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2 CORINTHIANS 10:7-18

2 Corinthians Series

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, as we come before you now I ask that you would settle my heart and help my memory to remember the things I planned to say and guide me with your Spirit to say the things that you want said. I pray that your Spirit would flow down on this place today. Rain down on us and teach us. I pray that the spiritual energy that we receive today will be so powerful that people would go away from here changed and experience new insight in their hearts and that you would do miracles in the lives of people. For those that are here that don't know you yet, I pray that you would reveal yourself to them in such a miraculous way they're drawn to you and who you are. Lord, I pray for each of us who have known you for a while that we would have a renewed sense of grace in our lives today. So Lord, we open your hearts to you as we open up your word, knowing there's a sacred moment when those two things come together. We ask you to do a work inside of our hearts now. In Jesus' name, amen.

We're in the study of the book of 2 Corinthians. As we study 2 Corinthians, we are learning about the power of God. Every time when we study the Bible, we don't just open it up and say, "What does this mean to me?" Because that's not the first question we ask. The question is, what is God saying? We want to know what God is saying, so every time when I share a passage I try to help you understand where the passage is coming from so you understand what's going on in that situation when it was written.

In this case the book of 2 Corinthians is written by Paul to the Corinthians. There are a number of reasons why he's talking to them, a lot of power kinds of things that we've learned. But in particular one of his purposes is to defend himself. In the church of Corinth that he was a part of developing (and now he's away, of course, because he's writing a letter), some people have come to the church and they're discrediting him and saying that Paul doesn't have integrity. They're actually comparing him to other people and to themselves and they're saying, "Look at us," and they're boasting. Paul is being rather forceful in his writing to them and he's challenging them. So our passage today is really a passage where Paul is defending himself.

But the great thing about the scriptures is that as the story unfolds, whatever the story is, we can get into the heart and mind of Moses or David or Daniel or Paul. What were they experiencing? When we get into their hearts and we look at the challenges they were experiencing, then we can too look at our own lives and learn from that experience. Then we can wrestle with our own hearts in the same way that Paul did in his life.

So today we're coming to a very important passage of scripture, a passage that I think will inspire you in some new ways. I had a lot of fun with this passage this week. You're going to see that as I present some of these things to you today.

Before I do, I think it would be good for us to read the passage, so I want you to stand with me, please, in honor of God's word. Open your words if you brought them. I encourage you to bring them, write in it if you would like because it would be like a diary of your spiritual adventure over the years. Notice in your Bible or on the screen these words as I read them.

2 Corinthians 10:12-18 – *We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise. We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the sphere of service God himself has assigned to us, a sphere that also includes you. We are not going too far in our boasting, as would be the case if we had not come to you, for we did get as far as you with the gospel of Christ (talking geographically). Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our sphere of activity among you will greatly expand, so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in someone else's territory. But, "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord." For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.*

A lot about boasting, comparing, all those kinds of things. You may be seated.

I want to zero in on the key verse, which is the first one. I've underlined it there. Notice it says – *We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.*

If you got any aches and pains today, you can type those aches and pains into Google and you can find out what your problem is. Right? They'll give it a name. There's all kinds of names that you can find for the problems that exist that are kind of interesting.

As I was thinking about it this week and kind of looking at this, I found some interesting medical conditions. Let me share some of them with you. One of them is synesthesia. That's when your senses in your body get all mixed up so you start smelling sound. So this kind of music smells different than this kind of music. So your senses are all confused inside of your body. Now I'm not making fun of anybody. If you have that problem, I understand. Maybe my sermons smell nice to you, that's why you're here. But I found that to be a really interesting medical condition that someone might have.

Another one is antisocial mood disorder. We used to call it annoying. Now we call it antisocial mood disorder. It brings new dimensions to sibling conflict. Now if you've got an annoying brother, he's just got antisocial mood disorder.

Another one that I liked was jargon aphasia. Jargon aphasia is when you use words that are real words, but you put them together in a way that doesn't make sense. It sounds like marriage a lot of times today. I can't understand what you're saying and you don't know whether it's the way

the person is talking or it's the way the person is listening, but we're missing each other. Now there's a name for it called jargon aphasia.

I'm making up a disease today. The one I'm making up you're not going to find on WebMD. But I felt like making up this disease and describing it from the passage would be a great way for you to understand the idea that Paul is trying to communicate in this passage. I'm going to call this disease comparisonitis. Comparisonitis. We're going to talk about what it is, what its symptoms are, and its treatment. It will be coming straight from the scriptures here and maybe this will help you remember.

