

2 Corinthians 3

Sunday 4/15/2012

SEC: Introduction: The Heart and Ministry

If you have your Bibles today, I want you to turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 3. Last week we met with the guys, and the week before that we met with the ladies. All of you who are going to be part of, or aspire to be part of, our new ministry will begin to really go to work on dealing with people and the problems and the issues in the Bible. Now you are in these teams. I have been watching them and listening, and some of you even gave your principles today. This is what we need, and this is what will really help.

We are going to enter into 2 Corinthians chapter 3 today, and I want to build this chapter, especially today. I want to give you a verse that is going to be something that you want to remember. It is something that probably is one of the central key verses, not only in your own life, but in dealing with people and helping people through their issues, which is what we are supposed to do. It is found in the book of Proverbs, and you are going to find the farther we get into this, the more time we spend in the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 4:23 is probably one of the key verses in the Bible that will help you really put it all and keep it all in perspective. It says this:

Proverbs 4:23

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

Everybody goes through issues in life. Issues in life can be good; issues in life can be bad. But the heart of those issues, and where they start, is in our own lives and our heart. Hence, we use the term a lot, "the heart of this" or "I feel this in my heart." Somebody says, "the heart of the problem." Every problem and issue that man has will go back to his heart. That is why when you start to deal with people and problems, this is where you have to fundamentally start. This is what you have to look at.

From this point on, there will be times that I will preach at you. There are times that I will have specific things that I want to say to you, and you can take it when I am preaching at you. But that is not today. Today, I want to take you on the inside, and I do not want to preach at you, but I am going to preach to you this morning. I want to show you some things you need to see as far as understanding this issue of issues coming out of your heart.

I want you to look at it today like you were at KU Medical Center, and you are a medical student, and you are in a class on anatomy. You are sitting there in a big round table room, and the guy is up there, and he is explaining to you. He is not preaching to you about human anatomy, but he is preaching at you. He is giving you what you need to understand, not giving it to you in a negative way. I am not going to do that today, though it may come off as negative to some of you, but that is not my intent. My intent is to take those of you from this point on who want to be part of this, and we talked about in those prayer groups what level you want to be able

to do that. I want to be able to now instruct you and to give you things that will help you, obviously with your own life first, but you have to get on the inside of this and you have to see.

You want to keep in mind wherever we go, whatever we do here, we want to keep in mind about the book of 2 Corinthians. The book of 2 Corinthians overall is our handbook of ministry. What we do not want to do, as many times when we get into each chapter, we see all the side material and all the material that we deal with that shows you other aspects, and it is easy to lose sight of the overall book. We do not want to do that. Its major theme is that it is the handbook of ministry.

In Chapter 3, even though it does not seem this way, this is why it is so important, tying it into Proverbs 4:23. Even in our book today, or as we study it today, it may not seem like it, but this is one of the most revealing chapters in all of the Bible on who we really are in Christ. This is why you have to learn it. This is what I call one of the great sleeper chapters. It does not appear to be anything other than what you read. When you begin to look deep inside it, you begin to see how this thing really is a key in looking on the inside of understanding where the issues of life that you need to prepare yourself to deal with in your own life first, and in the lives of other people, come from.

SEC: Foundational Principles for Ministry

We know that the book of Proverbs now is our key book. It is our principal book. We know that it is filled with biblical principles. It has been coming up on Thursday night a lot, and we have been trying to show you how to do that. But in dealing with people, you are going to find throughout the book of Proverbs, and pretty much throughout the Bible, you are going to find four key words keep popping up. These key words are what you need to get into your life and understanding is how you begin to understand and deal with the issues of life.

The first word you are going to find is one we talk about many, many times:

1. discernment. Discernment comes when you get into the Word of God and you begin to get principles in your life.
2. The second word you are going to find popping up is the word discretion.
3. The third word you are going to find is the word called prudence.
4. The fourth word you are going to find is to perceive something or perception.

Discernment, as we find it in the Bible, and I have told you this before, your ability to discern something is to see any circumstance or situation, not as it appears, but as it actually is.

Discretion then, once you have the discernment to see the problem, discretion is how you deal with the problem. Discretion will be a balance of grace and truth. It will be a balance of seeing the situation as it is—that is discernment. Then discretion is how you use the principles that you have to deal with this particular issue.

Then we have the word prudent. Prudence would always exercise caution in what you do.

Prudence is something that you do not just run into and do. Prudence is when you see a situation, you have to deal with a situation, you do not get on your white horse and just charge into it. You step back and you use caution in making sure you understand all of the issues and the facts. It is a pre-action mode, something that you do. To be pre-active is the word I like to use today. To

perceive something or perception is to think outside the situation. You will find in the Bible that many times when a guy is faced with a situation, the Bible says that he perceived. Perception is thinking outside of the situation.

These four words give you the ability to understand basically where people are at. We talk a lot about reading people. Reading people is very important. Reading people gives you all of the advantages of being able to understand how to help them better. You do not read them for a wrong motive; you read them for a good motive. Remember, the key to dealing with people in their issues is to identify the root problem as quickly as you can to get to that point to be able to solve it.

SEC: Ministry as the Proof of Life in Christ

Chapter 3, along with that, is also, I think, one of the most damning chapters in the Bible of who we should be. I told you that it was a sleeper chapter. It was a chapter that really helps define who we are as Christians. God's people like to live between the cracks many times. You need to know that when you deal with people, you deal with problems. Anytime you are dealing with issues that they have, it is because they really do not want to deal with it the way they need to. Yet they want to complain about their circumstances, but they really do not want to get in and fix what the problem is. They kind of live between the cracks, so to speak, between the white lines, as the phrase goes. They want to give the appearance of one thing when in reality it is usually something else. This chapter is a great tool. That is why I do not want to preach it to you today. I want to give it to you from the inside. I want you to be able to step back and look at me as somebody who is just trying to educate you on spiritual anatomy.

