

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA
156

Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will deal with your unique ability to decide your own destiny. You even have the ability to decide your earthly destiny, but your eternal destiny as well. You have the ability to even reject the God Who created you! Animals do not! They have a physical body and physical life, but do not have a "spirit" You have a "spirit". Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians makes this clear that everyone does: **"May God himself the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23).** It is your "spirit" that makes you unique in creation.

In 1938 B. F. Skinner coined the term "operant conditioning". It refers to changing behavior by "reinforcement" until you achieve the desired response. He demonstrated positive reinforcement by placing a hungry rat in a "Skinner box". The box contained a lever on the side and as the rat moved around and bumped the lever, a food pellet would drop out. The rat quickly learned to bump that lever to get food. He demonstrated negative reinforcement by placing a rat in a "Skinner box" and subjecting it to an unpleasant electrical shock. This time, when the rat bumped the lever the electricity went off. Soon the rat learned to bump the lever and avoid the pain.

The book of Revelation describes a time when a third of mankind will be killed by plagues, but then informs us: **"The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood - idols that cannot see or hear to walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality, or their thefts" (Rev. 9:20, 21).**

A similar irrational situation is described in Rev. 16:9 when the people of earth were seared by intense heat, but still cursed God and refused to repent. This same absurd scenario is repeated in Rev. 16:11. This passage reminds us that even though men were gnawing their tongues in agony, they still cursed God because of their pain and sores, but refused to repent.

How is it possible for a rat to be more rational than a man? Yes! The lowly rat has enough sense to adjust his conduct to get food and avoid pain while often we do not.

As we have said, we are different from rats. This should be obvious. Man is created in the image of God and a rat is not. As we have said, rats have a body and physical life, but do not have a spirit. As we have also said, man is a three fold being with "spirit, soul, and body". While lower creatures, for example, migrate to avoid the cold of winter, man can build a house, light a fire, and survive without migrating. While lower creatures slavishly obey their instincts, man has been empowered by God with the ability to override those instincts. Man is therefore superior to animals, That's why God expects him to subdue and rule over every other creature on earth (Gen. 1:28). Sadly, however, we often find it easier to rule over others than to rule over ourselves.

Have you noticed in Scripture that animals, birds, and fish always obey God while man often does not? All the animals God called, for example, came on the ark, but only 8 people did. The

great fish swallowed Jonah and then spit him out. The birds fed Elijah, and the bears killed the young men who jeered at Elisha, The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel didn't know or understand (Is. 1:3). We have no Biblical record of an animal disobeying God.

It is the "spirit" of man that enables man to rebel against God. This is why lower creatures can be "conformed" by outward pressure and man cannot. While man cannot be "conformed" he can be "transformed". This transformation, however, cannot take place unless a change takes place in his "spirit". That's why Paul prayed for the Thessalonians that their "spirit, soul, and body" would all be blameless.

Transformation occurs when someone is "born again" of a "spiritual seed" (Jn. 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:23). This happens because the Word of God divides the "soul and spirit" (Heb. 4:12). This enables us to become "one spirit" with God (1 Cor. 6:17). This also enables us to be "made new in the spirit of our minds" (Eph. 4:23 KJV). Man, of course, cannot save himself that's why God promised "I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes" (Ez. 36:27).

Therefore, Grandpa joins with Paul in this prayer: **"May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ".**

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce