

Minimum Standards

By Joe Slater

“So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.’” (Luke 17:10.)

Car parts aren’t perfect. In automotive school, they taught us about “specifications” and “tolerances.” A cylinder in an engine block, for example, ought to be perfectly round; but none are. Even the best will be flawed a ten-thousandth of an inch or so. Car makers require that parts be within “tolerances.” That is, they can be imperfect up to a point; but beyond that point they are rejected. A degree of imperfection can be tolerated, but no more than that. Parts must meet at least minimum standards.

I understand why car parts are allowed to be slightly flawed. If we demanded near absolute perfection from each part, cars would cost

millions of dollars each! We err, however, when we apply “minimum standards” to Christianity.

People, like car parts, aren’t perfect. Our “specifications” are set out in the Bible. But even the best of us fall short of them. Yet we dare not think that God will be pleased if we seek merely to meet “minimum standards” as we serve Him.

“What is the least I can do and still go to Heaven? What is the minimum I can be while still escaping eternal torment? Can I squeak by with Sunday-morning-only attendance? No doubt Bible class is important, and Sunday evening and mid-week meetings are good, but are they absolute necessities? Am I outside of tolerances if I skip them? What is the least amount of Bible reading and study I must do each week to keep from starving to death spiritually? What is the least I can give to

the Lord’s cause and still be within tolerances? How many sins can I commit each day without jeopardizing my soul? How infrequently may I pray without cutting myself off from God?”

We must refuse even to consider such questions! Merely asking them demonstrates that our hearts are not right! We must strive for perfection, knowing full well that we will fall short of it, and realizing that even if, somehow, we managed to reach it, we would not merit anything from God.

We must seek to be the best we can be because we love God. He paid an awful price for us. While we rely upon His grace to forgive our failures, to be satisfied with “minimum standards” is to insult our God!

— Justin, TX

ARE WE TAKING THINGS FOR GRANTED?

By Mark Lindley

The question that serves as the title of this article is a question all should consider. I am persuaded that everyone at some point and to some degree, either has or is taking things for granted. We do not intend to, but it is so easy to take certain things for granted.

To take something for granted means “to fail to value something properly,” or “to assume that you will never lose something.” Usually, it is only after we have lost something of value that we can realize that we have been taking it for granted.

If the stars were to appear only once a year, most everyone would set aside time to go outside and gaze into the beautiful heavens above. However, because the stars are visible nearly every night, we hardly ever notice this wonderful display of God’s power. We take such a beautiful sight for granted. The following are other things we frequently take for granted:

1) We take for granted the precious gift of life. All life springs from the

Lord, the giver of life. (Acts 17:24-26.) A near-death experience or failing health may cause us to realize that this life is “a vapor, that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away.” (James 4:14.) We should live each day to the fullest, and recognize that time is quickly passing. (Psalm 90:12.)

2) We take for granted friends and family. The Scriptures teach that there is to be deep, abiding love, respect, and appreciation within the family. (Ephesians 5:25; Titus 2:4; Psalm 127:3-5; Ephesians 6:1-3.) Nevertheless, we sometimes take our spouses and children for granted. We fail to show love and appreciation, assuming that there will always be a later time for expressing ourselves. Rather than showing love and respect, we sometimes speak to our friends and family members with harsh, angry words. What if you spoke to your spouse or child in an abrasive and rude manner, and those were the last words he/she heard you say? Surely we would not want the last words spoken to a friend or

loved-one to be bitter, angry words. We should never take for granted that there will always be “tomorrow” to apologize or express love and appreciation to friends and family.

3) We take salvation for granted. God sent His only begotten Son that we might be saved from sin. (John 3:16.) However, we will be saved only when we choose to obey the gospel of Christ. (Romans 6:16-18; 3:4.) Some put off obedience to the gospel, believing there will be a time in the future for receiving God’s forgiveness. Yet there is no guarantee that such an opportunity will be available. (Luke 12:16-21.) Today is the day of salvation. (2 Corinthians 6:2.)

Let us resolve that we will always appreciate the gifts of life, friends and family, and salvation from sin. Never take such blessings for granted!

— Ripley, MS

Old Paths

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“ask for the old paths” (Jer. 6:16)

WHAT IS IT ABOUT THIS BOOK: THE BIBLE?

By Danny Tunnell

What is it about this is the book? That William Tyndale was willing to endure being burnt at the stake because of his desire to make the Bible available to even the common people of England. Today, he is known as “the father of the English Bible.”

What is it about this book? That Martin Luther was willing to hide away in a castle while translating the Scriptures into the language of the people.