Let me give you an overview of the sermon today by drawing attention to some different parts. Here's what comparisonitis is. It is the natural tendency to determine one's self worth by competing with others, focusing on externals, and developing a selfish pride.

Now it's very interesting as I work with parents of children that a lot of children have problems with comparing themselves to each other. In fact in parenting-sibling conflict, it is a real challenge for many families. Because what happens in the family is that children start to develop their self worth by comparing themselves to someone else. "I can run faster than Billy." "I can read better than Susie." So they're developing their identity that way and that's a problem.

Parents make a mistake at that point and they say, "Okay, we're going to treat everybody equally." That's what they say. "If I'm buying shoes for Billy, I'll buy shoes for Susie. So everybody gets the same around here." The problem with that is it backfires tremendously because now kids are on the lookout. "Well how come he has to do that? I didn't have to do that." So children believe something that's not true and that is fair means equal. Fair doesn't mean equal.

In fact God doesn't treat us all the same. Did you know that? God doesn't treat us all the same. In the parable it says he gives five talents to one, two to another, and one to another. If you're a two-talent person, you can't complain that you don't have five. Or you can't feel boasting or better than the person who has one. When God hands out spiritual gifts, He doesn't give everybody the same one. He gives this one to this person, and this one to this person, according to the measure of the faith that they have. It's His grace coming to that person.

God doesn't treat everybody equal. He treats everybody in a special way. That's really what children want. They want to be treated special. So we encourage parents treat your children special. Say, "You're special. That's why you're getting these chores and your brother is not." Or "Yes, we're going to the store. We're going to buy markers for your sister and we're not buying anything for you. We're treating her special on this day." What we're doing is we're helping people see that you don't use comparison as a measure of your self worth. That is the danger here.

Of course that's with children, but there's a tendency for all of us to want to compare ourselves to other people. Right? We can compare ourselves to the neighbors and compare ourselves to our other family members. We either come up higher or lower than they do. Notice if we come out

higher we can start boasting and have a selfish pride. If we come out lower we're going to start feeling inadequate. It's a problem. It's not a good measurement.

But in the passage today it's not only talking about comparing yourselves to others. You see that in verse 12, *comparing ourselves with those who commend themselves*. Or comparing themselves by themselves. You can compare yourself to yourself. Did you know it? You can compare yourself to where you wish you would be, but you're not there yet. "I wish I had a better job." "My desires for marriage are not what I wish they would be." So now you're comparing these different things and you end up with a problem. "I have a physical problem with my body. I'm sick. This isn't what I had planned for my life." So we end up comparing ourselves to ourselves and we end up with a number of challenges.

I'm going to suggest that there are some symptoms of this problem and I'm going to draw attention to these. You'll see them in the outline of my sermon because these are the three points – blurred vision, swollen ego, and spiritual nutrient deficiency. The problem with the symptoms here is what happens when you feel like you don't have what you wish you had for whatever reason, you're comparing yourself to yourself, your wishes, your desires, where you think you should be. Or you're comparing yourself to some other person who has something more or less than you do.

You have a problem and what are the results of that? One – we start feeling discouraged because of comparisonitis. We start feeling anxious because I've got to keep going, I've got to put more time in here, I've got to do this and this and this. So we start feeling anxious in order to make up lost ground in order to get where we want to be. Or we start feeling this spiritual pride or this sense of superiority. Because look how much I've done in my life.

I would suggest that this comparisonitis is a problem in our spirits. It's a spiritual problem that prevents us from enjoying much of the blessing that God has for us, much of the full life that He wants. Because we can't be content where we are right now. We've got to be looking for something else in our lives.

We'll come to more of those symptoms in a moment, but I would suggest here's just a summary of the treatment. All of these will be listed on another slide coming up. Here's the treatment from the passage. Add to your diet humility and gentleness, exercise your ability to build others up, curb your attitude for boasting, and rest in your true identity in Christ. We're going to come back to all four of those in a little bit, but that's where we're headed here. I just like this model and this outline of what it looks like to deal with this tendency or this temptation we have to compare ourselves to others.

