

## God's Shadow Activity - 7/15/2012

*Greg Boyd*

Well, ladies and gentlemen, today we're going back to Colossians and moving ahead two verses, verses 16-17. We actually ran through these eight verses several weeks ago but I'm focusing on these two verses. And we're entitling this message "God's Shadow Activity" and it's going to address a very, very, very important topic; it feels huge, really huge. In fact, that's why in this service we cut out one of the worship songs to give more time to deliver this and I appreciate the worship team for their flexibility. It feels like kind of a watershed moment, one of those chair's moments that you have in the life of a church. It concerns the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament and how we interpret that. How do you reconcile some of the stuff that you find in the Old Testament, some of the portraits of God you find in the Old Testament, with the revelation you have of God in Christ? And a lot hangs on this; a whole lot hangs on this.

Some of you know that I've been in a project, a research writing project, for the last four years addressing this issue. And it's been an interesting four years for me. Where I'm at now is that where I was at when I started. The thesis that I started off with, that I thought I was going to prove, I finally abandoned. It just didn't work. But then I feel like God's given me clarity about this that I never had before. Sometimes, honestly, it feels like revelation. And I'm not going to say, "Thus sayeth the Lord". I'm saying, to me, it feels like revelation. My eyes are opened to see something clearly that I hadn't seen before. And I've come to see how vital it is that we read our Bibles through the lens of the cross, where we finally find out what God is really like. And everything needs to be interpreted in that light.

The things I'm going to share this morning are going to be new, even to you who have heard me speak on this topic. It's been on my mind as I'm writing this book, which will be done next year, hopefully sometime. But as I've shared on this, I've sprinkled some of it into messages but the way I'm delivering it here this morning is going to be new; it's a different angle. And for those of you who have never heard any of this before, it's going to be radically new. If you're new to the church here, in all likelihood it's going to be a complete reframe. It's going to raise a lot of questions, I guarantee you, and that's why I'm encouraging you to text in whatever questions arise or write out questions that arise and turn it in to The Hub and we'll address those in the weekend service in August. We'll designate the whole service to Q&A time.

This is my way, as I've struggled with this...I've been in process with this thing for twenty five years. And the last three years has been this turning of a different perspective and working it out. It's a process. And this is my way of resolving this difficult issue of how to reconcile some

of the stuff you find in the Old Testament with the revelation of God in Christ. It doesn't have to be your way, OK? This is my way and I'm just going to share it. We in the church make this kind of distinction. Not everything is equally important. [Follow the link to the presentation slides for a visual representation [http://media.whchurch.org/2012/2012-07-15\\_Boyd\\_Gods-Shadow-Activity.pdf](http://media.whchurch.org/2012/2012-07-15_Boyd_Gods-Shadow-Activity.pdf)] At the center of everything is Jesus Christ and the love of God revealed on the cross. And we're to get all our life and worth from that alone. And then, in the next ring of importance is what we call "dogma". These are the beliefs that the historic Orthodox Church has always had. They are very important but we don't get life from them. Then, outside of that are the doctrines of the church. These are the different beliefs that churches have and they disagree on them. They are ways of interpreting the dogma. They're important but they're not as important as the dogma. And then on the outer ring we have the realm of opinion. These are just opinions that people have. They're good to debate and discuss and things like that but they don't define the church.

What I'm sharing here today is, I think, very important but it is opinion, it is opinion. So, it's OK to disagree with this. You might disagree with it now or come to agree with it next year. It's a process. And I'm so thankful that God gives us the grace to grow and to work things out and to disagree and to share with one another. I just ask you to keep an open mind while I'm sharing this. And if you feel like it's revelatory, good, then wear it and that's wonderful. If not, then just keep on chewing on it and if you find a better way of answering the question that I'm asking, please e-mail me. I am always open to new stuff.

Because I've got a lot to say here today...the book I'm writing is called "The Crucifixion of the Warrior God" and it's already over six hundred pages, a quarter of which are footnotes. Most of you aren't going to read it so I'm going to write a popular version to go along with it. But I'm trying to condense *that* into this sermon for the next forty-five minutes or so. It's not easy, so it's going to be rather condensed and for that reason I'm going to stick to my notes. Also, I am aware that anytime you say anything new you're going to take hits. And as this gets out there I am very aware that it's going to be pushed back on so I want to say it right. I'm going to try to resist the urge of giving in to ADD tendencies and going spontaneous. I want to say it right. If I'm going to get shot I want it to be for the right reasons, not because someone misunderstood me. So I'll be sticking close to my notes here; a little unusual for me.

OK, so the passage is Colossians chapter 2, verses 16 and 17.

*"Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ."*

The “therefore” refers back to what we’ve been studying this last couple of months. It refers to verses 13-15 where Paul talks about what God did for us on the cross. The reality is found in Christ. Don’t go back to the shadows, the reality is found in Christ. Pray with me here.

Abba Father, I pray that as we’re wrestling with this tough issue that you give us clarity. We’re at different places on this and that’s wonderful, but I pray God that you use this message to give clarity, to open our eyes to see. I pray God that whatever is of you, you just anoint it and make it huge and give it a “YES!” But whatever is not of you let it fall two inches down the steps here so it doesn’t even reach the audience. And God, however we work this out theologically, I pray God that you would use this to increase our trust and confidence that you are as beautiful as you reveal yourself to be on the cross. That that really is you, however we work this out, that is you. We surrender this to you in Jesus’ name. And all God’s people said, Amen.

