

2007

Taking Measure (The President's Page)

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Recommended Citation

Lichtenwalter, Larry L. (2007) "Taking Measure (The President's Page)," *Perspective Digest*: Vol. 12 : Iss. 1 , Article 6.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pd/vol12/iss1/6>

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Larry L. Lichtenwalter

The first summer I worked for the Shillington (Pennsylvania) Roofing Company, I learned an important lesson about measuring. I was new to the trade, the “gofer” who ran errands for everyone. I cleaned up the mess made when we tore off the old shingles. I picked scraps of dry old tarpaper clinging tightly to the bushes and collected nails from the grass with a magnet on the end of a broom handle. I kept the workers supplied with shingles, nails, tarpaper, caulking, whatever. I held the soldering-iron pots and kept them hot with charcoal while the workers soldered copper flashing around chimneys.

For weeks, I carried a hammer and nails, a utility knife, a square, a ruler, and pencil in my carpenter’s pouch, but never used them. One day I got a break. An older guy named Ed called down from the roof, “Hey, Rosedale” (that’s what they called me), “cut me an 8-inch board 24 inches long, and get it up here as fast as you can.”

I whipped out my new pencil and

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wooden ruler. I took a measure on the board—24 inches—and cut it off. Exactly. Finally, I’d done some real work. Hurrying up the ladder, it felt good to be more than a clean-up and errand boy. But when Ed placed the board into the opening, it fell short of the rafter on one end by almost a 16th of an inch.

“This isn’t 24 inches,” he said. “It’s too short!”

So I ran down the ladder and quickly cut another board. I laid my new ruler on the board, carefully lining up edges of the board and end of the ruler with my finger. Then I looked at the 24-inch mark. *This is what I did before*, I assured myself. I marked the point, laid the square, drew the line, and cut it with the circular saw.

When Ed laid this second board into the opening, he became ominously silent. This time it was too long, by an 8th of an inch or so.

“Give me your ruler,” he demanded sharply. When I handed it to him, he opened it up and laid it

down on the roof. Then he opened his own ruler and laid it alongside mine—carefully lining up all the increments.

Expletive.

“These rulers say the same,” he exclaimed. “Now get the *&#@#! down there and cut me that board right—or don’t bother coming back up here at all or back to work tomorrow!”

You can imagine the care I took measuring and cutting that board for a third time. My reputation as a productive worker—my job—was on the line. It was just a rough-cut pine board that no one would likely ever see again—mere fractions of an inch in play. I was just a teenager. It was just a summer job. But it was an important measurement!

Scripture’s last book reminds us of how taking proper measure of things can make the difference of eternity: “the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (Rev. 12:17, NASB). This is one of the most important texts in John’s Apocalypse. It appears in the apex of Revelation’s chiastic structure and theological center. It’s a verse that outlines in a nutshell the basic players and the basic issues of the final crisis of the Great Controversy. Two players: the dragon and the rest (or remnant) of the woman’s offspring.

Revelation 12 depicts the dragon’s relentless pursuit of God’s faithful people. The dragon has been making war with the people of God throughout history, but without success. So now, as the end approaches (following the 1260 years), the dragon goes away to muster all the help he can. He’s not running away from the battle; he is simply regrouping for the final conflict. In chapter 13, we read how the dragon calls up a monster from the sea and a monster from the land. They are the dragon’s allies at the end of Earth’s history.

But Revelation 12 also gives measure of the incredible resolve of those who genuinely love and follow God and Jesus Christ: They “*keep* the commandments of God and *hold* to the testimony of Jesus” (12:17, NASB, italics supplied), a measure echoed later in 14:12. We’re quick to use this passage to outline the qualities of God’s people and then apply it to our Adventist Church—to claim remnant status. Our evangelists use it to help listeners take measure of the end-time issues and know what church God is calling them to.

I don’t disagree, but I wonder if that’s enough? I yearn for something deeper than a quick list of attributes that we can so easily apply to ourselves and then use in leading people to Christ. What does this passage say about the real nature of God’s last-day people?