A doctor specializes in one thing, maybe internal medicine or cancer, or he deals with the eye, ears, and throat. Somebody else does the GI. Somebody else, they specialize in things. You have people who specialize with ears, their feet, your skin. No doctor can be really good at doing it all. This is where the difference is between the physical world of being a doctor and the spiritual world of being part of the Great Physician's team. You have to be good at it all. You have to understand body, soul, and spirit. You have to understand how they connect together. You have to understand how they define in the Bible. You have to understand how not only do they connect, but how one works off the other. When you have a problem with this one, how it affects the other ones. These are the things that you have to be. You have to become a specialist in everything when it comes to dealing with the issues of life that people get into. So I want you to look at it from that aspect today. This chapter is a great tool in helping us understand how to read people, being smarter than the problem, being able to use those words: discernment, discretion, how to have prudence in what you do, and to be able to perceive things.

I told you before that each chapter has a theme in itself, and this is very important. The Holy Spirit of God takes those themes and then builds on that theme as He puts the book together and teaches us ministry. I told you chapter one was a great defining chapter on the definition of ministry. Ministry that you and I are going to get into with people is not me standing up here and yelling for you to do right and get your life changed. Ministry is suffering with your people. Ministry is going through with your people what they are going through and helping them based

on the things that you have gone through in your own life. Now that you have learned how God is dealing with you, you are able to help somebody else. Ministry is suffering with the people that God has given you through their tough times and through the issues in life.

Chapter two, we saw, was the forgiving spirit of the ministry. I kind of told you that chapter one defines the ministry. Chapter two defines the minister. That is your ability to forgive and forget, your ability to not hold grudges, your ability to take things as they come, your ability as a minister to be able to not take things personal, realize who you are working for, realize that God has given you a job, and many times, just as they hated Him, they are going to hate you because you stand for the truth.

Then chapter three, where we are going today, deals with what should be the central theme of our lives as God's people. This really defines us, who we are, who we are in Christ. Chapter two defined us who we are as ministers. Chapter three defines us who we are in Christ. You are going to find in your life, if you pay attention to the Word of God and keep growing in the book, you are going to find that your whole Christian life is nothing more than a redefining process of everything in your life. In five, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, thirty years, you are going to find, if you look back, if you are doing what God wants you to do, that your Christian life and your growth in Christianity and the Word of God has been nothing more than a very fine-tuned defining process that you redefine yourself every day of your life. Every day of your life. So it is no wonder that chapter one defines the ministry, chapter two defines the minister, chapter three defines who we are in Christ.

Understanding, and this chapter also helps give us a better grasp and understanding of two great principles that we have talked about before.

- 1.) The first one is in 1 Corinthians 6:19, when it says: 1 Corinthians 6:19
What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? We are not our own. God saved us for a purpose. God saved us for a reason. You have heard me say it many, many times.
- 2.) The second great principle we talked about when we came through the book of Romans, in Romans chapter 14, verse 7, is the Bible simply says that in your life and my life, once we are saved: Romans 14:7
For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. Those two verses are really the key verses that this chapter is built around when we want to talk about it today.

Let us begin by reading here the first six verses. I would like to invite you to look down here in 2 Corinthians chapter 3, and I will begin reading in verse one.

2 Corinthians 3:1-6

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.

Father, we ask you today to help us unravel all of this. There are a number of men and women here today, Lord, that have decided to take that challenge to become able ministers, to be able to deal in people's lives, to be able to take the Word of God through discernment and discretion and all of the things that you give us to be able to read the problem, read the people, and to help them, to bring them to a place where their life, if they are unsaved, to bring them to a life in Christ, if they are already saved, to help them become fruitful in everything that they do. We pray, Father, you will take this time and use it. Take these young men and young ladies that have deep down in their hearts, and Lord, I can only imagine what the conversations must have been with many of them with you, because I know that many want to do right and they want to follow that. Lord, I pray you will help them, help me help them, help me not make this thing something that is unreachable, but something that is very tangible, very reachable, but it takes the things in their life that they have to have to be able to get there. Lord, at the end of the day, we pray you will raise up out of this church men and women who are committed to invest their life in the life of people, to help people get through their issues of life as you have helped us get through ours. We will thank you and praise you in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it. Amen.

This chapter deals with the proof of your life in Christ, which is simply your ministry. The word "ministry" is like the word "love." The word "love" is a word, but it is really not a look; it is a word that gets misused today. Really, love is not a word; love is an action. You can tell people you love them all the time, but many people tell God that. But the true definition of love is not in the word you use, but in the action that follows the word you use. Of course, ministry is the same way. Ministry is an action. We talk about ministry, but ministry is an action. Ministry is something you get involved in. It takes something of your life.

I have said this a thousand times, and you have heard me say it, that there is nowhere in the Bible does God ever recognize in the Word of God a child of God that is not involved in ministry. It is just not there. It is kind of like people get the idea when they get saved, "Should I get baptized or not?" People think, "Well, do I have to join a church? Should I join a church?" I have people all the time telling me, "You do not have to go to church to be a Christian." Well, that may be true, but here is the bottom line; here is the answer to those two questions. You come to the Book of Acts, which is the foundation of the church and certainly the foundation of church history. You know what I find? I find that every man, every woman that ever got saved got baptized. You do not find any place in there where somebody says, "Well, maybe not today, maybe I will wait until I understand it better." You do not find that. The model is clear in the New Testament, early

church: when they got saved, they got baptized. Now, they did not get baptized to be saved. You understand baptism has nothing to do with your salvation. They got baptized after they got saved because they understood the importance of it and what it identified them with.

At the same time, everybody in the Book of Acts that got saved, got baptized, joined the church. There was not any of this, "Well, I think you do not have to be a good Christian; you do not have to be a Christian to go to church." It was not that. The model was set. Just like you do not find anybody in the Book of Acts, in the foundation of the church, that when they got saved, they got baptized. And when they got saved, they joined the church, you do not find anybody in the early church in the Book of Acts that did not get involved in ministry. Ministry is a non-negotiable item, or should be, in your life and my life. Again, I am not preaching this at you; I am telling you, these are things you need to understand.

