



Living in a World of Critics – Part 2

Keeping Your Cool in a Comparison Culture

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Well, I'm sure many of you, if not all of you, have driven past it on the I-405 at Bear Street, just across from the South Coast Plaza. If you've lived in Orange County for any amount of time you certainly noticed the extravagance of the building that was formerly occupied by the Trinity Broadcasting Network and all the extravagant decorations they used to put up there. Now, maybe you have noticed of late, it was in the paper this week, that the excavators were out there knocking the whole thing down, and it's obviously been previously sold. Now even if you didn't live locally like we do and saw that extravagant building all the time, if you live across the country, certainly if you're old enough, you remember the extravagant image of the woman who became the face of the ministry. Now, I don't bring her up to take cheap shots at an easy target. I just bring her up because the caricature that became Paul and Jan Crouch, with all the excesses, the image, the lip filler, the plastic surgery, the, you know, cotton candy wigs that she wore, all the outfits, the crazy stuff Paul started to wear, just the just all of that I think most of us would look at and did look at, I hope and just you rolled your eyes.

I just want to remind you that it didn't happen in a vacuum. As a matter of fact, it's the kind of thing that all of us in this room are vulnerable to, to some extent, if we're not careful. You see because the pressures that drive that kind of distortion are not unique. For them it was the concern for ratings. It was the focus on their image. It was the temptation to adjust the message in their programming to please people and viewers. And it was their growing defensiveness over the years. It was their growing competitiveness that they had with other networks and other shows. It was their distorted views of themselves they could no longer see objectively. And those aren't just problems over there, right? Those are the pressures that everyone of us can feel to some extent and we can wrongly respond to. And God wants us to learn how to deal with all of that before we start taking steps in the wrong direction as it relates to our pressure points.

Now, this is really what Second Corinthians Chapter 10 is trying to safeguard us against. It's trying to help us in this regard. As we began last time we were together looking at the topic here, the context for the lessons we're learning in Second Corinthians Chapter 10, they're forged in the context of criticism. Criticism. Now for the Crouches at TBN the pressure points and the criticisms, they came from phone calls and letters and emails and, you know, the viewers and the ratings. Those were their pressure points. For us it's a little different but they're just as real. They show up much more simply. They're in conversations, they're in comments that people make verbally, they're comments that people post on social media, the reactions that you get, their facial expressions in conversation, their concerns that are verbalized to us. It's that constant, recurring thought in our head as we drive away from meetings or work or church, and we ask ourselves the question how do we measure up to everyone else?

In Second Corinthians verses 7 through 12 of this 10th chapter, God is going to give us some clear instructions on how to avoid getting pulled into all of that, ultimately into the comparison

game that the Apostle Paul is trying to guard us against and his readers here, the Corinthians, and how to evaluate ourselves properly and stay grounded in what we ought to be grounded in, to think rightly about ourselves. So I want to look at these six verses, verses 7 through 12, and see if we can't come away with some security, some insurance in place to keep us where we need to be in our thinking. So follow along with me as I read it for you verses 7 through 12. I'll read it from the English Standard Version, which starts here in verse 7 and it reads like this. "Look at what is before your eyes. If anyone is confident that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ's, so also are we." Verse 8, "For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed. I do not want to appear to be frightening you with my letters." You can hear a little sarcasm in that statement. "For they say," and I know they say, "'his letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech is of no account.' Let such a person understand that what we say by letter, when absent, we do when present. Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding."

Now that's the real problem. All this lateral comparison, all this looking and sizing one another up. This is a perpetual problem, and it's the problem that we need to deal with. And believe it or not, it's embedded in that very first sentence in verse 7. And you need to look at that and Paul is trying to say, oh, if they say they're Christians, these are the critics talking to the Corinthians, well, I mean, you need to know we are too. Duh, right? I mean, obviously. Now look at that first line here. "Look at what is before your eyes." Now, in the original language there is a little ambiguity here. It can read just like that, "Look at what is before your eyes." That's a command. And if that's the case then the second half of that verse makes perfect sense. "If anyone is confident that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ's, so also are we." And that look becomes metaphorical. Then follow me. Now he's saying they're saying we're not Christians. Well, he's writing a letter. He's not literally before their eyes. Matter of fact, he sent a messenger with a letter and he's saying, look, quote unquote. Right? In other words, look what's before your eyes. I'm a real Christian. No, that's not literal looking.

Well, he ends with people who are kind of comparing themselves and literally looking at each other. And he said that earlier. I'm not just guessing at the interpretation of verse 12. And I'll show you that in a minute. But they are really looking at each other on the surface of things. And that's where naturally we all seem to go by default. And certainly the world and your coworkers and your non-Christian family members and your neighbors are going to look at you that way. But we're not supposed to. That's the lesson of this text. But here if he's saying look at what's before your eyes as a command, right? Then he's trying to say, look, look past the surface. Look down into where I am. Look at me as a real Christian. Look at what's in my heart. Okay.

