

Scripture: Hebrews 10:1-10

Text: Hebrews 10:1..._...the law
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Subject-Topic: Good Living is Not
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Proposition: Good resolutions and good
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Date written: December 29, 1972

Dates and places used:

Walden Pond, Dec. 31, 72

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Introduction:

1. These days we read a great deal about the conflict in Ireland. A story coming out of the tragic area is sort of funny, and can serve us today to "kick off" the thinking which was started for me in reading the Scripture ~~we have~~ ^{we have} read today.

According to this story, a fellow manages to leave Ireland and emigrate to the United States. When he lands at Kennedy International Airport in New York, he is surrounded by dozens of reporters who deluge him with questions. "Look," the travel weary Irishman said, "You fellows take the smallest incident and exaggerate it just to sell a few extra newspapers. It's about time you printed the truth about my country. Northern Ireland is a peaceful country. The Catholics get along with the Protestants, we all get along with the British Army, and IRA is really a benevolent organization."

The reporters thanked the visitor for straightening them out, and one of the newspapermen asked him, "By the way Sir, what do you do for a living?"

"Me?" replies the Irishman. "I'm a tail gunner on a bakery truck."

(from Funny Wunny World, 11/6/70)

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The reporters thanked the visitor for straightening them out, and one of the newspapermen asked him, "By the way, what do you do for a living?" "I'm a baker," replies the Irishman. "I'm a tall banner on a bakery truck."

(from Lucky Funny World, 11/6/79)

If that story strikes your funny bone at all, it is because the Irishman's job was so opposite to the type you'd think he would have if all were as he said it was. That is the way people often are, saying one thing and perhaps really believing it, while acting a way that is the opposite of the thing they say.

2. One such class of people, saying one thing but not really living up to it, is mentioned in the Scripture that we read for today. ~~In terminology that we recognized today because we have heard it put this way,~~ there are people who say that they "live a good life," ^{but} and they don't worship God formally in Church or anywhere else, and don't have to in order to live such good lives. We'll consider such people ~~in another way~~ as we examine today's Scripture.

3. Another group of people, suggested by our Scripture, ~~might be~~ ^{are} those who seem to take great pride in regular church attendance, in serving in church administrative and service positions, in being good members of community and civic organizations, and

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II. Today's Scripture selection retold or summarized, somewhat in our own wording.

1. This is a Scripture that is a bit hard to understand, according to my reading of it and according to several full-time Bible students. Whoever draws conclusions from it must do some interpreting or else accept somebody ~~else~~ else's interpretation of what it means.

2. As I understand it, the basic or dominant idea of Hebrews is that Jesus Christ is the high priest of the Hebrew faith, who, however, serves as the chief high priest for anyone, Hebrew or not, who will accept his services. The book teaches that Jesus Christ alone is the one ~~that~~ ^{who} gives a valid interpretation of Old Testament, Hebrew sacrificial rites so that there is ~~any~~ meaning in them for all people.

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3. This passage, Hebrews 10:1-10, deals with some aspects of that old bloody-sacrifice worship, but does not treat it too clearly. It points up some common areas in which ~~we~~ we do get confused quite often. It deals with the questions of righteousness and of religious ~~are~~ ceremony and how they fit into our lives.

4. The summary of this Scripture is this: It is pointed out that law, meaning Jewish ceremonial and religious law, is but a shadow, an indication of "things to come," of the true form of the best state of mankind which can and will some day exist. People try to purify themselves repeatedly, "year after year," by bloody sacrifices on the altar, but they never become perfect thereby. If they did, they would not have to repeat these sacrifices again and again. If they were perfect they would have no consciousness of sin, and would not need these ceremonies of sacrifice. Then the writer quotes as Christ's words some words which are in the earlier writing of Psalms 40:6-8:

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in burnt offerings and sin offerings
thou hast taken no pleasure.

Then I said, 'Lo, I have come to do
thy will, O God.'

as it is written of me in the roll
of the book."

The chief suggestion here, as Hebrews interprets Psalms, is that obedience to God is the true sacrifice. Instead of ~~an~~ animal sacrifices, as had been the custom, Christ offers himself as the one sacrifice truly and fully acceptable to God on behalf of us all.

~~III~~ **IV**. Turning now from our summary of the Scripture, let's look at what the Scripture has to say to those who feel that they can live good lives by themselves without help of formal religion.

1. Perhaps a story will help. It's about a man who hadn't flown on an airplane before, and maybe who wasn't too bright. Before the plane took off, the stewardess gave chewing gum to all the passengers. "This will help you keep your ears from popping when we attain high altitude," she said. After the plane had landed, ~~the~~ worried looking man came over to the *hostess.*

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"This was my first flight," he told her. "It was very nice, but now that it's over, could you tell me how to get the gum out of my ears?"

Like gum in the ears, some people have let themselves be kept from ~~the~~ right insights by hearing only part of the meaning of life, of faith; the part that they can themselves be good and are responsible for their own morality. That's true, but it's only part of the message. Like the man hearing about the gum, but not thinking it through to realize that just to chew it would help keep the tubes open and prevent pressure troubles.

