

The Spirit Gives Life

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Bible Text: 2 Corinthians 3:1-5

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Well, then now let's turn our Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter three and let's read just the first few verses. I am not going to preach must out of this chapter today. Well, I am going to preach for a long time, but I am only going to preach from the first couple of verses.

Now hear the Word of God, 2 Corinthians chapter three.

Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you? Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.¹

Amen.

In some ways I think this epistle as a crisis of confidence for the apostle Paul. Not in the sense that he has lost confidence in God, but in the fact that he is not confident in the flesh. He is certainly not confident in himself. He is not confident in the fact that he is going to survive a missions trip to Mexico. Oh, excuse me, through Asia Minor. He is not confident that he is the man upon which the Spirit of God is going to establish the entire kingdom of God all over the world for the rest of the extent of the work of the kingdom of God on earth. Paul understands who he is. But now he is coming back to God. He is leading us back to God. This is a passage for the ministers of the Word. All the way through chapter one, two and three this has to do with whether or not Paul's ministry has been effective. It has to do with whether or not Paul's ministry has been

¹ 2 Corinthians 3:1-6.

received. I mean, remember, there is some lack of confidence that this church in Corinth has actually received the words that he gave in his first epistle. There is a little bit, maybe, at this point, but he is not sure. He is not exactly sure where these people are. He hasn't been back to visit them recently so he doesn't know where their heart is. And it is possible, as we read through this epistle of 2 Corinthians, that Paul's reputation has slipped somewhat with the people at Corinth. This is not unusual. There are points at which people's confidence in other people will lack. There will be points at which people become fickle and they may come to you one week and say, "That is the best message I have ever heard." And then two weeks later they are gone. They don't ever want to hear another message from you again. That is not unusual with people. That is just the way they are.

So there is no confidence in the flesh. There is no confidence in them, but here Paul gives us the source of his confidence and that is in the work of the Spirit of God. And this is where we are going to go today.

Now it is true that throughout this epistle Paul is trying to buttress his reputation, his ministry with his people. Now he could send them the résumé. He could go get the letters of commendation from other churches. He could go find other people who have been greatly ministered by the apostle Paul. I mean, he went and he had a great conference out in Greece or out in Antioch or he had a great opportunity to minister and people said the man was filled with the Holy Spirit of God and there were evaluation forms and 300 people said it was the most unbelievable message. My life was incredibly transformed. He could have gone through all the evaluation forms, copied them to the Church at Corinth and buttressed their confidence in him. Evidently he has some competition with what they call the Judaizers. And this is going to show up in chapter nine and chapter 10. Paul's ministry is being challenged by the Judaizers. These are Old Testament scholars. Many of them know the Old Testament well. They may be the best of Theonomists. They perhaps have gone through 300,000 pages of commentary on the Old Testament Torah. They know something about what they are talking about and they can take Paul to task for some of the things that he said.

But the question here that Paul is answer is: Is this ministry really worthy anything at all?

And he begins right away in verse one of chapter three by saying, "Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you?"²

In verse two, "Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men."³

What it comes down to is: You know what? It is not going to be letters of commendation and it is not really going to be evaluation forms and conferences that will validate a ministry. Even though there are ministers that warrant some level of validation and

² 2 Corinthians 3:1.

³ 2 Corinthians 3:2.

commendation, the number one form of commendation or validation is what is happening in the hearts and the lives of those that hear the Word of God. That is the commendation.

Now sometimes, I tell you. Brothers and sisters, I would like to be a Mark [?] where you build a house within six months you know what you have accomplished. You know you have done something, versus laboring in the Word of God of 10, 11, 12 years and not really sure that the people of God are really growing or whether there is true sanctifying fruit in the lives of God's people.

Now, granted, what tends to happen is that God works in a slow and steady way over a long period of time and if you step back and you look at 10 or 11 years, you can begin to see things happening within the lives of people.

And this is really Paul's point, is that the only way we are going to know whether we have got anything happening is whether or not there is a true spirit revival in the hearts and lives of those people hearing the Word of God.

Effectively, you are the brochure.

I kid my chiropractor from time to time when I walk in and, you know, he does a really good job and I say, "Wow, you better put me back on the front of the brochure." And then six weeks later, you know, I am a mess again. That is the way my back is. And I always kid with him. "Why don't you take me off the brochure now because I am not a good candidate for what you have accomplished with my back, my physical condition. I am in worse condition than I have ever been. Take me off the brochure, man."

And he laughs and that is really what Paul is saying here. He is saying, "You are the brochure."