Ministry is defined as people. There is nothing more damning, and you need to realize this when you start to look at people and the issues of their lives. There is nothing more damaging to a child of God in his Christian life, nothing more telling as to his true condition, than a Christian who refuses to do what God has called him to do. Fundamentally, it breaks down the whole concept of God's plan. I have said it 100,000 times. You will say it 100,000 times when you get into the position where you are going to get. God saved you for a purpose. How many times have I looked at many of you one on one, and you will look at many people one on one, and you will tell them, "God saved you for a purpose. There is a reason that God saved you." It was not to fulfill your own goals, it was not to fill your own desires, it was not to pursue your own destiny, but rather to finish for Christ the work that He started, and then He went back to heaven and He left for us to finish.

Now I know getting to that point is a process. I understand that. I realize that when you get saved, you go through a process, and as you go through that process, you grow, and as you grow, you understand more, and then in time you become part of what God wants you to do, and you minister for God. The Bible tells us in Genesis chapter 4, a great story back there about Cain. The Bible says that God put a mark on Cain. God put a mark on Cain so everybody would know who Cain was. He did not want anybody hurting Cain. He put a mark on him, and He said, "Do not touch that guy," and He marked it. Then you get over into the New Testament with Paul over there in Romans 16:17, and he says, "Mark those who cause division among you." You go back in the Old Testament, or in the Tribulation period, and you find that the Antichrist puts a mark on people. Then you go back to Isaiah, and you will find that in the Tribulation, you never hear about this one, everybody wants to put the hype on the Antichrist. But God in the Tribulation marks His people. God is in the marking things. He is in the mark, and nothing marks us. Nothing marks us for who we are more than our willingness to be involved in ministry to people. It is just the way that it is. Nothing will define us as God's people more than the aspect of ministry. These are things that you need to get in your mind and understand because there is going to be some place down the line that you are dealing with people along those lines.

SEC: Building Blocks of Ministry

You can fake a lot of things in Christianity. You cannot fake true biblical ministry if you know what to look for. It is a thing where it is absolutely important. I will tell you why, because ministry contains the building blocks. Ministry contains the building blocks that you have to have for your own Christian life. When we talked about getting saved and building yourself in the Word of God and going through that process, there are building blocks to that. You do not just do it. There are building blocks. Just like when you built your house, there are stages it goes through. When you build a building, there are building blocks. Anything you build. When you were a kid, you got a Lincoln Log set. There were pieces in there, and you built things with it. In the Christian life, there are building blocks, and those building blocks are a necessity in our life to be a successful Christian. But what ministry does, it guarantees that these things get into your life.

You know the building blocks; we have talked about them many times:

- 1.) Dedication. Being dedicated to something. I see that in many of you, and I know that there are times you cannot go. Things come up, but overall, this church is absolutely dedicated to what we do at Restart and what we do down in the inner city. That is key, because for it to be successful, that is the way it needs to be.
- 2.) We talk about self-discipline. Self-discipline is an absolutely vital thing you have to have in your life to be a fruitful Christian, but you have to have it in ministry.
- 3.) Accountability.
- 4.) Responsibility.
- 5.) Sacrifice. We talked about it. We talked about you people that go down to Wichita. What a sacrifice. Sacrifice today. Giving up your time with your family, or the time you could. I know some of you people come to the place where you go down and Restart. You are down there until seven o'clock, and you have to go to work all night. You go home, catch an hour or two, and then you work all night long. That is a sacrifice. We do not put it up on the bulletin board. I know some of you go down there, and you work, and you are down there until we are done, and then you go home, and you have to get up at three o'clock in the morning to go to work. That is a sacrifice. That is a sacrifice. That is what it takes. It takes sacrifice.
- 6.) It takes long-suffering. These are the building blocks. These are what you get when you get into ministry that makes you. It does not just happen because you get a name tag and it says, "I am a minister," or "I am in this ministry." No, it is the building blocks that are in your life that build into this.

SEC: The Problem in Corinth and Paul's Defense

In this chapter here, a problem has arisen. You probably figured that out by just reading it here. Again, the Holy Spirit of God uses this issue for us to teach us and give us what we need to learn in understanding ministry from this book. Remember, I have told you that the difference between 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians, in 1 Corinthians they are totally carnal. They are not anybody who wants to do what is right. They are absolutely the most messed up, screwed up, fouled up church anywhere in the New Testament. Somewhere along the line, they want to do what is right, and now Paul writes them 2 Corinthians. Where chapter by chapter in 1 Corinthians, he deals with issues that they have to get straightened out, now in 2 Corinthians, chapter by chapter, he

deals with issues teaching them how to ministry, and it forms for us the great contrast. 2 Corinthians now becomes the great book that we have to teach us about ministry.

Here is the issue, and these are the things we need to learn today. I am going to take you inside now. I am going to show you the inside of this thing. I am not preaching at you; I am showing you, I am instructing you now as prospective physicians how this issue of life concept works. Here we are in 2 Corinthians. Everything is just great, is it not? No, it is not. Not everybody wants to do right now. The majority of the church does. Most of the people do. But there is an element in this church. It does not tell you who. It does not tell you how many. But I guarantee you that when you get in ministry, you are going to find this element in every church in Kansas City, every church in Missouri, and every church across this planet. It is just the way that it is. Not everybody wants to do right. Not everybody wants to minister. Not everybody wants to begin to minister. They are now questioning Paul's authority to say and to teach what he is teaching them about ministry. This in itself is a great lesson for us. This is a great lesson for you.

I have been in churches or around churches all my life. The people who always get disgruntled, the people who always will cause issues, will always, almost without exception, be the folks who do not or will not get on the inside and fulfill their obligation to God as far as ministering to people. The reason why that is is because they have nothing invested in it. It really does not mean anything to them. It is like you all, hopefully you older folks, you younger guys do not think about it, but you older guys, you probably in some place where you work have some kind of retirement, 401K or whatever, that you contribute to on a regular basis. You look around the world and you find yourself looking at the stock market, checking it out, making sure you are losing money, making money or whatever. You know why you do that? Maybe some of you younger guys do not care about it, do not even think about it, do not even know what the stock market is. You do not have an idea how it works. Older guys look around, you know why? The difference is that one person has most of their life invested in it, and the other ones do not have anything invested in it. When you do not have anything invested in anything, you do not care about it.