What is it about this book? That caused Charles Colson (1931-2012) to write: “The Bible

— banned, burned, beloved. More widely read, more frequently attacked than any other book. Generations of intellectuals have attempted to discredit it; dictators of every age have outlawed it and executed those who read it.”

What is it about this book? That down through the years it has been ridiculed, burned, refuted, destroyed, but it lives on. It is the anvil that has worn out many hammers.

What is it about this book? That time and time again the Bible has been proven right and the scholars who attacked it were proven wrong.

What is it about this book: the Bible?

It is the only divinely inspired book in the world. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16,17.)

What is it about this book: the Bible?

Nearly all of our knowledge of Christ comes from the Bible. Only one or two other men contemporary with Christ ever mentioned that He had lived, Josephus being one. Without the Bible, we wouldn’t know that God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, so those who believe in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16.)

What is it about this book: the Bible?

It has been preserved by God; it lives on. “The grass withers, the flower fades . . . but the word of our God stands forever.” (Isaiah 40:7,8.)

What is it about this book: the Bible? That motivated Chuck Colson, actively involved for decades in prison ministry, to say: “Fragments of the Bible smuggled into solitary prison cells have transformed ruthless killers into gentle saints.”

What is it about the book: the Bible?

Let’s let the Bible, itself, answer our question. This is the book that accurately describes itself as “living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12.)

— Miami, OK

HEEDING HEAVEN’S INSTRUCTIONS

By Bobby Key

There was rebellion in the camp. The way had been hard, and the people were discouraged. Complaining about food, water, and hardships of the journey now turned into speaking against their leader, Moses. In fact, it went further and turned into speaking against Almighty God.

Punishment was equally swift. Fiery serpents appeared among the people, and by their bites the Israelites began to die. “We have sinned,” the nation cried. “Save us. Take away these snakes!” Their plea was presented to God by an interceding Moses, and a gracious God hearkened unto them. “Make a fiery serpent. And it shall come to pass that every one that is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.”

Those who did as they were told, lived. (Numbers 21.)

More is embraced here than just an historical event. Christ says this is an analogy of the redemption of fallen man. “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:14,15.)

Sin is the deadly malady that has spread through the world. Wherever man is found, there sin is found also.

Like the venom from the snake, sin is deadly. Victims died from the venom. In a more awful way the victim of sin pays the penalty of death.

Remedy for both snake bite and sin are prescribed by the Lord. The Israelites could not heal themselves; neither can we! They escaped punishment just as we will, by heeding heaven’s instructions!

— Miami, OK

“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” (Mark 16:16.) “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38.) “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” (Acts 22:16.) “There is also an antitype which now saves us - baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 3:21.)

“I’D BE ASHAMED TO BE ASHAMED”

By Lewis Hale

Recently some gospel preachers were discussing problems plaguing our brotherhood. Much of the discussion centered on the fact that there is a concerted effort on the part of some to change the face of the church.

Some would alter the role of women in the church so that the ladies can have any role that the men do. Some would make the day of the week for taking the Lord’s Supper to be optional. One “prison minister” serves communion to prisoners on Tuesday evenings. Still others regard the use of instrumental music to accompany our singing to be a matter of opinion and not a matter of faith.

Questions were asked regarding why these views were being spawned. Those professing the views claim they are the result of a new approach to understanding the scriptures. Someone suggested it was more likely that men decided what they wanted to do then found an approach to the scriptures which they believe would allow their practices.

It was suggested that these views may be held due to a combination of factors. One suggestion seemed more significant to me than the others. Someone said that these brethren advocating a “new hermeneutic” have found our “traditional views” to be an embarrassment to them. They are embarrassed in the presence of the “pious un-immersed” when we preach that sinners who are not baptized are lost. They are embarrassed when we preach it is wrong to use instrumental music when singing in worship of God. . . *ad infinitum*.

I fear that the word “embarrassment” is not quite the proper word. It seems more to me that these people are ashamed. And Jesus said, “Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He shall come in His own glory, and in the Father’s and of the holy angels.” (Luke 9:26.)

Someone long ago put it aptly, “I’d be ashamed to be ashamed.”

— Oklahoma City, OK

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” (Romans 1:16.)

Editorial . . .

DON’T GIVE UP AS YOU GROW OLD!

By Dalton Key

The Bible gives those growing older the following assurance: “The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing.” (Psalm 92:12-14.) And another word of encouragement for seniors: “The glory of young men is their strength, and the splendor of old men is their gray head.” (Proverbs 20:29.)

