Religion Versus Christ

Each One Reach One: The Cost and Rewards

2 Corinthians 10:1-18

Pastor Bryan Clark

One of the great things about a snow day is you can curl up around the fire and read a great book—like the book *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*[1] — one of my favorites in which you will find this parable:

> "There once was a man who lived in a country that had no fruit trees. This man was a scholar and spent a great deal of time reading and in his readings he often came across references to fruit. The description of fruit was so enticing that he decided to undertake a journey to experience fruit for himself. He went to the market and asked everyone he met if they knew where he could find fruit. After much searching he located a man who knew the directions to the country and place where he could find fruit. The man drew out elaborate directions for the scholar to follow. With his map in hand, the scholar carefully followed all of the directions. He was very careful to make all the right turns and to check out all of the landmarks that he was supposed to observe. Finally he came to the end of the directions and found himself at the entrance to a large apple orchard. It was springtime and the apple trees were in blossom. The scholar entered the orchard and proceeded immediately to take one of the blossoms and taste it. He liked neither the texture of the flower nor the taste. He went on to another tree and sampled another blossom and then another and then another. Each blossom, though quite beautiful, was distasteful to him. He left the orchard and returned to his home country reporting to his fellow villagers that fruit was a much over-rated food. Being unable to recognize the difference between the spring blossom and the summer fruit, the scholar never realized that he had not experienced what he was looking for."
>
> -From Halcolm's Evaluation Parables

When I first read that parable several years ago I thought how accurately that describes millions and millions and millions of people who, in all sincerity, are on a journey to discover a relationship with God. But what they discover along the way is religion and they think, because they have tasted of religion, they've tasted of God and they have found it very distasteful—so much so that they would say that, "God is really not the satisfying fruit I thought He would be." The fact of the matter is, a lot of people have discovered religion and have not understood that that is something *other than* a relationship with God. We often say Christianity is not a religion; it's a relationship; but what do we mean by that? What are the characteristics or the distinctives of religion? How does that differ from a relationship with God?

Well that is what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible with you, turn with us to 2 Corinthians, Chapter 10. Strangely enough religion is not a *pathway to* God, but oftentimes one of the greatest *barriers to* finding God. The tone dramatically changes from 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 to Chapter 10—so much so there's a lot of debate about what caused such a dramatic change in tone. Really all that is just guesswork but, what we do know is, the tone changes dramatically. We do know that Paul's assignment was very complicated. In our modern world we get used to the fact that we have so many ways to communicate effectively, but in the ancient world it was very basic. Paul would have to write a letter. The letter would be handed to someone and that someone would

have to take a very dangerous journey to hand deliver the letter. It would then be read out loud to the church. Therefore, by the time they would respond and Paul could respond back, you are talking about months and months and months in between. So Paul understands that there's the core of Corinthian believers, there are the false teachers and the critics that are mixed in with them. So in one letter he needs to encourage the true believers but he also needs to call out the false teachers and that's a rather complicated thing to do in the same letter. I think now in Chapter 10, to the end of the letter, Paul is drawing a line in the sand. He's calling out the false teachers and he's *powering up* a little bit.

Chapter 10, Verse 1:

> **Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent!**
>
> (*NASB, 2 Corinthians 10:1)

Now Paul is starting off by naming himself. It's very unusual that Paul would name himself and especially this late into a letter. Typically when Paul does that, he's powering up and that's definitely what he's doing in this section of the letter. He says he urges them **...by the meekness and gentleness of Christ**. That word *meekness* is a word that basically means to be humble and not hold wrongs done to him against them. The Corinthians have not been real fair to Paul and Paul is saying, "I'm willing to let that go." *Gentleness* is a word that would have been used to describe a judge that was especially fair, that would take all of the factors into consideration and try to arrive at a very right and fair judgment. Those would be characteristics of Christ and that's what he says. But the accusation of the critics in Corinth is that Paul, *when he's face-to-face with them, is very meek.* Now this is a different Greek word for meekness. This means *fainthearted.* This means he is a bit of a weakling. We would probably say today, "When he was with them face-to-face, he was very wimpy, but when he gets behind his pen—when he gets behind the computer in an email—he's very bold." And so that's the accusation. We might say today, "*He's all bark and no bite*." "Paul, when you get behind your pen, boy you're really courageous, but when you show up face-to-face, you're just a big wimp; you're meek; you're fainthearted."That's the accusation that has been made.

