

THE TRIAL OF **COMPARISON**



The Trial of Comparison

**Christian Resources App > Audio Sermons > "Ric
Cunningham - The Trial of Comparison"**

TRIAL OF COMPARISON

The Trial of Comparison. Maybe you have never experienced this yet. Maybe it is something that lies ahead. Maybe you have had it in the past and maybe you are passing through it...

We are going to bring out some scriptural examples, ones that you will probably be familiar with. But it is as a means of establishing how some of these Trials of Comparison may come about. You will recall early on with Cain and Abel.

There was a Trial of Comparison, wasn't there? Cain was the elder brother, Abel the younger. They offered their sacrifices before the Lord and Cain's was not acceptable. Abel's was. But Cain was upset about this. Why wasn't God accepting the sacrifice that he offered? And the Lord in some manner spoke to Cain to let him know that if he had offered in a similar manner as Abel, it would be acceptable. But if he would not, if this negative attitude continued, then a sin lieth at the door.

Cain could not submit himself to what he thought was a very humbling experience, that is, to follow his younger brother's example. So, his offering was unacceptable and what did it lead to? It led to Cain

comparing himself to his brother, and not being able to live with it, in anger he slew Abel. The first human on human murder.

What can we learn as New Creatures from this event? We might be comparing our sacrifice with that of our brethren. Are we able to receive constructive criticism or instruction from others, or do we HAVE to HAVE it OUR WAY? Perhaps we are comparing our little sacrifice with that of another by looking for some outward evidence that God is accepting or appreciating our sacrifice in a similar way as He might be accepting another's? It can lead us to commit not literal murder, but we might slander and evil speak or evil surmise about our brethren and thereby murder them indirectly by assassinating their character. Jealousy, envy, can arise and commit such a heinous crime even amongst us who are the Lord's people.

Now let us consider how the LORD worked with three of His greatest prophets, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. These three were contemporaries, and they were prophesying about the same time. Jeremiah was the oldest, then Ezekiel and then Daniel was the youngest.

Jeremiah was witnessing about the LORD'S condemnation of Israel and the coming punishment by Babylon, except that the King might humbly accept God's instructions. But instead the king rejected his advice and had Jeremiah imprisoned in a most horrific manner. Let us read about this in

Jeremiah 38:6: *"Then took they Jeremiah and cast him into the dungeon of the Melchiah, the son of Hamelech, that was in the court of the prison. And they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon (or cistern, well), there was no water but mire, so Jeremiah sunk in the mire."*

Poor Jeremiah! No way out. Pitch black at night and probably only very dimly lit in the day time. There were probably insects, perhaps lizards and snakes.

Have you ever been swimming in murky water and when you touched your feet on the bottom it was all mucky and muddy? Well, this was much worse. We can only guess how far down he sunk in this muck.

And we remember, Jeremiah didn't have a choice to leave or even a way in which to push himself up out of the muck for some relief.

About the same time we have Ezekiel, who was the prophet of the LORD amongst the Israelites that had

been led captive up into the northern and western part of the Babylonian Empire.

From the fourth chapter we will summarize what the LORD had him do as a witness of the coming siege of Jerusalem.

He was instructed to lie upon his left side for the iniquity of the house of Israel — according to the number of the days that he shall lie upon it, he shall bear their iniquity. For the LORD had laid upon him the years of their iniquity according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days, so that he shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel.

And when he had accomplished them, he laid again on his right side and he bore the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days. The LORD appointed him each day for a year.

So just here we have Ezekiel laying on his side for three hundred and ninety days and then for forty more days. That's well over a year, isn't it brethren? Now how do you think Ezekiel laid on one side for over a year with this iron skillet set in front of him with a portrait of Jerusalem portrayed upon it being besieged? And furthermore, he was bound with chains or bands so that he could not move! But that was what he was doing, this was his witness. He was a LIVING PROPHECY! This was most likely done in some type of a public place where

the other Jews would be passing through on their daily errands, even though they're in captivity they still have to provide for their living.

