

GOD'S MEASURING ROD

By Bobby Key

The Bible is God's measuring rod. John said, "I was given a measuring stick like a rod, and I was told, 'Go and measure the temple of God and the Alter, and count the people worshipping there.'" (Revelation 11:1.) Yes, the standard of measurement for "churches of Christ" (Romans 16:16) is the unfailing word of God. Our conduct, our worship, and our preaching must be measured by this divine measuring rod.

Success is usually the measuring rod used by the world. "We will measure this movement by the success of it. Time will tell, and nothing succeeds like success," cries the world.

But the earth's yardstick has never applied to Jesus Christ. According to the world's viewpoint of His time, Jesus was a failure. He died in disgrace, as a common criminal, and

his followers were scattered in the process. Countless centuries have come and gone since then, and yet today it still looks as if Caesar, not Christ, is on the throne and that the devil is pretty much having his own way. The Lord once asked, "When the Son of Man comes again, will he find those on earth who believe in Him?" (Luke 18:8.)

No, that is not success as the world measures it.

Nor is it true in the things of Christ that "time will tell." My friend, eternity will tell and we await the verdict of eternity!

A church may meet all the outward signs of progress and yet be a failure. Numbers, wealth, popularity, and fine church buildings do not make a church right in God's eyes.

May we all return to God's divine

measure. How do I look beside the unchanging word of God? Does the church where I worship meet God's standard?

Remember, God's standard is the only one that matters.

"Anyone who hears my words and does not obey them, I do not judge, because I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. There is a judge for those who refuse to believe in me and do not accept my words. The word I have taught will be their judge on the last day." (John 12:47,48.)

"God's word is alive and working and is sharper than a double-edged sword. It cuts all the way into us, where the soul and the spirit are joined, to the center of our joints and bones. And it judges the thoughts and feelings of our hearts." (Hebrews 4:12.)

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

By Danny Tunnell

Hell is a tough message. Jesus talked about it 33 times. He talked more about Hell than He did about Heaven.

Jesus told an actual story in Luke 16 about a certain rich man and a certain beggar named Lazarus. The rich man died and found himself in torment. Jesus quoted him saying, "I am tormented in this flame." (vs. 24.) Luke 16 should end all debate about whether or not Hell is real. It is a place of fire . . . unquenchable fire, everlasting and eternal fire . . . a lake of fire and brimstone. (2 Thessalonians 1:9; Luke 3:17; Revelation 19:20.) Luke 16 also indicates that it is a place of torment. From what Jesus said we can discern what happens to a person who goes to Hell. (1) He desires comfort, (2) He expresses concern. The rich man was concerned about his five brothers, and (3) He seeks consolation.

There is no light in Hell. It is a place of utter darkness, complete and total darkness. (Matthew 24:51.) However, in Heaven there is light. Jesus is the light. (Revelation 21:23.) The reason there is no light in Hell is because God takes His presence away.

Hell is a bottomless pit. (Revelation 9:11.) There is no place to sit down, or to touch something, or to walk. The two things that help keep us mentally stable on earth are missing in Hell: light and solids.

The things that help us stay emotionally stable on earth are also missing in Hell: rest and hope. There is no rest in Hell. (Revelation 14:11.) There is no hope in Hell. When a person commits suicide, Satan has convinced that person that something is true on earth that is actually true in Hell, that there is no hope. On earth we always have hope, because if we are alive, we can turn to God for help. Those in Hell for 10,000 centuries do not have one less second to be in that place. Hell is forever and there is no hope.

Jesus used a word to describe Hell that no other person had ever used in that way. He used the word "Gehenna." It describes a valley south of the old city of Jerusalem, a place where they burned the bodies of poor people who had died. The history of that valley includes the times of King Manasseh and King Ahab who offered children to the god, Molech. (1 Kings 23:10;

Jeremiah 32:35.) Children were made to walk into the fire and were burned alive, sometimes driven with whips.

These young boys and girls would be so afraid and in such pain that they would weep and wail and gnash their teeth. It is believed that Jesus was referring to that horrific tragedy in Matthew 24:51, as if to say, "I'm telling you about this place so you won't go there."

Suppose you drove by your neighbor's house and saw it on fire! What would you do? You would immediately call 911, and if safe to enter, you would try to see if anybody was inside. You would not just pull into your driveway and think, "Someone else will tell them. I'll just pray for 'em." No! Prayer is important, but the second step is to tell 'em.

It's ludicrous to not speak up and try to help. Your neighbor's house is not on fire, but your neighbor may be. If you don't tell him, he will go to a place of fire and torment for all eternity. What should you do?

— Miami, OK

Old Paths

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"ask for the old paths" (Jer. 6:16)

SEEDS PLANTED WILL GROW

By Mark Lindley

The principle of sowing and reaping is a law of the natural world. For farmers, a time of sowing must precede reaping. What is true in the natural world is also true of spiritual things. The apostle Paul wrote, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life." (Galatians 6:7,8.)