Verse 2:

> **I ask that when I am present I need not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh.**

Paul is saying, "*When I come to you I don't want to have to be bold. You know, can't we do this in a spirit of gentleness and love*?" If you remember in 1Corinthians Paul actually said to them, "How do you want me to come? Do you want me to come with a rod or do you want me to come with gentleness and love?" He is saying the same thing here. "I'm hoping, when I come, I don't have to be bold." But then he follows that up by saying, "*By the way, I am going to be bold with a confident, courageous boldness in order to stand up to the critics who have said we walk according to the flesh.*" Several times in this chapter Paul is drawing a line and he is saying, "I'm going to deal with this when I get there. I will be bold and it will be a courageous, confident boldness to deal with my critics." When they have accused him of walking according to the flesh, what they mean by that is that Paul is just a man and there doesn't seem to be anything supernatural about him. The critics, the Jewish legalists, have identified themselves as the spiritual elite. They believe they've shown themselves with signs and wonders. They believe that they've demonstrated that they are a *cut above*, so their case is that they are filled with the power of God and Paul is but a mere man. So Paul is going to respond to that in verse 3:

> **For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.** (Vs. 3-4)

Paul does acknowledge it is true; he's just a man. But he also acknowledges that this is a spiritual battle and the weapons of warfare are not fleshly. They are spiritual and he is going to show up with the power of God—with weapons that are divinely powerful—in order to what? —in order to tear down fortresses. Now that Greek word translated **fortresses** really means *a tower*. In the ancient world, if you had enough money, a city would have an exterior wall—and most cities did— but, if you had enough money, you also built an interior tower so, if the enemy breeched the outside wall, you would rush into the tower. That was your last place of safety. If the tower was torn down, that was total and ultimate defeat. So the metaphor is pretty strong here where Paul is saying, "*I'm going to show up and I'm going to show up with the power of God and this is going to be a spiritual battle and I have divinely powered weapons that are going to tear the fortress all the way down and God is going to win His battle."* What does he mean by that?

Verse 5:

> **We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God...**

What is it that prevents people from knowing God?—**speculations and every lofty thing**. Now what does he mean by that? *Speculations* is a Greek word that means *human reasoning*. It's not saying that there is something wrong with human reasoning. But human reasoning, for the basis of knowing God, turns into religion. Religion is based on human thought and human reasoning. Basically all the religions of the world have their differences but there are some things that are exactly the same in all of them. One of the characteristics that is the same in all of them is that they all have some sort of performance-based mindset. In other words there is something you need to *do*. There is some ritual, some rules you need to keep, some checklist. There is something that you do to somehow merit the favor of God or the gods. It might be this kind of a ritual; it might be these kinds of rules but, at the end of the day, every religion has something that you do—some degree of performance to somehow earn the favor of God. The reason for that is because that makes sense. Everything that we've ever experienced in life tells us that that makes sense. Every environment we've ever been in—in the marketplace, in the school, in our homes, in our neighborhoods—every environment has this performance-based mindset. The better you perform, the more value you have. Therefore human reasoning concludes this must be how it works with God. Therefore religion is born out of human reasoning. One of the reasons why religion is so popular is because it makes sense. It makes sense that I should somehow have to perform in order to get God's attention, in order to gain God's favor.