It is suggested that he probably did it for eight to twelve hours a day like a business day in the daylight hours when people would be passing by so it would serve a purpose. But can you imagine laying on your side for over a year for an entire day?

But that wasn't the end of Ezekiel's trauma. He was also directed by the LORD to do something else. He was to take wheat and barley and beans and lentils and millet and fitches and put them in one vessel and make bread thereof according to the number of the days that he was to lie on his side.

Three hundred and ninety days did he eat this bread. And his meal which he ate was by weight — twenty shekels a day. From time to time, he ate it.

He also drank water by measure.

Still not bad enough? He was instructed to bake this meal like cakes, using human dung, being done in the sight of the people! Poor Ezekiel! This he protested to the LORD saying he never defiled himself like this, perhaps he could use animal dung instead? And the LORD so allowed him to use cow dung to fuel the baking fire. Now this method of collecting, flattening and setting the dung out to dry is not unusual, it was done by

the American Indians on the Plains and I have seen it years ago being done in India.

They used that like we would use charcoal briskets. You take it home after it's dried and that's your cooking fuel.

I don't think you and I would find this a pleasant task.

Now we want to consider Daniel, from the second chapter. This too is about the same time. Daniel was the Lord's prophet to his people who were in captivity in the capital of Babylon.

Due to Daniel's faithfulness in abstaining from the king's dainties, he and Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego were blessed with the privilege of interpreting the king's dreams. And because Daniel did this, in the second chapter we read:

"Then the king Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and worshipped Daniel and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odors unto him. The king answered unto Daniel and said, Of a truth it is that your God is a God of gods and the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal the secret.

Then the king made Daniel a great man and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole

province of Babylon and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon.”

What a contrast in experiences these three different prophets of the LORD were passing through at the same time! Jeremiah is in the dark in a miry pit, despised Ezekiel is laying on his side for over a year, eating just a meager amount of bread cooked with cow dung, while Daniel was exalted in the king's palace!

All three were faithful. All three were doing the will of the LORD, they were not being punished.

Brethren, if you had to choose which one to be, who would you choose to be? Well, like King David once said, “Let the LORD choose as He thinks best.”

We can think back about how our brethren in Europe were suffering terribly under Communism and under the Nazis, while at the same time, those of us in North America had our freedom of movement and our comfort.

While this was going on, we weren't even aware of what they were passing through. And even today, when we compare ourselves to experiences of our brethren overseas, their poverty and their persecutions and their restrictions, while we generally have bounty,

yet the LORD allows it to be so and HE finds both acceptable.

What might be some trials of comparison here? First, we can think of this on a global scale. Now like never before we have far more information on the current national conditions of country or location, so on one hand, those who are in a better physical or temporal situation might be tempted to think despairingly of those who are in a lesser condition. While on the other hand, those who are in the more desperate situation might feel that because other brethren are doing so much better temporally, maybe God is punishing them. Or, with some, it may be a trial to think kindly of brethren who have so much — living afar off even though they do not offer any assistance.

One of the hardest things to do is to know how to best distribute the LORD'S bounty to brethren in need without creating problems or perhaps even unduly disturbing the environment that the LORD has allowed these brethren to endure.

However, we can be sure that our prayerful remembrances of our brethren worldwide as all being equally God's children even as we think of ourselves, is an acceptable Christ-like attitude.

But this type of trial of comparison does not require that our brethren are somewhere far off. In fact,

we can find ourselves challenged by comparing our personal circumstances with those around us! We will consider this aspect further in some following examples.

Before we leave this example of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, we want to make another observation.

In Ezekiel 14 we glean an insight into Ezekiel's attitude toward Daniel.

Ezekiel 14: 14. *“Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God.”*

Now, it's true, this is the LORD speaking through Ezekiel, but Ezekiel records it for us, and I think Ezekiel had this sentiment. He is using Daniel, one of his contemporaries, as an example of righteousness. That is really astounding, especially when we think of the trials and the burdens Ezekiel was under at the very same time that Daniel seemed to have such a comfortable and, in fact, exalted position.

This is the attitude we want to have. Accepting our struggles while appreciating others who do not.

