

The Well of Living Water: *Part Two*

Light + Life Group Conversation and Study Guide

Based on *Life-Giving Holiness* by Bishop Linda Adams
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Part Two: An Outside-In Approach

This is the second study guide in a series of four. Be sure to download [part one](#), [part three](#) and [part four](#).

*For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.
(Romans 3:28)*

In our last session we discussed what it means to be holy as God is holy. Now we will look at the *law* and why it is not effective in bringing about holiness in our lives. Let's pick up where we left off in Bishop

The Letter Kills

At the outset, we need to admit that those of us who have been in this denominational family for many years have at times seen a pursuit of holiness that was not life-giving. If we picture the *Highway of Holiness* winding through varied terrain with generations of Free Methodists traveling along it, describing it and teaching others about it, we'll notice some veering off into the *Ditch of Legalism*. (Other movements have steered off-course into the opposite ditch of either License or Liberalism, but that hasn't been our error.)

Following John Wesley's "General Rules for Christian Conduct" and adding a rule against buying, selling or holding of a human being as a slave, the first Free Methodists adopted rules for holy living. Definition brings clarity and objectivity, they reasoned, so sinful

actions and attitudes were forbidden, and behaviors of holy living were defined and required. For instance, the rules forbade the use of tobacco, opiates and alcohol, worldly amusements, membership in oath-bound lodges, and profane language and evil speaking. They required plain dress, business integrity, and careful observance of the Lord's Day in addition to classical expressions of Christian devotion such as attendance at worship, prayer, Scripture reading and tithing. Relational accountability structures were created to aid new believers and seasoned saints alike in living the life of holiness as defined in these terms.

One of the problems with a rules-based approach is that rules and prohibitions multiply. As with the Pharisees in Jesus' day, principled motivations get lost in the proliferation of laws. As an example from

our past, I enjoy reading historical accounts of 19th century female preachers. One pioneering evangelist's personal account told tales of courageous witness in taverns and brothels resulting in dramatic conversions, but then delved into her agony over the rule against decorative collars and buttons on women's blouses. She so longed to be holy, to surrender fully to the Lord, to consecrate her whole self to God's work — but she struggled mightily with guilt over wishing she didn't have to alter her blouses to make them plain!

Eventually, we incorporated a balancing scriptural truth. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant — not of the letter but of the Spirit, for the letter kills,

but the Spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:6). Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection brought salvation by grace through faith, as Paul proclaimed in Ephesians 2:8–9, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast." And, from his letter to the Galatians, "Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?" (Galatians 3:2b-3). Over the course of several decades, we have tried to reorient our path out of the ditch of Legalism to aim for the gracious center of the *Highway of Holiness*.

What is the difference between *rules and a rules-based approach*? Name some rules we all live by every day. Name some rules that are helpful and create a way of life for us all that provide life-giving boundaries.

Consider Bishop Linda's statement, "One of the problems with a rules-based approach is that rules and prohibitions multiply." Talk about ways you've seen rules and prohibitions multiply in our society. Why do rules give way to more rules?

Why do you think people are enticed to break rules?

Go all the way back to the Garden of Eden (read Genesis 2:15–17). God sets forth one rule — a "don't do this" statement. What is it? What goes wrong? Why do you think things went so wrong so fast?

All rules begin with a reason in mind. Here's a classic example: Are you allowed to be noisy and disruptive in a library? Have you ever been asked to leave a library because you were noisy? Can you envision a librarian with their finger over their mouth sounding out an indignant "Shhhhhhh"?

Why? Why is that rule in place?

What becomes of a library when it's a noisy environment?

When we forget the reason for a rule — simply obeying it “because” — it becomes *legalism*. What rules exist in your church about which you're not sure why those rules are in place?

Bishop Linda describes legalism as a *ditch*. Do you agree? Why or why not?

A rules-based approach to holiness is an outside-in approach. Praise God that there is an alternative. In fact, His design has always been an inside-out approach. In our next session, we'll drink from a well of Living Water.

Let's Pray:

Lord God, help us to forsake legalism. We know that rules are helpful in their place, but in the end, You and You alone give life! We want that life — that Living Water! In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.