We've tried to make this case before: That I think one of the ways by which we defend the reliability of the gospel of grace is to recognize that the concept of grace is so *other than* any experience we've ever had, in any environment of our life, that it could not possibly have been conceived in the minds of men and women. It is so scandalously *other than* anything we have ever known, it could have only originated in the mind of God. Grace is understanding that religion doesn't work. We do not have within us the ability to perform well enough for God. Therefore God did *for us* what we could never do for ourselves and offers us salvation as a gift of His grace. Grace means an *un*merited, *un*deserved, *un*earned favor from God. Christmas is the ultimate *un*-religion. If religion works, there is nothing about Christmas to celebrate. Christmas is totally unnecessary if religion works. The whole point of Christmas is God saying, "Religion doesn't work." There is not a single person who can perform well enough to earn the favor of God. Therefore God sent His Son

to be the Savior of the world. The whole point of the celebration of Christmas is this is an *un*-religion. It is an acknowledgement by God Himself that religion doesn't work. "That's why I'm doing this." That's what he means by **speculations**. It's religion that flows out of human reasoning and, rather than that leading us *to* God, it actually creates a barrier *from* knowing God.

The second thing he says is **...every lofty thing**. That Greek word basically means *that which is filled with arrogance*. It is a natural outflow of religion. The only way that you can be part of a religion and believe that you are performing well is to believe that you are out-performing everyone else—that you are at the *top of the heap*. Therefore that can only lead to arrogance. The only way to be in a religion and believe that your religion is working is to believe that you are out-performing others—which has to lead to arrogance—and that's what the word means. **Speculations and every lofty thing**...it creates an arrogance in our actions and in our attitude. Again, rather than that leading us into a relationship with God, it becomes the barrier that prevents us from experiencing a relationship with God. That's what he says:

> **We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,** (Vs.5)

Paul clearly identifies that this spiritual warfare is a thinking warfare. It's about "taking thoughts captive". That word **captive** means *prisoner of war*. When we live in a world filled with religious thought, we have to take **every thought captive** and recognize: Is this true or is this not true? Spiritual warfare is a thinking battle because it ultimately is driven by truth. We kind of use a preaching model; I would say it's a discipleship model here. Basically it comes from the idea that everybody ultimately lives out their belief system, so life must flow from right thinking. Therefore we start with understanding the truth. Once you understand it, you believe the truth, and if you believe the truth, it should flow in obedience. We do not put the emphasis on *doing* the right thing so much as *believing* the right thing. If you believe the right thing, then it will outflow in doing the right thing. You will not do something that you don't believe, and you can't believe it if you don't really understand it. So that's the way the flow goes.

About a year ago *Back to the Bible* shared that they had done extensive research and found that those people who were engaged in the Bible four times a week or more lived dramatically different Christian lives than those people who are engaged in the Bible three times or less. We would say, "That makes perfect sense." That flows right out of the truth of the New Testament—that if you don't understand the truth, you can't believe the truth; you are not going to live the truth. Now what makes that so important is to understand that religion turns it exactly upside down. Religion puts the emphasis on the *doing*, which eventually might lead to some *believing*, which rarely leads to *understanding*. If you join a religion, you find out these are the requirements: You *do* this; you *do* this; you *do* this and you *do* this. These are the expectations; these are the rules and these are the rituals. It's all about *doing* what's acceptable or appropriate. You do that long enough and eventually you might believe that. But very seldom do people in religion understand that. If you don't think that's true, find someone who is neck deep in religion and ask them, "Why do you do that?" and see what they say. Most people will say, "I don't know; it's just what we do; it's just our religion." They don't understand the truth that drives the behavior. I have some friends that are in a different religion and I ask them that question and usually the answer is, "I don't know". One time the answer was, "I think it makes God happy." There is just no sense of why we do this; it's just the requirement of the religion. It's driven by behavior. Do the right things; somehow perform and God will be happy.

Paul is saying that Christianity is driven by truth—that our obedience flows out of **taking every thought captive** and making sure that it's not flowing out of human speculation. It's not flowing out of our own arrogance but it is according to truth.