How about the example of Rachel and Leah? Certainly they had a comparison of their different family members.

As we know, Jacob loved Rachel more than he loved Leah. Leah hoped to gain his affections by having the most children. She had the first child. And then Rachel had her struggle, and when you read it, it's so pathetic. It was a contest for their husband Jacob's affections.

What a family struggle! And it was two sisters. At a later time it became unlawful for a man to marry sisters.

But here it was. This situation is recorded for us so we can see this trial of comparison within a family and we suggest that these sorts of internal family comparisons continue, not necessarily between sisters wedded to the same husband, rather other related trials like which sister's family is larger or better off than the other. This too can equally affect brothers.

There was the trial of comparison between the three apostles with the nine. What I'm speaking about is that James, John, and Peter on several occasions were given special privileges separated from the other nine, for example on the Mount of Transfiguration and also in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Now it isn't recorded that the other nine had a trial with this. However the possibility is there for the nine to feel left out.

How come these three had these special privileges? Brother Russell in Reprint 4649 suggests that these were Jesus' favorites. And in reprint 3345, he suggests it was because they were most advanced in their faith and zeal.

So, what could the trial be for us in considering this? The trial of comparison may be that some of our brethren have greater privileges of service than we might have. Do we begrudge that? We shouldn't. The Lord is dealing with His people each in a unique way.

This is one reason why the Lord gave us two parables: the Pounds, where each servant received the same amount (representing that all have an equal justification), but then what do they do with this responsibility in life – how do each uniquely serve the Lord thereafter? And also the parable of the Talents, how each servant had different amounts of talent to serve the Master, now what did they do with these during their life? We see, in both parables, the lessons are that we are servants to the same Master, but each of us are different and we each are to serve as we have opportunity – yet we want to remember, that most of

our opportunities come to us as a result of what efforts we are making.

And this is a reflection of how even our Lord Jesus in His earthly ministry blessed these three for some special work they had to do. And the other nine, not begrudging it, had their special privileges as well even though these three were more prominent. It should have been something that they looked to and said, what are those three doing that I could do more of? And look to them as a healthy example in a healthy comparison.

However for the three, the trial of comparison might have been to become puffed up. We don't think they were, but that's a possibility. They had to be careful that they didn't think, oh, I am more special than my other brethren. We like to think they became well balanced in this. But you can see the trial of comparison can go either way.

There was a rich young man that came unto Jesus. And when he asked about discipleship, Jesus says, you have to sell what you have and dispense it to the poor and follow Me. And he went away sad because he had great riches.

We remember Peter's response — We've given up all for the Lord. What will we have? Well, Peter was comparing. He was in a trial of comparison.

He was comparing what they had sacrificed, these earthly things, and Peter is asking the question, what are we going to get? And the answer in essence was, you'll have spiritual blessings in this lifetime, you'll have your temporal needs met, and you will have treasure in heaven if thou art faithfully following Me.

That is an attitude we need to develop, brethren, as we look about us, in the workplace and in our families or neighbors, along natural lines. Are we keeping in mind Jesus' answer to Peter and really to us all — is our New Creature putting greater value on the rewards rather than on that which we give up?

But we also have the promise that our necessities will be met. Will we be content with that when compared to the bounty that those in the world or even other brethren might have?

How about the possible trial of comparison between James and John, the sons of Zebedee? Both were apostles, and we'll suggest that James was probably the oldest while John was the youngest.

The trial of comparison here was that James was the first apostle to die, John was the last apostle to die. James probably died after 15 years of a consecrated life, John after 65 years of a consecrated life. John might have wondered, how come I have to stay in this flesh so long? Am I not doing something properly? Am I not developing properly? Am I not learning my necessary experiences? He might have asked himself that.

The answer could be just as simple as the Lord had a work for John to do. It was needful for him to be in the flesh longer than James and that the LORD needed John to live longer to help the early struggling Church to become grounded before all of the 12 Apostles fell asleep.

Actually, we have listened to some of our dear elderly brethren voice similar questioning on why they were still here while others their age we gone.

