

Intro:

All people are religious. There are no irreligious persons in the world. How can I make such a bold statement? Because religion is not merely the way that organized religion or philosophy works, but it is the very way that the human heart works. Competition and comparison between individuals and between classes exists in every culture because it is the universal way of the fallen soul. Every one of us here also has the natural bent of competition and comparison, gauging our righteousness, however that is perceived and defined, according to how well we measure up to others' righteousness. How we compare largely defines how we feel about ourselves: proud, boastful, disdainful when we measure up; envious, devastated, and self-pitying when we don't.

My friends, Jesus came to smash this system of competitive and comparative religion of the heart. He doesn't fit this mold of religion, settle in this system of competition, nor can he be contained within its boundaries. Trying to put Jesus within the category of self-righteous religion will leave you feeling distended beyond comfort, swollen with joyless hypocrisy, and He will eventually break through your comfortable control of self-righteousness and shatter your foundations of life. He is the great equalizer of all peoples, the One thing that every individual and class needs and must have. There is no righteousness by which one can compare to each other when Jesus is all in all.

In 2 Corinthians 10:12-18 Paul is wrestling with false apostles whose righteousness is based upon their comparisons to one another and not upon the gracious and passive righteousness of Jesus. Paul contends that this comparison and competition of righteousness between them shows that they don't understand even the basics of the gospel of the grace of our Lord Jesus. So, he employs a Greek rhetorical tool where he enters into their language, uses their terms, and through irony, sarcasm, and parody shows their foolishness in the face of the gospel.

1) THOSE WHO BOAST OF THEIR OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS IN COMPARISON TO OTHERS DON'T UNDERSTAND THE GOSPEL

- a) Those who compare themselves with themselves are overly bold (daring).
 - i) They measure (technical unit of measure) themselves by themselves and compare (see how they fit).
 - ii) Paul won't even dare to do so because of the Gospel of Grace
 - iii) Competition and comparison with other is completely self-righteous and faithless
- b) Comparing Ourselves With Others is Simply Self-Righteous Religion, Not Christianity
 - i) Jesus does the same thing as Paul in Matthew 9, entering into the Pharisees' language of "righteous" and "sinner"
 - (1) "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners..." (Matt 9:13)
 - ii) Religion is the drawing a line between good and bad, "big" sins and "little" sins
 - iii) Drawing this dividing line (religion) between big sins and little sins is not just the way organized religion works, it is the way that the heart works
 - (1) Really a way that we can control our salvation
 - (a) Works salvation means that you are in control
 - (i) Like taxes – I've put in my due, God can't ask me for anything more
 - (ii) There is no risk – so no dependence upon God, humility, peace, rest,
 - (b) Grace means that you aren't in control
 - (i) There is nothing that I've put in that makes God owe me
 - (ii) God may ask me to do something and I'll have to trust Him for EVERYTHING
 - (2) "Those people are what's wrong with the world"

- (a) Religious or irreligious think the same way
- (b) Every person is exclusive in this manner, nobody is inclusive
 - (i) Even postmoderns are exclusive
 - (ii) Elephant analogy and the necessity of seeing the entire truth
- (3) The only difference between a conservative worldview and a liberal worldview is where you draw the line between the “big” sins and the “little” sins
 - (a) Ecology or Economy; Social Care or Individual Freedom; Beavers or Ducks
- iv) All comparison is really a means of wanting to justify ourselves before God (or whatever gains you power in your life) and others.
 - (1) Making God or others respect me through my righteousness, my sacrifices
 - (a) We feel that our sacrifices for God and to God have somehow obligated Him to us: You owe me a good life. You cannot disrespect me! You will notice me.
 - (i) I’ve done all these things: I go to church, I read my Bible, I say “no” all over the place, denying myself things so now God owes me
 - (ii) In our prayers: “God, if I do ‘x’ will you do ‘y’ for me?”
 - (iii) Then people feel that life is unfair if things don’t go their way, because they feel that they have been better than others and those people have a better life
 - 1. You look down on others who are not as “good” as you are
 - 2. The false apostles do it here, and the Pharisees in Matt 9, but we all do it in our lives. That is why we get anxious, fearful, angry, bitter, and irritable when things don’t go our way: we think we deserve better treatment
 - 3. It doesn’t matter what your religion is, organized or secular, these feelings of “unfairness” reveal the true attitude of our hearts
 - (iv) I feel like I should have done these things, but I failed to do them well enough, so I feel condemned and worthy of all suffering.
 - 1. This self-pity has the same root as the more obvious arrogance: we feel that our blessing or our curse is based upon our ability to perform
 - 2. When we believe this, we lose all joy because we are working within a system of religion that we fail
 - (2) This self-righteousness makes us either look down on others or idolize others (compare)
 - (a) I judge others for lack of moral restraint
 - (i) I look down on others in whom I see greater sin
 - (ii) Phariseeism
 - (b) I envy others for their righteousness
 - (i) Self-pity
 - (ii) Joylessness
 - (c) Both are self-righteous religion that are based upon our performance/sacrifices