> **...taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.** (Vs. 5b-6)

It's an interesting verse. Paul's absolutely drawn a line in the sand. When he uses the word **punish**, it's a Greek word that would be used of a king *putting down a revolt*. Paul is saying that when he comes, he is going to come with boldness and he is going to come with a boldness that is filled with courage, that is filled with confidence. What he needs from the Corinthians is for them to take their stand. That is what he means. We need the Corinthians to be obedient and take your stand. That will isolate out the false teachers and I will deal with them. The big problem Paul is having is they are all mixed together and that makes it very hard to deal with, so he is asking them to take their stand. Paul will do the rest.

Verse 7:

> **You are looking at things as they are outwardly. If anyone is confident in himself that he is Christ's, let him consider this again within himself, that just as he is Christ's, so also are we. For even if I boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be put to shame, for I do not wish to seem as if I would terrify you by my letters. For they say** (meaning his critics)**, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is un-impressive, and his speech contemptible."** (Vs. 7-10)

Paul is saying in verse seven that religion looks at the outside. It's all about behavior. It's all about rituals; it's all about clothing; it's about titles; it's about buildings. It's about the trappings of religion and God. The Jewish legalists have really brought a lot of attention to the *external* and it's very impressive, but what Paul says is that the relationship with Christ is *interna*l. You have to get beyond the externals and look at what's really going on inside.

You think about religions around the world. There's a tremendous amount of emphasis on the external. It has to do with clothing; it has to do with buildings. A lot of religions would have a building that represents God's temple and God's presence is there and you go there to meet with God and a lot of the trappings that say, "This is God's house; this is where God lives." We would say that this building is a mere convenience. This is not God's house; this is not a sanctuary. God does not live here. When you leave, God leaves, because God dwells in you. This is just a building. We could have this same service in a park or in a barn and it would be just as spiritual. Religion has a sense of the external and, in so many ways it communicates power and God from an external standpoint.

But Paul is saying Christianity is measured from what is within. Paul is in a difficult place because, if he powers up, the accusation is: He is trying to scare them. If he doesn't power up they say he must not be an apostle because he does not exercise his authority. And that is what Paul is talking about there, "I am going to exercise **authority** when I come and the point is not **to terrify you**." That's probably quoting what the critics have said but, "It's to protect you." All of us that are called to be spiritual leaders do understand that, from time to time, we must exercise God-given authority and power up, not to harm the body but to protect the body. That's part of the responsibility of the shepherd and that's what Paul is saying. But then he goes back to the voice of his critics when they

say, **"His letters are weighty and strong..."** which they already said—he is really courageous behind his pen**...but his personal presence is unimpressive.**

Now when he was saying that religion looks at the outside but what matters is on the inside, now he is getting specific. This is what the accusation is: that when Paul showed up in town, physically his presence was very unimpressive. Paul was not tall, dark, and handsome. Paul was not suave. Paul did not swagger into town and they all said, "Whoa, who is the new guy in town?" Now we don't know exactly what Paul looked like. As a matter of fact we don't know at all what he looked like. There are records from history but they were written about two hundred years after Paul and it is hard to know if they're accurate or not. But, by Paul's own admission in several places, he was not physically impressive. All the descriptions we have are far from flattering. But then he goes on to say not only that, but his critics say that **his speech is contemptible**. That word contemptible is a strong word. I think the NIV says something like "of no account" which is way too weak. The Living Bible says, "He's the worst preacher we have ever heard," and that's pretty close. (Laughter)

You do have to put that comment up against the backdrop of the Greek world. In our world today we have athletic celebrities and we have Hollywood celebrities. In the Greek world they had athletic celebrities and they had their own Hollywood celebrities. They were the orators; they were those that were gifted in public speaking. That was, for them, their Hollywood celebrities. It was big, big business and it was a big deal. It had very little to do with content; it had a lot to do with style. It didn't matter quite so much what you had to say as long as you said it really well. It was about theatrics; it was about acting. It was about the ability to persuade and move a crowd. As a matter of fact the ultimate goal was that if you could get a crowd to change its mind on something, that was a touchdown. That was the ultimate prize and the *best of the best* were their celebrities.