Sometimes it has been a remaining spouse, sometimes an adult child dies before the parents, sometimes one is left out of a group who had been immersed together.

It is good for us to remember that we just have to leave it all with the LORD, “better to go in the dark with the LORD than go alone in the light.”

Take the lesson of the parable of the Penny. Those who worked longer in the Lord's vineyard grumbled when they saw laborers who worked a shorter time receiving the same payment. How easy to understand their complaint – IF – this was just a business working arrangement, but it wasn't. It was a parable to teach that no matter how long or how short a time a fellow disciple works for our Master, we should be content with receiving the same reward but to REJOICE that we had longer to serve him while still in the flesh.

Certainly, none of us should despise or resent it when we see those who are newer or younger in the Truth receiving similar or even more opportunities of service.

We read in Isaiah 14:12-15 that Lucifer thought in his mind that he would be like the Most High God. He compared himself to be like God. Can you imagine? It was the trial of comparison that led Lucifer astray. He failed in that trial because his attitude soured him and pride lifted him up. Contrari-wise, in that same trial of comparison in Philippians 2:5-10, Paul tells us that Jesus, as the Logos, was of the same spirit nature. Not divine nature, but He was of the spirit nature. Jehovah was of the divine nature, yet Jesus didn't seek to make Himself like God. He did the opposite of what Lucifer did. In the

trial of comparison, when Jesus just looked at the difference between Him and the Heavenly Father, He humbly acquiesced to that and accepted it.

So, the trial of comparison is not confined to the human family.

We think of Justus and Matthias. Remember when Judas Iscariot lost his bishopric, that the eleven apostles thought to replace him, and they voted between Justus and Matthias, and Matthias was voted in as one of the 12 Apostles. Even though it was not to be so, as the Lord chooses his own 12 and later chose Paul, yet I wonder, boy, that must have been a trial of comparison. What was Justus thinking? He wasn't voted in. But it probably didn't compare to the trial that Matthias had once he realized he wasn't accepted of the Lord, but that the Lord chose Paul.

Certainly, we hope and trust that Justus and Matthias had a sweet attitude of humbly acquiescing to the Lord's direction. So too with us. If we are not elected officials in an ecclesia, can we humbly acquiesce when one of our brethren are elected instead?

Even if we might be joint officers, is there one that has a greater prominence of service and opportunity than others? That's our trial of comparison.

How about Peter and Paul facing off on doctrine in Galatians 2? Paul was the newcomer by comparison. Paul had been the persecutor of the Church. And here, Peter had been given the keys to open the door of heaven, the high calling to the Jews and to the Gentile Church at the first. And yet, who was right in this debate concerning the Judaizing effect on the Gentiles? Why, Paul was correct. It was a doctrinal face-off between two apostles. And Paul, as the relative newcomer to Peter, was the one who was right.

What was Peter's attitude in this trial of comparison? In 2 Peter 3:15, 16, you will recall that we read that Peter writes, "our beloved brother Paul" humbly acknowledging Paul wrote deep things in his letters. Some hard to be understood because they are so profound. Peter is endorsing Paul's doctrinal abilities and insights. In time Peter successfully passed that trial of comparison.

What a trial there must have been between Servants and Masters in the early Church. I often wondered about this, and I'm sure you have too. In three different places Paul writes to the brethren who were servants, which in the Greek, the word is slaves. He writes to the slaves, and then he writes to the masters.

Both are Christian believers but we note that he doesn't write to the masters, free all your slaves, nor does he write to the slaves, rebel against all your masters for your liberty.

Instead he writes them both to act as Christians in their responsibility and in their different positions. Brethren, how difficult that must have been in a trial of comparison to have been a slave to a Christian master!

It may be that we find ourselves enslaved in our different experiences in life? Are we enslaved maybe to the trial of an unconsecrated spouse? Are we enslaved to responsibilities that burden us and limit us from having the liberty to travel or to entertain brethren, as we would like to? Are we enslaved to some type of situation in the workplace that prohibits us from going to meetings when we see our other brethren have this liberty to seem to travel at will, to entertain at will, to go to all the meetings they want? It can be trial of comparison.