That is why so many people get disgruntled in churches, and it is always the people who have seen it all my life, and you need to learn it. It is always people who make no investment. It is always people who put nothing into it. Your mother used to tell you, "You only get out of something what you put into it." That is where it is at. So what happens then, and there are several reasons for this, what happens then? God saved you for a purpose; God saved you for a reason. He wanted you to do what He wanted you to do after He went back to heaven. We do not do it. So then we grieve the Holy Spirit of God. It has got to pop out somewhere, and it pops out in your being disgruntled. It pops out, and it is very obvious. Five thousand people can get saved. The church can be going crazy, a revival going on. All they see is a couple of stupid little negative things. You know why? They do not have anything invested in people. They do not have anything vested in people.

My father in the Lord told me many, many years ago, "It is always interesting to watch what upsets people, especially God's people. Always look and study what makes them mad or gets them upset." It is an incredible deal. A lot of times it is the exposure issue. If everybody wore a

red suit next Sunday, and one guy wore a green suit, you would stick out pretty well. Everybody else has got red on, you have got green. Many times that is what happens in churches. Everybody gets in ministry, and the ones that get in ministry, it is just by a natural process. The ones who do not want to be in ministry, they wind up with a red green suit on. They get exposed. People do not like to be exposed. Now that is one of the, well, I guess that is how you look at it. I was going to say it is one of the bad things of a small church. I think it is one of the good things of a small church. I guess it is how you look at it. It is hard to live between a crack in a small church. No place to hide. We all see each other's downside of things. When everybody, you get a small church and everybody gets on board and you have somebody out here wearing a green suit. I mean, it is just the way it is. So people have to come up with plan B. I mean, you cannot say, "Well, I do not want to do it. I do not like this," or "I do not want to do that," or "I do not." So you come up with plan B. Now your work schedule always conflicts, you see. You always have family issues. Your health issues.

I had a guy tell me one time, he said, "Well," he says, "I am going to get in ministry." He said, "I just have been really, really sick, and I just have been sick for a long, long, long, long time." He says, "I can hardly do anything." I said, "Wow, you have been off work all that long time?" "Oh, no, no, no, no, no. I go to work." Speaking of work, years ago, when I worked at the Hoover Company, we had this guy who was absolutely worthless. I cannot remember his first name, but his last name was Arbor Gas. You go, a guy with a last name named Arbor Gas has got to be a problem. This was a little run of a guy who thought he was 6 foot, 12 and 500 pounds. He was a worthless guy. He always would find excuses not to come to work. Where we worked at the Hoover Company, he had so many sick days, and then you got penalized, and personally you lost your job. But if somebody died in your family back then, that was always the excuse. This guy had more people die in his family than anybody I remember. It became a joke. He got so mad at me one time. I was picking at him because he had, they always gave him the raunchiest job because he could not be trusted. So when he did not show up, somebody else had to do the raunchy job. I had got that raunchy job. I was ticked myself. So the next morning when he does show up, and he finally shows up to work, everybody is kidding him about being off from work. I just stepped up and I had it. I just said, "Oh, do not be on him. His grandfather died again." He did not like it. We all find our excuses when we do not want to do something. Some of God's people never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity. That was my old buddy, Arbor Gas, wherever he may be. It is just the way that it is.

Now look at verse one here. A problem has arisen. I want to show you what we have got. This thing develops into a great study for you and me on the issues of life.

2 Corinthians 3:1

Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you?

You see, a problem started here. There is some group in this church or some people in this church that are asking Paul, if we could even get our head around this, to prove who he really is, and to show proof that he was sent by God to them. Now, the first thing I ask you is, "Come on." Do

you really think that people did not know who Paul was? You think everybody knew who Paul was. You think they did not know that he was God's man to the Gentile world? You have some people here, just like you are going to have people today who do not want to minister and do not appreciate the fact that the rest of the church is ministering. It is exposing the fact that they do not want to be part of it. I mean, the problem has to be Paul. It could not be them.

Paul's answer is a classic. I love it. I like Paul. I know him well. I have studied his life probably more than anybody in the Bible just because I know that in ministry he was up against what I am up against. I am not saying by any stretch of the imagination I am anywhere near where he was at in his relationship with God. But I will tell you what, him and I could be good buddies because we both at least agree on one thing and we have it in common. That is a no-nonsense attitude toward ministry and doing the Word of God. I love Paul's in-your-face style of ministry. You do not find that much today. Paul did not take anything off anybody, and he never cut the corners. When it was not right, it was right. One time over there in Galatians, he took on the whole church of Galatia. I remember one time he took on Peter because Peter did not do what was right down there. Peter is supposed to understand now that the gospel has gone to the Gentiles and put it in perspective for the Jews. Peter is kind of crawfishing down there and not doing what is right. You know what Paul says? Paul says, "I withstood him to his face." I like that. My kind of guy.

Paul's answer to them is a classic, and it shows his ability to get to the root of the issue. He does not waste any time. He says in verse 2:

2 Corinthians 3:2

Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men.

What a great answer. Let me translate it for you. Paul is saying, "You want a letter from me? You want a letter from me of who I am? You want me to bring in letters of recommendation from other churches, from other people? You want me to prove to you that I am the man that God says I am, and I am here by God to help you straighten this out, and you do not like it? So you now want proof that I am the man that God put in your life to help this church get along?" He says, "I will tell you what, go look in the mirror. You would not even be here. You would not even be saved. This church would not even be in existence if God did not bring me to put it in." Wow, what an answer. Now what? How do you respond to that? He put it right to him. He says, "You be my letter of commendation. You be it." You know what? "You want to ask me why, who I am, and should I be here and do all this? Why? Go look in the mirror, pal. You would be in a lake of fire if God did not send me down here to win you to Christ. This church would not even be in existence if God had not sent me down here to start it and then bring me back in to keep it straight." There is no response to it. "You be my letter of commendation." How stupid. God used me to get you saved, and God used me to start this church, and God used me to do all of this.