Here is a generation of God's people who are not only used as a measure against all others (our traditional approach), but a final generation who themselves are taking moral and spiritual measure of everything around them by God's standard of measure (covenant commands and the testimony of Jesus). But, even more important, they are a generation who allow themselves *to be measured* by the very divine standard they use. They *keep* the commandments of God and *hold* the testimony of Jesus Christ.

They are biblically measured—prophetically measured. Everything in their life is by the Book—Scripture as a whole, the Ten Commandments in particular, and a worldview prophetic vision that places the everlasting gospel in the urgency of an apocalyptic context (14:6-13). There is insufficient space here to trace the subtle progression in Revelation of more general terms like “the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (1:2, 9; 3:10; 6:9) to more specific and pregnant terms as “the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus” (12:17; 14:12), but the latter's occurrence in the book's chiasmic apex lets us know that though every generation of God's people were confronted with the priority of Scripture and the gospel, the final generation will be confronted with Scripture's concrete commands and the eternal gospel set in an

apocalyptic context (see Rev. 12:17; 14:6-13; 19:10; 22:6-10). This generation will place their own selves against these divine standards and surrender themselves to them accordingly.

Every measurement has some standard by which there is assessment. When they “keep the commandments of God,” it means those commandments are significant enough to gauge their life by and to be used as a rule to measure the things that the dragon and contemporary culture hurls in their face. When they “hold the testimony of Jesus,” it means that they understand how prophecy places the gospel in an urgent apocalyptic context that demands personal response.

Here is a generation who have measured truths from Scripture and prophecy and have determined their validity, a generation that then turn around and measure themselves by these very truths. It is a generation that only after doing so, measuring truth and self by such truth, measure everything they hear and all others by them as well.

But don't we already do these things?

I wonder!

We are quick to use this passage to prove our remnant status, but how about our remnant nature, our remnant essence, our remnant core as biblically measured people or a biblically measured person? How

often do we use this passage to measure our own hearts, our own inner private worlds of thought and feeling, choices and values?

We apply these measures against all others to show they are part of fallen Babylon, but how often do we measure ourselves by them? Scripture? The Commandments? The prophetic vision of things given to us by Daniel and Revelation and that have been affirmed, mirrored, made morally and spiritually practical and vivid in the writings of Ellen White? We are not to take the text and use it to measure others. We are to use the text to measure ourselves first and foremost.

The phrase “by the book” is an idiom. It means doing something strictly according to the rules or established guidelines—properly, correctly, without variance. It can come across as legalistic. Rigid. Stifling. Saying an organization is run by the book often represents a criticism of how the organization is managed. It implies that the organization lacks flexibility and is unresponsive to changing needs.

But going by the book can also express professionalism, integrity, and faithfulness. The focus of Revelation 12:17 is neither legalistic nor rigid. Rather, it speaks of heartfelt and humble obedience to biblical truth and an apocalyptic prophetic vision of reality. It’s about a generation that go by the book because of

their allegiance to God, not because of institutional or traditional values. These are not just arbitrary rules; they are “commandments of God.” This is not just any old testimony; it is “the testimony of Jesus Christ”—a picture of the eternal Jesus who is controlling history and calling the world to repentance in light of His soon return. The sobering reality is that if we are not regularly reading either Scripture (especially Daniel and Revelation) or the Spirit of Prophecy, we will measure by some other standard. And it will make all the difference in both how we will live and what we will tell the world.

It takes something to be so measured, biblically, prophetically: faith, patience, self-surrender (Rev. 14:12). Contemporary humanity wants to be set free from the doctrinal and ethical absolutes of Scripture. Our postmodern contemporary society doesn’t value structure or concrete behavior. It would consider itself free from the moral, spiritual, doctrinal implications of this critical passage in Scripture’s last book. But like measuring and cutting that rough-cut pine board for a third time, something critical is on the line—not just a summer job—eternity. No mere fractions of an inch are at play, rather the grand moral and spiritual truths for life today and our witness to the world.

Are you so measured?