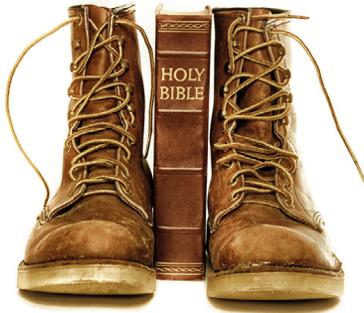


Set free



bring Jesus

Making sense of mission

by Rev Dr Steen Olsen



Steen also blogs at LCA eNews. To sign up to his newlist go to www.lca.org.au/enews, insert your email address and tick the box next to 'bring Jesus'. He would also love to hear your thoughts and stories about mission in your context.

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'I slept in and so didn't get to do my 20-minute personal devotion this morning. I feel like God is disappointed with me.'

When I was a young Christian in high school and university, I understood that God's law convicted me of my sin. Then at some point in confirmation class I got it. Jesus died for me and I was forgiven. Nothing could now separate me from the love of God.

And yet, at the time, it still seemed to me that having settled my salvation, God now gave me a new set of rules to obey. Some were in the Bible, others were not. Apart from the morning devotion thing, there were rules about witnessing, about love and about my unruly thought life. Some of my evangelical friends had other rules about smoking and drinking, not going to the movies and not playing cards. In the old days, Lutherans believed women should cover their heads in worship and they were not allowed to speak or vote at congregational meetings or to serve on committees. They were allowed to play the organ, teach Sunday school and form women's guilds. Men should not have long hair. Dancing was also out of bounds for some (but I never understood how the Twist would lead to immorality).

The trouble was that I was never very good at keeping all these rules, so I constantly felt guilty. In my mind's eye, God was frowning on me. Around that time I did manage to read the whole Bible in a year. God must have been pleased with that! I could almost hear his 'well done, good and faithful servant'. I had performed well, and surely that is what God wanted and

how he evaluated my life. Most of the time though, I was sure that God still condemned me for my feeble attempts at discipleship.

My approach to Christian living was performance-based. When I thought I had done well I could kid myself for a little while that I was finally succeeding. Mostly, that was not the case. It was all about how well I kept the rules. For all the talk I heard about grace, the law, it seemed, still had the final word and that was a heavy burden to bear.

I have since discovered, that in his letter to the Romans Paul clearly tells me I am now under grace and not under the law (6:14) and that I am therefore not condemned because I am in Christ Jesus (8:1). In his letter to the Galatians he puts it bluntly: 'For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery' (5:1). Jesus died to set me free from the law, not to give me better rules. Therefore I should not make myself a slave once again. I should not surrender the freedom which Jesus died to win for me. Quite simply, I should not be living under a burden of guilt. Martin Luther was very clear about that. He didn't bring back the rules, or God's law, as God's final word to us after we had heard the word of forgiveness.

Galatians and Romans are also clear that I should not use my freedom to gratify the desires of the flesh. But if I am honest I still do that in so many ways. The good news, however, is that when I fail I am already forgiven and I live in God's grace because of Jesus. How wonderful! That is God's last word to me. I am to let God's Spirit work in



my life, not to try my best to get it all together. When I fail, as I surely will, I am not to sweat it. God forgives me, so I should also forgive myself and move on in God's grace. God is still smiling on me.

When we bring Jesus to others we need to make sure that they understand that being a Christian is not about obeying a whole lot of restrictive rules. God is no kill-joy. He wants the very best for us and that is what his will for us is all about.

Of course we do learn about God's good intentions and his will for us when we read the Bible. But we don't see that as a series of rules we now need to try to obey. We understand that this is a picture of what God

is doing in us by his Spirit at work through his word, as he makes us more like Jesus. As Paul says, 'If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit' (Galatians 5:25). Rather than finding rules to obey, we can ask what good habits we need to embed in the fabric of our lives so that the things we believe truly shape who we are as his people. Jesus died to take my guilt. I am free.

While we are still in this world we remain both sinners and saints. God uses broken people like us in his mission to his world. Thank God for that!

Steen Olsen serves as the SA/NT Director for Mission and as a member of the LCA Board for Local Mission.



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*The Board for Local Mission has prepared **Renewing the Life of our Congregations and other Communities to help us to embed half a dozen good missional practices or habits into our lives together.** You can download that resource at www.lca.org.au/local-mission.html*



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