

Gospel vs. Religion

If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. – [Galatians 1:9](#)

Is your Christianity marked by a deep belief, assurance and dependency on **grace** through Jesus? Or is your heart bent on man-fearing, self-worshiping **religiosity**? Religious people are glory thieves – taking from God what is rightfully his. Even worse than resulting in personal corruption, **religion** spread insidiously in churches; Paul's fiercest commands throughout his letters were always against the religious people in the church.

Grace is freedom from the curse of works ([Gal. 3:10](#)), freedom from condemnation ([Gal 2:15](#)), freedom from slavery ([Gal. 5:1](#)) and freedom to worship and obey Jesus by the power of the Spirit ([Gal. 5:16](#)). Religion can never love or honor Jesus – it is ashamed of and offended ([Gal. 5:11](#)) by the gospel that declares all as sinners in need of a Savior. Religion says you can save yourself. Religion is “another gospel.”

What gospel are you spreading like a wildfire in your church or life? Grace? Or Religion?

Tim Keller shows the difference between Religion and Gospel in his new publication, [Gospel in Life Study Guide](#) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), p. 16.

Acceptance

- **Religion:** “I obey; therefore, I’m accepted.”
- **Gospel:** “I’m accepted; therefore, I obey.”

Motivation

- **Religion:** Motivation is based on fear and insecurity.
- **Gospel:** Motivation is based on grateful joy.

Obedience

- **Religion:** I obey God in order to get things from God.
- **Gospel:** I obey God to get God – to delight in and resemble him.

Circumstances

- **Religion:** When circumstances in my life go wrong, I am angry at God or myself, since I believe that anyone who is good deserves a comfortable life.
- **Gospel:** When circumstances in my life go wrong, I struggle, but I know my punishment fell on Jesus and that while God may allow this for my training, he will exercise his Fatherly love within my trial.

Criticism

- **Religion:** When I am criticized, I am furious or devastated because it is critical that I think of myself as a “good person.” Threats to self-image must be destroyed at all costs.
- **Gospel:** When I am criticized, I struggle, but it is not essential for me to think of myself as a “good person.” My identity is not built on my record or my performance but on God’s love for me in Christ.

Prayer

- **Religion:** My prayer life consists largely of petition, and it only heats up when I am in a time of need. My main purpose in prayer is control of the environment.
- **Gospel:** My prayer life consists of generous stretches of praise and adoration. My main purpose is fellowship with God.

Confidence

- **Religion:** My self-view swings things between to poles. If and when I am living up to my standards, I feel confident, but then I am prone to be proud and unsympathetic to failing people. If and when I am not living up to standards, I feel humble but not confident – I feel like a failure.
- **Gospel:** My self-view is not based on my moral achievement. In Christ I am *simul iustus et peccator* – simultaneously sinful and lost, yet accepted in Christ. I am so bad that he had to die for me, and I am so loved that he was glad to die for me. This leads me to deep humility and confidence at the same time.

Identity

- **Religion:** My identity and self-worth are based mainly on how hard I work, or how moral I am – and so I must look down on those I perceive as lazy or immoral.
- **Gospel:** My identity and self worth are centered on the one who died for me. I am saved by sheer grace and I can't look down on those who believe or practices something different from me. Only by grace am I what I am.

This post was written by Pastor Scott Thomas.