Whatever has happened in terms of my ministry is what will be evident in your own lives. Is there love? Is there faith? Is there joy? Is there righteousness? Is there obedience to God's laws? Are there fornicators who have stopped fornicating? Are there people willing to lay their lives down for their brothers and sisters in Christ? Is this kind of thing happening?

We begin to see this happening, a growing in the lives of God's people.

It really isn't rocket science, guys. It doesn't require a lot of heavy duty analysis. You know, it would be nice to stick a thermometer in something and determine whether you have got love, joy, peace, longsuffering, but, you know, you can step back and ask yourself: Do we have less fornication in the congregation than we did 10 years ago? Do we have less addiction to pornography? I mean, do we have more love, more unity? Are more people willing to lay their lives down than 10, 20 years ago? We could ask those questions. I mean, this is not rocket science.

Now you say, “Well, there is a little lack here. There is a little lack there, but it looks like we made some progress here. We may have made some progress over there.”

It is possible to look at people’s lives and determine whether or not something is happening.

Now, take a look at verse three.

“Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.”⁴

Now this is the key verse and I want to spend a tremendous amount of time on this this morning. First thing we see is that there is writing on the hearts. And I have got to draw in Old Testament texts on this in order to understand what is being said here. So if you want to go to Jeremiah 31:33 in your Word this morning and let’s take a look at what Jeremiah says about this writing on the heart.

Jeremiah 31:33.

“But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.”⁵

This is the prophecy concerning the new covenant. The new covenant is somewhat distinguished from the old covenant in that God’s law was written on stone in the Old Testament. The New Testament is written on the heart. That means that there is a real sense in which the words on those rocks or the words in this book come so close, come into us in such an intimate way that it literally becomes part of us.

You remember in that exhortation I gave several weeks ago where I said, “You have got to be doers of the Word as well as hearers.” And I said, “I want these words to flow in that I want them to become part of us.” And I started rubbing the Bible up and down my body. Do you remember that?

You see, that is pretty much the analogy that is being used here. There is such an intimate sense in which the Word of God is part of our lives that we begin to live and breathe it. There is a sense in which we don’t need 100,000 pages to direct us concerning the will of God. We don’t need to grab that book off the shelf, 300 pages on how to use a hearing aid on the sabbath day because we don’t need to be those sorts of Legalists. We know what God expects of us, but how do we know? Because we have 100,000 pages of interpretive detail on every single minute little law that you find in the Old Testament. Or is it because the law is on our hearts and if it is on our hearts we will delight to do the will of God and it will be as just a second nature to not just understand the laws of God or to

⁴ 2 Corinthians 3:3.

⁵ Jeremiah 31:33.

cognitively study it and absorb the propositional truths found in each law, but it is so true to us and real to us that it doesn't matter what situational perspective we are in. We can apply that law.

But why? Because it is on the heart. It is there in the heart.

We are not denying that the Old Testament law is applicable to us. What we are saying is it is on the heart. It is written on the heart.

Psalm 37:31 also refers to this.

“The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide.”⁶

You see, again, the Old Testament they understood this idea that if you do not have the law of God penned upon the heart, if you don't get it in the heart, then you are not going to know the will of God and your steps will slide. That is, the decisions you make in your life will not be appropriate decisions to the will of God, to what God wants in this situation, that situation over here and over here.

Also Psalm 40 and verse eight.

“I delight to do thy will, O my God.”⁷

I referred to that verse in the exhortation and here at the end of that, it is very important, listen here, “yea, thy law is within my heart.”⁸

So the law being in the heart involves certainly an understanding of what to do, that is, it directs the steps. We don't need the 100,000 pages of matrices over every possible situation in life and how to apply the 579 law codes found in the Old Testament to this situation and that situation. We have it in the heart. We are in a situation. God brings us into a situation. We know what to do, but more than that we also delight in doing that will. It is something that comes naturally to us. Again, Christ is not a hard master to us. It doesn't take, you know, a 600 ton force in order to get us to get up and get out of bed and go do the will of God this morning. It is just natural. It is something we delight to do. We want to get out of bed. We want to do God's will. Why? Because the law is in the heart. The law of God is penned in the heart.

Now what is it that writes the law of God? And the ink used is the Spirit of God. Look at verse three again. Let's read it again.

“Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.”⁹

⁶ Psalm 37:31.

⁷ Psalm 40:8.

⁸ Ibid.

So who does it? Who does it? It is not written with ink. Oh, what is it written with? It is not ink. The Spirit of the living God.