It could be, though, that it's what we call in grammar, an indicative, that it's something that's being said, like you are looking at what's before your eyes. In that sense, it is that they're starting to be swayed by the people who are telling people to just look at things on the



surface. Right? In other words, you are doing this, this is what you are doing. And usually in Greek, what's great about the Koine Greek of the New Testament, it's usually very specific in how you conjugate these verbs. And in this case, it's the one sense that any first-year Greek student in our auditorium today can tell you there is a little bit of ambiguity with a couple of the ways you conjugate these verbs. In this case, the second person plural indicative and the second person plural imperative are identical. And so in this case, it's always context. If you're taking a quiz in your first-year Greek class context has to give you the difference. And so in this case the context could go either way. That's why some translations, about 25% of the translations go one way and 75% go the other way, because it works in both ways. He's either saying, look at what's before your eyes metaphorically. Look, look, look, look, look at us as he does in Second Corinthians Chapter 5. Or he's saying you guys are looking at what's just right before your eyes. But you have to look.

Think now if they think they're Christians, right? I mean, let him remind those critics that we're Christians too. And it starts there. Then it goes on to authority because they think they're super apostles, we're apostles too. We have authority here. I'm an apostle. Okay. So with that ambiguity, nevertheless, the message is there and it runs throughout the whole text in these six verses. And it's already been introduced to us chapters earlier. Matter of fact, I referenced it when we were in Second Corinthians Chapter 5 and then I kind of left it to the side knowing, barring my death or, you know, losing my mind, or the rapture, that we would get to this passage. So let's write it down this way. You should expect this. This is how the world works. And you should know this is coming. Number one in your outline, if you're taking notes and I wish that you would, here it comes. Number one, "Expect Superficial Evaluations." And do you think anyone's going to evaluate you that way? Absolutely. They're going to look at what's before their eyes and they're not going to, as Paul was saying here, if perhaps this is what he's saying, they're not going to look beyond that. They're not going to look like, really look like deeply look, they're not going to x-ray look what's before their eyes. Because as we just heard from this platform a few weeks back when Pastor Doug was filling in here for me when I was traveling, he had given you that great sermon from First Samuel Chapter 16. And do you remember that verse? It says, God doesn't look at people the way you look at people. Do you remember that great line? For "man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart," the interior heart. Right? "Lev" in Hebrew, the interior part of you. Right? So you're looking at the outside. God looks at the heart.

Now non-Christians are looking at you. Non-Christians at work are looking at you. They look at how you talk, how you act, how you look, what you drive. They look at your title. They look at your ambition. They look at your assertiveness. They look at what promotions you take, what promotions you don't take. When you speak up, when you don't speak up, right? They look at whether you're going to join their little lunch table in the workroom. They look to see whether or not you're going to join them for this party or for this, you know, this client meeting or this optional whatever is going on or this thing that's going on over here. They are watching all of that and they're making determinations about who you are based on all of that. And your neighbors are too. Your neighbors are making decisions about who you are based on what they observe. You're being evaluated all the time based on appearances.



By the way, just to flip this over, we as Christians shouldn't think that way. And I hope that Pastor Doug clearly made this a statement that because I know he was preaching also on First Samuel Chapter 16 verse 6, not just verse 7, but in verse 6 this whole thing started because Samuel was, you know, quick drawing his flask of anointing oil out of his holster when Eliab stepped in the room and Samuel goes, oh, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before me," right? This was David's older brother. And the Lord says, whoa, Samuel. Right? Holster that flask. Right? You're judging him based on how he looks, right? "Don't look on his outward appearance," top of verse 7, for the Lord has "rejected him. For the Lord sees not as" you guys do. But the "man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." It doesn't really matter that David is the youngest, the smallest, and is not even invited to the interview. It doesn't matter that Eliab looks like Saul. Saul was head and shoulders above the rest. What really would be great is to have a tall man in the office behind the Resolute Desk? That would look good. Stop with all of that. It does not matter what he looks like on the outside. What matters is what he looks like on the inside. And God says that to Samuel.

Now is Samuel godly, more godly than the people you work with at work? Yes. And yet Samuel's making that mistake. And after church you're going to meet someone maybe you've never met before standing out here in the lobby, and you are going to size them up in 30 seconds and you're going to start to classify people and put them in groups based on what you see. Just slow down, slow down. I'm warning you, you're going to be evaluated on superficial evaluations. I just want to make sure that YOU don't make evaluations on superficial evaluations. Right? Your best friends should not be made like the way you made best friends in high school. Okay? Let's not do that. Let's grow up a little bit.

