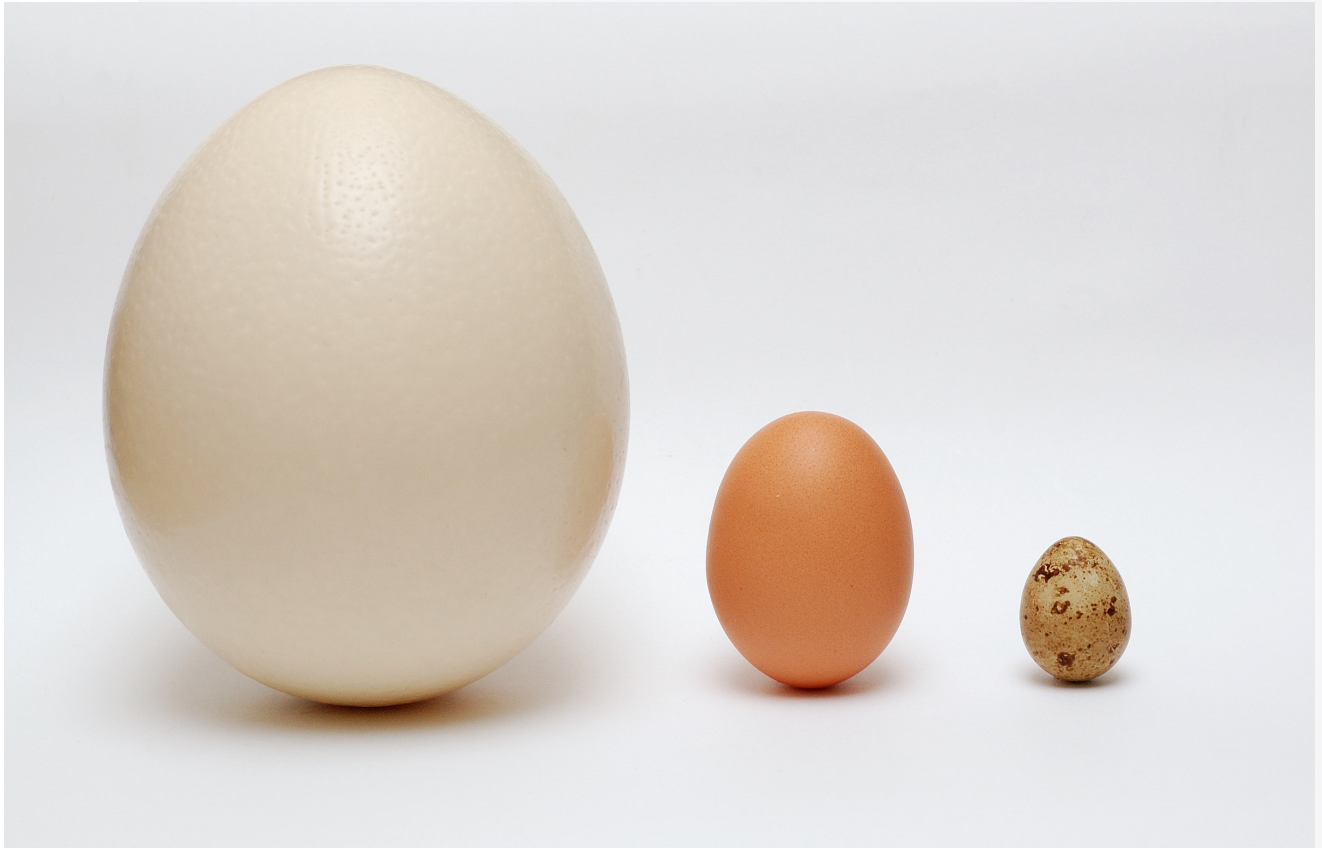


STRENGTH THROUGH WEAKNESS

2 CORINTHIANS 10:7-18

A CURE FOR COMPARISONITIS



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

DAVID MURRAY
MAY 1, 2022 (PM)

INTRODUCTION

How many of you have compared yourself with others? How has it improved or damaged your life? All of us have comparisonitis. It is "the compulsion to compare one's accomplishments to another's to determine relative importance, etc." Melissa Ambrosini, the author of *Comparisonitis* admitted that she has suffered with *Comparisonitis* for as long as she can remember, asking even in primary school, "Why can't I be like them?" She eventually ended up in hospital with physical and mental health problems. Here's how she described it:

It creeps up on you without warning—perhaps while chatting with a friend, scrolling through social media, or even just while walking down the street.

All it takes is the hint of someone doing or having something you perceive as “better” than you, and it hits. A feeling takes over—intense, blinding, gutting. Your brain starts spinning with toxic thoughts about yourself (or others), and you're left feeling ashamed, guilty, and even worthless.

