

YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS

by Hendrik Joubert

Some who lecture on self-esteem will discourage one to admit wrong in order to avoid feelings of guilt – everyone makes mistakes. Telling people that they are sinners is not the way to encourage them to feel good about themselves. Instead it encourages feelings of guilt. Humility seems to be considered the opposite of self-confidence. We are taught to rationalize so that everyone is always right; except perhaps when I stand to lose. We are encouraged to avoid those things which make us feel badly about ourselves.

The first principle towards solving a problem is to recognize that there is a problem. Changing the rules to suit myself will not resolve the issue. Once I have recognized the problem, I can start working towards a lasting solution that will bring peace of mind. I did not rationalize, still living with the suppressed feelings of guilt; I fixed the problem and can feel good about myself without being self-righteous.

There are things we just know are wrong, however it is difficult for us to recognize the extent as well as seriousness of sin. Consider the *original* sin, eating a prohibited fruit. (**Genesis 3:2-3**) The consequences are so serious that many want to see it as figurative - *the forbidden fruit* must be code for a more serious immoral action. In **1John 3:4** sin is simply defined as **lawlessness: Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.**

Sin is lawlessness, and God makes the laws or rules we are to live by. When we violate the rules of Him who created us for His purpose we **practice lawlessness**. In **Jeremiah 18** we find an interesting and vivid illustration of God's authority, but also the patient and caring way in which He attempts to shape His creation. In this inspired illustration God is the Potter who attempts to shape His people, granted the amazing ability to choose whether or not to allow Him to do so. In order to be meaningful the submission should be voluntary and obedience should come from the heart...**not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.** (**Ephesians 6:6**)

Obedience from the heart is not demonstrated by changing or adapting (interpreting) the rules. (**2Peter 3:16**) Instead it demonstrates a lack of faith not only in the rules, but more importantly, a lack of faith in the One who made the rules. It is for this reason that we learn through James that faith without the works which demonstrate it, is **useless**. (**James 2:20**) Notice that the faith must first be made *complete* by works. A dead faith cannot save and then become alive afterwards. These works are spontaneous acts in response to God's instructions, therefore *illustrating* faith, so that it results in salvation. (**James 2:22**) It is not the action per se; it is the natural way in which these actions expose faith in God, and in what He says. Those who have themselves baptized in water will not receive remission of sins (**Acts 2:38**) unless they do it *as God says*, and for the *purpose* He says, so that it *demonstrates* faith, not in the action itself, but in the action as God describes it.

Compare the following statements: ***Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord...but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven...Matthew 7:21***) ***Faith without works is useless.*** (James 2:20) In John 12:42 we learn of those who had faith only, however they would not confess Jesus as Lord for fear of being put out of the synagogue, as they were more concerned about what people thought. Jesus warns that there are many who are convinced that they are saved to the extent that they will reason with Him face-to-face in the day of judgment, only to learn that they were *workers of iniquity*. (Matthew 7:21-23, KJV) This obviously does not apply to us, right? We make mistakes, but we do not *work iniquity*. As in the case of the original sin, iniquity must refer to gross, immoral actions. Iniquity cannot simply mean eating a fruit, or practicing religious activities found in the Bible and interpreted so that it has meaning for us. (

Notice the examples of king Saul. He would not go into battle unless he sacrificed to God, even if he had to do it himself. (1Samuel 13:8-14) ***"You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you,..."*** (v13) Sacrificing became a *foolish* act because it was not done as God directed. It did not illustrate faith in God. It is further demonstrated in the way Saul reasoned. The sacrifice does not secure victory in and of itself, it has to be a sacrifice as God directs so that faith in God is illustrated. His actions did not make his faith complete. (James 2:22)

In the next example God tells Saul to kill all animals as well as all the (sinful) people. (1Samuel 15) Influenced by his people Saul keeps animals alive *to sacrifice to God*. What a noble gesture? No, it was changing what God said. ***"Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.*** (v22)

It is not a matter of doing what God says, it is doing *what* He says, *as* He says. Men may engage in all kinds of religious activities as they assign meaning to it, however if they are not done as God directs these acts of worship become useless works of iniquity. It is not the action by itself, but the obedience from the heart – as God revealed it – which demonstrates faith in God and respect for Him. When Moses changed what God commanded, and reverted back to a way similar to that which he previously had to do it, the Lord's accusation is: ***"Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."*** (Numbers 20:12)

To believe in God is to treat Him holy, and this is done by doing *what* He says, *when* He says, *how* He says. Sinful man cannot decide the purpose for and meaning of these acts demanded by God. Moses' *works* did not demonstrate faith in God and respect for Him. The instructions from God on how to worship Him is simple, and these acts are incorporated in every creed of every church; except the meaning behind these actions and the reasons for engaging in them has been changed by men, causing worship to be vain: ***'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'*** (Matthew 15:9)

When sinners humble themselves to admit their guilt from the heart, followed by humble obedience to God, they are granted forgiveness from their Creator and as result immortality in His presence – a higher level of self-esteem no man can offer.