



“Weights and Measurements”

...self-analysis in our day of self-justification

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Hebrews 12:1-4 *Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which*

so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.

2 Corinthians 13:5- *Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!*

The truth is, when it comes to God and His Word, we love select elements and certain parts of it all, but there are parts—practices, doctrines, and commandments—that we simply don't like. What we do with that reality will profoundly affect our future and how we walk out our faith in this life God has given us.

We tend to universally embrace the God who is gracious and loving ...and we love the fact He sent His Son to take the heat for us, and we relish in the fact that He made us positionally right with Him. We hold to the fact that He's into restoration and hope, and we bask in things like His grace and mercy. And yet truth be told, we don't really like hearing about other His attributes that might be a little scarier or demanding of us.

Thus many of us have been, either on purpose or by accident, become conditioned to view God incompletely. We hold to what is a one-sided view of who God is, and eventually the rejection of the other sides of God begins to collapse our homemade strawman and then we stand in very real danger of spiritual collapse. We have seen it often here in this community. We have all witnessed the losses, the crash-and-burn of those who eventually failed to make that leap to a grown-up faith.

The fact is, we want God to do it all. We have embraced His gifts and power and all the unilateral aspects of our relationship with Him, but we flinch at His call upon us to now step up and use them for his glory and the furtherance of His kingdom. Some have taken to a kind of Gnostic position where they ignore all the parts of faith living that we are supposed to be doing, and put it all on Christ.

We then acquiesce to the position of a drone, one void of passion and response, and God just moves us around the board like a pawn. Such becomes then not a *relationship* but merely a duty where we are simply minions and God is a distant impersonal deity. Taking such a stance, we essentially force a different Jesus to emerge. One that is not the scriptural picture and not the historical Jesus that we read of in the gospel accounts. This new “re-imagined” Jesus asks nothing of us, does not require a maturing and an in-kind relationship with Him, and allows us to remain forever as spiritual children. A "Peter Pan" syndrome for Christians.

The stark results of such a belief system is that it is based upon only *receiving* from Christ and never *giving in return*. And sooner or later, when God says no on some matter, (and He will!), we reject that “still small voice” and go out and attempt to get it anyway but on our own. And that is guaranteed to bring some painful discipline. Pain that touches our family, our church and community, and finally, often our very life. Growing up and taking our place in a community where we can serve, give, love, respond and carry is crucial. How many have we lost because they respond to Jesus only as a child, only as a consumer and they want what they want and they won't be denied?

Often we will defend our style of living by rightfully proclaiming that the things we are living for are not sins. However, Paul warned us about something he referred to as “weights.” We often will attempt to justify our lifestyle by claiming that the plethora of possessions, goals, and pursuits that occupy our lives are not sin. And that may very well be! However, Paul warns us herein not specifically about **sins**, but about **weights**. Things that slow us down, burden our lives, and cause us to tire. Ultimately, they will and do, distract us from the Kingdom and from the one we verbally declare to be our “first love.” I read a short list a guy put together...certainly not exhaustive yet gives us a picture of what we are talking about...

1. Personal hopes, goals and relationships (traveling, degrees, people I want to meet, extended family, business goals, savings, sports metals and trophies, etc.).
2. Material things (our clothing, a house, home furnishings, cars, etc.).
3. Entertainment (TV shows, movies, games, sports, parties, etc.).
4. Overeating (eating more than we need to be healthy, eating junk food, eating more for the taste than for our nourishment.)
5. Worldly books and teachings (worldly and sinful things and teachings of all kinds).
6. Fears and worries.

In Luke 14 Jesus made a rather shocking statement...one no doubt meant as a hyperbole yet it cannot be just ignored. He said “*If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be My disciple.*” He said also in John 12:25 that “*Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity.*” Clearly, we cannot draw lines in the sand and create diverse “levels” of Christianity wherein there are different kinds of Christians...varying vastly between a mere tacit church going individual with a mental belief in the existence and claims of Christ, and a 21 year old girl who goes to Haiti to serve God and others and loses her life violently in His service.

It's easy to claim that going to Haiti is not what God called you to do. Ok...what **has** He called you to do and are you actively pursuing it? I can assure you that whatever it is, you can't do it. He won't ask you to do things that you can do. He will ask you to do things that you can't do without Him actively working in and through you, and I promise you, it will be a challenge. Jesus said in Mark 12:30 “...*you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.*”

Hebrews 12 began with the word "therefore". Chapter 11 lamented-on in length concerning the very real cost of being a child of God and used language of the likes of “torture”, being persecuted, whipped and put in chains.

Some were stoned, others were sawed in half, others killed by the sword. Others were destitute, oppressed and mistreated...living lives where they had to wander far and wide, hide in caves and holes in the ground.

In stark contrast we can be found incredulous... “*what do you mean ‘serving’ Jesus and his bride the church?’ Hey man...I have a life and I have stuff going on!*” Then comes... “*you’re just being legalistic and promoting a works oriented faith!*” Ya...tell that to the guy that got sawed in two or the guy living in a hole.

“Therefore” ... (or “because of all that”) ... “since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.”

What that means is, in light of such sacrifice for God, what follows is to be **our** response, ... our answer to it all. Immediately the passage hits us with phrases such as, "let us lay aside", "let us run with endurance", "look unto Jesus", "consider Him..." All of these things are actions which are actually ours to do and are moreover seemingly expected of us! The writer, probably Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, calls upon us to actually move...to *respond*...to what God has done in us. We are called to run a race that explicitly calls for endurance on our part. That does not sound like “Easy Street” or a child-like approach to God's grace and patience.

