

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Raising the Bar

(Jerry Fite)

After the high jumper or pole-vaulter clears the bar, he or she is challenged to greater heights by raising the bar. Such imagery challenges managers in corporate board rooms as greater production and sales are proposed. Raising the bar is a clear metaphor for reaching higher, further or greater in any field of endeavor.

Implied in “*raising the bar*,” is the thought that we can do better. The state or world high jump record may be set today, but we believe we have not reached the limit. We therefore raise the bar ¼, ½ or 1 inch. Sales are good today, but for the next quarter, we raise quotas because we believe our representatives can sell more.

It is interesting to think of how “*raising the bar*” may fit our lives in the spiritual realm. What is our standard? Can we raise it to greater heights?

There is a great contrast between raising the bar in our secular world, and that of the spiritual. The bar is already set at the highest we could ever go: the perfect character of Jesus Christ. Paul reminds us that the standard of a full-grown or mature man is

“...unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (*Ephesians 6:13*). You cannot add any more to “fullness,” and do better than the sinless character “of Christ.” The bar cannot be raised any higher than the “stature” of Christ’s perfect character. Look on high, and you see glistening in the sunshine the high standard by which we “measure” ourselves: “the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

God does not allow us to measure ourselves by ourselves. Paul writes of those who do so are people “*without understanding*” (*2 Corinthians 10:12*). We do not start the Christian life by looking to a certain brother or sister in Christ as our standard, then later, focus upon a more mature saint by which to measure how we are doing before God. The day we are born into Christ, we see the bar raised high as the standard for maturity. With Christ as our standard, we see the ultimate of perfection forever.

This could be depressing. Looking up to Christ’s fullness, and seeing God’s demanding standard so far above us, we might think, “What’s the use. I could never measure up to Christ. I give up. I quit!”

While God does not lower the standard for righteousness, He does provide us a way to be right again when we fail to measure up. The cleansing blood of Christ is always available to the child of God who first “*speaks with God*” by “*confessing*” that he has sinned, or missed God’s mark, and then “*repents*” and “*prays*” for forgiveness (*1 John 1:7-9, Acts 8:22*). This knowledge allows us to live with a positive attitude towards self and the future, instead of being derailed by a depressing past.

While we could never be better than the sinless Christ, we can be a better self. Is there not room our lives to “grow” in knowledge, faith, love and hope? God thinks so. Paul exhorts us to “*walk worthily of the Lord into all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God*” (*Colossians 1:10*). Walking worthily of God, we will determine to be abounding or increasing in love and hope (*2 Thessalonians 1:3, Romans 15:13*). Have you reached all the people with the Gospel you can? Can you raise the bar to include one more soul today? We should raise the bar that has marked where we are spiritually and move it higher towards the fullness of Christ.