Jot this one down, if you would, John Chapter 7. This is a great text. We should always remember this. I'll just quote it for you. It's very short. "Do not judge by appearances." These are the words of Christ. "Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment." This, by the way, you could put on a card, you can put the reference on it but make sure you put signed Jesus. Pull it out of your pocket every time your non-Christian friends say, doesn't the Bible say don't judge, right? Well, number one, we could put that Matthew passage in its context when it says, well, don't judge lest you be judged, because the same "measure you use will be measured to you." So don't be trying to take the speck out of your brother's eye "when there's the log in your eye?" There's context for that. But if you want to know what the context is in one distilled little statement, you can just have this card ready. You can say hold on a second when you tell me not to judge, let me tell you what Jesus says, my Lord and King says this: "Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment." You're right. I should not be judging you by your face. I should be judging you by your heart, and the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. And I know you're a scripture twister. Let's just start with that. That's probably not the line you should follow with. (audience laughing)

I do want you to correct people, though. The Bible does not tell you not to judge. The Bible tells you with the authority of the God-Man, Jesus Christ, "judge with right judgment," and the right judgment is looking past the surface. And here's all I'm telling you, if you live in the world you're not going to be judged that way. The average non-Christian, your neighbors, your coworkers, your friends, your family members are often going to judge you by appearances.



They're going to judge you by superficial things. Just get ready for that. That's just how this is going to work.

Now, this is very important to catch, and we ought to spend a little bit of time there. I told you we were introduced to all this in Second Corinthians Chapter 5. I'm not misinterpreting Chapter 7. So let's turn back to Second Corinthians Chapter 5. And one of the problems of verse-by-verse, expositional preaching, although I believe in it, we ought to do it and we're doing it with sequential text, I believe expositional preaching, verse by verse, digging in, spending time in it, the series that lasts a long time. And we do see, I get it, it's the right thing. But when Paul wrote Second Corinthians Chapter 5, it wasn't long in the dictation process with his amanuensis until he got to Chapter 10. How long did that take? Not long. And when the letter got to Corinth and they stood up and read it in the church, how long was it between Chapter 5 reading and Chapter 11? No one had to take a lunch break between those two things. So everything in Chapter 5 was fresh in their mind.

Now the problem is, when did I preach Chapter 5? I don't know, you could look it up, but it was a long time ago. So we need to remember very clearly the reason it may seem nuanced and confusing in Second Corinthians Chapter 10 verses 7 through 12 is because this is not fresh in our minds. So let's get this refreshed in our minds. Let's start in Second Corinthians Chapter 5 verse 10. You can just glance at verse 10. The judgment is coming both for Christians, "the judgment seat of Christ," where we'll get rewarded for what we do good and then he throws in and also evil, evil's going to be judged in terms of what we receive, not for us, but for the lost of their names not written in the Lamb's Book of Life at the Great White Throne, Revelation Chapter 20. So there's judgment for everyone, and Christ has been delivered the responsibility for all judgment. So I know this is a scary thing.

"Therefore," Second Corinthians Chapter 5 verse 11, "knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others." What Paul is saying in that very simple phrase, "knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others," he's explaining his persuasion. I persuade and I persuade and I persuade. And you should know why I persuade. I'm thinking about things that are going to happen to everyone. "It's appointed for man to die once, and after that comes the judgment." I'm concerned. I fear the Lord. I care for your soul. That's why I'm always talking about these things. I'm always preaching to you. I want you to store up "gold, silver, precious stones." I want people not to go to hell. I don't want them to face the judgment. I don't want them to keep "storing up wrath" for the day of God's judgment. Do you see? He's revealing motive. I'm persuading not so that I can impress you with my speech. I'm writing letters not so that you can think, oh, he's such a prolific writer. I'm writing letters so you can know I fear the Lord. I need to persuade people. He's giving motive here.

Now, what we are is known to God. And you can say that, too. If you're doing something right, even if it's being misunderstood by your critics. Right? You know this, God knows. God knows what I do and why I do it. People don't know why you do stuff, but God knows. But some people who know you well know why you do it and he says this, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. If you think we're always just persuading and talking and trying to get you to do stuff, I hope you know why. I hope you know it's because I fear God. Second Corinthians

Chapter 5 verse 12. Now here's the key. And it's fresh in their minds by the time they get to reading Second Corinthians Chapter 10, "we are not commending ourselves to you again." It's not what we're trying to do "but giving you cause to boast about us." We want you to say yay, Paul! Why? "So that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what's in the heart." Do you see what's happening right there? He's already projecting to what he's going to settle into in Second Corinthians Chapters 10, 11, and 12 when he deals with the critics and he set it up. Here's the premise, here's the proposition. There are people who care about appearances and, you know, people who care about appearances and external things, what I call superficial evaluations. There's kind of an accepted norm about how often you should bring up spiritual things with people. How is it that there's to be a reasonable amount of times you talk about religion and politics, right? Paul doesn't care about that. Why? Because he's motivated by what? Fear of the Lord, coming judgment.