We are called to “endure.” We forget, *or perhaps we have never really known*, the Jesus that "endured." He "endured the cross, despising the shame." He did more than just **run** that race. We are told He actually did so for the “joy of it.” Doesn't that just make you throw on the brakes? He **endured** that stuff, serious stuff, right on through to the end and He did it with joy!

We on the other hand want to be like the late Rosie M. Vivas. Vivas was a Cuban-American fraudster who, among other schemes, was declared the winner in the female category for the 84th Boston Marathon in 1980, only to have her title stripped eight days after the race when it was discovered that she had not run the entire course. She is believed to have jumped onto the course about a half-mile before the finish.

We too are willing to run *a little*. But hey...**endure**?

Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

~ 2 Corinthians 13:5

In that verse, the apostle Paul is calling on the Corinthians to examine themselves to see if their faith in Christ is genuine. He wants them to determine if their walk matches their talk. Many profess their Christianity via some level of knowledge about God or via their morality or by their involvement in various ministries within their church. They may base it on a prayer they once said, or look to things like their baptism or communion as a proof of their salvation.

The measurements...the quantifiers of our faith, are many. Some are nebulous and unverifiable. But there is one overwhelming and mandatory proof...none as stark and clear... as the fire of passion. A real driving passion for Christ that motivates and drives us forward and causes us to implicitly endure. Passion drives us to the front lines. Passion prioritizes our life and motivates our living and our choices. How do we get this passion? Through a real and active thankfulness and love through the understanding of the cross of Christ and the salvation that He has given!

When we fail to actually run this race with passion, ...when we fail to participate with a gnarly focus to win that race, we are bound to get tired and discouraged. We lose our way and find ourselves off course and off the path. We fail to move forward in the faith we have been given and see faith instead as a tool to get something we want. We want the winner's trophy, we just don't want to run! It all really comes down to the desire of your heart: is it for Him or is it for you and this world? Is it for *someone* ...or *something*? What are you living for this morning? How many of you are in truth fighting against God with your dreams and aspirations that may not be what God wants for you or what you were created for? How many of you consistently see your future and your path as always "over there" and never here before you?

For many of us, when we don't get what we want, we feel like we're dying, but this passage says, "*You have not actually bled over this issue yet, have you?*" The writer is trying to bring us to some grounded perspective here. Jesus was beaten and crucified for His faith. How about you? That's where the writer is trying to take us. He tells us that a relationship such as this IS a righteous loving Father-Son relationship, whether we want to acknowledge it or not.

Few of us are willing to look into this deep dark well and ascertain just where we stand. Seldom will we make that leap for fear of what we might find! Yet...as they say... "ignorance is no excuse." We know that going in for a yearly physical, especially as we age is a good thing. It can catch early symptoms of a health issue before it becomes a problem. Even more important than a physical check-up is a spiritual check-up. It determines the matter of where we spend eternity. It's one of the most important examinations we will ever take.

Indeed our salvation it is by grace alone that we are saved through faith in Jesus Christ. But as Martin Luther stated, "*We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.*" Real salvation and faith will never be a secret. However, many will still attempt to profess a faith in Christ while still not surrendered. Paul exhorts us in our passage of 2 Corinthians 13:5 to examine ourselves because the outcome of real faith will show that Christ is indwelling in us by the Holy Spirit and it will manifest godly lives that desire to be obedient to the Word of God and in participation with His work!

In his book "Who am I: My Identity in Christ" Jerry Bridges wrote, "*These are important questions that we should seek to answer truthfully. The stakes are too high to ignore them or play games with them. Our eternal destiny is at stake and eternity lasts forever. There is no end to it. All of us will spend eternity in the blessed presence of God, or we will spend it under the never-ending curse and wrath of God.*"

So the question each of us should honestly face is this: Do I have significant evidence that I am a new creation? Not perfection by any means, but confirmation that I am actually in the race? What about my friends and relatives who consider themselves to be Christians, but who show little or no evidence of being new creations? Perhaps we should also...out of a real love for them... seek to graciously challenge them to examine themselves.

Matthew 7:20 says that we will "recognize them by their fruits." We attempt to defy this clarifying truth by saying that we are indeed an apple tree although we are growing no apples at all and are in fact growing oranges! The only one that such seems to have any effect upon is us alone. No one else is so gullible!

Galatians 5:22-23 gives us the evidence of our standing, saying that "*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...*" That means...especially effective in this act of measurement, that if the Holy Spirit is present in my life...*and we are told that if we are reborn that is a default fact*, we will bear this fruit! All of it. For it is not "fruits" of the Spirit, but FRUIT of the Spirit! That same chapter in Galatians...verse 19-21 give us the fruits of the flesh: *sexual immorality, impurity, lustful*

pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Galatians 5 serves well as a measuring stick as to where we stand.

James 2:17-18 tells us that “...*faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works...*”

Charles Spurgeon once said that “*True salvation is not to be found through the mere reception of any creed, however true or scriptural. Mere ‘head notion’ is not the road to heaven. “You must be born again,” means a great deal more than that you must believe certain dogmas. The study of the Bible cannot save you! You must press beyond this; you must come to the living, personal Christ, or else your acceptance of the soundest creed cannot avail for the salvation of your soul. Salvation lies in Jesus only!*”

Matthew 7:21 -23 “Not everyone who calls out to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. On judgment day many will say to me, ‘Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.’ But I will reply, ‘I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God’s laws.’”