All right, get your thinking caps on, shoot your brains with steroids; you’re going to have to be paying attention to this one. There are some advantages to having a theologian as your senior pastor and there are some disadvantages. You’ll decide which is which as this message goes forward.

So, here’s the thing. We believe that the Bible is all inspired, God-breathed. You may not believe that but I believe that and that’s what Woodland Hills as a church believes, that it’s all God-inspired. But does that mean that it all has equal authority for us now? Does it mean that we’re supposed to all interpret it the same way? Here’s an illustration of what I’m talking about. Jesus commands us to love everybody unconditionally and to serve everybody unconditionally and to pray a blessing on everybody, even our enemies, even our persecutors. And the New Testament also tells us that we’re to pray for our governmental authorities, to pray that they know the ways of peace, that God gives them wisdom. At the same time we have in the Old Testament dozens and dozens of what are called “imprecatory” prayers. These are prayers of vengeance, prayers in the Old Testament you find in Psalms where they are praying for God to curse their enemy, to slay their enemy, to abolish their enemy, to delight in the blood that flows from their bashed heads. I mean, some of it is really grotesque.

I have a transcript of a radio program several years ago where Allen Combs was interviewing the former vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention who is now an influential pastor of a huge mega-church. And the pastor in the course of this interview admitted that he prayed for God to slay Obama, whom he called the “usurper of the White House”. And Combs was just taken back and he pressed for clarity like, “You mean that metaphorically. You’re not really saying...” and the guy just repeated himself over and over, “Yeah, I want God to kill Obama.” And Combs said, “How can you, a pastor of the Gospel, pray for such a hateful thing?” And here’s Combs, who so far as I can tell, is not a Christian, challenging this Christian leader, “Why

are you so hateful!?” And the guy said, I quote here, “I believe the whole Bible including its imprecatory prayers.” Well, if you believe the whole Bible is inspired, those vengeful prayers for God to bring a blood bath on your enemies are right there, so is he wrong? He’s just quoting the Bible.

It’s sad but this kind of religiosity is exploding right now. In fact they’re calling it a “Bible based hate speech”, which is really sad when you think about it, like God needs one more chink in the P.R. department here. Bible based hate speech. But right now we are living in a time of such dreadful venom polluting the political realm on both sides. And be very wary of this, there is a diabolical venom, hatred just permeating the atmosphere right now. It’s not going to get any better until November. So we’re seeing an explosion of this Bible based hate speech.

There’s this guy, a Representative, several months ago sent out an e-mail to the Representatives in his party and he asked all of them to pray Psalms 109 for the president. And then he quotes Psalms 109 and this is the version he has in his e-mail. I’ve seen it; this is right from his e-mail.

*“Let his prayer become sin. Let his days be few; and let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg. Let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places. Let there be none to extend mercy unto him, neither let there be any to favor his fatherless children.”*

Thus reads the word of the Lord for today. Can you imagine Jesus praying that prayer? It seems to me he prayed the opposite, “Father, forgive them” to the very people who were crucifying him. But then the legislator added right after having quoted that Psalms he said,

*At last—I can honestly voice a Biblical prayer for our president! Look it up—it is word for word! Let us all bow our heads and pray.*

That his children would be beggars and no one would have mercy on them!? All over the place we’re seeing Christian leaders speaking this way and they’re basing it on the Old Testament. The question is, are they right? If we believe the whole Bible is inspired, is this legitimate? And if so, then how on earth do you reconcile that vengeful, hateful, diabolical praying with the way Jesus told us to pray, to pray blessing on the very people who are persecuting us?

You could ask this question a million different ways and appeal to a million different aspects of the Old Testament. How do you reconcile portraits of God saying to slaughter everyone in Canaan? Everything that breathes, kill it. Show no mercy. Men, women, children, infants, animals, slaughter them all. How do you reconcile that with this portrait of God in Christ where God gives his life for his enemies and dies for all and prays mercy for all? This is a huge

question, folks. In the book I'm doing I just have a chapter where I collected all of those really nasty, violent portraits of God and prayers, and stuff like that into one chapter. When you put them all together it's like, whoa, whoa, there's a lot of nasty stuff there! It's a huge question. If you believe it's all God-inspired, and I do, how do we make sense out of this? Now see, what Christians typically do is they say, well, since it's all inspired, it all reveals God. So this reveals God in the Old Testament as much as the cross reveals God so I'll just smooch them together and see what happens. So we get a smooched portrait of God where God is partly Jesus-like, loving-like, graceful-like, but partly vengeful and hating enemies and all the rest. It's kind of an incoherent that combined is...fuse it all and you have got almost a schizophrenic God. And then whenever Christians want to justify their hatred and violence they just appeal to the nasty side of God. Well, God did this so, so can we! I just believe the whole Bible, oh God, slay them, slaughter them, and show no mercy on them. Just jump right over Jesus' commands and appeal to whatever part we like. And it's what Christians have been doing throughout history. Whenever they want to slaughter somebody they say, well God said we can do it so let's do it, as if Jesus hadn't showed up.

I want to ask the question, is there another way of affirming that the whole Bible is inspired without smooching the portraits together to create this kind of montage of beauty mixed with ugliness. Is there a way of affirming that the whole Bible is inspired? Because some folks will say, well whatever part is ugly, I'm just going to take it out, it's not inspired. I can't do that. For a lot of reasons that isn't an option. The whole Bible is inspired. But is there a way of affirming that without saying that therefore these imprecatory prayers are justified? In fact, I want to affirm the whole Bible is inspired but I want to say that the attitude behind those imprecatory prayers is *anti-Christ* because it's against what Christ commanded. It is anti-Christ, I want to denounce it.

