

# Gospel Theology - Mini Course

## Gospel is a Third Way

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Do you want to experience more power and joy of the gospel in your life?

Tertullian, a Christian writer in the 2nd and 3rd century said this,

“Just as Christ was crucified between two thieves, so this doctrine of justification is ever crucified between two opposite errors.”

Tertullian is saying there are 2 false ways of thinking drawing us away from the “gospel line,” robbing us from power and joy of the gospel. And all of us struggle with this. Our hearts natural slant is to be drawn to one of these 2 thieves.

So what are these two thieves? The Moralism thief and the Relativism Thief.

It's religion or irreligion

It's legalism or antinomianism

It's truth without grace or (false) grace without truth

It's justification = faith plus works or justification = faith minus works

All of us struggle with one of these two thieves, sometimes both in different times in our life. Our heart has a natural inclination towards one of these two, moralism or relativism.

How does the Moralism-Religion Thief steal power and joy?

Moralism means you believe you are accepted by God through your works and achievements. It's about keeping all the rules, living up to a high set of standards. If you struggle with this, you probably struggle with self-hatred or self-inflation. In other

words, you constantly hate yourself or beat yourself up because you can't live up to the standards. Or, you have an inflated view of yourself and your own godliness because you think you have lived up to the standards.

It's interesting to see that the root cause is the same if you feel superior or inferior to others. And how superior you believe you are, or how inferior and full of shame and guilt you feel depends on how high the standards are.

People who are moralistic can appear very religious but the Religious thief steals their transforming power and joy.

How does the Relativism-Irreligion Thief steal power and joy?

Irreligious people believe they are not all that bad. They don't see themselves as sinners. These people think, oh I can live how I want no matter what anyone else thinks. I determine right and wrong for myself. To irreligious people, God is either loving or an impersonal force, but because they don't see themselves as sinners, God's love cost him nothing. But God's love is far deeper and richer than that.

What do the Religious Thief and Irreligious Thief have in common?

They are both ways to avoid Jesus as Savior and keep control of their lives. Religious people seek to be their own saviors through religious pride. Irreligious people seek to be their own saviors through worldly pride. And both are wrong.

Tim Keller says

“A key for thinking out the implications of the gospel is to consider the gospel a third way between two mistaken opposites. However, we must realize that the gospel is not a halfway compromise between these two poles—it produces not something in the middle but something different from both.”

Take a moment to reflect for yourself. Which thief does your heart struggle with? Is your heart drawn more towards religion or irreligion? Moralism or Relativism.

Let's explore this more in the scriptures.

### **Luke 18:9-14**

*“He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

Take a moment and think through the following questions in reference to this passage:

### **Seeing the gospel in contrast slide**

1. how does this passage deconstruct religion?
2. how does this passage deconstruct irreligion?
3. what is the picture of growing in grace?

Do you see what's happening in here? The Pharisee did all the “right” things. He prayed, he fasted, he tithed, yet he wasn't saved. On the other hand, the tax collector was “standing far off.” He was doing all the “wrong” things, yet he became justified. Why? Is it because he did the wrong things? No, of course not. But unlike the Pharisee, the irreligious tax collector who couldn't lift up his eyes to heaven, began to beat his chest, a sign of repentance, asking God to be merciful to him a sinner!

Do you see? It's not about religion or irreligion. The gospel is a third way. It's about a repentant heart. It's about being aware of God's grace and holiness while being aware of your own sinfulness, thus driving you to love him, and obey him, not to earn his love, but because he loves you.

I'd like for you to go through this exercise again through the following passages. Pause the video and see how the passage deconstructs religion and irreligion, and then see how it is a picture of God's growing grace.

The gospel isn't religion or irreligion, it's something else.

When faced with any dilemma, most people settle for either legalism (obey even though you don't feel like it) or license (don't obey at all). But neither of these is the gospel! The gospel of God's grace is the fuel for mission, and when we run low on that fuel, our love and service to others dies down.

Let's put this into practice:

Here's a tool for you to Discern the Third Way

Think about a dilemma you recently faced. Name the situation. Name your emotions. Try to identify both a religious response and an irreligious response to that situation.

The "gospel" response will call you to do something in obedience to God even as you live in the freedom and rest of His love and grace.