It is a simple fact, though, and this is the thing which you learn from this: People who do nothing for God will always have a problem with people who are doing something for God. You want to write that down. That is a real inside look. All my life I have had people that have worked with me in ministry all my life. All my life I have had other people who did not want to be in ministry pointing fingers at the people who were doing ministry and trying to tell me how rotten they

were. My life has been that way. You always have people who will make themselves look better when they are doing nothing at the expense of people who are doing something.

Over the years, let me tell you something. I have seen young Christians get destroyed. I have seen young Christians quit coming to church. I have seen young Christians lose their zeal for God because some godless, worthless Christian was always pointing out to them the people in a church that could help them, that could disciple them, that could bring them help. But because of their own lack of spirituality, they badmouth all the other Christians out there that could help them, all to make themselves look like they are something special. I would not let them walk my dog. I do not have a dog right now, but I would not let them walk if I had one. I have seen it all my life. My standard answer is this: "Oh, really? Really? Really? Well, I do not know what to tell you. I will just tell you this: I like what they are doing for the Lord a lot better than what you are not doing." Leave it at that. We all have our problems. We all have our issues. But people do not like it when they will not serve God; they do not like to be put on the spot by people that do serve God.

I think it was Eve. Eve was telling me yesterday or the other day, and I was getting my hair cut. Eve went out to someplace and wore her Old Path Baptist Temple shirt. Old Path shirt. Tell me what happened real loud. You wore that sweatshirt that you made yourself. You went to someplace. Where did you go? Hy-Vee in the milk section. Hy-Vee in the milk section. Now, there is a woman who knows where she was. What happened? James in the milk, he runs the milk section. James the milk man. James said, "What is up with your shirt? You going to church now?" Out of the clear blue sky? "What is up with your shirt?" And what did you say? "I said, 'Yeah, I am going for like two years.'" And what did he say? "Oh, so how old are you?" And I said, "31." And he said, "So you have been sinning for 29 years, and now for two years you have been going to church, you are going to give me the runaround?" See? I said, "You brought it up. I am just wearing a shirt." Yeah, yeah. Happens with me and my wife all the time. The point is this: She wore the shirt. She went to the milk section to get milk. Jimmy the milk man shows up. Says hi. Sees her shirt. "You going to church now?" And then she never said a word. She did not say, "You need to get saved. You are a sinner." She did not say anything. Immediately he says, "Oh, so now you are going to try to tell me what to do." He brought it up. See how it works. That is exactly how it works. I am telling you. It is exactly how it works. When you understand this, it is a telling chapter. It really is. This chapter is a chapter in so many ways. It is a revealing chapter. It is a chapter on exposure. That is what she did. Jimmy the milk man. She never said a word. She wore a shirt that said Old Path Baptist Church on it. She wore a shirt. Jimmy saw the shirt. Immediately Jimmy knows he needs to go to church. He is not going to church. She never opened her mouth. That in itself is a great thing for Eve. She is now a member of the Secret Service. She wore a shirt. The guy saw the shirt and then says, "So you try to convert me now." "I did not say anything. You brought it up." You know why? The shirt exposed him. It exposed him. You know what ministry does? The people that do not want to minister, why it makes them so miserable. It exposes them. You need to learn this. This is Paul's problem here. These people are saying, "Who do you think you are coming in?" "Who do I think I am? I am the guy that won you to Christ." Incredible chapter.

SEC: Able Ministers of the New Testament

Now look at verse 6 for a minute. Let us jump ahead. I want to show you what you and I are supposed to be.

2 Corinthians 3:6

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.

That is the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. There was no life in the Old Testament. No eternal life. When they died, they went to Abraham's bosom. The blood of bulls and goats could never pay for sin. It temporarily covered it. The Old Testament represents death. The New Testament represents life. That is what he is saying. But he is saying here that you and I are to be able ministers. We are to be able ministers after the New Testament. But look at this: New Testament, able ministers, we minister life. The Bible says unsaved people are dead people. You have got life. Your job and my job in its simplest form, once God saves you, is to give life to dead things. Then how in the world do we have dead Christians, dead churches, dead sermons? I will tell you why, because there is no life in it. That is why. God's people put life in it.

Last week I preached a letter from hell on Easter. That is an old throwback sermon from way back in the 60s, long before I ever started preaching. But it goes to show you the way it was once, because what a preacher needs to do when he preaches is he needs to put life into what he preaches. The old boys used to preach hell so hot you could feel the heat. The old boys would get up there and preach on heaven. You would hear the angels singing. The old boys would preach on sin and tell stories about somebody dying or getting killed this way because of sin. I remember one guy, somebody preached on a train wreck and a guy got killed in a train crash and all that thing. Everybody could hear the train coming down the track. Because back then you took a living book with a man who had God's passion in his heart, who was alive, who was a minister of life, and whatever he preached he gave life to. Now we have to have pageants. Now we have to have films. I watched one church last week. They built their whole service, Easter service, around interpreting, dancing, whatever God meant that might be. We have lost the ability to minister life to dead things because we ourselves have no life. We ought to be ministers of the New Testament, not the Old Testament, ministers of the new, ministers of life, giving life to dead things. That is what our job is. I am sorry if you do not like that.

