

The Issue of Spirituality, Part 2

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 1374

For our study this morning I want to continue and conclude what we began last time, the study of the issue of spirituality within the broader study that we've been doing on the charismatic movement. If you're a visitor with us let me just say that we've taken a break in a rather lengthy study of 1 Corinthians and in a couple of weeks we'll be beginning again on the 14th chapter of 1 Corinthians to finish the book but in the interim because so many of you are so inquisitive and needed insights and because the elders directed me to do so we've been pursuing a study of the charismatic movement as we see it in the church and the world today. And this particular aspect of the charismatic movement, the issue of spirituality, is the subject we began last week and will continue and complete this morning.

Now you all remember last week that we began to study this issue of true spirituality because it is such a very important theme within the charismatic movement. And far broader than that we looked at a clear biblical definition of true spirituality and then compared it with what the charismatics have been teaching or implying in their view of spirituality. And we tried to show you last time that the charismatics say or imply even though they sometimes are not willing to say. They certainly imply by their experiential approach to the Christian life that if you have a certain baptism or you speak in tongues or you have a certain ecstatic experience that that automatically lifts you to another level of spirituality.

My own wife was raised in Pentecostal charismatic circles and she told me this week that it is just sort of a standard situation that the people who have had the experience and the people who have the visions and the people who speak in the tongues are thought of as second level Christians or spiritual ones and the rest are sort of left in another category in a second class basis. And we saw how that when you make the experience everything and the pursuit of the experience everything and then you attain a certain ecstatic experience or a certain baptism or whatever then automatically you're thought of as spiritual and we showed how that compared with Scripture this is just not so.

The Bible never makes such a connection between any spiritual gifts or any spiritual vision or any experience and true spirituality. That connection is not made biblically and we saw last time that true spirituality is the result not of an experience or a gift or anything like that but it is the result of a moment by moment walk in the spirit. That is the real issue. True spirituality results when we are walking in the spirit and we showed that the charismatic view of experiential, instantaneous, sort of spectacular spirituality just can't be supported biblically.

Spirituality we said then is walking in the spirit which involves two things. See if you remember. Receiving the word of God and living it out in obedience. And when we receive the word and live it out obediently at that point we are walking in the spirit. That is the true biblical standard.

Now we saw further that true spirituality doesn't necessarily even result in any experience. It doesn't result in any ecstasy or any vision or any revelation or any supernatural thing but the true spirituality really results in the graces of the heart because in Galatians 5:22 it says "the fruit of the spirit is" not gifts and tongue and signs and wonders but the fruit of the spirit is what? "Love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, humility and self control." Those are the real fruits of the spirit. That is what is really produced when true spirituality exists and the charismatics would claim that true spirituality is based on experience and issues in greater experiences just doesn't square with the Scripture and so we have to come back to what the Bible teaches.

Now I want you to take your Bible as we begin this morning and I want you to look with me at Psalm 85 because Psalm 85 provides for us a very helpful text on evaluating true spirituality or true spiritual revival. This is a test by which we can judge true spirituality. Now you'll remember in 1 Corinthians chapter 3 that Paul said to the Corinthians "I cannot write unto you as on the spiritual but as onto carnal." In other words I have to treat you as carnal. Why? Because you can't receive the word and there is division and strife and so forth among you.

In other words two things were missing in Corinth. They did not and could not receive the word. They did not live it out. The absence of those two things means carnality. In reversing it the presence of those two things means spirituality so spirituality is to receive the word of God and to live it out obediently. That's basic.

Now we see this in Psalm 85. Basically this is a prayer for revival. This is a prayer that true spirituality would exist among the people. This is a plea from the Psalmist to God to bring about a true revival of spirituality and the key verse would be verse 5 which says "Wilt thou be angry with us forever? Wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generation? Wilt thou not revive us again that thy people may rejoice in thee." In other words "God we've had your chastening. We've been through the exile. We've had that and oh God now we want a revival. We want to see your gracious hand. We want true spirituality to take the place of the disobedience that brought about the punishment." And so it's a plea for real revival, a plea for genuine holiness to grip the hearts of the people of God and such a plea really draws out the basic elements of revival.

The first seven verses kind of make up the prayer for true revival and then in 8 to 13 you see the elements of it. We're not going to study all of it but let me just show you the two things that make up true revival, verse 11. "Truth shall spring out of the earth and righteousness shall look down from heaven." Now you have two phrases there. "Truth shall spring out of the earth and righteousness

shall look down from heaven.” There are two things that always accompany true revival, truth and righteousness always. Those are the issues, truth and righteousness. And these two things are really a theme in this closing part.

You see the mention of righteousness in verse 10. You see the mention of righteousness going before God and he will set us in the way of his steps in verse 13. So righteousness is an integral part of true spirituality or true revival. Holiness and righteousness, mark this, always accompany the work of the spirit. That’s very basic.

