

For Our Learning

by Hendrik Joubert

In teaching children, the challenge is to get them to generalize principles learned. If you have six apples to be divided among 3 people they would get two each. This means that if you have six *dollars* to be divided between 3 people each would get two dollars. The same principle applies for *anything* you wish to divide in this way; however some children, especially those with specific learning disabilities, are not able to generalize in this way. They are able to divide apples and not anything else unless you teach them again, and again.

I want to suggest that this is a common problem in the religious world where we are able to recognize the mistakes of Israel; however we often are not able to apply the underlying principle of their disobedience to correct our behavior. I believe that this ability to generalize is what is involved when the Hebrew writer teaches us that maturity is the point at which we, through practice, have trained our senses to discern good from evil. (**Hebrews 5:14**)

There are many simple principles we learn from the examples recorded in the Bible. **...whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction. (Romans 15:4; 1Corinthians 10:11)** In **1Corinthians** chapter one we are told that God revealed the good news of salvation in His Son in simple terms so that the simple people would be able to understand it in order to obey Him. (**1Corinthians 1:18-31**) At the same time it may prove challenging for those who put their trust in their own intellect. This cloud of witnesses (**Hebrews 12:1**) implies responsibility as suggested in **Acts 17:30: "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent,..."**

Justification (or salvation) has always been **by faith** as is illustrated in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, and the genius behind this principle is illustrated by what God teaches us through **James (2:14-26)** – faith is illustrated by the spontaneous way we respond to God's word, and not by what we say. **"Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46)**

Not unlike the game known as "Simon Says," we eliminate ourselves by responding to what people say without supplying a *"thus says the Lord"* in the form of a Scriptural reference – **faith comes from hearing, and hearing the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17)** Many will get cute by trying to use the Bible (as Satan did when he tempted the Lord) in order to justify their lack of self-control by suggesting that if we were to be saved by doing *anything*, we would be deserving of salvation. It is through **Jude** that the Lord warns us against those **who turn the grace of God into licentiousness** as they use His grace to avoid repentance. (**Jude 3-4**)

No one is able to deserve salvation without living perfectly as Jesus did: **"HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM."** (**Galatians 3:10-12**) When God teaches us

through Paul that no one is saved by the **works of the law**, simply because we are not able to keep it perfectly, many conclude that he (Paul) contradicts James, who says **faith without works** to illustrate it **is dead**. They are unable to distinguish between those things for which one may deserve compensation and those gracious things which serve no other purpose than to illustrate that you have faith in the One who is telling you what to do.

Did Israel deserve the capture of Jericho because they had to walk around the city and shout? Ridiculous! Would they have been able to capture the city by God's grace had they failed to walk around the city and shout? The only thing their walking did was to illustrate that they believed God would give them victory in this unusual way.

What about the grace of God, someone objects? If we have to do anything salvation would not be by grace? Was Naaman (**2Kings 5**) healed by God's grace, or did he deserve his cleansing because he had to dip himself seven times in the Jordan? Would he have been healed if he decided six times was enough, or if he had gone to one of the rivers of his own country to do it, as he reasoned at first? NO, that is not what God said for him to do! It would have been quite arrogant for him to do anything different from what the Almighty God of heaven and earth told him to do, and the gracious aspect of his healing is illustrated by the simple action he had to take in order to receive it, as his servant pointed out: **"My father, had the prophet told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" (2Kings 5:13)**

Could one deserve salvation by making **an appeal to God** for the blood of Christ through the simple act of being buried in water by someone else? (**1Peter 3:21; Hebrews 9:13-14; Hebrews 10:22; Romans 6:3-4; John 3:3-5; Mark 16:16**) Because the Lord mentions faith twice and baptism only once to make sense, some argue that faith is more important and deny the action which would illustrate faith in the very words of the Messiah. It would be like Israel saying that they believe God would give them Jericho, but they would not walk around it as that would mean that they deserved the victory.

The sin of Adam and Eve illustrates how simple sin is, but also the seriousness thereof. We will not generalize and we tend to grade sin. Brethren walk disorderly when they lie and commit adultery; however they are not walking disorderly by forsaking the assembly. (**Hebrews 10:25**) Sin is sin. The eating of a prohibited fruit is as condemning as is the act of adultery, even though adultery is not the forbidden fruit. Attendance is such a simple principle to master and it often is one of the clearest way in which we express our priorities. **"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."** (**Matthew 6:33**) Or **"The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity."** (**Luke 8:14**)