So the ink is the Spirit and the Spirit of God effectively tattoos the law of God and the truth of God on the hearts of believers. He does it with indelible ink. You cannot get it out of there. It is permanent. And that is the sense in which I think it applies here in this text.

Because later on or here in the same verse we have the contrast between tables of stone and the fleshly tables of the heart. The stone is permanent. There is a permanence in that sense, but it is also permanent in the heart.

Now, I want you to take a look at the interaction between the ministers and the Spirit of God. Again, verse three.

“Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us.”¹⁰

So you are the epistle. The ministry was by us. Then it says:

“...written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God.”¹¹

So the ministry comes by the apostle Paul. The ministry comes by the teaching of the Word of God. But the Spirit of God is the force, is the person that takes that Word and impresses it upon the heart of those people that are listening to the Word of God.

And now I want to spend some time here studying the Spirit of God.

Now as we talk about the Spirit of God, remember we have got to be careful about talking to somebody in their presence. That is very important. So the first thing you need to understand is the Spirit of God is [?] and the Spirit of God is real and the Spirit of God is a person. So as we talk about somebody in their presence, let's give that person some credence. Let's talk to that person as well. Let's pray for a second.

Heavenly Father, as we talk about your Spirit who is right here with us, we pray, God, that you would direct us by your Spirit, you would give us the words to say, we pray you would impress these truths upon our hearts. And, Spirit of God, we want to give you the credence. We want to give you glory. We want to worship you as well. We want to cry out to you that you would come, that you would not be grieved by us. We want to receive you. Father, we pray that you would receive us, the Spirit would receive us, the Son would receive us in his name. Amen.

⁹ 2 Corinthians 3:3.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

The Spirit of God is a person. He is the third person of the Trinity. He is truly God. He is a person. The Son of God interacts with this person. The Father interacts with this person. The persons of the godhead talk to each other.

Now that means they are not sitting there talking to themselves. They are interacting with each other as separate persons in relationship with one another. The Spirit of God is important to us. The Spirit of God is as important in our redemption as the Father and the Son. All three have very important role in our salvation. They work together. They work in unity. You never can imagine the Spirit of God working separately from the Father. That is why we can pray to the Father and know that the Spirit is listening to us at the same time and know that the Spirit of God will act in accord with the Father's will and with the will of the Son.

So they work in coordination at the same time. The Spirit of God is also essential for the ministry of the new covenant. And this is why it is very important that the Spirit of God not die the death of a thousand qualifications to the point where people hardly know if they really are in need of the Spirit of God's work in their lives.

If the Spirit of God is not here with me, if the Spirit of God doesn't speak through me to you as the ministration of the Word of God is being presented here, brothers and sisters, I have no business being up here ministering to you in the new covenant message of God's Word from his Word. There is just no separation of the Spirit of God from his Word. There should never be a separation of the Spirit of God.

When you sit down for family worship, the Spirit of God needs to be there. If you are not sensitive to the Spirit of God, if you are not open to the Spirit of God, close the Word. Don't do it. Don't get into it. The Spirit of God is vital. Without the Spirit of God, we are dead. All we have is the dead letter and if there is ever a time where you are sitting down and you are just sort of dead lettering it in family worship, you probably need to close the Word. Start opening your heart. Stop grieving the Spirit and start receiving the Spirit or cry out for the Spirit's visitation upon you, fathers, as you present the Word of God to your children and to your sweet wives.

Now how do we know that the Spirit of God has visited his people in the Church of God? It is very important to us, brothers and sisters. The reason I say this is because I am convicted that the Spirit of God has, to some extent, been grieved by this congregation. I think we have grieved the Spirit. And I have grappled with this. I have prayed about it all week trying to understand what we have done to distance the Spirit from us as a congregation.

We need the Spirit of God. But what does it look like when a congregation has been visited by the Spirit of God? What is it? What are the manifestations? Now I am not going to Acts two right away. There is an overarching principle. It doesn't have to do with the speaking in tongues. It does.... that was one aspect of it in the Old Testament at Pentecost. But, guys, just one aspect. The tongues aspect was just a tiny little aspect. [?] talking about tongues because it is not important.

Well, what is important? Acts chapter four and verse 28. Turn there. You have got to read these words with me. Acts 4:28. This is what it looks like for the Spirit of God to visit the people of God.

Listen. This is Peter preaching.

“For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.”

And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.¹²

Ephesians six and verse 19. Paul encourages the Ephesians Church to pray for him.