So he didn't really care about what the norms are, right? He didn't care about those superficial appearances. He cares about God. So he is not going to be evaluated by other people who just care about appearances. Well, I don't want to be seen as pushy. How often has that gone through your mind? I don't want to be seen as a Holy Joe. I don't want to be seen as a Jesus freak. Paul says this in Galatians Chapter 1, he says, "if I were still trying to please man, I wouldn't be a servant of Christ," right? But as it is, I'm trying to please God. That's the whole point. Superficial evaluations. Keep reading. "If we are beside ourselves," and you do know that phrase means if we seem crazy to you, "it is for God." If something is outside the bounds of what you figure is sensible, if we're not really comporting with your sensibilities, we're doing it because of God. We have a God motive. We have a God reason for that. And if we're in our right mind, if we're trying to, as I said when I taught this months ago, if we're putting this in a place where it's all lining up and it's making sense, it's because we're being very patient like a parent with a child and making sure you get it right. Because we love you. We care about you. It is for you.

And speaking of you, the love of Christ controls us like a parent for a child. We love you. That's why we're going to all this effort. We love you. What is that? It's a motive. We love you. The love of Christ controls us because we concluded "that one has died for all, therefore all have died." Our past life is over. All about ourselves is over. "He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves," and we're not living for ourselves, "but for him who for their sake died and was raised." So I'm living for Christ. The love of Christ controls us, his pattern and his love in our hearts shed abroad in our hearts. Now I want to love people. That's the whole point. And if you need to know something, I'm going to slow down and make sure you understand it. If it seems crazy to you or I'm saying it too much, it's for God's sake, I fear the Lord. He's saying look at my actions. Look at my motives. Problem? Bottom of verse 12. There are so many people who just care "about outward appearance and not about what's in the heart." It's so easy to live that way. And all I'm saying is you need to be ready. If you're going to live for God, you're going to be evaluated by people by superficial things, and you're going to have the same kind of critics that the Apostle Paul had.



One more verse in verse 16, "From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh." Make that a distinctive between you and the non-Christians at your work, you and the neighbors in your neighborhood. You don't really care about the externals. It doesn't matter if they seem weird or flunky, or they don't make much money, or they don't drive the right cars, or they don't seem to be Orange County enough for your neighbors, that does not matter. We don't care. We don't regard anyone according to the flesh, even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh. Think about the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul was once Saul of Tarsus, sitting at the feet of Gamaliel, the great trainer of future up-and-coming superstars of the Jewish people. Paul had his sights set on going to Jerusalem and being on the Sanhedrin and guys like that. They didn't just want to be on the Sanhedrin. They wanted to be the leader. They wanted to be the chief justice of the Supreme Court, as it might be called from our parlance, of Israel. He saw himself in the robes and the special outfits of the chief priests, perhaps. I mean, he was going to be the guy, right? He wasn't a Levite. He couldn't be the chief priest, but he was going to be the ruling class. That's what Paul wanted to be.

And if he heard about some itinerant rabbi who had a Galilean accent and he's running around and he says to his followers, hey, I don't even have a place to lay my head. "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." That guy? Look how he's dressed. Look at his guy who's publicizing him. He's eating locusts and wears a camel hair outfit. I'm not interested in that guy. I care about what I wear, I care who I hang out with. He said we used to regard Jesus according... Think about how embarrassing it is now for Saul of Tarsus, who's now Paul the Apostle, to think back at how he disdained Jesus Christ, the traveling rabbi who now kicked him off his horse on his way to Damascus and blinded him? How now must he think, oh, I can't believe we did that? You want an understatement? Here it is, the last few words of Second Corinthians Chapter 5 verse 16. "We regard him thus no longer." Now we see who he really is. You want to talk about the truth of the incarnation of Christ humbling himself in the container, this humble container of a servant. A servant who is subject to death, even death on a cross. How humiliating. And now, here's the Apostle Paul. We don't look at people like that. We don't care about their outside. Our king was an itinerant rabbi who walked through the desert with fishermen and tax collectors and political zealots. That's our king.