Now we didn't read earlier the verses from 7-12. So I'm going to read them now. Verses 7-12 say this: *You are judging by appearances. If anyone is confident that they belong to Christ, they should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as they do.* That's going to be our identity issue. Who do you belong to? *So even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for (building others) building you up rather than tearing you down (we'll talk about that), I will not be ashamed of it. I do not want to seem to be trying to frighten you with my letters. For some say, "His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and*

his speaking amounts to nothing.” In other words he’s a good writer, but not a good teacher. *Such people should realize that what we are in our letters when we are absent, we will be in our actions when we are present.* Here’s our key verse, verse 12, again. *We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.*

See when you compare yourself to yourself, what happens? There’s no measureable standard. It’s just a problem. Now I’m going to give you an illustration. For those of you who are under thirty years old, you might not get this. So let me explain. There used to be a time when we didn’t have atomic clocks. Now we have atomic clocks that sync regularly so we know what time it is. But it used to be that we would wind our watches and they would tick along and you would have to reset them every once in a while manually. That’s how it used to be. Keep that in mind as I tell this story.

There was a man whose job it was to blow the whistle at the factory at the beginning of the day. Every day as he walked to work he would walk past the window of the clock shop. He would set his watch by the clock in the window and he would then know what time to blow the whistle when he got to the factory. So he would blow the whistle. He did this day after day after day. Well one day he was going by the clock shop and the clockmaker was outside sweeping the walk. So he said to the clockmaker, “Hey, can I ask you a question? How do you set the time of the clock in your shop?” He said, “I set it by the factory whistle.”

Now there’s a problem there. You have to understand there’s a problem there. But that’s what we’re talking about here. If you’re comparing yourself to yourself, you’re ending up with a standard that’s moving around all the time.

Imagine building a building and you measure the space. You know the adage “measure twice but cut once.” If you know anything about building you know that that’s a really valuable thing. But you can measure as many times as you want. If you go back to cut it and the measuring stick is wrong, you’re going to end up with something that doesn’t work.

Comparing yourself by yourself is not a good idea. We need to understand how this works and how to avoid it. Because when we start to do this in our own lives it robs us of the vitality that God wants us to experience.

Well let’s look at some of these symptoms. I put them in a kind of medical terminology. Blurred vision. In verse 7 you remember it said you’re judging by appearance. You’re just looking at the outside. If you look at people only on their Sunday look, what they look like on Sunday, you might not get the true picture of what’s going on in their hearts. If you only look at them by their Facebook look or their Instagram look, you might not get what’s going on in their true hearts. The reality is we are all broken people. Some of us are better at hiding it than others.

Well we all experience brokenness in our hearts and that brokenness is a weakness. The beauty of this whole experience with God is that in our weakness we experience God’s strength. Say this with me: “I am weak. I am weak.” Come on, I need some audience participation. I know this isn’t a Pentecostal church, but let’s try to be a little respondent here. Say this: “I am weak. I am

weak.” Good. “But I am experiencing the power of God.” That is a great statement we need in our lives. I am weak, but I am experiencing the power of God. Good. I think it’s important.

We don’t just judge by appearances. We have to realize that that annoying person at the office is a really a broken person that has some challenges that is causing them to be annoying. Maybe they do need to be confronted by you, but maybe there’s something deeper going on in their hearts that you might be able to touch, administer to. We’re all broken people. We can’t just judge by appearances. We must go deeper than that. The blurred vision then causes us to want to compare and compete with others based on what they look like on the outside.

A swollen ego. Our ego gets built up kind of strong when we find other people that are not doing as well as we are. So he says in verse 18 – *For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.* Now we’re starting to move to a new measuring stick, one that is more permanent, one that is more reliable. And that is the Lord’s opinion of me, the Lord’s insight. If we start measuring ourselves by the people we’re passing in life, we can start to get this swollen ego.

I always have this problem when I’m driving long distance. Let’s say I’m going to drive and see my grandkids in North Carolina or even Baltimore. I have to drive for two or three hours. I’m on the freeway driving and I’m passing people and then I feel like I need to stop at the rest stop. I’m thinking if I stop at the rest stop, you know what’s going to happen? All those people I passed are going to pass me again. I’m going to have to pass them all again. So what am I doing? The reality is if you’re driving along, there’s always going to be people in front of you and there’s always going to be people you’re passing. Can’t we be content where we are?

There’s a certain godly contentment about not comparing ourselves to the other people around. If we start getting this swollen ego that we’re passing people left and right and we say, “Oh I’m so good” we’re missing out on the measurement that God has for us. The measurement is that we’re weak, but God wants to give us this power so we can experience the power of God. The swollen ego is a problem.

A third symptom of comparisonitis is a spiritual nutrient deficiency. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves they are not wise. When you have the wrong measuring stick you get yourself into all kinds of challenges because there’s always somebody who’s doing better than you and there’s always somebody who’s doing worse than you. The reality is that God is working in your life right now. There’s a certain amount of contentment that God wants us to have that’s godly.