It's called comparisonitis. And if you've suffered from it, you're NOT alone.

Comparisonitis is a contagious, socially transmitted condition that occurs when you compare yourself to others so frequently and fiercely that you're left paralyzed, with your confidence in tatters and your self-worth plummeting. It may sound trivial, but this affliction can have serious adverse effects on our mental health, leading to depression, anxiety, overthinking, and regret.

To make matters worse, our comparison culture is only expanding. Thanks to social media, we have more opportunities to compare ourselves than ever before, and even kids are falling into the trap.

Melissa Ambrosini, *Comparisonitis: How to Stop Comparing Yourself to others and be Genuinely Happy.*

Why is comparisonitis so bad and how do we cure it?

BACKGROUND

In 2 Corinthians, Paul is teaching us how to get strength through weakness and how to strengthen the weak.

In chapter 10 verses 1-6, Paul called the Corinthians to war by using spiritual weapons to battle against all words, ideas, opinions, and thoughts that create strongholds in our minds. From there our Enemy can launch campaigns to bring down God and ourselves.

In verses 7-12, he identifies and battles one of the deepest darkest mental strongholds that our great Enemy uses to bring down God and ourselves. It's the stronghold of comparisonitis and with this our enemy can bring down God by bringing down others and promoting ourselves.



Why is comparisonitis so bad?



1. COMPARISONITIS RESULTS IN CRITICISM OF OTHERS

Paul's enemies attacked Paul's identity, leadership, and character. The criticisms they launched at him are obvious from his defenses of his identity, leadership, and character.

Falsehood: Paul is not Christ's.

Truth: I am equally Christ's (7)

Falsehood: Paul is authoritarian.

Truth: I use my authority to build you up (8)

Falsehood: Paul is a coward.

Truth: I will be the same in presence as on paper (9-11).

These criticisms of Paul were rooted in comparisonitis. Paul's enemies compared themselves to him so they could identify areas of his identity, leadership, and character for criticism.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Those who criticize most, compare most. Those who spend much of their time criticizing others have spent even more of their time comparing themselves with others. That comparing is not about finding strengths in others but weaknesses. If our story has many chapters of criticism it's because it has many chapters of comparison. Comparing muscles, money, car, fish, deer, jobs, hair, body, children, moms, intelligence, cooking, etc.

Those who criticize most have been compared most. Our criticisms come from comparisons. But where did our comparisons come from? For many of us, it came from the chapters our parents or teachers wrote in our stories when we were very young. Our early stories had many paragraphs where our parents compared us favorably or unfavorably to others resulting in a deep comparisonitis that manifests itself in a constantly critical spirit. That kind of stronghold is almost impregnable. Almost. Hang in there and we'll find a spiritual weapon that can pierce and pulverize this stronghold.

CRITICS ARE COMPARERS
COMPARERS ARE CRITICS



Why do people enjoy putting others down?
Because it's a way of puffing self up.



2. COMPARISONITIS AIMS AT COMMENDING SELF

Most criticism of others is not just about tearing someone down but promoting oneself. Critics of others are commenders of self. Even when all we hear is the criticism, the underlying message is "I'm better than them/you." Paul's Corinthian enemies were not just criticizing him but commending themselves: **"Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves"** (12). This verse gives us a new way to read verses 7-11. They were not just criticizing Paul but commending themselves.

- It wasn't just "Paul is not Christ's," it was, **"We are Christ's in an extra-special way."**
- It wasn't just "Paul is an authoritarian leader," it was, **"We are gentle, kind, and loving leaders."**
- It wasn't just "Paul is a coward," it was, **"We are bravehearts."**

They put down Paul's identity, leadership, and character, but the ultimate aim was to puff up their own identity, leadership, and character.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Use the right standard. Every comparison requires a standard, something to compare with. When comparing fish we've caught, we put it beside another fish to see how our latest catch stacks up. How foolish if we decide to use a minnow as our standard of comparison. Yet that's what we're doing when we compare ourselves with others: **"But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding"** (12). The only right standard is Christ.

Use the truth standard. This is not a defense of or excuse for false humility. False humility is as false as false boasting. False boasting exaggerates what we have done and our role in our accomplishments. False humility denies what we have done and plays down our role in it. The end result is the same - falsehood that commends ourselves. In one case for our accomplishments and the other for our humility. Instead, we must always use truth as our standard as Paul did when he spoke honestly about his ministry and how God had used him in Corinth (13-16). He wasn't going to just be a passive doormat while enemies destroyed Christ's church. It's a false humility that never stand up for the truth.

WE INFLATE OURSELVES
BY DEFLATING OTHERS



OK, I see how bad comparisonitis is.
Is there any cure?