A study was made a few years ago of 400 of the worlds most impactful figures. The names were chosen from a wide variety of vocations and activities. The findings? A full thirty-five percent of the world’s greatest achievements have been achieved by people between the ages of sixty and seventy-five. As an incoming member of the threescore club, I find this study both encouraging and challenging!

While youth has its advantages, don’t dismiss the fruit of a few more years. Those who are older still have much to contribute to the cause of Christ! “Paul, the aged,” was still of great use to the Lord and His church. (Philemon 9.) The apostle John, an inspired New Testament penman, wrote his inspired account of the gospel, three epistles, and the book of Revelation, while living in the twilight years of his life. He often referred to his brethren as “My little children.” (1 John 2:1.)

To Christians living in what some have called “the golden years,” please consider the following friendly word of advice: Don’t allow age to become an excuse for giving up. You may be retired from years of employment, but don’t allow yourself to retire from life or from the Lord’s work! Yes, you may be unable to do all you once did, but you may well have opportunities and abilities now which were unknown to you in times past.

Senior saint, do what you can, where you are, with what you have, for as long as God grants you strength! Your greatest work for the Lord may yet lie ahead. In short, don’t give up and don’t give out . . . just keep giving all you have to give! “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.” (Galatians 6:9.)

When considering life’s greatest and most important responsibilities - serving the Lord, doing good, helping, encouraging, teaching others and being a blessing within our circle of influence - you are never too old!

As years increase and strength allays,
Why look ahead with dread?
Consider, friend, the fruitful days
That still may lie ahead! (DK)



OUR JOURNEY TO ETERNITY

By Milton Smith

belongs to each one of us.

It was Jesus who admonished each person to make that important choice of traveling the narrow way so that he/she might enter through the strait gate that leads to eternal life. He then warned that the way is broad and the gate is wide that leads to eternal destruction, and that many will choose that path. (cf. Matthew 7:13-14.) As we grow and mature, the world will beckon us to follow many roads. It will be those decisions that will ultimately decide where each of us will spend eternity. Jesus spoke very vividly about heaven and hell, which tells us that both of these places are real. To insure that we can know whether or not we are bound for the right place, God gave to mankind His inspired Word. Following its teachings will secure eternal life for the faithful.

Whoever you are, there are particular stages of existence that apply to you because they apply to everyone. Sometime in the past you were born. In other words, you were physically conceived and soon brought forth into this world. You entered the world completely innocent. Deuteronomy 1:39 tells us that such infants (little children) “have no knowledge between good and evil,” so this was our innocent state.

But as a person grows and matures, important decisions must be made. These decisions will determine the direction one travels in this life. It was Joshua who once stated, “choose this day whom you will serve . . . as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” (Joshua 24:15.) Joshua made it clear that this eternity-determining choice

When one obeys the gospel, he puts himself under the redeeming blood of the “Lamb of God” and is added to the Lord’s spiritual body, a body known as the “church” (i.e. God’s “called out” group). It then becomes this person’s responsibility to remain under the saving blood of Christ and within the sphere of the grace of God, accomplished by remaining “faithful unto death.” (Revelation 2:10, KJV.) After death, the obedient child of God will inherit that home that Jesus went to prepare for us, and experience the unequalled privilege of eternal life in the “New Jerusalem.” The facts regarding how to secure eternal life are simple to understand.

It thus remains up to you and me to determine we are willing to respond to God’s merciful offer of pardon.

— Tulsa, OK

NOT YET HOME

By Dalton Key

We may as well admit the obvious: things are getting morally and spiritually worse nearly everywhere you look. As God’s children living in a benighted world fraught with ever-increasing levels of depravity, we seem to be sharing an unwanted kinship with Lot, of Old Testament days, who while living in Sodom, was “oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds). (2 Peter 2:7,8.)

The decadence of our day reminds us of the sordid conditions, the “perilous times,” described by Paul in 2 Timothy 3. Among the apostle’s warnings, note these ominous words: “But evil men and imposters will grow worse

and worse, deceiving and being deceived.” (2 Timothy 3:13.) From all appearances, evil men and imposters are, even now, alive and active and intent upon deceiving all souls within their ability to deceive.

Lot’s soul was tormented “from day to day” in “seeing and hearing.” And he didn’t even have facebook or twitter!

Despite today’s worsening spiritual and moral climate, we do have reason for hope and genuine optimism. Trials and tribulations are not novel. There was sin in the Garden of Eden. There will be sin around us until the end of time. The world has never been inclined toward God and godly behavior. But the good news is found in heaven’s promise: “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I

have overcome the world.” (John 16:33.) “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” (1 John 4:4.)

Remember fellow pilgrims we’re not yet home! (1 Peter 2:11.)

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