings, down to become like a slaughtered animal so that we won't be slaughtered by God's wrath. God made Jesus, who knew no sin, to be seen on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in him. 2 Corinthians chapter 5.

We came down low, he came down low and lower than low so that we may go up high to where we never deserve to be. I'm not a professional firefighter but recently I joined a school to work there and so I went through some mandatory fire training.

[24 : 55] Fire fighting training, not lighting fires. Did you know that there are different fire extinguishers for different types of fire? I only just found out.

They have water foam based extinguishers that are good for like wood and paper and other combustible stuff and there are other ones like dry powder or carbon dioxide extinguishers. They're all labelled on the red thing, the tanks. They're all good for something and not good for others. Now, there's this special type of fire, they call it class D fire.

Class D fire. It's a metal fire and it's like combusting aluminum and titanium and magnesium, all this elementary table stuff that I can't pronounce.

Apparently, it is highly dangerous, very volatile fire. You know, and what the fire expert says in the training is, if that happens, don't try to fight the fire and whatever extinguishers that you have, just leave it there, right?

[25 : 58] Shut the place down, evacuate, call the professional firefighters in. The fire of God's wrath, it's a bit like a metal fire.

It is beyond us to extinguish. Only Jesus, with his life and blood poured out, can quench God's fire. We also need to quit trying to appease our holy God because even Jesus, our great high priest, is done with it.

The author says that in Hebrews chapter 10 verses 12 to 13, Christ has accomplished his high priestly mission for all time. Past, present, and future sins are all dealt with.

He has moved on from sacrificing for sins. It is now onto his ministry of kingly rule, the Bible says. That is why Jesus has sat down at the right of God, waiting for God to completely subdue his enemies and pile them under Jesus' feet like a footstool.

That's an allusion from Psalm 110. Now, to sum up point two, it is by Christ's sacrifice that we have been sanctified so that God is satisfied.

[27 : 15] Hebrews 10 14 says Jesus has perfected for all time some people. Perfected already? Who? He's talking about us. We've been made whole, complete, and perfect in God's sight, even though our daily experiences might say otherwise, and if you're married, your spouse will remind you of that every day.

Apart from Jesus, we are supposed to be the objects of God's wrath, love, but because of Jesus, we are now the objects of his pleasure. Would our subcultures look at us and say that we are perfected for all time?

Or would they forever say that we need to get better and try harder and keep up with this positive thinking and self-help or white lotus trip or yoga or mindfulness app, listening to your inner voice and do some trending diet or whatever they decide to put up on TikTok tomorrow?

One tries to enslave us and the other says we are free already. Jesus has done it. Which one would you choose? Now, Jesus is the propitiation that is perfect.

John Stott in his book *The Cross of Christ* says this, the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man.

[28 : 43] Because of Jesus' substitution, we are now set apart and purified, no longer defiling or defiled and contagious, by which we can confidently approach God's throne of grace, fully enjoy him, rain, hail, or shine.

But wait, that's not all that Jesus has achieved. There is more. that brings us to point two, sorry, point three, the last point of today, the promise of complete transformation.

In Hebrews 10, verse 9, we are told that when Jesus completes his mission of sanctifying us through his self-offering, he does away the first in order to establish the second.

First and second what? the answer is covenant or the law. A covenant is a promise or positive commitment to give that is later fulfilled.

For example, when God gave Abraham a covenant saying, I will make you into a great nation or I will bless those who bless you, he commits to it and then he later fulfills it, although it felt like taking forever for Abraham for a while.

[30 : 02] over the course of the biblical narrative, God has made a number of covenants with a good number of people, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David.

These are some of the key ones and there are other ones too in the Bible. But in the context of Hebrews, the main covenants here, like the book of Hebrews here, are the Mosaic covenants, also known as the old covenant, and the new covenant promised in Exodus 24 and Jeremiah 31 respectively.

The old covenant was inaugurated by animal blood, while the new one by the blood of Jesus. Both covenants are very purposeful.

The old aim at partial and temporary atonement for sin and restoration of relationship between God and his chosen people to an extent, and the new, as we've discussed, complete atonement for sin and full renewal of relationship between God and those trusting in Jesus Christ.