3. COMPARISONITIS IS CURED BY CHRIST

Cure by Commending Christ

"Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord" (17).

The first cure for boasting is boasting. The cure for bad boasting is good boasting. The cure for unjustified boasting about self is justified boasting about God. We all know a boaster, don't we? A braggart? A big-head? They cannot stop talking about themselves and love talking about themselves. They do it with energy and enthusiasm.

Imagine if Christians could be Christ-boasters in a similar way. No one could stop us talking about Christ. Talking about Christ would be our favorite activity. We'd do it with the same energy and enthusiasm as the boaster. We have so many reasons to commend Christ to boast in Christ and of Christ. It's entirely justified and warranted.

This cures comparisonitis because we're no longer looking at others or ourselves but at Jesus and therefore that's all we talk about. We will speak most about who we see most.

Cure with Christ's Commendation

"For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends" (18).

Boasting commends ourselves to get commendations from others. We praise ourselves to get praise from others. But living to commend ourselves or get commendations from others is like a slug commending itself and living to get commendations from other slugs. What's that really worth?

But when a lion comes along and commends a slug, that's worth something, isn't it? That's the possibility we read of here. If we live to commend Christ, Christ will commend us. He will boast of us, he will show us off, he will say to heaven's audience, "I'm proud of him/her/them!"

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Commend Christ to others. In every conversation, we should be asking, "How can I speak well of Christ here?" How can I recommend Jesus to them. How can I help them think much of Christ (not me)?"

Hear Christ's commendation. No matter how many criticize you, if Christ commends you, that's everything. Every time you commend him, he commends you, he validates you.

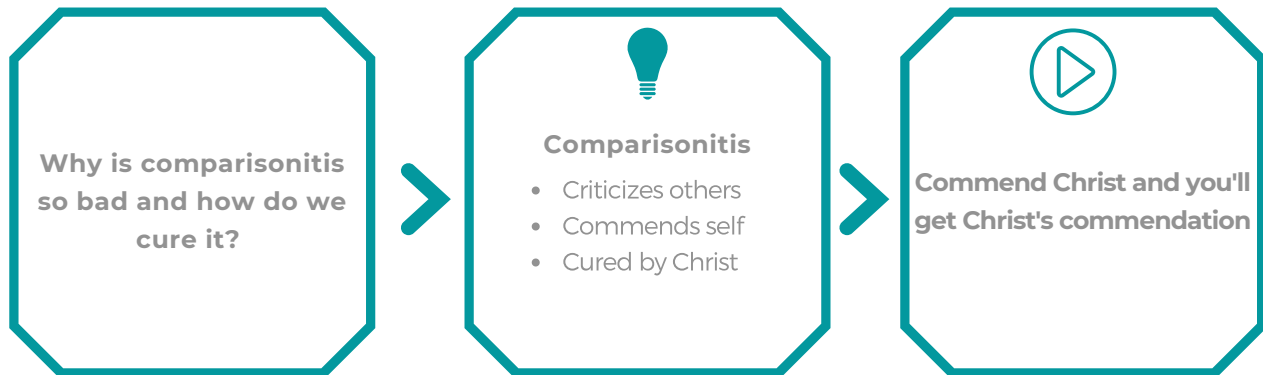
COMMEND CHRIST FOR
CHRIST'S COMMENDATION



Hear God's Story > Change your story > Tell the story > Change others stories



SUMMARY



A NEW CHAPTER

- **Jesus:** God commends his love to us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8). He doesn't wait until we are commendable to make us savable.
- **Mental health:** Parents especially need to understand the connection between comparisonitis and mental illness. We will either depress and exhaust our kids or turn them into arrogant critics of others. Keep pointing them to Jesus as the only standard and the only commendation worth receiving.
- **Church:** Let's beware of comparing our church with other churches.
- **Monday:** Every time you think about commending yourself tomorrow, ask, "How can I commend Jesus instead?"
- **Heaven:** If we live for Christ's commendation, one day we'll hear the best commendation ever: "Well done, good and faithful servant."
- **Prayer:** Commendable God, thank you for commending Christ to us. Make us commenders of you to save us from comparing ourselves with others.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In which areas of life do you suffer comparisonitis?
2. What are the results of comparisonitis in your life?
3. How does comparisonitis connect with criticism of others and praise of yourself?
4. How would you commend Christ? What would you boast about him?
5. Whose and what commendation matters most to you?
6. How will this sermon change the way you parent?

First Byron Christian Reformed Church
8541 Byron Center Ave SW, Byron Center, MI 49315
Phone: (616) 878-9768
www.firstbyroncrc.org

Pastor David Murray
www.HeadHeartHand.org
www.thestorychanger.life