

Minimum Standards

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 out 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!

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Remembering Jesus

As we take the bread and fruit of the vine, we remember Jesus. He died on the cross, not for His own sins, but for ours. *“He Himself bore our sins in His body in the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds, you have been healed”* (1 Peter 2:24, ESV)

The nails driven through his hands and feet were not for any sin He had done. They were for my sins and yours. The crown of thorns was placed on his head so that we might die to sin and live the new life as disciples of Christ.

When you die to something you separate yourself from it. When we die to sin we do not live in it any longer. (Romans 6:1-2). Jesus died so you we might have that opportunity to live a Christ-like life. Shouldn't that be our goal?

Jesus allowed himself to be sin for us. Why? "So that, in him, we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Let that sink in as we study about the Lord's Supper today and share in this time of remembering Jesus.

--Rob Alright (Greensboro, NC); via Bulletin Digest (adapted)

Judging

The Master Teacher warned, *“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with what measure you use, it will be measured back to you”* (Matthew 7:1, 2).

Not all judging, however, is prohibited, for Jesus also taught, *“Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment”* (John 7:24).

How, then, do we determine whether, and when, judgment is justified. When is criticism in order? Perhaps a few personal questions will help:

- ✓ What are my motives?
- ✓ Am I guilty of similar or even more serious sins?
- ✓ Am I aware of all the facts?
- ✓ Am I sure I am dealing with facts, not rumors?
- ✓ Will I be following the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12)?
- ✓ Will my criticism help, or hurt? encourage, or discourage? build up, or tear down?
- ✓ What would Jesus do?

All too often, the difference between constructive criticism and the more damaging, toxic kind, is no more than a matter of perception, depending on whether we are on the giving or receiving end. “Shooting first and asking questions later” may play well in the movies, but relationships require a gentler touch.

--Dalton Key (Oklahoma City, OK) via *Old Paths*