I say that, you know my stand on salvation today. I make no bones about it. I personally have told you many, many times, I do not think for a moment everybody who says they are saved is saved today. I do not. I am sorry. I just do not. I know what it takes to get saved and I know what it takes not to get saved. The Bible says there are seven things you lose when you lose your Bible. We have certainly lost the Bible today. Somebody said on the radio last week that we have, it was a secular radio, and he is absolutely right. He says, "America has moved past the Christian era. America is no longer within the Christian era, and America is no longer in any pretense at Christian nations." He is right on the money. He is exactly right. He is not talking about lost people. He is talking about saved people. The reason why I know that, because everybody who says they are saved, why are not they ministering life if that is what we are

supposed to do? I would think to myself, "Have you got life? You might minister a little bit of life." We have lost the truth of anything today. Salvation is like everything else. It is a nice, feel-y, touchy, emotional thing. If there is anything, you have got to leave out of your salvation and base it on simply God's Word and God's truth. You have got to leave out your emotions. It does not mean you do not cry. It does not mean you do not get filled up with things. I am not talking about that. I am talking about this: going down, hearing a sad story, seeing a sad story. Somebody is praying, feeling somebody playing 28 stanzas of "Just As I Am," and then moving down, getting on your knees, claiming to get saved, and then getting up and going right back to your godless lifestyle.

I know what a real Christian is. I saw real Christians. I have a comparison of what is not Christianity today. I am old enough to see the difference. I know what a real Christian is and I know what a Christian is not. I do not see today in God's people's life what the Bible says is godly sorrow. There is sorrow, but there is no godly sorrow. The tragedy is that most of God's people do not even know the difference today. If I put a gun to your head in a corner and said, "Tell me the difference in the Bible between sorrow and godly sorrow," most of our brains would be on that wall. We do not even know. I will tell you the difference. Godly sorrow is for a shamed man. Sorrow is for an unashamed man. You do not even know the two examples in the Bible that lay it out. You see a bunch of people because they played the game. They went to church. They knew what Bible to take. They were in church all their life. They just played the game. They went along with the whole thing. There was nothing real ever in their life.

I was talking to a guy one time, and he said, "What do you think about so and so dying?" I said, "I think it was a real tragedy." He said, "Why is that?" I said, "Because I do not think he was saved." He said, "Well, you know, you cannot judge a guy like that." I just looked at him and said, "Do you want to take his chances?" He did not answer me. You know why? Guess why? He did not want to take his chances. You see, it is godly sorrow, repentance, godly sorrow. There is no godly sorrow today. God's people do not even know what godly sorrow is. I do not see today the witness of God's Spirit in the sin of God's people's lives. There is no godly sorrow. I am telling you, you will learn this when you start to deal with people. I have seen parents all my life, seen people all their life, they want to justify their kids are going to heaven when their kids are living like hell. Their kids will not go to church, cannot go to church, will do nothing for God. We get in this dream world that "Oh, they were saved. Oh, she is saved. Oh, yeah, a long time ago." Hey, let me ask you a question. How come there is no light? How can you be saved and have the light inside you and just always live in darkness? You need to explain that to me. The answer is godly sorrow. You do not even know what it is.

I want to be honest. People who never minister life, they scare me. Because my Bible says, "By their fruits you shall know them." I mean, if you have life from God, how do you not? How do you stay in a continual life without God, without the Bible, without church? How does it not bother you? How come there is no chastisement in your life? How come nothing ever gets to you? It just goes on, and it never. I will tell you why, because there is no godly sorrow, and godly sorrow is the difference. You learn this, learn this. I have seen people that have been to church all their lives. You have learned to play the game. You were raised in church. As I said, you know

what to say. You know the Bible to bring. You know how to sing the song. You read 10,000 sermons. But in church all your life, you just never brought life to anything. That scares me. It ought to scare you. But it will not. I am telling you, my friend, the difference is between sorrow and godly sorrow. When you do not see godly sorrow, when you do not see, take it from me. Yeah, I know. I am old fashioned. I think the old way. That is why I call it the Old Path Baptist Church. But I am telling you, if you do not understand the difference, you better find out the difference. There is a difference between sorrow and godly sorrow. When there is no godly sorrow, I will tell you right now what you are dealing with. Like it or not, now it gets worse or better. These are things. You want on the inside of ministry? Come on in.

SEC: The Christian as a Living Epistle

Look at verse 3.

2 Corinthians 3:3

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.

Every Christian in this room, every Christian you are ever going to deal with, says he is a Christian, says she is a Christian. He is now looked at as a letter from God to this world. That is what he said, a spiritual letter, not in stone, but in the tables of the heart. We started with a verse that said, "issues of the heart." Verse 3 says, "Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, in the fleshy tables of the heart." Verse 2 said, "the epistle read of all men." The proof of you and me as a Christian, and the kind of, is the kind of letter we are to this lost world. It will be very clear to everybody who sees your life or my life.

Now I understand that many of you are a work in progress. I understand that. I realize it takes time to get there. I understand that too. But at the end of the day, when you want to learn to deal with people, and out of the abundance of the heart come the issues of life and all of those things, the people you win to Christ basically, in a finalization, the people you win to Christ will speak to what kind of Christian you are. You either minister life or you minister death. If you hang out with unsaved people all the time, I wonder what your ministry letter is all about. Because if you minister life, you know what? The unsaved crowd does not want anything to do with you. It is so simple. It is so easy. The problem is we do not understand the difference between godly sorrow and sorrow.

The way you handle your own personal life, the way you raise your family, the way you treat your wife, the way the wife treats her husband, the way you deal with your children, the way you deal with the brethren, will be the letter, the epistle, the book that people will read. That is your letter of recommendation to, "Yes, God's way and salvation is the best way." The investment of your life with other people, as so many of you do and many of you want to do, teaching and training them, will speak to what kind of minister of life you really are.

This is why in 2 Corinthians chapter 3, not everybody was happy with Paul. Last week I preached a letter from hell. A couple told me, when I was preaching it, we were just talking this

week, when I was preaching, she said, "Well, I do not," she says, "the two people behind me certainly did not like that sermon. Did not think that was appropriate for Easter." I do not know who it was, did not say who it was. I do not even know if they knew who it was. I do not need to know who it was. You want a good read on people based on what I have said so far? The person to make that statement, I can guarantee you one thing about their life: They have never won a person to Christ in their life. I will give you everything I have on a bet on that. You know why? Because ministers of life do not talk that way. Ministers of life who give life, ministers of life who understand what your job is, and you are a minister, and you realize that your life is a record and a letter and an epistle written that all men read. You are a letter. Your life is an open book. You want to learn to read people? It is so easy. It is not hard. It is so easy. Once you have a little bit of discernment and discretion and you learn some of these basic things, reading people is absolutely the easiest thing in the world. You know why? Because I just told you, they are a book. They are a letter, a spiritual letter on the heart, and out of the heart come the issues of life. That is why somebody told you, "Never judge a book by its cover." That is why your mother used to say, "I can read you like a book." God's people's lives are an open book.