I think the answer, the core of the answer to this question is found in the two verses that we read this morning. Paul is speaking to this Gnostic group that's trying to influence the Colossian Christians. And this Gnostic group is teaching them that if you want to be right with God, if you want to know God and experience the fullness of God, well then, among other things, you have to obey the meticulous regulations of the Old Testament concerning food and religious festivals and the Sabbath and things like that. And Paul confronts that and says, don't let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink or what day you're going to worship on. These are a shadow of the things that were to come but the reality is found in Christ. The reality *is* Christ. He's saying, if the reality is Christ, why would you ever go back to the shadows?

To see how Paul's answer allows us to affirm that the whole Bible is inspired without doing the smooching technique to find out what God is like, let's ask the question what is a shadow?

What is it to be a shadow? And the answer is that a shadow reflects a real thing but it does it by negation. It's the negative outline of a real thing. So here's me and my shadow.

[Follow the link to the presentation slides for the visual [http://media.whchurch.org/2012/2012-07-15\\_Boyd\\_Gods-Shadow-Activity.pdf](http://media.whchurch.org/2012/2012-07-15_Boyd_Gods-Shadow-Activity.pdf)]

Isn't that nice? I look like some kind of 60's beatnik. "Hey, Daddio", "What's happening, Papa?" OK, my shadow, you'll notice, is like me in some respects. You can see an outline of me in my shadow. It points to me in some ways but it's also *unlike* me in most respects. The shadow itself is distorted; it doesn't quite capture the outline of my body. The shadow is a 2 dimensional thing, where as I, the real Greg Boyd, am a 3 dimensional being. The shadow is by definition a negation of the radiant me you see in the light. It's the negation of all that. So it doesn't capture the fullness of me that fills your senses. It doesn't capture the nice color of my eyes and the smooth baby-soft texture of my skin, especially down here where I have eczema. It doesn't quite capture that. And it doesn't capture the soft texture of my curly hair. It doesn't capture my 6-pack abs. The shadow doesn't capture that! And my ripped muscles! It doesn't capture my aroma after I haven't showered for a week, how wonderful that is. It doesn't capture my spark, my personality, it doesn't capture my spirit, and it doesn't capture my mind. It doesn't capture any of that. All it is is a negation. And a negation tells you something but it doesn't tell you much.

What Paul is saying is that, as my shadow is to me, so the Old Testament law is to Christ. Now all through Hebrews it says the same thing. He says,

*Hebrews 10:1*

*"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."*

It's very important to be able to distinguish the shadow from the reality. No matter how much you do to the shadow you'll never get to the reality, that's what he's saying. So he's saying that those animal sacrifices in the Old Testament...I don't know if you've ever read Leviticus but for animal lovers like me it's a very upsetting book, especially the middle part when it goes into all the meticulous rules about how you have to slaughter animals to make atonement for your sins. You must take up the pigeon, twist its head counter-clockwise three times and pop it and sprinkle the blood over here and over there. It's like, "Aaahh! Poor bird!" I can just imagine those animals saying, "I wish you guys would just stop sinning! Ripping us apart for it!" And you read that stuff and it's like, what on earth is going on there, but the author is saying, that is just a distorted negative image of the reality. It's a distorted, negative image of what was to come. The reality is these good things that are to come and the good things all pertain to

Christ. Christ is our intercessor, our high priest, our mediator, the head of the new human race that Christ has inaugurated here on earth and all of the other things. All of that is a shadow of the reality. The reality is Christ. So the image that both Paul and the author of Hebrews are getting at is this, the crucified Christ cast a shadow back in time into the Old Testament and part of that shadow is the law. It's a shadow of the reality. And I say it's a shadow of the crucified Christ because the cross on which Jesus died sums up everything Jesus was about. Everything Jesus was about manifested God's other-oriented, agape, self-sacrificial love and nowhere is that more perfectly and poignantly and powerfully and unambiguously expressed than on the cross. So the cross is the theme of Jesus' whole life. That's why throughout the gospels they're all oriented around the cross. In the epistles the gospel is always centered on the cross. The cross is the theme of everything.

That image of Christ dying on the cross casts a shadow back in time. That's why John says that God is love.

*1 John 4:8*

*"God is love."*

He *is* love. But see, love can mean anything to anybody. St. Augustine says that God is love and then he ascribes to this God who is love some of the most heinous you can imagine, predestining the majority of human beings to be damned forever in hell before they're ever created. But see, fortunately, John himself gives us a very specific definition of love. He says, here's how we know what love is,

*1 John 3:16*

*"This is how we know what love is; Jesus Christ laid down his life for us."*

Christ gave his life for us. Love is self-sacrificial love. The kind of love that God is, is the love that leads him to become a human being and die a God-forsaken death on behalf of us. That's what love looks like. We have to grasp the importance and the magnificence of this. God is a love that looks like the cross. Out of love the almighty God became a human being, bore our sins, condescending to bear our sins, bear our judgment, bear our God-forsakenness. Why? Why would he leave the bliss and the joy of heaven, his own being, to suffer like this? And the answer is, because that's what love does. That's the kind of love that God is. This is his nature, his essence. God *is* this. As Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God is from all eternity an other-oriented kind of love that gives itself wholly away to another. God is that. And then when God presses himself to us in our fallen condition, it looks like the cross. So the cross isn't just something that God *does*, the cross is who he *is*! It captures his essence. It's the only

revelation that does that. So the cross isn't simply one of the activities that God does. No, the cross is the theme for everything that God does. He does it out of self-sacrificial love.