The law of sowing and reaping is a universal rule that applies to Christians and non-Christians. It is an unchanging truism that we reap what we sow.

Fundamentally, there are three things necessary for sowing and reaping to occur: seed, ground, and time. A seed is a common and relatively small object, but it produces great results. Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches." (Matthew 13:31-32.) The "seeds" sown by our words and deeds may seem small, but they produce significant results.

The ground in which we sow is life. In good times and bad, during all seasons and circumstances, we are sowing.

After sowing, there is a period of waiting for the harvest. In the natural world, the farmer waits for his crop to mature and has "long patience." (cf. James 5:7.) Regarding spiritual things, after we have sown, we may reap in hours, days, weeks, years or in eternity. But we will reap what we sow.

Sowing "small" seeds of poor choices can lead to a bitter harvest of regret and sorrow. One may sow seeds of theft, stealing money from one's employer, and reap a damaged reputation and loss of employment. One may sow seeds of addiction to alcohol, and reap the loss of health. If one never sows these seeds, the unwanted "plants" cannot grow.

It is also true that we may sow words and deeds of kindness, encouragement, gratitude, and love, and reap strong relationships and happy homes. (cf. Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:18-20.) As we journey through life, sowing small seeds for the Lord will pay great benefits. Sow good seed and reap a harvest of spiritual blessings!

— Ripley, MS

OUTLIVING YOUR LOVE FOR GOD

By Danny Boggs

The true story is told three times in Scripture - in 2 Kings 20, 2 Chronicles 32 and Isaiah 38 and 39. He did not outlive his health. He did not outlive his mind. But Hezekiah may have outlived his love for God.

King Hezekiah brought sorely needed religious reform and restoration to Judah. When he fell sick, God's prophet Isaiah told him that his time was up. He was only 39 years old! "Thus say the Lord, 'Set your house in order, for you shall die; and not soon recover.'" Hezekiah was as rattled as you and I would be by such news. He wept bitterly, and he prayed fervently. Graciously, God sent Isaiah back with a promise of fifteen more years as a result of Hezekiah's prayer.

In his prayer, the king asked God to remember how he had walked before Him in faithfulness and with a whole heart and how he had done what was good in God's sight. He vowed to walk in humility all of his days if we was allowed to recover.

God answered Hezekiah's prayer, but Hezekiah did not keep his promise. In foolish pride, he showed off his wealth to foreigners who would come back as greedy enemies. Three years after his desperate prayer, Hezekiah's first son was born to him. What joy! But that son, Manasseh, would become king at age 12, reign for 55 years, and lead the people "astray to do more evil than the nations had done whom the Lord destroyed before the people of Israel." And to think he never would even have been born if Hezekiah had died at 39. Isaiah came back to warn Hezekiah about how bad things would turn out in his family and his country after he died. The only bottom line that Hezekiah cared to see was that "there will be peace and security in my days."

I don't know what the original illness was that threatened his life, but by now Hezekiah had a serious heart condition. I hope that he did not die with it, but it seems like Hezekiah lived too long.

What would you do if death was knocking hard on the door? If you prayed, and God responded with assurance of a specific bonus span of time to your life, what would you do with that extra time? Would you spend it selfishly or give it back to God in faithful and grateful service?

Here's the real question: what are you doing with the life God has given you today?

Think about the rest of your life this way: "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit' - yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.' As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." (James 4:13-17.)

Pray like Bernard of Clairvaux did: "O make me thine forever, and should I fainting be, Lord, let me never, never outlive my love to Thee."

— Neosho, MO

PREACH IT FROM THE HOUSETOPS

By Milton Smith

If the message is important, we often use the metaphorical term “shout it from the housetops!” In day of old, with no electronic devices available to amplify the human voice, people often looked for ways to project the voice out greater distances. Some time in the ancient past it was discovered that one such way to accomplish this goal was to stand on a housetop and speak in a loud voice. Perhaps those ancients did not fully understand the scientific reasons that this worked, but they obviously noticed that it helped greatly.

In Matthew 10:27, Jesus issued this decree to His disciples: “Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops.” In other words, this is a message that needs to be heard! It needs to be proclaimed far and wide. “What I whisper in your ear, shout it from the housetops” was our Savior’s commission to his people. The message of the good news of the gospel has never been more needed than it is needed today. Many people today are distressed and searching for some meaning to their life. I have no doubt that there are still people out there who are anxiously looking for something of more value than what just living day-to-day provides for them.

This is an opportunity for us to “shout the good news from the housetops.” The Great Commission is just as “great” today as it was in the first century, and every soul deserves the right and privilege of hearing about Jesus Christ. Let us never forget that our mission today is exactly the same as the mission of the apostles 2000 years ago. While we still have the privilege of working for the Master, let us proclaim the good news of the gospel. Surely many will be listening.