And you know what? It's exactly what the prophets predicted. But we just glossed right over those passages in Isaiah 53 that said about the Messiah, "he had no form or majesty that we should look at him like," "one from whom men hide their faces." So we saw him despised, stricken of men, right? Despised, and God had stricken. We think, oh, God, that's a reject from God. That's how we saw him. "A root out of dry ground." He was no towering cedar. No, no, no redwood in California. He was just a little root. The danger is us being like the world, focusing on appearances. Don't do that. Jesus talked about that when he said, you know, the Pharisees, they're lovers of money because they're always looking to externals. They're always comparing themselves. And they ridiculed Christ. And he said, you guys are the ones who "justify yourselves before men." You're always there trying to make sure you measure up with other people, and it distorts who you are and distorts your view of yourself, "but God knows your heart." See? You're not even caring about that. "You're like whitewashed tombs." It says the outside looks great but on the inside it's full of wickedness and greed he said. He



said, "For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God." That's the biggest verse, I think, in the New Testament, almost. Luke 16:15. "What is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God." Some things that we want the world to do this to, God's going yuck! And all I'm telling you is that the world's going to view you based on the externals that God does not care about. He cares about what's in your heart.

Go back to our passage, Second Corinthians Chapter 10 verses 7 and 8. "Look at what's right before your eyes." Either penetrate, look beyond the surface and look at the heart, or you're looking at what's right before your eyes. You have to look deeper. You have to look at our relationship with God. You have to look deeper than that. "Even if I boast a little too much about our authority," I just want you to know, yeah, we are leaders here, in that case, he's an apostle, "which the Lord gave," not for me. This isn't about rolling out the red carpet for me. It's "for building you up not for destroying you," I'm not trying to stomp on your heads, "I will not be ashamed," about telling you, yes, I am your apostle. Now, "I don't want to appear to be frightening you with my letters," there's some sarcasm there, "for they say, 'His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech is no account.'" Here is a statement of integrity right here, verse 11. "Let such a person understand what we say by letter when absent, we do in present." Here he's saying I know they're misunderstanding what I'm saying. I'm saying what's good. I want to be your apostle here. It's like me saying I want to be your pastor not so I can do this all afternoon long. I want to be your pastor so I can feed you, so I can teach you, so I can help you. That's the whole point. And they're saying, well, that's a thing that's bad. He's saying that because he has bad motives. And Paul is saying you don't get it. It's a good motive. I'm not ashamed of saying that, this is for your good.

And he's saying you want to talk about my letters, right? The letters are integrous. I'm going to come and do what I say. I'm not trying to be hypocritical. I'm not hypocritical. There's integrity in what I'm saying. Just know this, Paul is doing good and the good is the stepping stone for criticism. The good is the reason that there are misunderstandings. I put it this way. Number two, "Expect Doing Good to be Misunderstood." Doing good is going to be misunderstood. And we kind of touched on this last week when I turned you in your small groups to First Peter, which kept saying just when they ridicule you, just keep doubling down on doing good. And here's the problem. You'll start to learn that doing good is sometimes the catalyst for them misunderstanding you. You do good like you don't go to the raging party or something at work because you think that isn't good. Christian shouldn't be there, shouldn't go there. I've heard all kinds of crazy things lately about people's jobs. And the guys are going to go to this crazy place, and it's like no Christian should ever be there but I'm not one of the boys if I don't go there. And all of a sudden I'm saying no, it's like a condemnation of them. And so it's all of a sudden you're doing the right thing but that right thing is now putting a target on your back. Nothing could be further from the truth. You're doing the right thing. You should be commended for being a good man, right? Being a faithful husband. And instead you're now being ridiculed at work. That makes no sense. And here's what the Bible is saying keep doing the right thing. Keep doing good. And it's almost the better you are, the more good you do, it's almost like the more misunderstood you're becoming. It's weird.



God's timing. I don't always appreciate it. How about you? I don't always appreciate it, but occasionally I do. This week someone sent me a meme, which made me laugh out loud and once I was done laughing, I said this is perfect for my sermon this weekend. And when those two things collide life is good for those five minutes at least. So here's the reel I was sent, which was a set of one-star reviews on Yosemite National Park which God made and it's kind of nice. I don't know if you leave reviews on restaurants and hotels or whatever, but these people gave one-star reviews on Yosemite. You know, where Half Dome is. Ansel Adams made his calendars, you know, kind of a nice place. Do you want to hear the one-star reviews? One-star review, too many rocks, (audience laughing) basically a bunch of granite. One-star review, the waterfall was disappointing. Not enough water. One-star, too crowded, too many people trying to see the same views. One-star, the hike was too hard. They should make it easier to get to the top. (audience laughing) One-star, no cell service. Couldn't check my messages. One-star, bears were a problem, and I felt unsafe. (audience laughing) One-star, not enough shade in some areas, there was too much sun. One-star, I had to walk too much, it's not a very convenient place.