So the reality of God is Christ crucified. The cross isn't part of the reality of God, it defines God totally. God is *all* cross-like. John says that he is light, and in him there is no darkness. None. Zero. He's altogether light. He's altogether love. And the love is defined by what's revealed on the cross. That's his essence.

So Paul and the author of Hebrews are telling us that this reality, this reality that's revealed on the cross casts a shadow back in time, which means that God gave the shadow to humans in history before he brought the real thing. The minute we accept that it has massive implications for how we're going to interpret that back-in-time shadow, how we're going to interpret the Old Testament. There are major implications. Implications that I don't think the majority of Christians yet get. Because we don't treat it like a shadow, we treat it like reality. And because we treat it like reality we just take it and we give it as much authority as we give the cross and that's what leads Christians to smooch it all together and get a partly cross-like God but it's mixed up with a lot of other genocidal stuff. So we compromise the beauty of the cross and then that's what motivates them to do some demonic stuff like praying that people will die in the name of Jesus.

To see the implications that this shadow teaching has, let's ask the question, why would God give the shadow before the reality? Why would God do that? What's he doing? And the answer that I'd like you to think about is this; God always meets people where they are at. He comes down to our level. To deal with us he comes down to our level. Now maybe you're somewhere hearing this in the auditorium or through podcast and you're saying, "No, God's all powerful. He doesn't *have* to do *anything*. He could snap his fingers and make everyone perfect if he wanted to." And you're right; God has the power to do that. But think about it, if God were to do that then what he effectively did is he just destroyed a race of *real* people and replaced them with perfect, mannequin look-alikes. It's not the same creation. See, God creates *persons* and then he treats us like *persons*. If you're treating people like persons you can't just wiggle your nose and transform them into mannequins. No, if you're dealing with *persons*, that means you have to come down to their level. You have to get on the inside, you have to gradually, slowly transform. That's why God throughout the Bible is always wrestling with people. He's struggling; he gets frustrated with them, because he honors the integrity of their personhood. He doesn't just bulldoze over them. He's a God of influence, no coercion.

So God throughout history comes down and meets people where they're at and he slowly transforms them to be the people that he wants them to be so that he can eventually reveal who he really is. God is like a missionary to a foreign country. If you're a missionary and you go to a different country and you see things that are not consistent with the Gospel you can't just



bulldoze in there and say, “Hey! You’re wrong about this, that, and the other thing.” No, if you’re a missionary you have to go humbly, you have to enter in to the culture, you have to go native and you have to affirm as much as you can affirm and gradually win the love and the trust of people before you can start telling them how things should change. You can’t just barge in there.

So God enters this world as a missionary and in this world, the ancient world, is frankly barbaric. The world that God enters is a world that really only understands brute force and the threat of law. This is a barbaric world where people instinctively think of God and the gods as these petty, tribal violent warriors. When you think of God you just think of a dysfunctional king on steroids in the heavenlies. And so the Israelites are going to be inclined to think of God that way. That’s the world God enters. As a missionary God humbly steps into this brutish, barbaric world to slowly transform it from the inside out. He reveals as much of his true self as he can but to the degree that his people can’t handle it he accommodates sin, enters into it, and so far as he can’t reveal who he really is as we see on the cross he relates to his people in the shadow of the cross. And he does it to eventually, and gradually, and lovingly bring humanity to the point where he can now reveal who he truly is on the cross.

It’s like a missionary couple I learned about a couple of years ago and I think I’ve shared this before. There were the first couple in this African tribe and this tribe practiced what is commonly called “female circumcision”. It’s the wrong word for it because it’s not at all like male circumcision. Some people just call it mutilating young women. It’s an excruciating, barbaric practice of mutilating the genitalia of adolescent girls for the sole purpose, usually, of ensuring male property rights so when they claim them as a wife they can be sure that they’re virgins. It means in many cases, maybe most cases that the young ladies in their whole life are never going to be able to enjoy sexual intercourse. It will always be something painful. Now this couple comes to this tribe and they see this but they can’t just immediately go, “Stop that! Stop that!” because they would lose all credibility with this tribe if they were to do that. Who do these foreigners think they are? This is a revered tradition that’s been practiced by our ancestors for centuries and centuries and you’re going to come in here and just tell us that it’s wrong? See, it doesn’t work like that. If this couple ever hoped to get that tribe to be free from that barbaric practice they had to come in humbly, they had to go native; they had to enter in to the world of these folks. Though it grieved them terribly they had to for years, several years anyways, watch this tribe continue this barbaric practice, sometimes even to an extent participating in the festivities because this was, I was told, a big deal in this African tribe. The tribe would naturally assume that these folks are OK with this because they probably think everyone’s OK with this. But see as this couple gradually manifested God’s love to this tribe and serve this tribe as they were, they gained credibility with this tribe. The tribe began to trust them and so they could slowly begin to reveal their real character and their real will and they

could slowly start to bring principles of the Gospel into the tribe as they won the right to begin to speak into their lives. So they began to teach about how human beings are all made in the image of God and they need to be treated like they're the image of God and how men and women are equal. And the tribe slowly comes to accept this, they slowly came to accept the Gospel, embrace the Gospel and become followers of Jesus. And they finally came to see for themselves that this practice was inhuman and not honoring God so they abandoned it. That is how God, I believe, works throughout all of history and it's what we're seeing in work in the Old Testament.