In the words of our Lord, let us shout this message from the housetops so that all may be granted the opportunity of either receiving or rejecting God’s offer of salvation to the world.

— Tulsa, OK

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20.)

EDITORIALLY SPEAKING . . .

INSIDE AND OUT

By Dalton Key

God seeks rule over more than just our bodies; He desires our hearts and minds as well.

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” (Romans 12:1,2.) We offer to God our bodies as living sacrifices, conjoined with, or perhaps more accurately, resulting from the renewing of our minds.

This inward affection for God is referred to by Christ as “the first and greatest commandment.” (Matthew 22:38.)

Heaven’s message has ever sought to operate on the heart of man. Peter’s inspired message on Pentecost “cut to the heart” of those who heard it. (Acts 2:37.) The word of God, “sharper than any two-edged sword,” pierces “even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12.) “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.” (Psalm 19:7.)

Without a sincere change of heart, outward expressions of obedience are both hollow and ineffective. We are “set free from sin” and become “servants of righteousness” after obeying God’s teaching “from the heart.” (Romans 6:17,18.)

A new birth results in a new life, but the new birth itself concerns the spirit. “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” (John 3:6.) We “have purified our souls in obeying the truth.” (1 Peter 1:22.)

Conversion, to be genuine, must include the whole man. While our behavior must manifest fruits of repentance, while we must live right and do right, we must first freely offer to the Lord our hearts and souls and minds. Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” (John 14:15.)

Ours is more than merely a regimented religion of doing; it is one of being and becoming. “These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.” (Matthew 23:23.)

The only way God makes a Christian is from the inside out.



Saved, But Just Barely?

By Joe Slater

“If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and sinner appear?” (1 Peter 4:18.)

I have no idea how many times I’ve heard this passage quoted and misapplied to teach that even the most faithful child of God will just barely squeak through the pearly gates before they slam shut. I call it “skin-of-the-teeth salvation,” and let me say here and now: “The Bible Teaches No Such Thing!”

Peter was quoting Proverbs 11:31 from the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew text used by Greek-speaking Jews to whom Peter wrote. It will help us to read it from an English translation of the Hebrew text also. “If the righteous will be recompensed on the earth, how much more the ungodly and sinner.” (Proverbs 11:31, NJKV.) That doesn’t

match with the idea of just barely making it to Heaven! Nor does Peter’s context pertain to salvation from sin in Heaven. Peter was writing about suffering as a Christian. (1 Peter 4:16.)

If God allows His children to suffer, delivering them only through great difficulty, rest assured that the fate of the ungodly will be infinitely worse! And that’s what “scarcely” means – not “just barely,” but “with difficulty.” The same word is used in Luke 9:39 where a demon left a man’s son “with great difficulty.” The unclean spirit didn’t “just barely” depart, but as it left, it caused the boy a final dose of misery.

In a different passage which actually does pertain to salvation in Heaven, Peter wrote that “an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our

Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 1:11.) Just barely saved? Nope!

By the way, the pearly gates will never slam shut; they are open continually (Revelation 21:25).

— Justin, TX

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit . . . Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:1, 37-39.)

IS THE BIBLE DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND?

By David Deffenbaugh

Is the Bible easy or difficult to understand?

That’s really not a very fair question because the Bible, in a sense, is both.

There must be a sense in which it is easily understood because it is God’s desire for all men to understand and be obedient to His will. (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9.) How could God expect something of all men that is beyond their capacity to do?

There are also some parts of Scripture that are difficult. Peter even acknowledged this fact specifically regarding some of Paul’s writing. (2 Peter 3:16.) Any honest student of Scripture is going to agree with Peter.

But just because there are parts that are difficult, it does not mean it is all difficult and beyond our comprehension. This is precisely the point at which some people make a tempting, but false, leap in their thinking. After all, if all of Scripture is difficult would this not excuse a lack

of obedience?

How can you do what you don’t know or understand?

Mark Twain is credited with a statement that is probably closer to the truth and more honest than most people may want to admit. He said it wasn’t the parts of the Bible that he didn’t understand that troubled him, it was the parts that he did understand.

It’s an age-old problem. Man’s failure to do what is right is usually not because he doesn’t know any better; rather it is a failure to do what he already knows.

Many times people aren’t in need of knowing more; they’re in need of doing what they already know. The plea of God is for mankind to repent, to change the mind, heart and will from self-service to submission of His will.

Are we willing to do what we know? It might seem easier to just plead ignorance or an inability to really know - that is, at least for now.

“So whoever knows the right

thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.” (James 4:17.)

— Oklahoma City, OK

“So be very careful how you live. Do not live like those who are not wise, but live wisely. Use every chance you have for doing good, because these are evil times. So do not be foolish but learn what the Lord wants you to do.” (Ephesians 5:15-17.)

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