

From The Pulpit Of



Authentic Ministry

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Series: 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 3:1-6

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Nathan Carter

Text

3 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you? 2 You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. 3 And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered 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 is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. 5 Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, 6 who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Introduction

Tokichi Ishii was a hardened murderer who was hanged for his crimes in Japan in 1918. “He had been sent to prison more than twenty times and was [notorious] for being as cruel as a tiger. On one occasion, after attacking a prison official, he was gagged and bound and his body suspended in such a way that his toes barely reached the ground. But [even then] he stubbornly refused to say he was sorry for what he had done.

“Just before being sentenced to death, Tokichi was sent a New Testament by two Christian missionaries, Miss West and Miss McDonald. After a visit from Miss West, he began to read the story of Jesus’s trial and execution. His attention was riveted by the sentence, ‘And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”’ (Luke 23:34).”

Here’s how Tokichi describes what happened in that moment:

I stopped: I was stabbed to the heart, as if by a five-inch nail. What did the verse reveal to me? Shall I call it the love of the heart of Christ? Shall I call it His compassion? I do not know what to call it. I only know that with an unspeakably grateful heart I believed.¹

Now, we can understand that Tokichi wasn’t literally stabbed in his chest with a pointy metal object. He’s speaking metaphorically, as we must when describing these kinds of phenomena. But something happened. What was it? Well, the Word of God is the five-inch nail. Here it was a verse revealing the merciful heart of Christ spoken from the Cross (Lk. 23:34). But what drove that truth deep down into Tokichi’s inner being and opened him up to the love of God? That is the power of the Holy Spirit. The sword of the Spirit is able to pierce all the way into the depths of the soul (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12).

What happened to Tokichi is what happened to 3,000 people at once on the day of Pentecost when Peter preached the Word and “when they heard... they were cut to the heart” and cried out to God in faith for his mercy (Acts 2:37). It’s also what happened to the Thessalonians when Paul preached the gospel to them and it came “not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” (1Thess. 1:5). That, my friends, is the mysterious, wonderful working of the Holy Spirit, always through the truth of God’s Word, but taking that truth and thrusting it into the very core of your inner being, leaving you profoundly and forever affected.

It’s happened over and over again throughout history. Have you ever experienced it? Do you know anything of what I’m talking about? Have you experienced the heart penetrating work of the Holy Spirit? Personally? Have you observed it in others? That’s what we’re going to be dealing with today as we look at 2 Corinthians 3:1-6. In short, what we’re going to see is just this: **authentic Christian ministry is dependent on the Holy Spirit.**

Let’s pray...

You can organize what I’m about to say under three headings, three words that come from this passage: commendation, confidence, and covenant. Commendation, confidence, and covenant.

Commendation

First, let’s look at this concept of commendation. Paul begins ch. 3 – “Are we beginning to *commend* ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of *recommendation* to you, or from you?”

This week I was looking for a book to help me on a particular theological topic. A friend suggested one to me. I had never heard of it. I had never heard of the author. But because my friend, who I trust, recommended it, I checked it out. And on the back cover of the book there were endorsements – blurbs written by well-known authors that I was familiar with. Because of these reviews I bought the book. It’s a common and understandable practice to rely on commendations.

Something similar happened in the first century religious landscape. There were itinerant preachers traveling from town to town. And in a world without the internet, without email or text, how would you vet a stranger? They needed letters of recommendation. We still use these for college and job applications today. Someone else with some recognized credibility will vouch for somebody else. It makes sense and is wise.

The Apostle Paul did this type of thing for other people. He commends Timothy in 1 Corinthians 16:10-11, Titus in 2 Corinthians 8:22ff, Phoebe in Romans 16:1-2, Timothy and Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:19-30, and in some ways the whole book of Philemon is a letter of recommendation. So he’s not opposed to the idea in principle.