Now, just imagine if somebody in that tribe were to have chronicled the missionaries' behavior from the minute they got there. So they record it for three years, three years of appearing to condone this mutilation of young women and they record it in a book. When the tribe came to understand who the missionaries really were, what their true character and will was, and when they came to understand how wrong it was to be engaged in that practice, imagine how they would now read that chronicle that is to them like an Old Testament, a "B.C." document. They would now see, as they read this chronicle of their missionaries' activity, they'd see in the former behavior of these missionaries when they appeared to condone and even celebrate female circumcision, they would now know that that doesn't reveal their true character or their true will. They would see it as a shadow of their true character; it's a negative contrast to their true character. It doesn't reveal who they are it reveals who they're *not*. But precisely because it reveals who they're not, because it's a shadow, a negation, the tribe as they look back on this B.C. document would also begin to see the outline of the missionaries in the shadow. The shadow points to the reality. How? Because as they're reading this chronicle they would see, they would now understand that it was out of love for the tribe that these missionaries stooped to appearing to condone this barbaric practice. They would see that it's out of love for this tribe that these missionaries allowed the tribe to think that in fact they condoned this. It was out of love for the tribe that they went native. It was out of love for this tribe that they allowed the tribal folks to project their own image of people onto them and make it appear that they were condoning this.

As they look back on this chronicle, now that they know who the missionaries really are, they would see in this shadow activity a reflection of love where this couple bore the sin of the community for a period of years. They bore the sin and took on the appearance of one of the tribal members who celebrates female circumcision. Because they know that that's *not* who the missionaries are they would see how that behavior points to the reality of who the missionaries are. Do you see this? Because they now know that these missionaries love them and sacrifice for them. They understand how it must have grieved their hearts to have put up with this for such a period of time.

I'd like to ask you to consider thinking about aspects of the Old Testament in that fashion. God's been doing this patient missionary work in human history for centuries, humbly stooping into our world and accommodating, though it surely grieved his heart, accommodating many things he didn't approve of and it's chronicled in the Old Testament. We now know who God really is if we trust Jesus. We now know that God is revealed; the quintessential expression is on the cross. We know that God's eternal nature is self-sacrificial love. And we know that he's a God who's willing to stoop to bear our sins and a God who's willing to take on the appearance of something much uglier than it really is because that's exactly what he does on the cross. And God is cross-like love. So with that understanding, knowing who the true God is, we now need to look back on the chronicle of our heavenly missionaries' behavior and we need to be able to see when he was engaging in shadow activity. The criteria we use to decide when the real God showing up and when it's the shadow of the reality, is the cross. The criteria is the cross. I love what Martin Luther said, I found this a couple weeks ago, when he said, "When reading the Bible we should have the attitude of Paul where we say we know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified." I Corinthians 2:2. Now Luther didn't apply that consistently at all but I think it's a very good principle to go by and just be consistent with it. God has always wanted to reveal as much of his real self as he could. And so as we look at this chronicle know who God really is, every aspect of our missionaries' activity that is consistent with what he reveals himself to be on the cross, we can say, "Ah! The real God is popping through! He managed to pop through the sin and the cultural conditioning and get through!" So whatever is consistent with the crucified Christ we say, that's the real God showing up. But whenever we see depictions of the heavenly missionary that are *not* consistent with the God revealed on the cross I ask you to consider seeing that as a negative contrast to the reality that we have in the Christ who's crucified and we consider it to be a shadow. It's in the same categories as the missionaries appearing to condone female circumcision. In so far as we see depictions that are not consistent with the cross we're seeing there the shadow of the real God, not the real God himself.

Now that we know who God really is we can understand how it must have grieved God to accommodate all the sin that he did throughout the Old Testament even as he does in our own lives right now. But we can see in God's shadow activity, we who know who God really is, the sin-bearing God, we can see God stooping to bear the sin of his people. By allowing them to project their assumptions onto him he wears them, as it were, he takes on the appearance of a deity that reflects much more of the sinfulness of the people he's working with than it does his real, true nature. Because that's what he does on the cross. On the cross he reflects our sinfulness, whatever's ugly, he reflects our sinfulness. The beauty is found in the God who condescends to take that ugliness on himself. That reveals what God is like. So that reveals what God is always like and when we read the Bible we should know that that is what God is always like so we should be looking for it. "Ah, here's an ugly picture of God, this is a deity that

isn't at all consistent with what we find on the cross so the picture is a negative contrast to that. What reveals God is that he's stepping into it and bearing the sin of his people." The ugliness reflects the sinfulness of the people that has to work with.

You know, Jesus says in John 5 and in Luke 24 that "all scripture points to me, it's all about me". Well, you have to ask the question, how is it all about you? When you see a picture of God that says, slaughter everything that breathes, how does that point to Jesus? I mean, you hear these vengeful prayers, slaughter these enemies, make their children starve...how does that point to Jesus? I'm open to any kind of answer but I submit to you that it points the way a shadow points to reality. It's a negative contrast! For years I tried to inch it towards the cross. Well, maybe it's not as bad as it sounds, maybe...but how does it actually bear witness to Christ? Jesus was the one who bears our sin on the cross! Here's another place where he's bearing sin! He's the kind of God who does that! I know that. And so it's a negative contrast to the reality and that's how it points to the cross. The same love that led God to condescend to bear our sin on the cross was always at work to condescend to bear the sin of his people taking on the appearance of something much uglier than he actually is.

OK, let me get specific here. There are three fundamental ways that I believe, you don't have to believe it, but I believe the Old Testament is conflicting with the revelation of God on the cross. So these are three fundamental ways that I think we see shadows in the Old Testament. The first is what we've already been talking about.