And then there is the trial of health. In Acts 19: 12, we read that they would send handkerchiefs to the apostle Paul, that if he blessed it and returned it to them, they would be healed of their diseases. Yet in 2 Corinthians 12, you recall Paul prayed thrice to the Lord that the thorn in his flesh might be removed from him.

Perhaps Gal. 4 implies that it was his poor eyesight. Those poor eyes that were blinded from his conversion on seeing the glory of the Lord, which it took a miracle to gain his sight back at all. This was such a thorn in the flesh to him, and such a trial in his experiences that he prayed for its removal – IF — it would be the Lord's will.

But it wasn't. The Lord's will was that he would humbly submit himself to this trial of poor health and that by submitting himself, he would be showing the greater strength of the Lord working through and in him. And that humble submission on the part of Paul would be an example for all time to us and to others.

Do we find ourselves comparing our health problems with that of others? If we have poor health and are suffering on our sickbeds or bearing our ailments and our disabilities, the tendency might be to ask, why, Lord, when other brethren have better health and they seem to have greater spiritual opportunities because of it.

Brethren, this might easily be a severe trial and one that is very common. And yet, we see in Paul, he who healed others did not use that ability to heal himself. And when he beseeched the Lord regarding it, the answer came back, only continue to endure it by my grace.

Now we'd like to read John 21:18-22, “ Verily, verily, I say unto you, when you were young you girded yourself and walked where you wanted, but when you shall be old, you shall stretch forth your hands and another shall dress thee, and carry you where you would not choose. This spake he (Jesus) signifying by what death he (Peter) should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he said unto him (Peter) FOLLOW ME. Then Peter turning about sees the disciple whom Jesus loved following, (he which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said Lord which is he that betrayeth thee?) Peter seeing him says to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus answered him, if I will that he tarry till I come, WHAT IS THAT TO THEE? FOLLOW THOU ME.”

The setting was on the beach that morning on the Sea of Galilee. Peter had just had the three reprovings and finally had peace with the Lord. But then Jesus gave a prophecy concerning what would happen to Peter in the latter days.

It wasn't a pleasant thought. He would grow old, and he would be imprisoned, and he would die a violent death. However, it would glorify God and it demonstrated that he would be faithful to the end.

When we remember that neither Peter nor the others were yet Spirit-begotten, we can sympathize with Peter, being rather overwhelmed in his spontaneous

nature he tried to deflect Jesus' attention from himself and to redirect it to John. But Jesus was not deterred. Rather he gave Peter and by extension to all of us, a most PROFOUND LIFE LESSON: we are not to compare our experiences to that of our brethren, nor anyone else for that matter, rather we are stay FOCUSED ON FOLLOWING JESUS.

Now we would like to read from reprint 4184 on this. So excellent, under the sub-heading: "What Is That To Thee? Follow Thou Me"

"This is a difficult lesson for all of the Lord's followers to learn, but a very important one. If we allow ourselves to look about us and to wonder why some fellow disciple is not receiving apparently the same amount of chastisement or trials or difficulties or burdens that the Lord permits to come to us, and if then we permit ourselves to become judges of the Lord and his wisdom and his providences, the results will be disastrous to ourselves. It will destroy our peace, it will undermine our faith, and it will hinder us from learning the lessons necessary to prepare us for the kingdom. If such criticisms of divine providence at any time come to our minds, we should answer ourselves, that is, in our own mind, answer ourselves promptly in the language of our Lord to Peter. What is that to thee? Follow thou me.

You are not competent to regulate these matters, nor is it proper nor necessary for the Master to explain to us all of his plans and purposes. It's far better for us that we learn faith, submission, and trust, for no two of us have the same natural dispositions. So, no two of us, therefore, need the same disciplinary training at the hand of the Lord. We have confidence in his wisdom and love, and let us manifest that confidence, realizing that if our trials are greater, our blessings will be proportionate. And as the Lord said to Paul, so he would say to each of us, My grace is sufficient for thee. My strength is made perfect in weakness."

Truly this is sage advice from a well-seasoned follower of the Lord himself.