And then sometimes when you’re first meeting people, you may have to commend yourself. You’ve all done this. And you see it all the time. Just this week, I met with someone I had never met before. He emailed me out of the blue a few weeks ago to let me know he was going to be in town. I’m generally leery on these kinds of things, but this one for some reason seemed like it was worth a try. He said he worked

with Baptist associations on helping churches with revitalization. So he came into my office and we sat down and started to size each other up – “Tell me about your ministry? Where did you go to school? Where have you worked? What books have you read? Who do you know?” I tried not to make it an inquisition, but he kind of had to commend himself to me, because I didn’t know him from Adam. And he did a good job. He wasn’t insecure or boastful. His credentials checked out and we had an encouraging conversation that was helpful. He wasn’t trying to get something from me or sell me something.

Now, some self-commendation is slimy. There’s this billboard that’s by the exit we take to come home from visiting my parents in Indiana. It has to have been there for at least 10 years I would guess. It has this selfie picture of a man with big hair and a smoldering look advertising his own tax accounting firm. “IRS problems? Call me?” And it has his name and number. It must work for some people because he can afford to still have the sign up. But I would never call him in a million years. It smacks to me of extreme narcissism. It’s an icky form of commending oneself.

So what is going on here in this passage of 2 Corinthians 3? Paul had planted this church in Corinth. He lived there for at least a year and a half. They knew him. He knew them. He stayed in touch with them, writing back and forth, running in to people from there in other cities and receiving reports. He sent people to visit them. He paid them visits. And now some of the members of the Corinthian church were questioning Paul’s credentials!? They thought maybe that he wasn’t legit, wasn’t someone they should pay attention to. What!

When Paul says here – “Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you?” – the ‘we’ is Paul and his close associate, Timothy (cf. 1:1). And it’s like he’s saying, “We seem to need to go through the process of establishing our relationship again.”² “[T]hey have forced him to act like he needs to go through the process of self-recommendation again”³ or produce some papers from someone else to prove his bona fides. They’re acting like it’s the first week of freshman year of college all over again and they’re just getting to know each other. It must have been very hurtful to Paul.

But what is Paul’s answer to this crazy scenario? He doesn’t appeal to his endorsement by the Apostle Peter (cf. Gal. 2:9). He doesn’t produce some diploma or resume. What does he say? He says, “You yourselves are our letter of recommendation.” As someone has put it, Paul’s credentials “are not on paper but in persons.”⁴ The very presence of the church in Corinth is proof-positive of the authenticity of Paul’s ministry. He doesn’t need anything else to prove to them that he is legit. The fact that they exist is evidence that Paul is an authentic Christian minister. Otherwise, how do they explain that they came to be a Christian church?

What’s more, Paul loves them dearly. If they themselves are the letter of recommendation, the parchment on which the letter is written is Paul’s (and Timothy’s) heart. He carries them with him wherever he goes – thinking about them and caring for them and praying for them and enjoying the memories and the continued fellowship he has with them.

And Paul tells everyone all about the Corinthian church, like a proud papa showing pictures of his child on his phone to everyone at work. “You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all.” It’s as if

Paul was saying, “I don’t need you to write me an endorsement on First Corinthian Church letterhead to take to others. Your very reality demonstrates my validity and I carry you in my heart everywhere I go, telling others of what happened through my ministry there in Corinth.”

And what exactly did happen through Paul’s work in Corinth? It wasn’t a mighty work of Paul. It was a mighty work of the Holy Spirit. Flip back with me to 1 Corinthians 2. Listen to Paul’s account of his initial ministry in Corinth –

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

The commendation of Paul’s ministry is not his skill, his rhetorical ability, his charisma, his connections, his education... it is the Holy Spirit’s work through him to create faith in the Corinthians and supernaturally establish the Corinthian church. That’s what commends him.

And so come back now to 2 Corinthians chapter 3, verse 3. Paul says, “And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered 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.” They themselves represent Paul’s letter of commendation to them and to anyone else because they are “from Christ,” meaning: Jesus caused them to be. How? By the power of the Spirit of the living God. Where did this occur? In human hearts. Paul simply spoke the message of the Cross and the Spirit drove that like a five-inch nail down into their hearts and made them new, knit them together, brought a church miraculously into existence. And that church, the Corinthian church, is greatest commendation Paul could have, the very proof that God was at work in Paul. **Authentic Christian ministry is dependent on the Holy Spirit.**

This, I believe, has implications for the self-authenticating nature of Scripture. The recorded teaching of Apostles like Paul shows itself to be the Word of God by the effect that it has and the ring of truth it produces in regenerate hearts.