## I. The Law

You read the Old Testament and there's at least a strand of it where you get the impression that God is really an obsessive, law-oriented deity. A person picks up sticks on the Sabbath and "bam", they have to get slaughtered. So when Jesus comes on the scene the people expect him to reinforce the law. If he's the Messiah then you're the one who is going to crack down on the law. You're going to kick some behind here. Actually what happens is Jesus who *is* the real God does the exact opposite in a number of different ways. He shows the impossibility of anyone keeping the law perfectly. And Paul does the same thing! In Galatians 3 he says the law is given to us as a negative object lesson, you could read "shadow" there, to lead us to the cross. It's given to show us that we can't do it that way. And so it's like after centuries God is saying, "How's that working for you?" It doesn't work very well. It keeps on falling back on you because you can't keep it perfectly. That's why Paul says no one is justified by the law. No, you can't do it that way. So God is essentially saying, "Do you get the point yet? That's not the way to do it! That's the shadow. Here's the reality." And then he gives us a very different way of relating to God based entirely on love and trust.

So in the light of what Jesus says and what Paul says I propose we see the Old Testament law as a shadow which is exactly what Paul says it is in Colossians 2:17. And the portrait of God as a law-oriented deity is a shadow, just as Paul says. It says that God had to first break humanity's addiction to trusting in rules and regulations if he was every going to inaugurate a Kingdom in which it's based on a love and trust relationship and not on external threats.

But in that shadow activity of this law-oriented deity we can see how it points to the cross because here God is bearing the sin of his people. This is what they needed. If humanity was ever going to get it this is what he needed to do. And so as we look at that we should see our sin-bearing God and it points to the cross where God finally fully reveals who he truly is by bearing the sin of the whole world.

A second example would be the nationalism of the Old Testament.

I. The Law

II. Nationalism

You read the Old Testament and there's a strand of it where you can't help but see that it seems like God plays favorites, "This is my special people. I'm on their side. I'm against others, whoever opposes you." So when Jesus shows up, of course, people expect him to reinforce the nationalism. That's what the Messiah is supposed to do. He's supposed to be a ruling King who's going to reinforce our nationalism. He's supposed to confirm that we are God's special people; he's supposed to lead us into national sovereignty. Many folks of the time believe that the Messiah was supposed to lead a violent revolution against all who oppressed Israel because you find things in the Old Testament that would seem to justify that. But Jesus who is the real God does the exact opposite; everything about him. He models and teaches a God who is a God who gives his life for all people equally. He's a God who doesn't show favorites, a God whose love is unconditional and universal to everybody. He models and teaches that being a child of God has got nothing to do with your nationality but everything to do with the state of your heart. He does the opposite of what people expect so in that light I submit to you that the Old Testament portrait of God as a nationalistic deity was a shadow. It's a negative contrast to the real thing that was given ahead of time to prepare humanity to eventually be able to receive the real, transnational, global loving God who is revealed in the crucified Christ. Amen.

It's like God had to first break our addiction to our tribal-istic, nationalistic mindset and had to break our addiction to our nationalistic gods who fight on our side and against our opponents. He had to break that addiction if he ever hoped to have a people who could finally get that his love is not defined by national boundaries, his love is universal. He had to break that addiction if he ever hoped to have a people who had a capacity to view him and to view the world outside of national categories, a people who are free from tribalism, who love people of other

nations as much as themselves, who understood that God is as much on their side as on our side. Sadly, it's those national, tribal-istic categories that are at the foundation of all the world's wars and sadly, God's people to a large degree still seem to be addicted to that way of thinking.

See, God was preparing the world for at least the potential for people to get this. And in God's shadow activity, playing that nationalistic deity, we should see a shadow of the cross. Because we see in this nationalistic activity, now that we know what God's really like, we can see, ah, our missionary was bearing the sin of our people. And the ugliness of that portrait of God, and there are ugly aspects to it, doesn't reflect on God's true nature. No, because I know who God really is, he's revealed on the cross. That reflects on the nature of his people that he was dealing with but what reveals God is that God was willing to stoop to bear their sin and take on that appearance just as he does on the cross when he fully reveals himself by bearing the sin of the world.

And a third way that's foundational, fundamental, has to do with violence.

- I. The Law
- II. Nationalism
- III. Violence

This is so important. Holy Spirit let this land, open our eyes. Throughout the Bible you have a God who condones and engages in violence. And you saw it there in imprecatory prayers, presupposing a God who slaughters. So when Jesus shows up on the scene people expect that he's going to reinforce the use of violence against enemies because that's all part of the Old Testament law. But Jesus who is the real God does the exact opposite. Jesus reveals a God who demands us to swear off all violence and to never retaliate. He reveals a God who loves his enemies and chooses to die for them rather than to crush them. And in that light I propose that the Old Testament portraits of God commanding and engaging in violence should be seen as shadows. They're a negative contrast to the real thing and they were given ahead of time to prepare humanity to receive the real, enemy-loving, nonviolent God who is revealed in the crucified Christ. God had to first break our addiction to violence and our violent views of him if he hoped to ever eventually reveal his real enemy-loving, nonviolent true nature on the cross.

The history of Israel is ongoing proof that if you live by the sword you die by the sword. You want a covenant that is based on the sword? You obey the covenant then you use the sword effectively, if you don't you get the sword. Well look at the history of Israel. It works against you. Jesus shows up and he says, hey that nationalistic law, the violent covenant, how's that working for you? Not very well, actually. They had been oppressed for almost a century now.