[Pray] for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.¹³

So what is it? What is the manifestation of the visitation of the Spirit of God in Acts chapter four, Ephesians chapter six? But bold speech. It isn't the warm fuzzies. It isn't an emotional high per se, because, brothers and sisters, that is not an indication. There is nothing in the Word of God to indicate that you have got to feel something in order to know that the Spirit of God has visited the people of God. But how do we know that the Spirit of God has visited the people of God, but that you begin to hear bold preaching. Boldness and that, of course, is what you get in the book of Acts, because you know the idea of boldness was essential at the beginning, number one, because there was so much political resistance against the message; number two, because if you stood up in front of a bunch of people who had just killed their Messiah and you say, “You guys killed the Messiah. You need to repent of that now,” that is a tough message. That is going to be hard to buy with the people of God who wanted the Messiah, the people of God who perceived themselves to be religious and just performed the most wicked deed that anybody had ever performed since the fall of man. And you confront them with that sin, brothers and sisters, that would take boldness.

¹² Acts 4:27-31.

¹³ Ephesians 4:19-20.

Boldness is not emotional preaching. Emotions are a function of the personality of the person who presents something. So it is not an emotional thing, per se. Now not to say that we shouldn't be worshiping God with all of our emotions and bringing our emotions to bear. Yes, we ought to, but what is the measurement here? What is the measurement? Gold preaching. When a man of God will stand up and give forthright, confident, faith filled [?] against all kinds of perceived resistance. And understand that as the Spirit of God opens our minds to the truths of God's Word, we, at the same time, that are... we are preaching the Word of God. We usually are able to perceive a little resistance. Why? Because there is spiritual resistance. Why? Because there are principalities and powers that work within us that by God's grace we have got to overcome, by the Word of God, by the courageous, brave, faith filled preaching of God's Word we can over come. This is important.

God help us with this boldness, the boldness to understand the oppositions, the difficulties. I mean, in Colorado over the last 15, 18 years I have come to understand a lot of the principalities and powers that we have gone up against and we have faced many, many times in counseling and preaching the Word of God and in engaging people in the Church of Christ, the divorce culture, the non covenantalism, the inability, the insipient inability for people to covenant together for more than 6.7 years on the average, the fornication, the adultery, the bitterness. I mean, guys, I have seen the sins and I have preached against it as much as I can and tried to bring people to the cross of Jesus Christ, but I am here to tell you that the principalities and the powers are huge. They are huge. The powers go to the 50th story and it is hard for a little guy to scale the towers and bring the walls down. It is. The spiritual forces around us are strong.

Have any of you felt them? Have any of you understood that there are powers and they do undermine and they [?] strong and it is only the gospel of Jesus Christ preached by the power of the Spirit of God impressing the truths of God's Word on the hearts of men where we are ever going to see these things come down.

I am not giving up. But one thing I am giving up on is my own ability to do it. I can't do it.

And, again, it is not flesh and blood. It is something that works beyond flesh and blood. There are ingrained sins, they are rebellious characteristic that just are there. It is only the Spirit of God that brings these things down.

So is boldness important? Yes. Boldness... have you ever seen a bold preacher? Have you ever been out on the streets? I remember back in my college days. I still remember a young man. I saw some nutty cases, but I saw one young man that I believe the Spirit of God is upon him. I mean in his balanced approach in his preaching, in his careful exegetical work in the Word, in his willingness, his loving way to interchange with people who had problems, even people in the group that was... that were angry and were opposing him in vociferous ways. He was willing to gently correct them and kept persistently applying God's Word and to this day I still remember him. He was one of the few street preachers I have ever seen that I still remember as somebody who was

bold, who was willing under all duress to bring the Word of God, especially uncomfortable things. And he began to talk about things like fornication on a college campus and bring God's Word to bear and call men and women to repentance there in the square, the public square and Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. I still remember this man.

And, brothers, when I see that, I love it. I love it. My blood runs. I mean, what do you do when you hear bold preaching? Do you get embarrassed? You know, you crawl under your chair and you kind of back away a little bit. I hope nobody asks me about this. I don't have anything to do with this. No. When a man is willing to get up and boldly preach the Word of God there ought to be people with their hands in the air as they... yes, brother, yes, brother. I am with you there. I believe this. I can see the Spirit of God is now upon you as you preach boldly to the people of God.

If there aren't men and women doing that, they are quenching the Spirit especially within the Church of Christ.