But there’s also application here for how we think about evaluating someone’s ministry. Seminary degrees or program certificates or references can be helpful to some extent. But the proof of the pudding is in the eating. What really commends the authenticity of a minister is the power of the Spirit at work through his or her sharing of the Word. You can have all these accolades and qualifications, but what really matters is: are people helped by you when you teach God’s Word? Are you speaking God’s truth from the heart and to the heart? And does it strike a chord in somebody? Does God work through you to create and grow and sustain faith? That is the work of the Spirit and that is the greatest commendation there can be.

Have you benefited from the ministry of people like this? Have you ever experienced being used like this... in evangelism... in discipleship...? In other words,

are you a letter commending someone else's ministry? And do you have living letters in your life displaying God's power at work in you? Isn't that a cool feeling?

Confidence

So commendation – that's the first concept. The second organizing word that I want to camp out on for a bit is confidence. Paul says in v. 4 – “Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God.” If it's the Spirit's work through someone that commends that person, not their achievements and endorsements and human credentials, then anyone can have great confidence in Christ before God, even if they feel totally inadequate. In fact, feeling totally inadequate, unqualified, and incompetent in and of yourself is the perfect recipe for a potent ministry. **Authentic Christian ministry is dependent on the Holy Spirit**, not self-dependent, self-sufficient.

In the next verse Paul says – “Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God.” This reflects someone who truly doesn't find his legitimacy in any of his own abilities. He's not feeling good because of any of his accomplishments. He's completely dependent on God's Spirit to work through him. And this gives him a great boldness and freedom. It's so nerve-wracking to have to perform to prove yourself... to God... or to others. But when you acknowledge your innate insufficiency and look to God for everything, you can actually have great confidence.

This is how it works in salvation. As long as you're trying to defend yourself and recommend yourself to God by your own works and building your *curriculum vitae*, you will always have the nagging feeling that you're not enough. And it's true. You're not good enough, hard-working enough, capable enough. But when you acknowledge your sin and moral deficiency and throw yourself entirely on Christ's mercy and let his death alone atone for your sins and let his perfect, spotless, record of righteousness alone stand for you before a holy God, then you can have 100% confidence before God that he has no wrath for you (that was all exhausted on Christ on the Cross) and he has only complete and total pleasure in you (that was impeccably and irreversibly attained for you in Christ's perfect life). Total confidence in your salvation can only come from eschewing all self-righteousness and finding your sufficiency solely from God.

And this is also how it works in ministry after you've been saved. As long as you're trying to make stuff happen in your own strength, prove to God and to others that you're special, thinking that your ministry success is dependent on you and your skill and effort and intelligence and diligence you will be insecure and either depressed by your lack of success or puffed up by perceived success and yet constantly driven to maintain it. But if you acknowledge your weakness and limitedness and inability on your own to understand God's Word much less make other people understand it, your impotence to change people's hearts... then the Holy Spirit's power will flow through you and use you and give you great joy without you taking any credit.

Hudson Taylor was a missionary from England to China in the 1800s. His pioneering work opened up the inland of China to the gospel and left behind an immeasurable impact that is still being felt today. Here's what he said – “God chose me because I was weak enough. God does not do his work by large committees. He trains somebody to be quiet enough, and little enough, and then uses him.”⁵ Doesn't that sound like Paul and Gideon and Isaiah and Jehoshaphat and so many others?

It's when we come to the end of ourselves, when we stop trusting in our own resources, when we admit our weaknesses and stop pretending that we're smart, that we're capable... when we stop relying on our resume, our education, our experience, and just depend on the Spirit, that powerful things happen. When we stop trying to prop up our confidence by looking to ourselves and instead look desperately to God and his power, then we can have great confidence in him.