Some cases it is a letter of life and hope. You know why the people at Restart like us to come down? You know why the people down there at the river like us to come down? I will tell you what. I will tell you what we do every time we go down. We give them hope. We give them hope. They know there is somebody that genuinely loves them. Somebody does not want anything from them. Somebody that cares about them and loves them, and that letter gets transferred through us to them, and in time they see that only we love them is because God simply loved us. I told you a couple weeks ago, we are all homeless. This whole world is not my home. But some of you have never got that. In some cases your life is a letter of life. It is a letter of hope. It is a letter of light. You are an able minister of the New Testament. In some cases it is a horror story. It is one follow-up after another. It is something like Ken of the Night of Living Dead, who marries Godzilla. In some cases it is a fiction letter. Not even real. In some cases it is an X-rated novel. Somebody said one time, "None of us are apostles, but all of us are epistles." And we are read of all men.

SEC: Sufficiency in God

You see, God takes that letter, this is what you need to learn. This is on the inside. I am not preaching at you; I am trying to show you how this thing works. God takes that letter, the witness on our heart, verse 2, and then through your ministry, not your own sufficiency, but your sufficiency in God, and through that ministry of life, He will tell the story to others, and through that story we will minister to them life. That is how it works. That is why going out and doing everything before it is right in your life the way it is, will never last. It will never last. It will never last.

He says, verse 4:

2 Corinthians 3:4

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;

In this ministry you are not sufficient of yourself. It has to be of Him. It is not our sufficiency. I want to tell you, that is the hardest thing in the world. I go up to this, I was going to the fitness center, and they closed, so I had to go over to this extreme fitness place, but everybody over there. For years I saw these three guys up here who were bodybuilders, and they are Christian bodybuilders. No, no, no. They have a ministry, and they have a ministry that they go to churches, I guess, or youth groups, and they, I guess, one guy rips a telephone book in half, and the other guy bench presses 900 pounds, and all those things, and they do all that stuff. So people know I am a pastor up there. I did several of the funerals for people that passed away up there, and all the people come to it, so they know I am a preacher.

So one day, about six months ago, this guy, huge guy, he is real big. He has got tattoo verses all over his body, you know, John 3:16 on the back, so when he flexes his muscles, you know, you can get the Word of God, all that stuff, you know, crazy. Oh yeah, it is a system, I guarantee you. So he says, "Hey," he says, "you know, we have a ministry." He says, "You are a pastor, are not you?" I said, "Yeah." He says, "Well, we have a ministry," he says, "we would love to come to your church." I said, "Well," I said, he says, "Well, you know what we do, we are weightlifters for Christ," I forget what it is, something like that, "bodybuilders for Christ." I said, "Yeah, I know," I said, "that is not really where I am at, that is not where I am at." He started getting a little defensive. He says, "Well, what is wrong?" It is just kind of like your shirt deal, I am minding myself. Maybe it was the fact that I was bench-pressing 600 pounds, he thought I could be part of the ministry, I do not know. I am telling you, I think you are, well, we will get to that in a minute, but anyway. So he is getting a little defensive. I am fine, and I am a cool guy, but you push me a little bit, and you try to make me like I am the wrong person when I am not doing anything, and I am just trying to be nice to you, and you want to slap me, I will kick you right alongside the head, I will give you one of them Billy Jack deals, you know. So I am cool, see, I mean, it is cool.

Finally he says, he said, "Well, I do not understand," he said, "Now his other two buddies have come over." Now, here it is, 167 pounds up against 5,443 tons, you know. So I am saying, "Look," I said, "no offense, guys." The one guy looks at me and he says, "Well, we do out there, and we do all kinds of things." He says, "He tears telephone books in half," and, you know. I said, "Yeah, I do too, Raytown. I can tear that sucker, no problem." Whoa, you know. So, and he is going there, and he is kind of getting kind of, and he says, and the other guy says, "Yeah, we go in there, and he says, we do, and he says, we got that versus tattooed on it." I said, "Yeah, I saw him," you know. One guy says, "I can bench press 600 pounds." No, I have had it, that point. I said, "Well, now it is sounding exciting to me." I said, "Let me ask you a question. You bench press 600 pounds? Absolutely. You know 600 Bible verses?" I said, "You guys are here all the time. How much time do you use it? We work out five hours a day, seven days a week." I said, "You spend that much time in your Bible? I mean, certainly Bible says bodily exercise profits nothing, but godliness profits all things." I said, "Certainly you would not tell me you want to come to my church, at the Bible-even church, I am going to have you get up there, and you are

going to tell everybody you got 450 pounds, 600 pounds, you can bench press, and you do not know 600 Bible verses. I would much rather you just forget the whole thing and just start rattling off the 600 verses."

You are not going to tell me you want to come to my church, where I tell my people that everything about the Bible, they need to spend their life in the Bible and bet their life in the Bible. You are telling me, you know, you all have been to gyms, any place you go where there is that many mirrors, I watch these guys. I mean, I watch these guys, they just, I mean, they are fixed on themselves. Can I say something to you? You spend five hours a day pampering his flesh. You know what that is going to lead to? You are best to let your six-pack turn into a keg and be okay with life, I am telling you. I see somebody has taken that advice already. But that is where we are at today. Nothing about the Bible, nothing about principles. "Come watch me rip telephone books for Jesus in half. Come watch me lift 600 pounds." You know, I am going to be a little bit more than I am today. He lifts 600 pounds, you know, and one of his name was, his name was Samson. But that is a good character. If I was going to pick a lot of names for me to be a preacher, somebody Samson would not be the name I would pick. He may have been a strong guy, but that is about where it ended.