A preacher must preach with a sense of spiritual realities. That is if he doesn't understand, if he doesn't perceive it himself, if he doesn't understand the risks, the death and life, hell and heaven perspective that is being conveyed to us in Scriptures. Do you understand that this is how we really how we interpret reality? And there are men and women going astray and they need to be called to repentance and they need to understand the power of the blood of Jesus Christ at the cross. If they don't see that in the pastor, if the preacher doesn't understand the spiritual realities and he doesn't perceive the intensity of the rebellion that lies in the hearts of men and women that are in the congregations, then he doesn't have the spirit of God. He needs to understand the truth of it. He doesn't get the relevance of it. If he doesn't understand how this Word perfectly meets the needs of the people that are listening right now, who is going to hear it? Who is going to believe it? Certainly the Spirit of God must be on the one who presents. And, guys, not just this guy here talking to the elders and the fathers and those that witness at work or what have you. Is the Spirit of God on you in order to bring the Word of God to bear?

Hey, in the Old Testament in Joel chapter two we have the little girls and the little boys are prophesying. And I am just looking at that. I am interpreting that to mean they are just bringing the Word of God.

Now, granted, they have prophecy back... We have got a lot of prophecy. Prophecy away. It is right here. You will bring this prophecy to a people of God and you could do it as a little girl, a little boy. Could it be that a little boy or little girl could be endowed by the Spirit of God such that they could be sitting in a chair somewhere or some seat next to somebody on a flight out of Denver and convey the truth of God's Word with boldness and with courage? I believe so. This is where we are in the New Testament. And if there is no bold preaching, if men can't get past their embarrassments, if they can't get past their inability to love others, if they can't understand the spiritual realities conveyed in these words, if these are just boring words to them and they can't see any real relevance

of these words to the hearts and lives of their own children sitting before them in the living room, brothers and sisters, we have no spirit.

The preacher of the Word of God must get past his self confidence and his pride. I mean, way past self confidence and pride. He has got to get way past his reliance upon his academic preparation. He has got to get past his nervousness in abandoning his notes. I mean, I am not saying preparation notes aren't important in the presentation of the Word of God. It is vitally important. But at the point when you are starting to convey that Word, if you are non reliant on that Spirit, more than you are reliant on your brain cells, your academic preparation or your notes, you are not trusting in the spirit of God.

We need to rely upon the Spirit of God, not our own pride. We have got to get past our embarrassment. We have got to get past our self centeredness. We have got to get past our fear of offending others. We have got to get past our own flesh. We have got to get past all of this. If the Spirit of God must work through the preacher or if he does not work, there will be no writing of Christ upon the hearts of the people who are listening to the Word.

Ok, that is number one. Number one is bold preaching. If there is bold preaching, there was a conveyance of the Word of God with boldness. It doesn't matter who is saying it. Doesn't matter what context it is in. It could be on a plane. It could be on a college campus. It could be in the church service. It could be in your living room. It doesn't matter where it is. Where there is bold preaching, where there are spiritual insights, clear understanding, discernment concerning the times, an enlarged heart of love, an unfettered liberty of conscience or utterance, excuse me. Here we have these things we have the Spirit of God. We have unleashed the Word of God for God's people to receive that Word.

Ok. Here is the second indication and I have referred to this before, but take a look at Galatians five. Back up to verse 15. We will get down to the fruits of the Spirit in a moment. But verse 15 of Galatians five.

But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.¹⁴

For the works of the flesh are... and he goes on to the works of the flesh: sexual immorality, divisions, strife, idolatry, et cetera. It is really pretty simple. The works of the flesh and fornication. As people are doing porn in the congregation and they are not unified. They are doing porn and they aren't unified. Those are the two problems. Two problems kind of boil down to. Porn can be idolatrous. It can be, of course, a violation of the Seventh Commandment as well, but those who have sexual problems and those that have these idolatry little fetishes laying around their lives and those who are incapable of maintaining the unity of the body within families and churches, are those who have not

¹⁴ Galatians 5:15-16.

been visited by the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God will manifest itself in sexual purity, in unity. It will be life.