I don’t know about you, but I always have to wrestle with is this a good contentment or a bad contentment? Because I don’t want to be lazy and say, “Oh I’ll just be content and I’m not going to do anything about the problem.” But at the same time I want to be content where I am and not get all anxious about it. So I’m wrestling with that in my own heart. But there’s something about God’s work in my life that allows me to do the work that He wants me to do and be okay with where I am right now where I am. So I don’t have to say, “Life’s going to be better when I get married,” “life’s going to be better when I have kids,” “life’s going to get better when those kids get out of the house,” “life’s going to be better when all these things happen.” Life’s okay now

that I can enjoy that. We need to have this importation of nutrients in our soul that allows me to experience this joy and peace and the things God wants in my life. He gives that to us right now through His power. It's so valuable.

Let's go to a prescription for comparisonitis. Here's your prescription for it. I would suggest there are four parts to the treatment. You might jot these down.

The first one is to add to your diet humility and gentleness. If you go back up to verse 1 in 2 Corinthians 10, he starts this passage by saying this: *By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you.* Now I find it very interesting that those two words, those twin words of humility and gentleness, are together a number of times in the Bible. Humility and gentleness is here and then Paul is writing in chapter 10 of 2 Corinthians.

But Jesus says this about Himself in Matthew 11. I love this verse just because it ministers to my own heart. He says – *Come to me all, who are weary and burdened.* We get so burdened by this tendency to compare and compete in our world. God wants to give us rest and peace. *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.* Man, don't you need that? You just need to take a breath. I just need some rest in this world. *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart.* I don't know what your picture of Jesus is, but here it says He is *gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.* Your perception of Jesus Christ should be one that just exudes His gentleness and humility that wants to connect with you in a way that you never imagined.

Another time the words are used together is in Ephesians 4:2. *Be completely gentle and humble.* This is a list that Paul is giving of things he wanted. I just find it interesting. These twin words like salt and pepper. They're together. *Be completely humble and gentle.* I would suggest if you have a problem comparing and competing in life then if you start becoming gentle and humble, you'll start breaking down the competing and comparing because you'll be looking for life differently. Recognizing your own weakness and humility and being gentle with other people. Good things can happen when that takes place.

So that's the first thing. Add to your diet humility and gentleness.

A second one is to exercise your ability to build others up. So even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than tearing you down, I will not be ashamed of it. Building up versus tearing down. We all have a responsibility to do that. Of course if you're boasting, then you're tearing other people down. If you're building up, then you're encouraging.

I was working with a mom this week. Her twelve year old son got into an accident a couple weeks ago and he rode the four-wheeler into a tree, broke his femur and his hand. So he's crippled for a little while. He's going to be healed, with God's grace, of course, but he's going to be in a wheelchair for three weeks and on crutches for a few weeks. So his spring is not looking like what he thought. It's different.

Now in the midst of that kind of a painful situation there can be a temptation for someone to become mean, controlling, and angry because they're experiencing pain. It doesn't have to be pain in a wheelchair. Just look at your own life. When we start to experience pain of any kind, what happens? You start becoming mean, angry, and controlling sometimes. You have to be careful.

His mom is brilliant. Right away she changed his whole chore list because he's in a wheelchair, but there are things he can do. He can fold laundry. He can put silverware away. So she's giving him ways to contribute in life. I just think that's great. She's also requiring that he contribute with his words. That he's looking for three things. Being encouraging, being complimenting, and grateful. It's hard for someone. There's a lot for you to be grateful for if you're in a wheelchair and everybody is doing everything for you. So do you see what she's doing? What she's doing is she's helping him to build others up instead of tear them down.

Do you see how that can happen in our lives when we have a comparisonitis problem? We're comparing and competing. I've got to get a one up on the other person. You tell me a story and I've got one better than you. "You went on vacation? Well let me tell you about my great vacation." "You solved a problem, I'll tell you about a problem I solved too." So we're back and forth on this comparing and competing. If we'll have this dose here of exercising the ability to build others up then good things can happen in our own hearts. Not just in relationships. Of course it will happen. But in our own hearts something good will happen as well.

A third part of the treatment is to curb your appetite for boasting. Notice in verse 17 it says – *Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.* Now is boasting wrong? No. Paul even boasts in the passage. It's not wrong to boast, but Paul is saying what are you boasting in? Are you boasting in your own achievements and how great you are or are you boasting in what God is doing? I would suggest that God is doing a lot in our world. God is doing a lot in our church, which I'm really grateful and it's fun to see what God is doing. We boast in the Lord and what God is doing in our lives. Did you know that the raise that you recently got was a gift from the Lord? If you don't realize that, maybe we need to back here because sometimes we rely on ourselves and think we're doing all these things and God's an extra somehow to deal with the difficult challenges. Everything we have is from the Lord. We can boast to the Lord. So adding that to our repertoire is a very important piece of what God would have for us.