So Paul shows up in town and he doesn't measure up. So you can imagine these Jewish legalists saying, "You know, what kind of a guy is this? He is very unimpressive, doesn't have the power of God in him and clearly is not nearly as effective as these others." Now again the point to be made is: It wasn't so much *what* they said; it was *how* they said it that mattered. We would never fall for that...would we? The comparison between the ancient Greek culture and our culture today is very interesting. The airwaves are filled with celebrities, politicians and preachers that have nothing to say, but they say it very, very well and they persuade thousands and thousands and thousands of people. It's the very thing Paul was dealing with in the first century.

One interesting question would be: Was it that Paul didn't have the capacity to do it or was it that Paul simply refused to compromise the gospel by playing that celebrity game? When Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians, in the first chapter he said to them, "I did not come to you in cleverness of speech." When the orator would speak, the emphasis was on *them*. It was a celebrity moment—much more *them* than the *content*. Perhaps Paul had the capacity but simply refused to get sucked in to that way of communicating, for the sake of the integrity of the gospel. What he wanted was the emphasis on the message—on the truth—and not the messenger. They, however, found that very unimpressive and very contemptible.

Verse 11:

> **Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when absent, such persons we are also in deed when present.**

This is a big time drawing of a line. Paul is saying, "Let's think about this." This same Paul that is very bold and courageous behind his pen is the same Paul that is going to show up in person with the same courage and boldness face to face. He's, in essence, drawing a line and saying, "If you

want a fight, you are going to get one," because the same convictions he wrote with his pen are the same convictions he's going to verbalize when he's in their presence.

Verse 12:

> **For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding.**

That last phrase**...without understanding...**is a little bit weak in the NASB. It basically means it *isn't very smart*. We would probably say today, "That really is rather stupid." It is a pretty strong statement. What he is saying is that religious people form a mutual admiration society. They sit down and they define: Here are the rules; here are rituals; here is what is expected." So we make our own rules; then we follow our own rules; then we pat ourselves on the back and say, "You measure up". So religious people, within their own religion, tend to**...measure themselves by themselves**. They tend to **...compare themselves with themselves** and, on that basis, they determine that they measure up. And the question would be: "Says who?" This is exactly what the legalist does. The legalist writes the rules, then follows the rules, then pats himself on the back. But the question needs to be asked, "Who says that's the measurement? Who says that's good enough?" Again I would go back to my argument: If that worked, Christmas is unnecessary. The very fact that God sent a Savior was His statement: Religion doesn't work. You don't measure yourself by yourself. The measurement or standard is the perfection of God Himself and, since no one measures up, God sent a Savior to do for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Verse 13:

> **But we will not boast beyond our measure, but within the measure of the sphere which God appointed to us as a measure, to reach even as far as you. For we are not overextending ourselves, as if we did not reach to you, for we were the first to come even as far as you in the gospel of Christ; not boasting beyond our measure, that is, in other men's labors, but with the hope that as your faith grows, we will be, within our sphere, enlarged even more by you, so as to preach the gospel even to the regions beyond you, and not to boast in what has been accomplished in the sphere of another.** (Vs. 13-16)

A very interesting paragraph, but rather difficult to understand. When he uses that word **sphere**, some of the translations have *field*. I think that's clearer. It's the Greek word *canon*. Canon means a *measurement*; it means to create a measurement or boundaries. You have heard people refer to the New Testament Canon of Scripture. What they are referring to is there were certain requirements for a letter to be considered inspired Scripture. That was the measurement—the canon. Those that passed the test were put into the Scriptures, so it's referred to as the canon of Scripture. That's the *field* of those that qualified. This word here, if we were to apply it to a football field, is referring to the boundaries, the end zone, the sidelines, the yard markers. They are the measurements, or the boundaries, that define the field. This is *on* the field; this is *off* the field. What Paul is probably referring to is when they were at the Jerusalem counsel, the deal was made that Peter, James and John would pursue the Jewish field—that was their calling. Paul would pursue the Gentile field— that was his calling. They would not try to impose the Jewish religion onto the Gentiles but rather he would go and present the truths of Christianity to the Gentiles. So Paul says, "My field included Corinth." So Paul went into a pagan environment that was very religious and presented the truth of the gospel and many came to faith in Jesus. The church was born. As the church began to grow, the Jewish legalists came up from Judea and were now trying to take over. This wasn't their field; they weren't responsible for these conversions. They didn't have

anything to do with these changed lives but now they want to impose their Jewish culture onto the Gentiles and take over. And Paul is objecting to that. He says that they are taking credit for somebody else's labors. They are taking credit for something that they didn't do.

