

## Us vs. Them

2-20-11

Jesus' main ministry message was "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is here." He defined the boundary of God's Kingdom in our hearts as repentance, which involves a complete change of heart away from depending primarily on the things of this world toward depending foremost on God's Word to direct our lives.

Instead of repenting, we spend a lot of time comparing. Whether watching TV, on Facebook, at work, school, the gym, beauty parlor or grocery store, we look at each other and are preoccupied with what Scripture calls "measuring ourselves by ourselves", to paraphrase *2 Corinthians 10:12*. The Bible says we are without understanding when we do this, but the problem dates back to the Beginning.

Satan persuaded Eve to question God's word and corruption entered the world. Immediately, Adam and Eve compared themselves and realized they were naked. The core issue here is one of identity. Previously they walked in the "cool" (literally in Hebrew, *ruach*, or "Spirit", *Genesis 3:8*) of the evening in communion with God. Now they saw themselves as different from God, and from each other, and they tried to make new identities for themselves with paltry fig leaves. It didn't work. God found them out. Adam blamed his wife (*Genesis 3:12*), and the rest is history. When our identities are founded not on our relationship with God but on comparing ourselves with each other, we are readily disappointed. Anger, guilt and blame are often the result.

Ancient Israel compared itself to other nations and asked the Prophet Samuel to anoint a king for them so they could be "like all the nations" (*1 Samuel 8:5*). God told Samuel: "They have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them." The result was disaster after disaster. Israel had to endure many bad kings who brought ruin upon the people, culminating in their total expulsion from the Promised Land.

Even Jesus' disciples could not resist comparing themselves with each other. In the midst of the greatest spiritual revival the world had ever seen—the disciples, themselves, had gone out "preaching the gospel and healing everywhere" (*Luke 9:6*), Jesus had fed the 5,000 (*Luke 9:14*) and been Transfigured on the mountain (*Luke 9:20*)—Scripture tells us "a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest" (*Luke 9:46*)! In the midst of revival, they started comparing their Godly exploits with each other!

It happened again when they were accompanying Jesus on His last trip to Jerusalem. James and John pulled Jesus aside and asked to sit at His right hand. When the other disciples heard it, "they began to be greatly displeased with James and John" (*Mark 10:42*). Even at the Last Supper, of all places, in the very last hours before the cross, the disciples were quarreling about who was the greatest (*Luke 22:24*)! They just couldn't stop comparing themselves with each other.

Jesus responded to their quarrels by saying "whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (*Mark 10:43-45*). This is God's model. Not comparison with each other, but service to one another.

The Apostle Paul said it this way: "You obey the law of Christ when you offer each other a helping hand. Do your own work well, and then you will have something to be proud of. But don't compare yourself with others" (*Galatians 6:2-5, Contemporary English Version*).

What about the ultimate "us vs. them" challenge for followers of Christ? How are we to behave toward non-believers? Paul concluded his message in *Galatians 6:10* with this simple exhortation: "As we have opportunity, let us do good to all."

*Father, thank You for forgiving us and blessing us with opportunities to serve one another and to do good to all!*