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Tower of Strength

**“The name of the Lord is a strong tower
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”**

—Proverbs 18:10

When We Measure Ourselves By the World’s Standard

Every Christian desires to bring glory to God by his daily life and behavior. We know that we are supposed to act differently than the world.

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is” (Romans 12:2).

“You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (James 4:4).

“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).

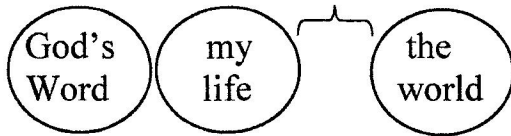
We are very familiar with such passages, and we set about obeying them. We ponder our lives, and we identify which behaviors we are comfortable with, and which behaviors we are not.

One frequent approach to making these lifestyle decisions is to measure one’s self to the world around him. One sees the depraved state of the culture, and says, “As long as I do not do that, and

that, and that, I am a light to the world, and I am pleasing to God. I am behaving much better than my neighbors are.”

The problem with such logic is that the moral standard of our culture is a moving target. And, it tends to move—sometimes slowly, sometimes rapidly—in a direction away from God’s word. If we measure our holiness by keeping ourselves a comfortable distance away from the world’s practices, we will likewise move away from God’s word. It may take years or generations, but we will inevitably find ourselves comfortably occupying a position that we once would have found scandalous.

Here’s how it happens:



A little while later, the world shifts. But I am careful to maintain the proper distance:



And eventually:



See the result? God’s standard has not budged. God’s standard never budges. “I, the Lord, do not change” (Mal. 3:6). “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever” (Isaiah 40:8). “Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven” (Psalm 119:89).

But my place has shifted right along with the world. I have maintained a comfortable distance, I congratulate myself for being noticeably holier than my neighbors. But if I am honest in my self-examination, and diligent in my reading of the Bible, I will realize that I have departed a great distance from God Himself. In fact, I am now at a point farther away from God's standard than the world was a little while ago!

Be a student of the Bible, not a student of the culture. Do not measure your righteousness by the distance between you and the world, but by the distance between you and God.

Do not measure your obedience to God's standard of modesty by comparing yourself to what everybody else is wearing these days. That standard is anything and everything. Compare yourself to God's word, which says, "I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly ... as is proper for women making a claim to godliness" (1 Tim. 2:9-10).

Do not measure your obedience to God's standard of pure speech by comparing yourself to what everybody else is saying these days. That standard is coarse enough for PG-13, but stopping short of R. Instead, compare yourself to God's word, which says, "let no unwholesome word proceed out of your mouth" (Eph. 4:29) and "let your speech always be with grace" (Col. 4:6).

Do not measure your obedience to God's standard of sexual purity by comparing yourself to what everybody else is doing these days. That standard is to wait until the second date, and live together if there is a fairly good chance you might get married. Instead, compare yourself to God's word, which says, "fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4).

Do not measure your obedience to God's standard of devotion by comparing yourself to how often everybody else is worshipping. That standard is to worship once in a while, on holidays, or never. Instead, compare yourself to God's word, which says, "let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some" (Heb. 10:24-25).

—*John Guzzetta*