A common saying is "comparisons are odious." That is, rarely does any good come from it.

Perhaps dear Peter was struggling that morning on the beach with a sense of insecurity about his relationship to the Lord. At times we might have a similar struggle. This can easily lead us to comparing ourselves to others. Br. Russell writes in the 6th Volume about us having "different temperaments." Some of us who have more self-confidence might not have this struggle so

much, while others of us do not have enough confidence and hence feel at times that it might be an evidence that their relationship to the Lord is less than others. But as this lesson from Jesus was to Peter, so let it be to us all – What is that to you? FOLLOW THOU ME!

The Lord is NOT COMPARING US TO OTHERS.

It is rather typical for us to want to try to have a gauge or a standard by which we measure or calculate our progress or how well we are doing. But poor is the standard for us Christians if we make any fellow fallen human our standard by which to measure or compare ourselves! We do have a standard and it is found in the Word of God. It was exemplified in His Son Jesus. As Jesus told Peter, FOLLOW THOU ME.

We can look to our brethren as good examples but let us be sure not to make a comparison of it. There are far too many differing factors between us, many of which we could never be aware. But God is aware of all our limitations, circumstances, idiosyncrasies, sins that so easily beset us, various responsibilities, different talents, and on and on. Only our heavenly Father knows.

In 1 Corinthians 11.1, Paul says, Follow ye me as I follow Christ. And similar sentiments are in Philipians

3.17 and 1 Timothy 4.12. Yes, we do want to observe others as they follow Christ and then follow that good example. However, undoubtedly Paul meant to observe his way of life and from that see how we too might make profitable sacrifices of time and talent in performing our consecration vows, of deepening our sanctification.

Brethren, each of us are a unique workmanship. God is working in us, developing us in Christ Jesus for a unique position in that mystical body of Christ of 144,000. And He's chiseling and shaping us exactly for a place that HE SEES, NOT WHAT WE CANNOT HOPE TO SEE.

Paul's use of the human body as an example of our Christian relationships is fabulous! We cannot think of a better way in which to diffuse our trials of comparison. As he explains (in I Cor. 12), those who are spirit-begotten are all part of the figurative mystical Body of Christ. He is the head. He gives every other member of the Body their directions, both individually as well as unitedly just as a human body coordinates all of its functions.

Paul presents that a hand member should not ever think of themselves as more important nor less important to any other Body part or member. Furthermore, what one Body part might be equipped to

do, another part could not do, so then, we are actually meant to compliment one another.

These are such great verses – I Cor. 12:21-26, *“On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no divisions in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it, if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”*

These verses and the spiritual lessons herein, were designed to greatly encourage us to recognize that whether we are weak, strong, outgoing, shy, talkative or quiet, struggling with health, robust, poor or wealthy, a deep student or still trying to be, nervous about public prayer or articulate, EVERY MEMBER IS TO BE APPRECIATED AND EACH MEMBER IS EXPECTED TO BE UNIQUE IN OUR POSITION IN THE ONE BODY.

Let us close with some encouraging thoughts found in “The New Creation,” page 146:

“We are not to think of our Lord as wishing to find occasion against us, and as inclined to judge us harshly; but are, on the other hand, to remember that his goodness and mercy are such that he was prompted to provide for redemption *while we were yet sinners*. Surely, after we have become his children and have been begotten of the spirit, and are seeking, however stumbling may be our best efforts, to walk in his ways – after the spirit, not after the flesh – under such circumstances his love must abound to us yet more than when we were ‘children of wrath even as others.’ We are to remember that like a proper earthly father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth those that reverence him. We are to consider our best earthly friends and their sympathy and love and compassion, and are to draw an analogy, and to consider that God would be much more kind and faithful than the very best of his creatures. He invites such faith, such confidence – and he rewards it. All who had faith enough to come to the Lord originally, have faith enough to come to him day by day with their trials, difficulties and shortcomings, if they will.”

Our heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus want us to succeed and they expect each of us to be unique – a one

of a kind – impressed with His likeness, and that will give Him the glory.

End.