And then the fourth thing is to rest in your true identity in Christ. See the problem with sibling conflict when kids are competing is that they're viewing their identity based on how they're doing with other people, whether they're doing better or worse than others. A true identity is something that defines who you are.

It says – *We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the sphere of service God himself has assigned to us.* That's what he's saying. God is the one who's given me the position I'm in. We can wish that we were somewhere else. But we would feel really good because last year we weren't, so now we're doing so much better. "Oh wow. Look at this." We can start boasting. He's saying look, I'm going to be okay where God has me right now. The situation is not going to define me. It's my identity that's going to define me. That's

the two things we're looking at. Is it the situation or is it my identity that provides this definition of my self worth?

There's another verse in this same passage. Verse 7 says – *If anyone is confident that they belong to Christ, they should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as they do.* Isn't that interesting? Sometimes we can think, "Well I belong to Christ more than the other person does." No.

I want to share something with you. There's a part of your life that can never be hurt, never be damaged, never be threatened. That is your identity in Christ. That's different than a situation. Too many people today allow their situation to define them. "I'm unemployed." And that defines them. That's such a difficult place to be is to be unemployed. I feel really sorry for people who are unemployed because there's a temptation for that to attack their own self-respect and ego and worthiness and so on. But what does that person need? They need to realize their identity is in Christ. Because nothing can touch your identity. Nothing.

I really appreciate how Paul says there is *nothing that can separate us from the love of Christ.* Nothing. And he lists a whole bunch of things there. *Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.* That's your identity. It's the bigger part of who you are. I get that. It's really the bigger part of who you are. It's not the fact that you're sick physically that defines you. It's your identity in Christ that defines you. It's not the fact that you're divorced that defines you. It's your identity in Christ that defines you. It's not your situation; it's your identity in Christ that gives you definition.

It's a whole new way of thinking about comparing ourselves. As soon as we start comparing ourselves to others, we have left the measurement. If we're measuring ourselves by ourselves, we can drift all over the place and be in places we never knew that we could be. We get ourselves then justifying addiction or justifying all kinds of pleasure or things that are outside of boundaries because look at me. So we have this self-pity and we find ourselves in the wrong place in life.

One verse I really like that helps us understand this idea is the one in Hebrews 12:1-2. It says this: *Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes not on the other people running the race because there's no one in the race with me. I'm running the race with my eyes fixed on Jesus.* Your race is over there on the other playing field. We're not competing with each other to get somewhere. We are having our eyes fixed on Jesus, not on each other because why? Because *He is the author and the finisher of our faith.* He's doing a work inside of us. He's finishing that work inside.

Wow. I just really need this message because I think that the times when I feel discouraged, the times when I feel angry are the times when I've somehow sucked into this idea of comparing myself to where I wish I could be or comparing myself to someone else. I need to know that my identity is in Christ. When I know that, then I can run the race with faith and I can run the race with this grace that God has. It's just a great place to be. So if you want freedom today in your life, I would suggest that choosing Christ is the way to get it. Choosing Christ. If you've never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, I'd say do it today. It's going to revolutionize

your life and it will be a completely different thing for you because you're going to start thinking differently. You've got to know it's going to be hard. Every situation you have in life is going to be different now because now you're measuring by a different stick. Oh man, the results are amazing. Because now you can actually start building something because the measurement isn't changing all the time. You've got an accurate measurement that's reliable. So now your life can start building in the right direction. Wow. That is really big and powerful.

There's this reminder to all of us who are Christians that that is what God would have for us. We need to avoid comparing and competing with ourselves or with others and we need to run the race that God has marked out for us.

Stand up with me and let's sing that out loud with praise. What God wants to do in our lives is powerful. He's accomplished it at the cross as we celebrate that in communion, and He wants to do more in our lives.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I ask that you would grant us your grace and your mercy. I thank you for all that you have done, but I also want to thank you for what you haven't done. You haven't given me what I deserve. Wow, Lord, that mercy that you've allowed me to experience is so powerful and I'm so grateful for it. I thank you for the cross of Christ and the personal nature of it. I pray now that you'd bless each one of us as we think through our own lives. As your Holy Spirit goes through each room of our hearts, we freely open our hearts for you to do it. Reveal to us what you want us to change, how we might experience you in a more powerful way. Lord, we want to love you with all our heart, and our soul, and our mind, and our strength. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.