

## The Sin of Comparison

VBC

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1 Corinthians 9:24, 11:1

Series: Seven Deadly Sins, The eighth deadly sin?

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### “Compared to Whom?”

#### *Introduction*

In buying a house comparison is absolutely necessary. You don't want to end up smelling like someone else.

Comparison is a skill that is useful for many things in life. In some contexts comparison can be a very good thing. However, I believe that comparison can also be a very deadly thing.

In a simplistic sense you could summarize the Christian life into three words, “Come, follow me.”

- <sup>NIV</sup> Matthew 4:19 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."

This is a personal calling that happens between Christ and one person. Hence, we call the Christian life a relationship because it's between you and God, it's personal.

Yet, as we look around we see that this personal call has taken place with many other people as well.

#### *Illustration*

I think of it like leaving to work in the morning. We begin by being all alone, but soon we realize that we are sharing the road with thousands of others.

- Likewise the Christian life is a “shared” personal walk.

Perhaps this sin of spiritual comparison could be found in Scripture through a misinterpretation of:

- <sup>NIV</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.

I want to clarify what Paul meant by this statement.

- What he didn't mean was a picture that shows one runner beating out another for the first place finish and just as he wins he looks back as if to ensure his victory or even rub it in.
- This is what I call spiritual comparison.

***Spiritual comparison occurs when we measure up against any other Christian in a manner that is destructive to ourselves and to them.***

- Is it possible that the goodness of comparison could be hijacked so that it would be turned into competition?

Let's look at two types of comparison. The difference between the two types of spiritual comparison that I want to show you is a difference of standards.

#### **Low Standard Comparison**

***- Low standard comparison occurs when we measure up to someone who appears to be spiritually below us so that we unhealthily elevate ourselves.***

A good example of this is the story of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

- Luke 18:9-14
- The Pharisee turned his individual relationship with God, his individual race, into a competitive fight to the finish. It was no longer about him and God. It was about him beating others so that God would be more impressed.
- The Pharisee measured up in such a way that it became destructive. He unhealthily elevated himself.
- His measurement was simple – he found out what he was doing that he assumed the tax collector wouldn't be doing.

This is how we usually do this:

- I'm serving in a ministry; I'll bet they don't even know where the ice machine is
- I had a quiet time every day this week; I should ask them how their quiet time is going

Ultimately this results in superiority. Our pride takes over and we see ourselves as superior to the person below us.

- A warning: So many of us may be thinking “That isn’t me at all. I would never put down another person like that. I would never disgrace a person to humiliate them like that.”

- Maybe you would even say, “I would never be like that Pharisee.”
- Yet, how close are we to actually committing the sin of spiritual comparison.

### *Illustration*

- There is a standard in school that describes what the Pharisee was going through, it’s called the curve.
- When a teacher grades on a curve they take the highest score in the class and make that equal a 100%
- Though in reality it may not even be close to 100%
  
- God doesn’t grade on a curve
- God doesn’t look at you through the eyes of another person

### **High Standard Comparison**

***- High standard comparison occurs when we measure up to someone who appears to be spiritually above us so that we unhealthily elevate someone else.***

- Genesis 4:3-10
- Why was Cain so angry at Abel?
- God was the one that didn’t like his offering
- God was the one who told him to lighten up and not be an angry person
- God was the one that challenged and confronted him
- Yet Cain is mad at Abel.
  
- I believe Cain is mad at Abel because Cain measured up Abel spiritually. He unhealthily elevated him to a point that it became destructive for Cain.
  
- Maybe we do this in similar ways by saying things like:
  - They have their ministry all figured out, I’m going nowhere
  - They are discipling people. God is constantly opening doors for them.

- We become discontent
- It is easy to allow other people's expression of their Christianity to distract from our own.
  
- When a person raises their hand to worship maybe all you can think is thoughts of judgment, resentment, or guilt.
- Or how about when a person goes up to the stage to take communion?
  - You wallow in self-pity thinking, "I'm not a good enough Christian if I don't do what their doing."
  
- As the second place finisher in the race we are consumed with insecurities and guilt.
- As these feelings are allowed to live in us they eventually turn into resentment and hatred.

### ***How to compare in a healthy manner***

I began this sermon by saying that comparison can be a good thing

- You may notice in my definition that I singled out comparison that is destructive as the kind of comparison that is deadly.
- There can be healthy comparison in the Christian life. In fact Paul encourages us to compare.
  - He tells us: <sup>NIV</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.
  
- There seems to be a disagreement between this verse and the first verse
- In reality there is not
  - Paul is not telling us to get behind him in the race
- Paul is the only one in his race and we are the only one in our race
  - Both of us our striving toward our own finish line.
  
- **John 1:19-27**
  - Early on in John the Baptist's ministry he was questioned by the Sanhedrin as to who he was.
  - The Sanhedrin tried to make him out to be who they thought he was
  
- In our Christian walk we are always going to be tempted to forget who we are.

