

## THE FERVOR OF MINISTRY

2 Corinthians 3: 3-6

Ezekiel 36: 23-30

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3 being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

4 Such confidence we have through Christ toward God.

5 Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God,

6 *who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*

### Religious Form or Relational Faith

This whole teaching can be brought down to one simple principle; religion that's ritual and rules, or relationship that's real and rich. Paul puts it this way: *"written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts."* NAS

You can find two things going on in Jesus ministry. Those that were the religious group who were always putting Jesus to the test, THEIR test, and those that were desperate for restoration, renewal and relationship. Those looking to trick Him, (always the religious group) and those who were desperate for HIM. Even the "in crowd in the religious group had to sneak around to see Him ( e.g. Nicodemus). Strange isn't it? There were those living by the law and they had it memorized man. It was always the outward thing they were into. *Taking communion meant more than communion. The baptismal certificate meant more than the baptism. Knowing the catechism, meant more than knowing the Christ. The approval of the church meant more than the approval of their Christ.* If you want evidence of this just read the book of John. The whole book. You will see this attitude of religion or relationship everywhere, and Christ really brings it out. He doesn't cover it over in any way. If the church is an organization, then it is about living up to the organizational expectations, which in itself is not evil. Where the problem begins is when the church becomes a living organism that swallows up it's world in action and love. Allow me to go back to an illustration from the past:

### ILLUS: See Only Christ

*You are familiar, no doubt, with one of the most famous paintings ever done by any artist: The Last Supper by Leonardo da Vinci, that classic portrayal of Christ and the twelve apostles at the table. Many students of art history believe that the painting, when first created, was somewhat different from the version which we now see. There was initially, it is believed, an exquisite lace border on the tablecloth. When, immediately upon completion, da Vinci invited a group of art students to view his masterpiece, they were immensely impressed by the delicate design of that lacework. They studied it intensely and praised it highly. Upon seeing the reaction of these young men, the artist took up a brush, dipped it, and made a few long strokes across the canvas, obliterating the lace. Then, with uncontrollable feeling, he shouted, "Now, you fools, look at the face of Christ!" (Source unknown)*

DO YOU SEE WHAT'S GOING ON? IT'S THE LACE NOT THE FACE THEY ARE INTERESTED IN. DETAILS WITHOUT DEPTH!!! This kind of stuff can kill a man. You can heal on the wrong day and they want to kill you, you can eat with the wrong people, and they want to kill you, you can pick corn because you are hungry, and they want to kill you. It's breaking the rules and it says right here in our church handbook... yada, yada, yada! We are not against rules, they just get so out of hand and they become goddesses instead of guides.

### THE REMEDY

How are we going to live this manifested life out? How are we going to pull this off. Paul presents both the

problem and the solution in one verse from our text: **2 Cor. 3:5** **Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God.**

**Let's look back in the Old Testament** to see what God says about the problem and the solution.

### **Ezekiel 36: 23-30**

23 "I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD," declares the Lord GOD, "when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight.

24 "For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land.

25 "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

26 "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

27 "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and **you will be careful** to observe My ordinances.

28 "**You will live** in the land that I gave to your forefathers; **so you will be My people**, and I will be your God.

29 "Moreover, I will save you from all your uncleanness; and I will call for the grain and multiply it, and I will not bring a famine on you.

30 "I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field, so that you will not receive again the disgrace of famine among the nations. (NASB). (I encourage you to read this in the Message Bible).

**FIRST:** Notice the "I will's". What is it that you are doing in this thing anyway? *Allowing, responding, not resisting!!!* **SECOND:** Notice especially He gives the new heart. The whole spectrum of our emotions are in this **Hebrew word for heart**. The innermost thoughts, the mind-set, the feelings, yes the feelings!! **THIRD:** Notice HE has to put a **new spirit** (small s) in you and *then* He gives you His Spirit (large s). **FOURTH:** Notice He will cause you to walk in His statutes. **Notice HE** removes the old heart of stone! What do you have to do? *Allow, respond, not resist.*

### **CONCLUSION**

Friends, wouldn't it be something wonderful if you could move from *expectations and fear, to excitement and faith?* To go from *have to... to WANT to?* To go from your *inadequacy to His adequacy?* You know Moses was given Ten Commandments from God. The first four were directly related to our relationship with God, the next six were our relationships with others. The Hebrew people developed 613 laws all related in some way to those Ten commandments. Then Jesus Came along and brought it all down to Two Commandments: One from Deuteronomy 6:5 and the other from Leviticus 19:18. Jesus quotes them in Matthew 22: 35-40. *One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And He said to him, " 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' "This is the great and foremost commandment. "The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' " On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."*

Then Jesus added a new commandment in John 13:34 *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another."*

**THINK** about it...three rules left and they all have to do with love, which is a relationship thing, not a religious ritual thing.

1. Where do I feel adequate? Inadequate?
2. Where might my heart be a little "stoney"?
3. If I could name one place where the "Spirit's life" is operating best, where would it be?