A story from Billy Graham's ministry is another example. He was a simple farm boy from North Carolina, and yet God used him in the 20th century in amazing ways to preach the gospel to millions of people. He never earned a PhD, though he did receive several honorary doctorates. But in 1955 he was invited to preach at Cambridge University. There were letters published in the papers that laughed at this idea. He's was just a country bumpkin from America. How could he hold his own at one of the world's greatest centers of learning? His biographer William Martin wrote:

Graham, ever insecure about his lack of advanced theological education, dreaded the meetings and feared that a poor showing might do serious harm to his ministry and affect 'which way the tide will turn in Britain.' Had he been able to do so without a complete loss of face, he would have cancelled the meetings or persuaded some better-qualified man to replace him.⁶

Billy wrote to his friend John Stott:

I have been deeply concerned and in much thought about our Cambridge mission this autumn.... I do not know that I have ever felt more inadequate and totally unprepared for a mission. As I think over the possibility for messages, I realize how shallow and weak my presentations are. In fact, I was so overwhelmed with my unpreparedness that I almost decided to cancel my appearance, but because plans have gone so far perhaps it is best to go through with it.... [I]t is my prayer that I shall come in the demonstration and power of the Holy Spirit.⁷

One of Billy's friends, Hugh Gough, heard how he was feeling and wrote him a letter of encouragement:

I can well understand your feelings of apprehension about Cambridge, but Billy do not worry. God has opened up the way so wonderfully & has called you to it & so all will be well.... Do not regard these men as 'intellectuals.' Appeal to their conscience. They are sinners, needing a Savior. Conviction of sin, not intellectual persuasion, is the need. So many preachers fail at this point when they speak to university men. So, Billy, keep to the wonderful clear simple message God has qualified you to preach.⁸

"In spite of his [friend's] admonition," Billy recounted, "I worked as diligently as I knew how to put the Gospel into an intellectual framework in eight messages."⁹ "For

the first three nights of the public meetings... I felt as if I were in a straightjacket on the platform, and very little happened.... One-fourth of the student body attended each evening, listening intently, but there seemed to be little spiritual impact.

“Then,” Billy explains, “on my knees with a deep sense of failure, inadequacy, and helplessness, I turned to God. My gift, such as it was, was not to present the intellectual side of the Gospel. I knew that. What those students needed was a clear understanding of the simple but profound truths of the Gospel: our separation from God because of sin; Christ’s provision of forgiveness and new life; and our hope because of Him.

“Finally, on Wednesday night, I threw away my prepared address and preached a simple Gospel message on the meaning of the Cross of Christ. That night more than 400 Cambridge students stayed behind to make their commitment to Christ.”¹⁰ Similar things happened the rest of the week. Afterward John Stott wrote to his praying church – “History will begin to show, but only eternity will finally reveal, how much was accomplished during that week.”¹¹

Authentic Christian ministry is *dependent on the Holy Spirit*, not yourself or other methods. And such dependence produces great confidence. It’s not up to you! It’s God’s work. And he can do anything!

Covenant

“Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant.” The third word I want to highlight in this text is the word covenant. There’s a lot to this word. And Paul will elaborate more in the verses to come. But I want you to see here how he’s alluding to the promises of a new covenant, a new set of operating principles governing God’s relationship with his people.

He started to hint at this back at the end of v. 3, contrasting tablets of stone vs. tablets of human hearts. The old covenant, the Mosaic Law, was summarized by the Ten Commandments and delivered on tablets of stone. Do this. Don’t do this. They were good and true rules that reflected God’s character, but they were external demands without any power by themselves to produce obedience. In fact, the old covenant just highlighted human disobedience and pointed out the need for something more.

And in Jeremiah 31 God promises – “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jer. 31:31-34).

In other places, like Ezekiel 36:26-27, this new covenant is explicitly tied to the internal work of the Holy Spirit – “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a

heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”

This is what Paul has in mind when he says that God “has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but he Spirit gives life.” The letter of the Law by itself just produces death. It just gives you moral clarity but no spiritual power which leaves you aware of your guilt. But under the new covenant instituted in Christ’s blood there is full and final forgiveness of sins and the power and presence of the Holy Spirit to actually change you from the inside out as you live in the freedom of that salvation. The new covenant is all about the Spirit.