2) Jesus brings in the new salvation, as opposed to the old religion

- (1) 9:16-17
 - (a) Jesus is the new wine that bursts the wineskin
 - (i) He doesn’t fit the old natural idolatrous system
 - (ii) He smashes it; Breaks out of it; Bursts its categories
 - 1. Trying to live religiously with Jesus will leave you feeling swollen, bloated, and distended
 - 2. It will not last. He will break forth
 - 3. We need a new wineskin
 - (iii) Christianity is about having this foundation of your religious heart shattered, smashed, and obliterated by the transforming power of Jesus in the heart
 - 1. There is a new wineskin, a new framework: the Gospel of Grace.
- ii) The Gospel of Grace Means there is only one comparison: the Great Exchange
 - (1) Rom 3:23 – All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God
 - (2) Rom 7:6
 - (a) Sin enslaves us through religion. Jesus sets us free by the transforming power of His Holy Spirit.

- (b) Born from above, a new heart, a new spirit, a new freedom, complete and full of joy!
- (c) No comparing with one another, but merely with the righteous standard of God, which we all fall short of (Romans 3:23) and are "big sinners"
 - (i) We need a Savior
 - (ii) One has come
 - (iii) We need freed from ourselves
 - (iv) He has come to free us

3) THOSE WHO UNDERSTAND THE GOSPEL BOAST ONLY OF GOD'S GRACE IN JESUS

- a) Paul will not boast beyond limits.
 - i) boast of his weakness (11:30)
 - ii) "beyond limits" set in opp to "measure" (ametra/metron)
 - iii) The Gospel limits our boasting to our weakness and to our brokenness and ultimately to the greatness of the mercy and grace of Jesus the Christ
- b) Paul will ironically boast within the limit that God has divided up for them.
 - i) boasting within this rhetoric of the letter of apology, or irony
 - ii) God has divided up areas of influence
 - iii) each worker has his place
 - iv) only place commendable
- c) This division of influence reached as far as the Corinthians
 - i) Paul points out that they were in his division
 - ii) He can boast of them, not himself, as opposed to his detractors
- d) This growth of the Gospel comes as the Corinthians faith grows.
 - i) Faith in Jesus produces proclamation of Jesus which produces faith in Jesus. CYCLE
 - ii) Paul's boasting has legs (entering into his opponents' argument) because the Corinthians FAITH
 - iii) The growth of the Gospel into other lands is Paul's desire and joy and boasting
 - (1) Not the growth of the Gospel in areas where the gospel has already taken root by others
 - (2) Implicit slam on those opposing him in Corinth, for they were boasting of what Paul had done

4) GO AND LEARN WHAT IT MEANS TO BE SHOWN MERCY BY THE LORD

- a) Whoever is boasting, should only boast in the Lord
 - a. His Mercy, NOT My Sacrifices of Righteousness
 - b. What the Lord has done and is doing
 - c. According to the calling of the Lord
- b) The Lord's approval is all that matters, and the humbly repentant are approved in the Lord by faith in Jesus Christ alone.
- c) This is a constant learning and relearning
 - a. All theology is an exposition of the Gospel
 - b. All Christian living is a living out of the Gospel
 - c. When we first lay down our filthy rags before Jesus and trust Him to save us (the Gospel) we don't really GET it, do we?
 - i. Coke Machine example of Christianity
 - ii. We're saved, we're Christians, but we don't fully get it, yet
 - 1. God has to pound us until the sweet nectar comes out