The whole thing backfired. So God took on the appearance of one who condoned violence just as the missionaries took on the appearance of ones who condoned female circumcision. He did it with the hope of getting a people who would eventually see the stupidity of thinking that violence ever is a long-term solution, because it's not! Ever! It always sooner or later backfires and there's no lesson of history that's clearer than that! If you live by the sword you die by the sword. All of history is filled with people trusting that God will help them use the sword. So Jesus shows up and he says, you know what, if you're going to be a child of God you need to put that thing down. He does the opposite, which means that what we're seeing there is a shadow. In the violent portraits of God in the Old Testament we should be able to see the sin-bearing God stooping to the sins of his people as a way of leading to the cross when he can finally reveal who he truly is by bearing the sins of the entire world.

Now as we look back on the chronicle of our missionary's behavior, prior to when he disclosed who he truly is, we can see the *real* him popping up all over the place because you have a lot of portraits of God where he is not law-oriented. You find a number of passages in the Old Testament where God is saying, what I really want is your heart. What I really want is a love-based, faith-based relationship with you. You find many passages where God isn't at all like the tribal-istic, nationalistic deities of the ancient Near East, where it's revealed that God's a God of the whole world, he loves all people equally, he raised up Israel to be servants to the whole world. You find that strand there and that's where the real God managed to pop through and disclose a little more of himself. And you find many passages in the Old Testament, we can see it, that are consistent with the God revealed on the cross where he hates violence, he abhors violence, and he's a God of peace. But to the degree that we find anything in this chronicle of our missionary's behavior up to the cross, to the degree that anything contrasts with the God revealed on the cross I'm proposing that we see that not as reflecting who God really is but it reflects the shadow of who he really is. It reflects God accommodating the sin of his people. It reflects God stooping to the fallen projections of people on to him. This is what the missionaries did in that tribe when they allowed the tribe to think a certain way about them. It was done out of love to the point where they could reveal who they truly were. That's what I think God is doing throughout the Old Testament.

Now lean in on this, OK? This is crucial. We're on the runway. Come in on the final 100 yard dash, OK? The marathon's almost over. But this is important. These shadows that we find are still inspired revelations, because as a shadow of the cross, they point to the cross just as my shadow points to me. So these images of God as a law-oriented, nationalistic, violent-prone deity are a negative contrast to who God really is but they point to the cross precisely because now that we know who God really is we can see the humble, heavenly missionary stooping to bear the sin of his people and appear uglier than he really is, just as the cross does when he bears the sin of the world and takes on the appearance of an ugly, God-forsaken guilty criminal.

The ugliness of the cross reflects our sin. What reflects the beauty of God is that he would condescend to bearing that sin and that's what he's been doing throughout history. These portraits of God that contrast with the cross, they don't reveal God in terms of their content, they reveal God in terms of the contrast because by the contrast it shows how low God is willing to stoop to stay in relationship with these people and lead them forward.

But here's the thing, and now really lean in, Holy Spirit help us to attend to this, shoot your brain with steroids, here it is.

You can only see how a shadow points to a reality if you accept that the shadow is a shadow that contrasts with the reality it is a shadow of.

I'll say it again.

You can only see how a shadow points to a reality if you accept that the shadow is a shadow that contrasts with the reality it is a shadow of.

If you don't see that then you'll never see how the shadow points to reality. Because you can only see how my shadow points to me if you understand that my shadow is my *shadow*. If you don't give my shadow as much reality as you give me. If you think my shadow is the real me, well then you'll think it's a different person connected to me at my feet, a person that lacks dimensionality and anything that pertains to the senses, a person who is a negative contrast. You have to first start with accepting the shadow as a shadow. We can only see how the violent Old Testament portraits of God point to the real God if we accept that they are negative contrasts to the real God on the cross. We can only see how the law-oriented, nationalistic, violent portraits point to the cross if we accept, listen to this, that these portraits don't reflect the real God alongside of the God revealed on the cross.

So long as people insist that the Old Testament portraits of God, in so far as they contrast with the cross, have as much authority to reveal who God is as the cross does, if you give them as much reality as you give the cross then you can never see how these pictures point to the cross. All these pictures can do is *compete* with the cross. That's what makes people smoosh them together, compromising the beauty of the cross. If you ascribe my shadow the same reality as you ascribe me and you think that shadow is me, if that shadow of me is as much me as the 3-D me, well then you come to the conclusion that Greg Boyd is a 3-D person but he's also got this 2 dimensional streak in him. Weird. He's got color to him but he's also got a side that's just no color at all. He's got personality but there's a side of him that's just without any personality at all. He's got odor but there's a part of him that doesn't have any odor at all. He's got a mind but there's a part of him that's just dumb, stupid, doesn't have any mind and just copies what someone else does. You fuse it together and you come up with a composite "me" that would be a whole lot less beautiful than the *real* me.



So also with God, if we don't know that shadows are shadows and if we ascribe to these shadows the same authority as we ascribe to the cross then we just say, God's got a loving streak and all that stuff, wonderful, but man, you tick him off and pick up sticks on the Sabbath, BOOM! You get slaughtered. He's got this streak in him that's really...who knows how to put it all together? We smooch it all together and we end up with a composite, compromised picture of God.

See, so long as we're ascribing to these portraits the same authority we give to Christ we'll never see how these violent portraits point beyond themselves to a beautiful God, a God who is far more beautiful than that. We'll never see how they point to the God of the cross. They point to a God who isn't nationalistic, who doesn't want a law-based relationship, who doesn't condone violence. As long as we're smooching these things together, we'll never be able to see how God is altogether beautiful. We can say that but we'll always be having this other part that's kind of ugly. We'll never be able to say how God is all light, there's no darkness because you're ascribing reality to portraits that have a lot of darkness in them. We'll never be able to see how God is *all* good, *all* beautiful. We can't believe it. We're smooching the things together. There's no way we can say that Jesus reveals all of God. We'll always have this composite portrait. The beauty of the cross will be compromised.