Someone has articulated it this way – “A vine does not produce grapes by Act of Parliament; they are the fruit of the vine’s own life; so the conduct which conforms to the standard of the Kingdom is not produced by any demand, not even God’s, but it is the fruit of that divine nature that God gives as the result of what he has done in and by Christ.”¹² This Spirit gets down deep into our spirits and does heart work, uniting us to Christ by faith and thereby giving us a new life, eternal life, a boundless energy welling up from within.

That’s what the Corinthians had experienced through Paul’s ministry. As someone has put it, “The dramatic change in their lives did not arise from the imposition of a code of morality, but from the Spirit of God arising from Paul’s preaching of the Son of God among them (1:18-22; 5:5; 13:14; cf. 11:4).”¹³ Paul was a minister of the New Covenant. **Authentic Christian ministry is dependent on the *Holy Spirit*.**

Application

So we’ve looked at the concept of commendations – Paul’s ultimate **authentication** was the Holy Spirit’s effect on the Corinthians themselves through his ministry. We’ve looked at the concept of confidence – Paul’s ultimate confidence came not in his own abilities of sufficiency, but in his **dependency** on the Holy Spirit. And then we’ve looked at this concept of covenant, specifically the NEW covenant, which is all about the work of the *Holy Spirit*.

Let me close with three applications:

1.) First, a question: Have you experienced the Holy Spirit yourself? *What does that mean? I don’t know.* Well, have you ever gotten an insight? Have you ever felt a sense of wonder or gotten some self-awareness? Do you know the emotions of fear or relief or joy or love or calm? Have you ever experienced motivation? Of course you have! That’s part of being human and having a soul or a spirit.

Well, the Holy Spirit operates in that realm. He gives you insight, not into the things of mathematics, but into the things of God.

The Holy Spirit gives you not just a vague, numinous feeling of awe and wonder, but connects that bigness or beauty perceived in nature back to nature’s Creator and cause you to ponder God’s infinitude and holiness.

The Holy Spirit doesn’t just give you a self-awareness that you should be better, a feeling of guilt that you’ve broken some rule and need to try harder. He brings genuine conviction of sin as a relational disruption with God – you’ve done these things to God, offended him, and so you turn to him seeking reconciliation.

The Holy Spirit gives you not just a natural fear of pain, but a holy fear of God that takes him seriously.

He gives you not just a temporary relief of a minor discomfort; he gives you profound relief from an awareness of God's wrath.

He produces in you not just a fleeting joy at circumstances ultimately inconsequential, but a pure joy in God himself, reconciled to you in Christ – sins cancelled, righteousness credited, right relationship with God restored. Tokichi Ishii wrote after his conversion, awaiting his just sentence of death – “Locked up in this prison cell six feet by nine in size I am infinitely happier than I was in the days of my sinning when I did not know God. Day and night... I am talking with Jesus Christ.”¹⁴

He gives you a genuine love for God that issues forth in a love for others that wants them to find their greatest joy in God.

The Holy Spirit gives you not just a generic calm, but an abiding peace that comes from knowing God's love and trusting his control of the future.

The Holy Spirit doesn't just motivate you like those who are driven for money or fame or a beach bod – he gives you a genuine passion to live for the glory of God.

William Tyndale, early translator of the Bible to English in the 1500s, described the work of the Holy Spirit this way – “For when Christ is preached, and the promises which God hath made in Christ are believed [by the power of the Holy Spirit], the Spirit entereth the heart, and looseth the heart, and giveth lust to do the law, and maketh the law a lively thing in the heart.”¹⁵ Have you experienced that? Are you part of the New Covenant? Are you born again of the Spirit through the Word? Have you sensed any movement of the Holy Spirit in your spirit, even now as we've been looking at this passage of Scripture?