If people can go there and give it a one-star, I'm just saying you can be the best employee, you can be the most godly person. You're still going to be given a one-star. You're still going to have bad reviews. There's no way around it. Let's put it in these terms. No one did more good than Jesus. Would you agree with that? He went around doing good was the summary in the Bible. Jesus went around doing good. As a matter of fact, at one point when they picked up stones, he says for what good deed are you stoning me? Why do you want to kill me? For what good thing are you killing me for? It was ironic that they wanted to kill him, clearly, right? The one doing the most good was Christ and they murdered him. Just think about that. But it wasn't just his enemies. Here's a passage you should jot down because you might need it when you think you're going crazy. Mark Chapter 3 verses 20 and 21. He has his disciples all picked, it says, "then he went home, and the crowd gathered again," so they're coming to Jesus. Such a "crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat." Now there are times your work gets so busy you can't get your lunch in, am I right? Verse 21, "When his family heard it," this is Jesus' family, right? "They went out to seize him, for they were saying, 'He is out of his mind.'"

Now picture Mary in that oil painting in the Louvre cradling baby Jesus. Mary is showing up with Jesus' half-brothers and trying to take him by the nape of his neck and drag him out. Why? Because he's nuts. Why is he crazy? Because the kid's skipping lunch. Too many people, he's working too hard. I just want you to think about that. What are you doing? I'm helping people. What are you doing? I'm teaching people. What are you doing? I'm healing people. Your mother doesn't even approve. You're doing too much. You didn't take a lunch break. I know, but I'm the one teaching people to "deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." If I can't skip lunch in this thing, Mom, what are you talking about? I'm not crazy. "I came not to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many." You haven't seen anything yet if you think skipping a meal is a problem. No one is going to understand your Christian life if your mom can't understand it. And Jesus said in Matthew Chapter 10, that's going to happen. Family members. You don't have to think about the Pharisees and the



scribes and the teachers of the law throwing rocks at Jesus. You can see Mary coming and saying, boy, you're crazy! While you're doing good.

That's just a reminder that when the misunderstanding comes from people that it shouldn't come from, like, Job's wife. Hey, Job, all that stuff about the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away, you've just said "blessed be the name of the Lord." That's a great worship song you just sang. But why don't you die and curse God before you do it? Good is going to be misunderstood. One passage I'd love to have you look at before I leave this quick second point. First Peter Chapter 3. First Peter Chapter 3. I know I turned you to part of this last week, at least in your small groups. Look at verse 13, "Now who is there to harm you if you're zealous for what is good?" Keep doing good. And you say, well, who is there to harm you? That's a rhetorical question I can answer with real answers, there are like a lot of people. Okay. And a lot of people do. The sermon series is about criticism. A lot of people to criticize me, for sure. Okay, the realist here is going to say, and certainly the Holy Spirit knows, "But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake," which of course we were promised we will be, "you will be blessed."

Now, that little comma between "sake" and "you," "even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake," comma, "you will be blessed." Here's the problem with a lot of statements in Scripture. Okay. The problem is there's a gap between those two, right? "If I go and prepare a place for you, I'll come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." That sounds great. John Chapter 14, right? There's a 2,000-year gap in the middle of that verse, am I right? That bugs me. And this one bugs me too because I want the blessing now. I'm going to suffer for righteousness' sake. And the blessing may take some time, but "have no fear of them, nor be troubled." Just like he said elsewhere. Jesus said, "in this world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." They have to wait to see it.

But for now, verse 15, "in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that's in you." They will really misunderstand your good. But at some point if they scratch their head and say what in the world is your life all about? You tell them, "with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior." You want a weird juxtaposition of a real paradoxical statement "revile you for your good behavior." Why would they do that? Well, they killed Jesus for good behavior. Mom wanted to yank him out of a good ministry session because he didn't get lunch. They'll "revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good if that should be God's will, than for doing evil." So you can run with the boys and avoid a little bit of criticism, or you can continue to do good that is going to be misunderstood and you'll be blessed. If God's will is that you have to take it on the chin a few times for doing the right thing and doing good? So be it. It doesn't matter how you package the externals of your life, if you're a Christian there's going to be some trouble. They won't understand. They'll misunderstand.

Second Corinthians Chapter 10 verse 12, back to our text. He ends with this, "Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves." We're not going to get in the comparison game. "But when they measure themselves by one



another and compare themselves with one another," that's foolish, "they're without understanding." Number three, "Refuse to Make Lateral Comparisons." That's a phrase I often use around here. We're just going to stop with comparing ourselves to each other, right? That's not smart. Christ said, "Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment." And those who are caring about appearances are always looking at other people saying how do I measure up? How do I measure up, right? We shouldn't care about how we're measuring other people. In John Chapter 21 they were worried about how they measured up with each other. And Jesus said in that post-resurrection appearance, no you follow me. You just worry about me.