Paul says to the Colossians, and I'm ending with this, he says, you have the reality, don't go back to the shadows. Don't go back to the shadows of these regulations, these rules, which, notice, presuppose this picture of God. If you have to do these things to appease God then that's presupposing a portrait of God, a law-oriented portrait of God. When Paul says don't go back to the shadow rules, he's saying don't go back to the "shadowy" God, the law-oriented God of the rules. The portrait of God as a nationalistic deity and the portrait of God that's condoning violence, those are just aspects of that same portrait. The law is wrapped up with the nationalism, which is what the violence is all about. So if one of them is a shadow, they're all a shadow. The reality is found in Christ. All of the reality is found in Christ. Everything in the Old Testament that negatively contrasts with the crucified Christ, I believe, and I'm submitting to you to consider, is a negative contrast to the cross, it's a shadow to the cross, but it points to the cross because it shows God bearing the sin of people, taking on the semblance of something far uglier than he really is because that's exactly what he does on the cross.

So, folks, it comes back to the question that I think is the most important question in the world, and we ask it here all the time but maybe now it's with a little more clarity than ever, what is your picture of God and who do you give authority to define your picture of God. We here at Woodland Hills Church say this with a great amount of blessed redundancy, it's Jesus Christ, it's Jesus Christ, it's Jesus Christ; nothing but Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ. Christ crucified. I know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified. So it comes down to this, do we believe that

all scripture points to Jesus Christ as he says and if so, how does it do that? I'm proposing it points as a negative contrast as a shadow points to reality. If you have a different way of seeing it then e-mail me. But do we believe that all scripture, including the genocidal portraits of God, that they all point to Jesus? Jesus says that if you see me you see the Father. Don't go looking anywhere else for the Father. Are we going to believe him or not? Jesus says in Matthew 11, "No one knows the Father except for the Son and to whomever the Son reveals him." Do we believe that or not? Or are we going to have pictures that compete with the revelation that Jesus gives us. Jesus says I am *the way*, it's a singular, *the truth*, it's singular. Are we going to believe that or not? Or are we going to ascribe truth to these things that compete with the revelation that we find in Christ. Hebrews 1:3 says that the Son alone, in contrast to everything that happened before in that chronicle of our missionary's activity up to the time of the cross, the Son is the one and only radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his very essence. Do we believe that or not? John says that the law was given through Moses but grace and truth were given through Jesus Christ. The contrast is there, the truth came with Jesus Christ, John 1:18. Do we believe that or not? The Bible tells us that there's one mediator between God and humanity, it's Jesus. And there's one word between God and humanity, it's Jesus. And there's one Savior, praise God, and there's one Revealer; it's Jesus Christ. Do we believe that or not? If we say, Yes, we believe that, the fullness of God as Paul says over and over is found in Christ, if we believe that then I personally don't see any other choice but to believe that everything that is contrary to that is a shadow of that, which I think is exactly that Paul is saying in this passage. He's saying, don't go back to the shadows. The shadow had a function and a purpose to lead us up to here, but now that we're here and know the reality, that's your sole, singular, absolute authority for telling you who God is. Amen.

See, my experience has been...once I see this, once I had that "Aha" moment, I have a weight lifted off of me. I'm tired of being embarrassed by these passages and disgusted by it and having to believe it's all inspired by God but seeing that it's ugly and trying to somehow take these genocidal portraits and imprecatory prayers and make it consistent with Jesus I finally just gave up. It's like, I can't inch my way there. And the minute I gave up I could say this is a negative contrast to that and Boop! It's a shadow. It's a shadow, it's a shadow. And now I see how it points to Christ. God bearing the sin of his people, he didn't start doing that on Calvary. That's where he did it definitively but that's the kind of God he is. That reveals God. So he's always been doing that. That's what love is! That's what love is! Love is defined as Jesus Christ giving his life for us.

You don't have to agree with me I just encourage you to keep an open mind, keep thinking about this. I encourage you, if this is something that's stimulating something in you then you might want to listen to this message again. Download it this week because new stuff can't be assimilated all at once. You have to chew on it and think on it and we have to give space to

disagree and give space to grow on this but I'm putting it out there for all those for whom it lands. Otherwise just be in process on it. It's OK to be in process on it, in fact we're all in process on it. I'm giving you the result of being in 25 years of process on it.

I'm going to close here in prayer. As I do I want to remind you about Communitas and consider buying some of those bus tabs, helping people out, and volunteering in that community as they're serving the poor at the Dorothy Day Center on July 28.

Father, God I thank you that you're a God who gives us space to grow and you treat us as persons and you work through influence. And God I thank you for this community where we have permission to think out loud and to wrestle with stuff and give space to one another. God I pray wherever this lands, wherever we're at, for the podristioners as well, wherever they're at and however they feel about this I pray God, however they work it out, that you keep on increasing our confidence that you are really, really as beautiful as you reveal yourself to be on the cross. God I pray that you purge out of our minds every vestige of any other competing portrait. I pray God that we would have minds that are focused on Christ without competition. We are focused on Christ without qualification. We're focused on Christ without compromise, without any kind of smooshing. And however we work it out theologically I pray Lord God that Holy Spirit you would be increasing our confidence that God is one hundred percent cross-like. That is the love that defines who God is throughout eternity in Jesus name. And all of God's people said, Amen. God bless you guys. Go out, love on the world.