Now, in both covenants, God promises transformation too. In the old, God promised the people of Israel to transform them from what? Slaves to God's holy nation, the kingdom of priests.

[31 : 18] How about the new one? Now, there are three that I would like to share. Three things about this new covenant promise that I would like to share. First, the new covenant promises a transformation that is inside out.

Transformation that is inside out. How does it do it? Let's take a look at Hebrews chapter 10 verse 16. This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord.

Them being the church here, not just the house of Israel. I will put my laws on their hearts and write them on their minds. laws on hearts and minds.

Now, what is the heart here? The heart, contrary to modern thinking, is not only the seat of our feelings. In the biblical sense, the heart is also the seat of our will, our decision making, our emotions, our mind, our desires, pretty much center of everything.

Hebrews chapter 4 23 says, above all else, guard your heart. For what? Everything you do grows from it. Everything you do flows from everything.

[32 : 28] Our objects are love, trust, and obedience. Everything that is in us, that comes out of us, is from the heart. That is what the new covenant promises.

Transformation of the heart, inside and out. If you think about it, this is the exact opposite of the old covenant, isn't it? Because as we discussed earlier, the practices of the law could only cleanse the flesh symbolically, the outside, but change nothing in the inside as the consciousness of sin or guilt and shame and everything that goes with it lingers on.

Now, the second thing the new covenant promises is a heart that is filled with ardent, centered love, a heart that's like Jesus. Jesus. When God talks about putting his law into our hearts and minds, it is unlikely that he's talking about turning us into Old Testament Bible trivia kings.

Can you recall when Jesus was tested by a lawyer in Matthew chapter 22? The guy asked Jesus, which is the great commandment in the law? How did Jesus reply?

Jesus said, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like you. You shall love your neighbor as yourself also.

[33 : 50] And on these two commandments depend all the law and prophets. To have a heart filled with God's law is to have a heart filled with God's love.

God's love is other centered love. That is on others and on God. A few moments ago, we looked at Psalms 40 verse 8, didn't we?

And I quoted, I delight to do your will, O my God, your law is within my heart. These were the words originally of David, but even more so, as Hebrews 10, 5 says, it was Jesus speaking.

Having God's law in the heart then is not like someone who knows a lot of Bible, but having a heart like Jesus. And it is because of this heart that he went on the cross and gave his life to us, for us.

A perfect and complete heart in the sight of God. And of course, our hearts are still a work in progress. While only glimpses of our transformation may emerge in this life, its entirety will be surely unveiled in the other side of eternity.

[35 : 03] Third and lastly, the new covenant promises a transformation that is fueled, not by ourselves, but by God's mercy. Hebrews 10, verses 17 to 18 says here, if you can follow with me, I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.

That's God's new covenant. Again, he's paraphrasing Jeremiah 31 here. Then the author explains, where there is forgiveness of this, there is no longer any offering for sin.

This, again, is the exact opposite of the old covenant. With the old, it's about an annual reminder of sin. But with the new, God chooses to forgive and literally forget, not literally forget, but counts as forget, which means he's not holding our sins against us anymore.

And we all know why, don't we? It is because if the accuser goes to God and says, look at Calvin, he's stuffed up again, Jesus, he says, look at my hands and my feet.

His blood is covering us once and for all. So here we have it, the new covenant. It promises a transformation that is inside out, a heart like Jesus, fueled by God's mercy, a perfect and complete transformation.

[36 : 30] What a promise. or to put it another way, the new covenant promises us transformation that isn't about adopting a new set of rules. It is about hearts that is transformed by the gospel.

Finally, back to our original question, why should we give up on whatever it is that defines us and follow Jesus instead? it is because the gospel of Jesus is infinitely greater than everything in the world.

Our heavenly father, our hearts are so small and so broken, we fail to see how holy you are, how great you are, and how wonderful your son and everything that he has done for us is.

Help us see your beauty, and feel the reality of the gospel every day in our lives, so that we can be transformed by you and to reflect your glory in this one, in this broken, very broken world.

In Jesus' name we pray, amen. what do you