

## *A quick comparison of religion and the gospel*

### **Religion**

"I obey; therefore, I'm accepted."

Motivation is based on fear and insecurity.

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

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

When I am criticized, I am furious or devastated, because it is essential for me to think of myself as a "good person." Threats to that self-image must be destroyed at all costs.

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

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

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

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

### **Gospel**

"I'm accepted; therefore, I obey."

Motivation is based on grateful joy.

I obey God to get *God*—to delight and resemble him.

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

When I am criticized, I struggle, but it is not 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. I became a Christian by understanding those truths; therefore, in Christ, I can take criticism.

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

My self-view is not based on a view of myself as a moral achiever. In Christ I am *simul iustus et peccator*—simultaneously sinful and lost, yet accepted in Christ. I am so bad he *had* to die for me, and I am so loved he was *glad* to die for me. This leads me to deeper and deeper humility as well as deeper confidence, without either sniveling or swaggering.

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

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