2. The problem with the idea that you can be good yourself, and don't need worship or church or others is that you come to overrate yourself. Nobody is perfect, and everybody needs to be reminded of that fact, if he is to be humanly humble enough to be pleasant for others to be around. Of course, when you're quite puffed up and overrate yourself, it seems that there's always somebody around to deflate you. When that happens, you feel hurt, and a friendship with those around you is almost impossible.

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3. That is where regular "sacrifices," as the Scripture calls the services in the temple, can be helpful. Sacrifices were offered as a way of saying "I'm sorry, Lord, for wrongs I have done." The wrongs were spelled out in the ceremony by the individual in his prayers, perhaps even confessed and told to the priest who prescribed the value and type of sacrifice to fit the crime. If a person felt that he had to do this to avoid great punishment and great eternal danger, he was apt to do it. It reminded him that he was not perfect, that he repeatedly was incapable of perfection and living the really good life all the time, and that he needed to be forgiven his wrongs towards others; forgiven by God and by others.

4. Similarly, we think that when in church we point to ~~the~~ dangers in certain personal attitudes and habits, and to ~~the~~ wrongs in society within which we live, that the same function can be served, and needs to be served. People may not like to be told that they're not so good after all, but we all need to be told that ~~after all~~. Being told it needs to be coupled with a means of forgiveness and acceptance, and our

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ceremony and worship should hold up that assurance too. God does forgive, but after the wrong-doer ~~xxxxxxx~~ recognizes and confesses his wrongs. The person who considers himself as "good" and sees no need to recognize his shortcomings does have a problem! The problem is that he is deceiving himself.

5. The other side of this truth is also presented in our Scripture, and we need to think about it.

III. The Scripture makes clear the point that some religious formality is helpful, perhaps necessary, in every life, for that person to achieve his highest, BUT That ^{these} never take away sin completely, never make a person perfect.

1. Of course, this is the essence, the thought, of the criticism that we hear so often, that so many church people ~~xxx~~ are hypocrites. They worship regularly, but are cruel and dishonest with their loved ones and neighbors. They don't practice what they preach. Because of so many people like this, many other people choose to stay away from formal worship, from the church.

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2. You've probably known people who were present every time the doors of their church opened, and who like to brag on their perfect attendance records, or on other signs of their loyalty to their church. They are to be found active in the church boards, often almost fighting to hold the same positions for years and years. Yet so many of these people have only a limited vision, limited to their own church and community, and then only to the few ~~special~~ people within their limited circles. They exemplify the reason for the criticism to which we are so often prone, that ~~the~~ church folks are no better --perhaps worse-- than many other people.

3. In our Scripture the point was made that regularly yearly sacrifices did not stop sinning by those who made the sacrifices. That's true still, that regular worship does not always (perhaps not often) produce saints, or make really good people. What it may do is produce a bunch of people who are satisfied that they have met the requirements, but who see the requirements as one of worship and church attendance and giving or tithing or other formal ceremonial habits.

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These things are needful and helpful, but they can be given too much credit ~~for~~ as evidence of goodness. This is a danger.

Conclusion:

1. The Scripture brings these two sides of human nature about religion together neatly, in presenting the basic Christian concept. It points up the impossibility of righteousness by oneself, while at the same time ~~is~~ showing that righteousness is not achieved merely through regular religious custom and habits.

2. It goes further, and compares Jesus Christ to a one-time sacrifice made by and for all people. No longer are regular yearly sacrifices necessary because Christ is the once-for-all and also the always-being-made sacrifice, sufficient for everybody. No one is forced ~~into~~ ~~looking~~ at him that way, but when you do you find that this imbalance we've been talking about comes neatly into balance.

3. Christ took part in the customary religious practices of his day, but did not hesitate to criticize them and to try to correct and improve them.

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3. Christ took part in the custom of religious practices of his day, but did not hesitate to criticize them and to try to correct and improve them.

He practiced personal righteousness, love for others, and saw the problems of his day. He kept his own humility, and knew that as a man he wasn't perfect, ~~as we know~~ ^{THIS} because he rebuked somebody who called him "good master," saying "there is none good but your Father who is in heaven."

4. We, too, can learn from Christ, in his bringing together of the two strains of personal righteous living by ones efforts, and of the need for formal worship to remind us of our needs and of our blessings.

5. At this year-end and year-start, it is a good time to realize that ~~our~~ resolutions for the coming year are good to make, but that we will not achieve them by ourselves. We will need help constantly, ~~in being~~ ^{TO} reminded of our shortcomings, ~~in being~~ ^{TO} shown that God and others care and want to help, and ~~in giving~~ ^{TO} God praise for ~~the~~ help from him through others.

6. That is the message of Hebrews 10:1-10, a New Year's ~~xx~~ message: that good resolutions and good living are not enough to sustain us in meaningful lives and a sure faith in the future.

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These come about chiefly through trust in God through faith in Jesus Christ. Personal devotions and public worship can be helpful in reminding you of your shortcomings and of God's love to help you overcome them. You need both:

to live as righteously as you can, and to seek God through participation in formal regular worship and ceremony.

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