## 1. Remember who you are

- Before you begin to look at anyone else you need to have a solid understanding of your unique relationship with God.
  - God has a purpose for your life unlike any other person
  - God has uniquely gifted you
  - He has uniquely allowed you to experience circumstances
  - He has uniquely given you passions and desires
- Don't throw all of that away by looking too much into another person's life.
  - <sup>NIV</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.
- You are a child of God that has an individual, personal relationship with God
- You don't need to measure-up to validate, justify, or make you acceptable
- God accepts you 100% through Christ's death
- You don't need to "fit in" through peer pressure
- Following an example is fine, but don't allow others to distract you from your walk
- Village is a great church because it knows who it is
- It has put itself out there and said, "This is who we are."
- Let's be people who can say the same
  - We know who we are between us and God
- John 3:22-30
- Once again John the Baptist was challenged and this time he was tempted to compete against Jesus for their number of baptisms.

## 2. Resist the temptation to compete

- We live in a comparative and a competitive society
- We are always going to be tempted to bring those emotions into our Christian life
- *Illustration*
  - Kobe Bryant and Shaq used to be teammates, but now that they're not the media wants to pin them against each other as arch enemies

- *Illustration*

- If you watch the Tour de France you notice that Lance Armstrong never wins the race by himself
  - He wins because of his team
- The U.S. Postal team works together so that together they can defeat their enemies.
- Unselfishly other bikers who have outstanding careers in their own right humbly sacrifice their chance to win so that Lance can win number 6.
- They allow Lance to be sheltered from opponents
  - from the wind
  - from anything that would keep him from winning the race
  
- We need to be that kind of team
  - <sup>NIV</sup> Hebrews 10:24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds
  
- We need to be a team that pushes one another forward so that as a team we can defeat sin, and save the lost
- Together let's get rid of the 7 deadly sins
  - "If we stop and think, especially in community we will almost always do the right thing." –Breshears
- As we work together as a team we are all striving to excel individually
- We are running our own race seeking as Paul did to remain pure so that we can save the lost and glorify God
  
- It's when we measure-up that our team breaks down, our goal is lost
- Livestrong
  - Let's livestrong as individuals and as a team
- John the Baptist never worried about measuring up to Jesus
  - He realized that they were on the same team
- When we begin to measure up another believer, stop and think about the fact that you are both going in the same direction
  - You are both seeking to glorify God and save the lost
  - However different that may look
  
- In the scenarios above you may notice that each time John was tempted to compare or to forget who he was
  - He always pointed his life back to Christ.
- John 21:18-23
  - Jesus had just told Peter to Follow Him, and in the next breath Peter is consumed with thoughts of comparison

### 3. Refocus on Christ

- "What's going to happen to John?"
- "Will he die like I'm going to die?"
- "Will he live longer than me?"
- The sad thing is that all the others who read about this kept talking about whether or not John was going to die.
- Instead they missed the lesson Jesus was trying to communicate ...
  - Follow me!
  
- <sup>NIV</sup> John 1:27 "He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."
- <sup>NIV</sup> John 3:30 "He must become greater; I must become less."
- <sup>NAU</sup> John 3:30 "He must increase, but I must decrease."
- John 21:22 "Jesus answered, 'If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.'"
- That's what we have to do if we want to use comparison to our advantage and not allow it to destroy us.
  - We have to refocus on Christ
  
- Any example that you look at in your life should point you to Christ
- He is the one that we are following
- Paul challenged us to follow him only so that we would follow Christ
  
- Are you measuring up?
- Have you become too focused on other people that you have neglected your own walk with God?
- Do feelings of guilt, insecurity, and anger characterize your interaction with other believers?
  - How about competition, superiority, or pride?

### *Conclusion*

- In order to follow Christ, you may have to do what He did
  - Simply get away so that you can focus on Him
- That's where the answer begins
- We want to create that place here at Village
- But the answer is not to run from people, it's to team up with people so that we might become like Christ
  - Do this through Life Groups, Junior High, High School, Young Adult ministry

# Spiritual Walk Checklist

## **In what ways have I responded to Christ's call to follow Him?**

Matthew 10:38–39

- What sacrifices have I made so that I can follow Christ?
- Do my family and friends know that I am a Christian by action and attitude, not by position?  
Can they tell by my lifestyle?

## **How have I allowed comparison to define my relationship with God?**

Luke 18:9–14

- Today, have I compared myself to another so that I would feel adequate or validated?
- At what times do I most struggle with destructive comparison?

## **Is there a person in my life who is spurring me on to follow Christ?**

1 Samuel 23:14–16, Hebrews 10:24–25

- Am I humble enough to ask for and listen to the advice of another believer?
- Do people look forward to being around me because I encourage them? When was the last time I encouraged someone?

## **In what ways am I teaming up with other believers so that both of us are becoming more like Christ?**

1 Corinthians 12:12–26, Hebrews 3:13

- Am I using my gifts in such a way that others are benefiting?
- How have I teamed up with other believers in order to share the Gospel?