He's drawing the distinction between the realities of religion and the organic nature of Christianity. Religion, by its very nature, tends to be that which is dominated by certain parts of the world—a certain religion in this country, a certain religion in that country. There are cultures that people are born into and, "I'm *this* because I was born into this culture and everybody in my culture is *this*." And if you enter into *that* religion, you basically adopt *that* culture. Now the pluralists in our world would say that is the reason for their argument. If you are born in this country you are Muslim. If you are born in that country, you are Hindu. If you are born in another country, you are Christian. That all sounds well and good. The problem is: It's not true. It is true of religion. By and large, if you are born in *this* country, you tend to adopt *that* religion, *this* country—*that* religion. That is the nature of religion. But what's different is: Christianity is different. Christianity flows out of every culture. It flows out of every ethnic group. It flows out of every religion. It is organic. It is *grass-roots*. People from all religions, people from all countries of the world, people from all ethnic backgrounds experience the life-changing message of Jesus and experience dramatic conversion at the grassroots, organic level and there is something about that that's infectious. And that is what Paul is saying: That would infect their region and it would continue to spread out like a disease. It is infectious but it is organic. It is life changing; it is a dramatic moment of experiencing a relationship with the living God. It is very different from the culturally-bound dominance of religion. The Jewish legalists are trying to take credit for something they haven't done and Paul comes back and says:

...HE WHO BOASTS, LET HIM BOAST IN THE LORD. (Vs. 17)

He is quoting from Jeremiah: That, at the end of the day, it is not religion that did this. It's God that did this. The only boast is in God Himself and then he ends in verse 18 by saying:

For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends. (Vs. 18)

By the way, at the end of the day, it's not a mutual admiration society that matters. Religious people can commend themselves all they want but, at the end of the day, there is only one opinion that matters and that's the opinion of God Himself. That's what he says in verse 18. Religion flows out of human reasoning. It always has a dynamic of performance that somehow merits favor with God. It's dominated by that which is external. It's much more about doing *this* and doing *that* than it is really driven by a sense of what's *true* and *believed*. They have a tendency to measure themselves by themselves and think somehow they measure up because they follow their own rules and, at the end of the day, it's a culture that people are born into or just kind of assimilate into and isn't defined by a genuine life-change experience. Christianity, on the other hand, is an internal experience with the living God. It's recognition that, on the basis of my performance, I can never earn favor with God. Therefore God sent a Savior. That's the whole point of Christmas. I need help because religion doesn't work. It's deeply internal. It's understanding that God sent a Savior because, "I don't measure up," and there's something about it that's organic, that's hope filled, that is a life change that flows out of every ethnic group, every culture around the world.

I want to close this morning by talking to two groups of people. The first group would be those of you who have been up to your eyebrows in religion. Perhaps it's current, or perhaps it's from your past, but you would say with all sincerity that you genuinely *tried*. You *tried* to keep the rules, you *tried* to keep the rituals, you *tried* to do the religion, but no matter what you did, you found it deeply

dissatisfying and, in your heart of hearts, you ultimately said, "If that's tasting God, God is much more dissatisfying than I would have imagined." And I am going to guess in your heart this morning, there is a dissatisfaction or you wouldn't be here. You're here because you're thinking "*There has got to be more*," and you're still seeking. What I would suggest to you is what you may have tasted was religion, thinking religion would lead you to a knowledge of God. But Paul says, "*Religion is actually a barrier to experiencing a relationship with the living God.*" What better time than Christmas to acknowledge that religion doesn't work! That's the whole point of Christmas. We needed a Savior and, rather than religion, God offers you a relationship with Himself through a gift—a gift of His grace—that Jesus did for you on the cross what you could not do for yourself.