2.) The second application to note from this passage about the Holy Spirit is that we have a need for the continuing experience of the Holy Spirit. Step back and think about what is happening in this passage? Paul is saying that the Corinthians are a letter from Christ, their faith demonstrates the work of the Holy Spirit in them via Paul's ministry. But he's writing them, continuing to minister to them, because they are currently struggling. They are walking in the flesh, not the Spirit by and large. They need a fresh encounter with the Spirit. As do we, constantly.

Philip Hughes observes – “The presence of the eternal age of Christ's kingdom is discernible, even amid the shadows of our fallen and temporal world, in the redeeming and sanctifying operation of the Sovereign Spirit.”¹⁶ We can see the obvious effects of the Spirit in the existence of this church. But we still have need for more. We still live in the shadows of this fallen, temporal world. We need to keep in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25), sow to the Spirit (Gal. 6:8), as Paul writes to the Galatian church. There's much that could be said on this, but here's just one specific encouragement from Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus. Look back in the bulletin at the CALL TO WORSHIP for today. Paul says, “[B]e filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.” Singing the truth of God's Word is a great means that the Spirit uses to re-awaken our hearts to spiritual realities. So as we get ready to sing again, I want to encourage you to really sing. Look at the person that is on the farthest corner of the room from you and sing to

him or her so as to be heard clearly by him or her. Get into it and see if in the singing the Spirit does something in you.

3.) And the third application I'll leave you with is: Do you rely on the Holy Spirit in your evangelism and ministry? Do you feel totally inept at it, and yet still seek to do it, depending on the power of the Holy Spirit to use you to bring conviction and encouragement and comfort and growth? Don't get psyched out and think you have to be a genius to share the good news with a non-believer or a Bible college grad to do some spiritual good to a brother or sister in the church. Stop trying to be sufficient and just be dependent and see what the Lord will do.

The Lord's Table

In addition to singing, another means of grace where the Spirit of God is very active is in the eating and drinking of bread and wine, signifying to our souls the body and blood of Christ, given for us. There's that passage in Luke 24 right in the flurry of activity after the resurrection when Jesus himself comes and walks with two forlorn disciples with their heads down. He explains the Scriptures concerning himself and then he breaks bread with them. And in that moment at the table "their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And.... [t]hey said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?.... Then they told [the others] what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread."

These were already disciples. Don't come take this bread and wine and eat this meal thinking that it will make you into a believer if you're not already. This is for those who are already marked out as disciples by baptism and belonging to the community of the church, either this church or a sister one. But if that's you, meditate on the Scriptures, pray, come forward as an act of faith, and let the Spirit work in you in the eating and singing...

Benediction

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope" (Rom. 15:13).

This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Immanuel Baptist Church, Chicago, Illinois, by Pastor Nathan Carter on Sunday morning, July 26, 2026. It is not meant to be a polished essay, but was written to be delivered orally. The mission of Immanuel is to be a multiplying community that enjoys and proclaims the Good News of Christ in the great city of Chicago.

End Notes:

- ¹ John Piper, *A Peculiar Glory: How the Christian Scriptures Reveal Their Complete Truthfulness* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 173-74.
- ² George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the NT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 183.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 184.
- ⁴ C.F.D. Moule, “2 Cor 3:18b,” in *Neues Testament und Geschichte*, ed. H. Baltensweiler and B. Reicke (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1972), 232.
- ⁵ Gail MacDonald, *High Call, High Privilege* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 222.
- ⁶ Qtd. in Timothy Dudley-Smith, *John Stott, the Making of a Leader* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 359.
- ⁷ Qtd. in Billy Graham, *Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (San Francisco: Harper, 1997), 257.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 258-59.
- ¹¹ Dudley-Smith, 365.
- ¹² S.H. Hooke, “What Is Christianity?” as qtd. in David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, NAC (Brentwood: B&H, 1999), 166.
- ¹³ Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 166.
- ¹⁴ Piper, 174.
- ¹⁵ William Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, in *Doctrinal Treatises* (Parker Society, Cambridge, 1849), 303.
- ¹⁶ Philip E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 89.