

Religion versus the Gospel

Religion

“I obey – therefore I’m accepted”

Motivation is based on fear and insecurity.

I obey God in order to get *things* from God.

When circumstances in my life go wrong, I am angry at God for myself, since I believe, like Job’s friends that anyone who is good deserves a comfortable life.

When I am criticized I am furious or devastated because it is critical that I think of myself as a “good person.” Threats to my self image must be destroyed at all costs.

My prayer life consists largely of petition and it only heats up when I am in a time of need. My main purpose in prayer is control of the environment.

My self-view swings between two poles. If and when I am living up to my standards, I feel confident, but then I am prone to be proud and unsympathetic to failing people. If and when I am not living up to standards, I feel humble, but not confident, I feel like a failure.

My identity and self-worth are based mainly on how hard I work. Or how moral I am, so I *must* look down on those I perceive as lazy or immoral. I disdain and feel superior to ‘the other.’

Since I look to my own pedigree or performance for my spiritual acceptability, my heart manufactures idols. It may be my talents, my moral record, my personal discipline, my social status, etc. I absolutely have to have them so they serve as my main hope, meaning, happiness, security, and significance, whatever I may say I believe about God.

Gospel

“I am accepted – therefore I obey.”

Motivation is based on grateful joy.

I obey God to get to God – to delight and resemble Him.

When circumstances in my life go wrong, I struggle but I know all my punishment fell on Jesus and that while He may allow this for my training, He will exercise His Fatherly love within my trial.

When I am criticized I struggle, but it is not critical for me to think of myself as a “good person.” My identity is not built on my record or my performance but on God’s love for me in Christ. I can take criticism. That’s how I became a Christian.

My prayer life consists of generous stretches of praise and adoration. My main purpose is fellowship with Him.

My self view is not based on a view of my self as a moral achiever. In Christ I am simul iustus et peccator – simultaneously sinful and lost yet accepted in Christ. I am so bad He *had* to die for me and I am so loved He was *glad* to die for me. This leads me to deeper and deeper humility and confidence at the same time. Neither swaggering nor sniveling.

My identity and self-worth are centered on the one who died for His enemies, who was excluded from the city for me. I am saved by sheer grace. So I *can’t* look down on those who believe or practice something different from me. Only by grace am I what I am. I’ve no inner need to win arguments.

I have many good things in my life – family, work, spiritual disciplines, etc. But none of these good things are ultimate things to me. None of them are things I absolutely have to have, so there is a limit to how much anxiety, bitterness, and despondency they can inflict on me when they are threatened and lost.