The second group of people would be those of you that have trusted Christ as Savior, but somewhere along the way you have turned this relationship back into a religion. You would sit here this morning and say, "You know my relationship with Christ has become very dissatisfying. I'm just kind of focusing on the outward; I'm keeping the rules. I'm trying to kind of stay consistent with the Christian culture but the reality would be, "I've lost my first love; I've lost my passion. My spiritual life is boring; it's mundane and I'm just cranking it out day after day." For some reason, many, many, many Christians have a tendency to turn their Christian faith into a religion and it becomes very dissatisfying. Maybe this morning you need to rethink and once again begin pursuing an intimate, passionate relationship with the living God, who loves you so much that He sent His Son to be your Savior, that you might have a real, dynamic, living relationship with Him. I can't think of a better time of year to make some of these changes than at Christmas time, when we are reminded that God loved us so much that he sent a Savior that we might have life.

Our Father, we are thankful that You do love us. Christmas is the ultimate reminder that religion doesn't work. Otherwise Christmas makes no sense. Christmas is the ultimate un-religion. Lord, I pray for those here today that, in all sincerity, they have tried really hard to make religion work. But deep in their hearts they have been dissatisfied and something deep within them has told them, "This isn't all there is," and this morning they find themselves here and they hear Your voice. Lord, may this be the day that they abandon religion and accept the Savior that You sent. Lord, I pray for those who have trusted Christ as Savior but, somewhere along the way, they have lost their relationship. They are following the rules; they are cranking it out, but it's become lifeless and boring. Lord, again, may this Christmas be the season where once again they go back to pursuing a living, dynamic relationship with the God who loves them. In Jesus' name, Amen.

[1]*Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods, Second Edition* by Michael Quinn Patton. (Sage Publications, The International Professional Publishers) 1990

[2]Patton. p. 9

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December 12/13, 2009

Religion Versus Christ

Each One Reach One: The Cost and Rewards

2 Corinthians 10:1-18

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. Do you think people in our culture today are confused spiritually? Why or why not? What are the main differences between a relationship with Christ and religion?

2. Why do most people believe what they believe? Is their belief system based on carefully reasoned out positions or based on something else?

3. Are people today more persuaded by content or style in communication?

Bible Study

1. Read 2 Corinthians 10:1-6. What is the difference between walking "in" the flesh and walking "according to" the flesh? Compare Romans 8:1-17.

2. What is the nature of the battle according to Paul? What does it mean to take every thought captive?

3. Read 2 Corinthians 10:7-11. Paul encourages the Corinthians to focus on what is inside a person not things as they are outwardly. What does he mean? In what ways can the outward focus be deceiving?

4. Apparently Paul was unimpressive in personal appearance and his speech contemptible. How would Paul be received in today's culture? What would he do and not do in today's media culture? In what ways are the Greek culture of the first century and today's media culture similar?

5. Read 2 Corinthians 10:12-18. What does Paul mean when he says the false teachers measure themselves by themselves? In what ways do legalists do this? In what ways do religious people do this? What's the problem?

6. Paul is discussing the fact that after he reached the Corinthians with the Gospel and established a church the Jewish legalists are trying to come in and take credit and take over. How do we work together as churches and ministries without appearing to move in where we don't belong?

7. When it comes to motives, obedience, etc… whose opinion ultimately matters? How should that affect our attitudes and actions?

8. Using this text as a guide, list the differences between a relationship with Christ and religion?

Application

1. How must we arm ourselves in a thinking spiritual war? How do we avoid the pitfalls of religion?

2. What are three practical things you can do to make sure you are not misled by false teachers today?

3. What are some practical things you can do to promote unity within the universal church without overstepping proper boundaries?

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