So where there is light there is the Spirit of God. Where there is faith, where there is mighty faith to overcome these idols in you life... And, you know, you look back over your life, over the last six, seven, eight years, do you see that by faith you have overcome the temptations of the world? Do you look back in your life and see that God has increased your heart of love for the brothers and sisters in this congregation? Is that possible? Are you more loving today than you were five, six, 10 years ago? That is the fruit of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”¹⁵

Now let me also add this. In the witnessing and preaching of the Word of God, whether it be in your own house, in your neighborhoods, in your workplace or in the Church, there must be what I would call an enlarged heart for God and for those that you are ministering the Word to. That means that... and, brothers, from time to time I step up here to this pulpit, I do not have a love for this congregation as I know I should. And I pray to God that he gives me a love, an enlargement of the heart. It is amazing what that does for the presentation of the Word of God. It brings in such balance to the Word. It helps me in balancing the demands of the law against the promises of faith. It helps me to understand how to convey a message to God’s people who are very unique in their own particular needs and desires. And it helps me to think back on my meeting last week with Mark Searcy and then week before with Scott Allen and the week before with Jim Mill and the week before with... it helps me to bring these people into my mind and remember that I am not just speaking to the air. I am not speaking to faceless people who have no personalities. I am speaking to real people, people with their own needs and desires and their own challenges and trials that they are going through themselves. And as a preacher understands that, as the preacher, as you as a Father can enter into the hearts and the minds and the lives of the little ones around you and understand the sins they are up against and the trials they are going through themselves, then you can minister to them. But without that enlarged heart, without what Paul says the greatest of these is charity.

Remember what he says in 1 Corinthians 13?

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity...”¹⁶

Though I have incredible rhetorical skills, though I have a PhD 100 times over and the presentation of theology. Though I have all knowledge and all wisdom, though I be the most unbelievable, un... most prepared, most academically prepared individual who ever presented the Word of God, he says, “If I don’t have a heart of love, I am nothing. I have nothing.”

But where do we get that, brothers? Where do we get that, sisters? It doesn’t come in Aristotle’s rhetoric. It doesn’t come in the preaching classes you get in seminary. It

¹⁵ Galatians 5:22-23.

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 13:1.

doesn't come in the scads and scads of preparatory work you get. It comes by means of the Spirit of God who works within our own lives, who teaches us to be like he is.

You know, I get to know some of these young men in the congregation and it is amazing. I will be facing away from them and thinking that is their father speaking. I turn a round and it is them. A lot of these young men are so like their fathers. It is amazing.

But when the Spirit of God comes in to play with us, when we begin to relate to him, remember he is a relational being. We begin to be like him. And the preaching of the Word of God takes on a unique characteristic where it is so much different than anything you have ever heard before. It doesn't sound like the rhetoricians from college. It doesn't sound like the great orators who give political speeches. It doesn't sound... it just sounds different. Now the guy could be stumbling over every third word. It doesn't matter. None of that matters. What matters is the Word of God coming through. And is it coming through with a large heart of love, of charity?

2 Corinthians chapter six and verse 11.

We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us.¹⁷

See, here I a spirit of genuine earnestness, concern and passion for God's people. You know, you can state the passion. You can. And I can be as passionate as I want to be. But if I don't convey love, the Spirit of God is not in me.

Now maybe that is one reason why the message comes across as so cold. Maybe that is why we are just not getting through. Our hearts are not enlarged with the people of God.

See, what we are after here is not to traffic in some sort of religious notions, high sounding ideas. What are we at? What are we doing? Are we trying to impress somebody? Are we trying to prove ourselves to be better than some other church? Hey, we have got better preaching down here. We have got the best oratory you have ever heard. What are we after here? What do we want? We want people coming to the cross of Jesus Christ and receiving his gift. We want them bowing at the knee of Christ and serving in his kingdom. We are preparing a bride here, a bride. Now, see, that doesn't come by mere oratory.

Now the first thing I know about preparing a bride is that father daughter relationship ought to be pretty decent. If that father is involved in any, way, shape or form in that courtship, there ought to be some preparatory work going on.

Well, that is what we are doing. We are preparing a bride for Jesus Christ. And it is going to happen by bold preaching in the Word of God and a reliance on the Spirit of God.

¹⁷ 2 Corinthians 6:11.

All of us need to rely on the Spirit of God. We come in here on a Sunday morning, we have got to be appealing to the Spirit of God in ministry that he come and he visit us together. And the reason for that is because we are all in here together and the Spirit of God understands that. And if there isn't unison, if there isn't unity here because, remember, we are to cultivate the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace and if the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace is not being cultivated in the people of God and we are not coming together to say, "We need the Spirit of God upon us," we have seen a lack of it in our midst and we desire that the Spirit of God come down upon the preachers, the teachers, the men who do the prayers. We desire that. We want it. And all of us want it and the one up front wants it and everybody else wants it. And they are leaning forward in their seats expecting the Spirit of God to come down at any moment. We have to come in together with that expectation, that desire, that prayer in our hearts or the Spirit of God may not move.