Let me tell you something. The giving up of self is one of the hardest things you will ever have to do. Giving up your own sufficiency, putting self aside, realizing to put no confidence in the flesh. This little flesh is going to be the source of your problems. The very idea of pampering this thing for five hours a day, grooming it, oiling it, shaving it, so you can get out there and say, "Look at Jesus?" Man, I am in the wrong century, folks. I am telling you that right now. I am in the wrong place.

SEC: The Process of a Life-Giving Ministry

The proof of us as a Christian will be the kind of letter, the epistle, that we are to the world. The people you win to Christ will speak to what kind of Christian you are, how you handle yourself and your personal problems, how you deal with all of those things. Based on 2 Corinthians chapter 3, the only credibility we have as a Christian, and the proof of our salvation, is your life, as your ministry of life, as an able minister. God being all sufficient. Bible says this letter, this epistle is written not on stone, but on the tables of our heart, and every man reads it. That is how you read people. That is how you read people. You first understand that every person you are going to deal with, every person you are going to talk to, everybody you are going to get involved with, is an open book if you just know how to read. You begin to look, and you begin to see, and you begin to know exactly where their problems are.

Now I want to show you the process. You will teach this many, many times, so you want to get this process down. We started today, here is how it works. Here is how it should work. Here is how it works in your life. If it does not work this way in your life, there is something wrong. You have been saying, I am just going to tell you, it scares me. You have been saved 5, 10, 15 years, 20 years, and there is no ministry of life in you anywhere. Your life is always around unsaved people. You want nothing to do with church. You want nothing to do with God's people. There is no ministry, no squeak of light out of you in ministry to anybody.

Our verse started today around Proverbs 4:23. Get ready for this process, because you will teach it a lot, helping people. We started with Proverbs 4:23, which simply says:

Proverbs 4:23

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

That is a great verse. That is a verse that is the fundamental verse of everything you are going to do. Everything you are, everything you are going to do and say from this point on, will come out of this verse right here. So your heart is the key to this letter. Out of it, your letter, your epistle, will tell the story of your own issues of life, and what God has done with you as a child of God, and the biblical principles that you have learned and you use along the way.

Now here is the problem. Jeremiah 17:9 says that our heart is deceitful.

Jeremiah 17:9

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

Above all things, it is desperately wicked. So there we have got our first issue. But then when a person gets saved, and we understand now how godly sorrow fits into our equation. Notice I have not told you what it is yet. I am not going to. I will let you try to figure it out for yourself. Though I told you it would just be over your head. You forget about it. But I wanted to stick with you. If you are a young single here today, I want to stick with you in your own life and the people that are your friends, that say they are Christians. I wanted to stick with you if you are married. I wanted to stick with you if you are a parent with kids. I want to stick with you and drive that thing down into you. I am telling you, you better see this world for what it is and realize that everybody that says they are saved, as much as you want to be in denial, probably is not.

Then we get saved, and now we get a new heart. We get life. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says that we are a new creature in Christ Jesus. You know the verse:

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

Now the process begins. Psalms 119 says:

Psalms 119:11

Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

You see, the issues of life come from the heart. Your issues are going to come out of your heart. So when you get saved, the first thing you have got to do is get the Word of God in your heart when God gives you a new heart. That then leads to Matthew 22:37, that you get through the process, that you learn to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all your mind, and all your soul, and all your strength.

Matthew 22:37

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

When you make God your sufficiency instead of yourself, and you get to the end of self, and you get to that sufficiency in your life, then Matthew 6:21 takes over and He becomes your treasure.

Matthew 6:21

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

It is a process. Then as to the abundance of what God has done for you, now this letter, this epistle, begins to be well on its way. Through all the abundance of the things that God has given you and He has done for you, we see the fulfillment of Matthew 12:34 that out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.

Matthew 12:34

O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.

See the issues of life? Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life, and those things come out of your mouth. Now Proverbs 23:7 kicks in.

Proverbs 23:7

For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee.

As a man thinks in his heart now, so is he. Now because he has kept your heart, now your letter will be to minister to others on the issues of life out of the epistle that all men read. Now you are an able minister. Now you are a minister of the New Testament, a minister of life, a minister of hope. Epistle read of all men. The process is not done. The husband then to his first ministry, which will be his wife, and he ministers life. He ministers hope, and he is a minister of life to her. The wife back to her husband. Once he leads the way, she follows, and then both of them to their children. Once that chapter of the epistle is complete, now the minister, now they minister life to other people. People will see in their hearts and read what God has done, and now they will seek them out because they know that they have the answers to the issues of life. The rest of our lives as we grow and we struggle and we fight the good fight and we continue to add chapters to our epistle, and in time it becomes a book, and that book is read of all men.

Nothing will define who you are or I am or the people you are going to work with are in Christ as God's people like 2 Corinthians chapter 3. If you are a saved person, you are going to minister life. If you are an unsaved person, you cannot minister life. That is why, even though you claim to be a Christian, listen to me, no life comes from you.

SEC: The Witness of Your Life

In closing, I just say this and we will be done. We talked to you about your witness as this book. All of my life, and I pay very close attention when people start to talk to other people. I pay very close attention when pastors speak to people. Many, many times we and our witness, when we are talking to somebody because we do not have a very good book to read, we always are telling that person what God and the Word of God will do for them. That is the wrong thing to do. When you are a minister of life, certainly God will do things for them. But if you want to minister life to another person, do not tell them what God will do for them. Simply tell them what God has done for you. But you see, when God is not doing anything, it is so much easier just to tell them what God will do.

I find that all the time, and that is why I say you are dealing with people. If you cannot live the principles, hey, be a lint roller. I do not know what else to tell you. You cannot sit there and give somebody else advice for things that you are not willing to do yourself. That book will never be a best seller. That is not a minister of life. A minister of life, life is an open book. By the way they dress, by the way they talk, by the places they go, by the folks they hang out with, by the relationships that they form, life tends to life. Not to dead people. We will hold up there today and give you about 10 minutes, and then we will meet down here for Restart.