Here's a line. It's a great line, it came up in my prayer in the middle of the service. Ephesians Chapter 4 verses 12 and 13. It comes after why God gave leaders and preachers to the church. He said, it's "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ." For what? What's the goal? "Until we attain to the unity of the faith," same doctrinal page, "and of the knowledge of the Son of God," we need to know Christ, "to the mature manhood," what does that look like, "to the measure," listen to this, of the stature of the fullness of Christ, "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." How tall do you want to be? I want to be as tall as Christ. Now, of course, that's metaphorical language, but you can picture the doorjamb wherever it was if your parents did this and put those marks on the doorjamb. You can sit there and compare yourself to your brother and your sister and feel good about yourself. But stop with all the lateral comparisons, because Dad is up here on top and that's where you want to be. And when it comes to your growth you want the maturity. You want to be, I love how it's put, "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

The point is how are you doing with spiritual maturity and you measure that by Christ? You're not going to be dealing with all the other externals. That doesn't matter. It didn't matter that Jesus didn't have a house. It didn't matter that John the Baptist wore weird clothes or ate weird food. None of that mattered. It mattered to the Pharisees. It didn't matter to God. It's always our temptation to measure ourselves with others. It's that classic illustration we quoted all the time in Luke Chapter 18 verses 11 and 12. Pharisee goes, "I'm thank you that I'm not like other men." And then he started looking at it. "I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get." Look at me. Look what I do that that guy doesn't do. Stop with that. Stop comparing yourself to others.

It would be like being on a weight loss program, which it seems like everyone in Orange County is on a weight loss program, and thinking that somehow your weight loss program can be done and you never use a scale. All you do is try to stay around people who weigh more than you. (audience laughing) You come to church, you look around, where's the heaviest row of people? I'm going to sit right there in the middle. And then you leave church and I ask you how's your diet going? Great. You should have seen me this morning. (audience laughing) It was so much smaller than everyone around me. But have you lost any weight? No, I gained 10 pounds. Okay. How you are relative to everyone else really doesn't matter. I'm going to buy you a scale, that would be helpful. If your kid comes home from school and says, Mom, I took a test. I feel like I did pretty well. Oh, you do, tell me about. Well, you know, I looked at what my friend, his answers. A lot of my answers were just like his answers. Oh, really? Yep.

And on the other side, you know, I sit next to Tommy. I hate Tommy, and every answer I saw on his page, none of my answers were like his answers. So I feel like I did pretty well. Did you get it graded? No, I didn't get it graded. You had no answer key? Nope. I don't plan on turning it in. I feel really good about it. Well, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. You have to get it graded.

One text on this that may help. It's all I have time for. Galatians Chapter 6. You ought to quote this and we often avoid it because it seems like the word "boast" is out of place in this context, but maybe I can give it some context for you. Galatians Chapter 6 verse 3, "If anyone thinks he's something," Galatians 6:3. "If anyone thinks he's something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself." It's a lot like a statement over there in Romans, right? Don't "think of himself more highly than he ought," right? "Think so with sober judgment," sound reason. So, of course I think I'm the greatest singer in the world. Okay, but if you're not, then you're just deceiving yourself. Okay. That's easy to understand. But when it comes to your spiritual life, and that's what's on the table here in Galatians Chapter 6 verse 4, "Let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor." Now they're boasting so he's adopting that word. And he says I know you're boasting as you constantly compare yourself, like in Luke 18, I'm better than that guy. Look at me. I tithe; I go to the temple. I do all this stuff. I'm glad that I'm not like that guy. Look at me. I'm boasting in my own self. But you're boasting in yourself as it compares to your neighbor. So stop boasting in yourself compared to your neighbor. Stop that. Test your own work.

Well, how are you going to test your own work if you don't compare it to anyone else? Lateral comparisons are wrong. Vertical comparison, the "stature of the measure of the fullness of Christ," that's a good measure right there. Now you're always going to recognize I have a long way to go. And I do think the word "boast" is left in here, in part, not only because they were boasting to each other. There is a sense in which I'm not boasting about, hey, look how great I am. Look at my sanctification. It's going through the roof. But there is a sense, if I'm always looking to "the fullness of the measure of Christ," there's always a great deal of humility. But there is a bit of satisfaction in the sense that I'm making some progress. And boasting even I'm glad it's there, in part, because there is this miserable worm theology that sometimes creeps in that everyone thinks, well, I can never feel good about any progress because I'm infinitely less holy than Christ. I just think the verse sometimes helps me with that. Like, okay, I can have some satisfaction that I'm growing and it's not so I can tell it to anyone because it's about myself. It's that Galatians Chapter 6 verse 5, "for each will have to bear his own load." And I have to do this. It's not that sanctification isn't part of a teamwork process, of course. "Stir up one another to love and good works," Hebrews Chapter 10 verse 24. Keep one another accountable. Just "confess your sins to one another," James Chapter 5 verse 16. Plenty of passages that say that. But I know I have to deal with my own sanctification. And I know I'm not caring about boasting as it relates to your sanctification.