If you don't need the Spirit, he is not coming. At least that is what we are conveying to him. He won't come. Now he will have to change your hearts to the point where we want to. And if it does that, then he will come. But our desire, our dependence, our trust needs to be on the Spirit of God doing the work.

Jeremiah 17:5.

"Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD."¹⁸

Now that is pretty severe. Cursed be the man that trusts in man. And how much do we wind up trusting in man? You know we are trusting in man's abilities. We are trusting in our own abilities.

No, we have to trust and rely upon the Spirit of God to do the work. Otherwise he says in verse six, "For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited."¹⁹

Our ministries will turn into a blasted field if we are not reliant on the Spirit of God doing the work. We get involved in doing this business. That really only the Spirit of God needs to be involved with in terms of our ministry. We are no better than the sons of Sceva trying to cast out demons without the aid of the Spirit of God. I mean, and you try that, you are in trouble.

"Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?"²⁰

Oh, we need the Spirit of God in the business that we are doing.

¹⁸ Jeremiah 17:5.

¹⁹ Jeremiah 17:6.

²⁰ Acts 19:15.

Ephesians four and verse 30 warns us about grieving the Spirit of God.

And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.²¹

Don't grieve the Spirit. The grieving of the Spirit appears to do... have something to do with bitterness, gossip, hard words for brothers and sisters in Christ.

So how might we attract the Spirit of God and not grieve the Spirit of God in our midst? I would say let's be very careful about gossip. Let's be careful about any form of disunity within the body. If there are multiple attempts to disunify the body, there are divisions within the body. The Spirit of God is less likely to be involved in the ministry of the Word of God.

1 Thessalonians 5:19 warns us about quenching the Spirit.

Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings.²²

Now the word "prophesyings" don't let that bother you. That is the word relating to the conveyance of biblical truth, whether it be that prophesying we find recorded here or the extra scriptural prophesying used in the first generation of the Church.

Ok. So what he is saying is, "Don't quench the spirit. Despise not the teaching of the Word of God." If there is any spite at all in the congregation for the teaching of the Word of God, if there is any spite of the bold preaching, if there is really bad attitudes within our congregation towards God's Word, especially if the Spirit of God has ever moved. The Spirit of God is working here or here and you despise the work of the Spirit of God in the preaching of the Word of God and the prophesying and the conveying of God's truth. There is some quenching of the Spirit of God going on. And the idea of quenching is the quenching of the fire.

The Spirit of God is like unto a fire and it is possible to come into the worship service with wet blankets and you will have a wet blanket attitude as you begin to hear the Word of God, a wet blanket attitude. You are not interested in the Word of God or you have got a bad attitude this morning and in your own heart is not cleansed and it is... of its own spite for God's people or that person or this person or what have you. You have got to confess that before the Lord. You have got to dry out that blanket and open yourself up for the work of the Spirit of God as a congregation to the preaching of the Word of God.

If the Spirit of God is working just a little bit in a brother, you know, you ought to stir it up. Stir it up a little bit. You sense that there is a little bit of a live fire going here. There

²¹ Ephesians 4:30-32.

²² 1 Thessalonians 5:19-20.

is a little desire for God. There is a little light that just went on in your sister's heart or mind and maybe your wife has a highly spiritual moment and you are not feeling spiritual yourself at the moment and you throw a wet blanket over that spiritual insight that your wife has given to you. Guys, you can quench the Spirit.

What should you do? If there is a little spiritual insight here or a little spiritual insight there, blow the flame a little bit. Contribute a little more to it. Ask the Spirit of God to come down upon you at the same time. Don't quench the Spirit. Don't despise the prophesyings.

On the other hand, it doesn't have to do with preventing emotional highs. You know, as the lights go down and the dry ice gets cranked up and the worship leader manipulates people's emotions. No, that is not the idea. The quenching of the Spirit is despising the conveyance of God's Word. That is what it is. It is just very simply that, especially if there is insight there, especially if there is a concern and a love of the Word of God and for the people of God as that Word is being shared.

Let's be very careful to present the right environment where the Word is being preached such that it is not a bunch of wet blankets. It is dry twigs. It is good fodder for the Word of God to convey.

Remember the Spirit is a free and living person. The Spirit moves like the wind and blows where it wills. So remember that. It is not as if we can manipulate the Spirit of God. We can't. We can't emotionally manipulate the Spirit. We can't sovereignly manipulate the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God is going to go wherever he wants to go.