## 12-05-04 THE FERVOR MINISTRY CONTINUED (from 11/28/04)

(A hot dish of 2 Cor. 2: 14-17, 3: 1-6 and Ezekiel 36: 23-30)

### THE REALITY

I Had an interesting week. How about you? Oh yes, interesting describes a lot doesn't it? Could be really good, bad, or average. I ran into a lot of people that fit into all those categories. Truthfully, I don't feel like writing this out. I'm not much into it. I am *really* into Him, as I reflect on the week, but I am much more a thinker and reflector than writer. I am aware that some of you are absolutely excited about the last couple of months of messages from the 7 or 8 verses we have covered. Some are probably saying to one another, "when can we get to more of the Bible, I'm really, really done with this passage". Maybe that's the advantage and disadvantage of preaching. I get to share the excitement of the process God is doing in me, or conversely, sometimes it's not where you are at, and you are stuck in my process. I am convinced however, I could not go on from this study. Had the new sermon ready, at least a great title, and a few more verses. Really intended to fly along a little faster, I can't. Sorry, I can't. God put all kinds of people in front of me this week that kept me absorbed in living letters, epistles, and fragrances. I saw His face in a number of places. I heard His voice behind the lip syncing of others. In fact, I'm going to leave this office now, go see my grand-kids that I left with Joy....to do ministry, and try to be more of a living letter to them. They see Grandpa preaching, but that will not really be the thing that convinces them of Jesus. Maybe Jesus needs to hold them on His lap tonight, just maybe Grandpa is missing ministry while he is on the way to minister. Read something like that once in the Bible... **Luke 10: 25-37.**

If I get a chance to work on this some more, I will. Otherwise you see the scriptures up at the top?? Bathe in those. Oh, by the way, Where might there be areas in your life where your good, necessary duties are obscuring the manifestation of Christ be in your world?

Well, I am back and let me tell you just a few places where I saw living letters, epistles of Christ, as well as being confronted with the opportunities to have Christ's aroma in me.

- 1.) I heard Him and saw Him in a man I ran into at breakfast this week. Wow, has God been moving in Him.
- 2.) I heard Him in the voice of a mother who stepped in to help two families with their children this week.
- 3.) I saw Him in the eyes of a young man who is really feeling hopeless...
- 4.) I saw Him in the eyes and heard Him in the pain of a young woman in the hospital...
- 5.) I had Him speak to me through a wonderful couple who challenged my thinking... and presented ministry opportunities. This young lady talked about a "gift of desire".. I'm contemplating that one a lot. Her

husband spoke softly and gently about answered prayer and reaching others. Not academics, Jesus.

6.) I heard about Him at a home this week. Jesus came to the highway in Brainerd, MN.

7). Wow, He was in Cloquet the next day. Home group, where “gifts of desire” are developing in people who

at a lightening pace. The growth and hunger is exhilarating.

8.) I saw Him in a smiling woman who brought a check in to help others, she didn't care where it went, just give it to someone for Jesus.

9. I watched Him dance at East Central High School.

10. And He's in the eyes of grandchildren building towers of blocks, and games of domination.

I see Him everywhere. His hopes, His dreams, His love, His life and death, His desire to help, heal, save, and be intimate with “whosoever will”. I can hardly stand His presence sometimes. I feel I am suddenly going to be swept away to another dimension. I feel this container called Sam can't hold the thrill of Him. I want this for everyone. I want to find the way, the formula, the steps for each one to feel the joy of Godly obsession. Of feeling like a man who has just felt the first rush from a new love affair, while at the same time sensing the abiding security that only a long term love relationship and companionship can afford. But perhaps there is no one formula, perhaps it's just the finger of God in His time, writing on my heart...perhaps.

*2Co 2:14 And I got it, thank God! In the Messiah, in Christ, God leads us from place to place in one perpetual victory parade. Through us, he brings knowledge of Christ. Everywhere we go, people breathe in the exquisite fragrance.*

*2Co 2:15 Because of Christ, we give off a sweet scent rising to God, which is recognized by those on the way of salvation--an aroma redolent with life.*

*2Co 2:16 But those on the way to destruction treat us more like the stench from a rotting corpse. This is a terrific responsibility. Is anyone competent to take it on? ( The Message)*

*2Co 3:3 Christ himself wrote it--not with ink, but with God's living Spirit; not chiseled into stone, but carved into human lives--and we publish it.*

*2Co 3:4 We couldn't be more sure of ourselves in this--that you, written by Christ himself for God, are our letter of recommendation.*

*2Co 3:5 We wouldn't think of writing this kind of letter about ourselves. Only God can write such a letter.*

*2Co 3:6 His letter authorizes us to help carry out this new plan of action. The plan wasn't written out with ink on paper, with pages and pages of legal footnotes, killing your spirit. It's written with Spirit on spirit, his life on our lives! 2Co 2:14 And I got it, thank God! In the Messiah, in Christ, God leads us from place to place in one perpetual victory parade. Through us, he brings knowledge of Christ. Everywhere we go, people breathe in the exquisite fragrance.*

*( The Message)*

*Ezekiel 36: 26 "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (NASB)*

1. If desiring you with all my heart is a gift Jesus...would you give me that gift this Christmas?
2. Where are you appearing during this season...where are you being birthed Jesus?
3. If I could give one gift to you, what would please you the most?
4. Is it possible I could sing carols, read poems, wrap gifts, read the Christmas story, and it would all be religious, but not **TO** you just **About you?**