Have you ever heard anybody say I'm neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet? Have you heard somebody say that before? Sometimes it's the Sunday school grads that like to drop that line to be funny where they predict something. It comes from the book of Amos in the Old Testament. And Amos used to say that because God picked him to be a prophet but he liked



to tell everybody I'm just a farmer. He was a herdsman, a shepherd, and a fig farmer of all things, a sycamore fig farmer. And so he'd say, you know, before I became a prophet, before I became a spokesperson of God, I was just a normal guy. And God sends him to the ten tribes of the North along with Hosea. But he's out there in 750 B.C. telling these people that they need to repent. He's calling them to repent of their sin. Now, God does something remarkable in this little book of Amos, starting with the very first thing that happens in Chapter 1 which is he tells him to start giving all of these judgments to the surrounding nations, all the nations that surround the northern tribes of Israel. And you think why would he do that? Well, because it was easy to cheer that on, right? "For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment." I'm like, yeah, I hate those guys in Damascus. Right?

So all of these nations get listed. And then he says, you know, you guys need to repent. He even gets to Judah and their southern brothers who are alienated from them. And then he says to them, now they're kind of bristling, well not us. And then he gives them all this call to repent and then he gives them some visions in Amos Chapter 7, and it gives them basically illustrations. The third illustration right in the middle, after saying you deserve a plague of locusts. And Amos goes, no, no, please don't bring that. That would devastate us. And then he says, there could be a plague of fire. That's the second one. No, no, don't bring us that. And then he drops this bomb. He says, let me give you this picture. Go relay this to the people. He says, I'm going to give you a vision of a plumb line, Chapter 7 of Amos. Do you know what a plumb line is? The string with a weight on it. Ancient architects and builders, construction workers would use that to plumb up, I mean they still use it, but plumb up like a vertical, it's like an ancient level. And he's basically implying there in that very short discussion, you guys don't measure up. You guys are crooked.

Now, it's easy for you to compare yourself to all the surrounding nations and feel superior. Isaiah. It's the same strategy in the first five chapters of Isaiah. It's easy for you to see the sins in Isaiah for everyone else but I have to give you a vision of my holiness for you to see your problem, you're a man of unclean lips, you need to repent. Now, it's the whole nation and Amos. Stop comparing yourself to the people around you. Belshazzar, it's familiar also in the book of Daniel. He should have learned from his predecessor when Nebuchadnezzar was humbled, did he not? Here's Belshazzar now, and God has to show up and give him four words. Measured, measured, found wanting in one word, and divided. And it would be divided. His kingdom would be divided. The Persians and the Medes would take over. But I like that sense that there's a set of scales. Scales. You've been measured in the scales and found wanting. The scales are supposed to objectively measure. The plumb line objectively measures. Now you can just look around, and I'm sure Belshazzar thought Dad was kind of freaked out by God and, you know, God humbled him. But let's get back into ruling the way ancient Near Eastern leaders ruled. And he was arrogant. And we often can look around and feel like, you know, it's okay. But, we can't live like the world. We can expect them to judge us on appearances and externals and all the rest of it. But we have to say we have to go back to the book; we have to go back to the tape measure and the scales that God has. And it's right there for us in the Word of God. That is what matters. And when you camp your life on that you may get criticism, you may get a lot of misunderstanding but we stay there. We do what's



right. And every day we stretch to live up to "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." And God help us in that this week.

God, please help us, please all of us as we seek to know your Word which is for us the rule. It is the measure. It is the "lamp to my feet and a light to my path." But it ultimately gives us that standard by which we can say are we doing the right thing? Because it's so easy to listen to people. We feel like we don't measure up to these superficial markers and benchmarks. And God, we want to say what really matters is how are we doing with you? We want to be like Paul who says I wouldn't be a servant of Christ if I cared about what people thought all the time. God, may we not use this to disregard a wise, reproofing voice in our lives, or a good sermon that's biblical, or a good biblical counselor that's coming from someone who's really quoting the Word accurately. God, it's not about my feelings. It's not about our feelings. It's about your objective truth. And I pray that we would submit ourselves to that wherever it is found, through someone's voice, through someone's sermon, through a book, or ultimately through your book. That's the clearest and most reliable codification of your mind on paper. And God, we want to be in it every single day. When there's misunderstanding, I pray we would manage it as well as you did. Even when your mother and brothers were showing up and trying to tell you that you were doing the wrong thing. So, God, we commit ourselves afresh to you even this morning.

In Jesus' name. Amen.