Now it is not to say that the prayers of a fervent man doesn't avail much. It does avail. But the Spirit of God is still a free and living person, also highly relational. He doesn't operate in a non relational porcupine kind of environment. So if we created that in this congregation, there is a little porcupine, a little standoffishness, a little I am not sure I really want to love you, brother or sister today. I am not really going to forgive you of this. I am not really going to forgive you of that. If that is the kind of environment we create in these churches, brothers and sisters, the Spirit of God is not going to show up.

Why? Because he is relational. He likes relational environments and there are times in which a husband might offend a wife by excessive boorishness for example or, perhaps, excessive demanding insensitivity or what have you. There is ways in which husbands have offended their wives and their wives have pulled back a little bit. She kind of closes up. She is no longer transparent, no more free flow of emotion and affection going on.

But why is that? Because she has pulled back. And that is what happens with the spirit of God. There are points at which he pulls back.

And just as a relationship between a husband and wife can be interrupted by what the husband does or by what the wife does in that relationship, the same thing can happen in the relationship we have with the Spirit of God.

One thing we must agree on. One thing I think we all should agree on. Whether or not you agree with everything we have said here today, I think we all ought to agree that the Spirit of God is absolutely necessary in our midst if anything is ever going to be accomplished. We need to cry out with one voice. We need to unify on this point. We need the Spirit of God to address the spiritual dearth in our midst. And if the Spirit of God doesn't, then we have no... we have no ministry. We have no prophecy. I might as well fold up shop and just go do something else.

No. Our one option is the Spirit of God working within our midst. Have you despised his work? Have you despised his voice? Have you been insensitive to his meeting yourself? I want you to think about that for a moment. Have you ignored him? Have you considered himself unnecessary in your family worship? Have you appealed to the Spirit of God in your family worship time, come down upon you and upon your little congregation?

We need the Spirit of God. This is the ministry of the new covenant.

Here is the final point, verse three. What he writes on our hearts is what is Christ. Look at that.

“Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us.”²³

So this is the word that he writes on our hearts. It is Christ. Who is Christ? Christ is prophet, priest and king. Christ is what he reveals himself to be in the Word of God. Christ is his law. Christ is his grace. Christ is his forgiveness. Christ is his cross. Christ is his resurrection. Christ is that power that works in us. Christ is the one we serve. Christ is the one who communicates his will to us and we live Christ. And in order to get to know Christ, we must understand his will and that is why we teach this Word.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we understand that no emotions, no force of rhetoric, no great logical presentation of a set of propositions are going to be sufficient, Father, to communicate your Word. Now we use these things. We use everything that we can from a human responsibility standpoint. But, Father, we need your Spirit. Father, we pray that you send your Spirit upon us. We have been hurting. We sense that there has been somewhat of a distance with your Spirit. Have we grieved your Spirit? Have we quenched the Spirit? Father, turn back to us and, again, our interest is not to point fingers at all, it is just we have not adequately presented your Spirit as important to us. We have not sensed our need for the Spirit of God. The spiritual realities have not been keenly presented. We have hardly been able to see them ourselves. Father, we pray that you would send your Spirit and you would indelibly print these things upon our hearts, that by faith we would know these truths, we would experience them, we would live them out. Father, right now we pray you would write with your Spirit upon our hearts. Even as I pray this prayer,

²³ 2 Corinthians 3:3.

Father, I know these are just words. Unless your Spirit can communicate to our spirits, unless your Spirit can do the writing, unless your Spirit can raise me up in order to put the words in my mouth, in order to turn back to you, Father, in a relational way and say, 'Abba Father,' we would have no relationship. Father, we pray that you would have mercy upon our little congregation here in Castle Rock. Send your Spirit upon us that we would respond, that there would be bold preaching everywhere. We pray that even as in the book of Acts we would have families going everywhere preaching the Word of God boldly. We pray there would be no embarrassment, no shame, but only faith, courage, boldness in the communication of your Word. We pray that as several of us go to Mexico that you would enable us to preach with boldness. Oh, Father, we have an opportunity to preach to the outlaws. We pray that in their face with guns pointed at us, we would be willing, oh God, I pray, we would be willing to raise up the truth of God's Word with faith that Jesus Christ is our Savior, Jesus Christ is our resurrection light and these men need to fear the true and living God and fall on the knees and serve Jesus Christ as Lord and King. Father, give us the words to say. Father, in the most difficult scenarios we could possibly face in Mexico, give us the words to say that we might be the men who can communicate your words by your Spirit. Make us bold preachers every one in Jesus' name. Amen.