In Ezekiel, to give you an illustration of it, in the 36th chapter of Ezekiel and there are many illustrations but this would be one that might be helpful. Ezekiel 36:27, just listen, “And I will put my spirit within you.” All right. That’s a great promise of spirituality yet to come. “I’ll put my spirit within” now watch what happens “And cause you to walk in my statutes and you shall keep my ordinances.” Now listen, you see true spirituality, the result of the true work of the spirit is not some ecstasy. It is not some revelation. It is not some vision. It is not some experience. It is the obedience of righteousness, you see. It is walking in God’s truth. It is walking in his statutes. It is keeping his ordinances and doing them.

Verse 31 of the same chapter says “Then shall you remember your own evil ways and your doings that were not good and shall loath yourselves in your own sight for your inequities and for your abominations.” Now listen beloved. True spirituality results in righteousness or holiness and that is a two part item. For one part it is the pursuit of the commandments of God and for the other it is the loathing and the despising and the hating of sinfulness. And where there is true spirituality there will be that pursuit of righteousness that carries with it a deep anxiety and sense of conviction about sin.

And that is something that I don’t see in what is going on today in the name of spirituality in the charismatic movement in many cases. There is a lot of laughing and a lot of having fun and a lot of happiness and a lot of outward frivolity but I don’t know if I see what accompanies real spirituality which is a deep burning sense of the conviction of sin and the pursuit of true holiness in a desire to obey the commands of God and to walk in them. That’s true spirituality. That’s the heart of the matter.

Spirit filled people pursue righteousness with a burning sense of conviction and sin so that where the spirit is at work there is joy but there is also deep sorrow. This is the heart of true spirituality. When the spirit of God came at Pentecost it says “thousands were pricked in their hearts and cried out in the misery of guilt. What shall we do?” And I don’t believe that any true Christian can live in this world without a deep pain caused by his own distress and his own sorrow and his own sin and when the stench of immorality fills his nostrils the spirit filled man just can’t be happy, happy, happy all the time.

And you know what? Sometimes it doesn’t square with what I see in the name of the Holy Spirit. As one writer said “He is not the jolly spirit. He is the Holy Spirit.” And I am afraid as I watch for example

on Channel 40 or whatever and I see this frivolity and this superficiality and this happy, happy, happy all the time and this constant smiling and everything is so wonderful that they don't understand two things, one the deep sense of the conviction of sin and two the lostness of the world around them or they just couldn't be happy, happy, happy all the time.

The apostle Paul said "I have continual sorry and heaviness of heart." See. That's the balance of it. Sure there's joy but the joy is deep down and very often what's on the surface is the pain from the guilt and the sin and the concern and I believe if we were seeing a true revival in our country. I believe if it was true spirituality that we were seeing in this supposed charismatic movement that's to be of the spirit. If it were real spirituality there would be people weeping like Christ wept. There would be the flowing of tears caused by the Holy Spirit. Instead of clapping our hands I think we would be beating our breasts and lamentations would fill the streets as they filled the streets of Nineveh in the day that Jonah preached and the spirit of God brought a true revival.

I don't see true revival as turning on to Jesus as a groovy trip. I see true revival as that which makes a man beat his breast and sense his sin deeply and pursue holiness. Walter Chantry says, "It cannot be said that all that are entering charismatic ranks are doing so with a desire to know God and advance in purity of life. The more from God that many are seeking is freedom from earthly troubles. Where the gifts themselves hold primary attention it is suggested that the spirit will cure all ills and smooth all the rough bumps along the road of life."

"Nowhere is this so evident as in the popular emphasis on healing. The impression given by the full gospel to the average believer is that God doesn't want his people to suffer in this world. If only Christians will believe spirit filled men will heal them of anything. Sufferings are pictured as detrimental and undesirable for the Christian. Here is the candy coated life guaranteed to extract all bitter tastes and while many talk of blowing their minds on Jesus and of exploding in experiences of the spirit and finding happiness we have heard too little of a sober interest in holiness." He's right.

We're not just a bunch of people chasing happiness. You see? Where there is true revival there will be the pursuit of holiness, righteousness. There will be a deep burning conviction of sin and a consuming desire to obey the statutes of God. That's the part that I see missing. The true believers don't look for the candy coated life. They confess with David in Psalm 119:71. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." Spirituality is not experiences and signs and wonders and miracles and happy, happy. It may be closer to the opposite.

Charles Spurgeon said, "The greatest earthly blessing that God can give to any of us is health with the exception of sickness." I like that. "Sickness has frequently been of more use to the Saints of God -" he says, "- than health has. If some men that I know of could only be favored with a month of rheumatism, it would by God's grace mellow them marvelously. I would not wish for any man a long time of sickness and pain but a twist now and then one might almost ask for. A sick wife, a newly

made grave, poverty, slander, sinking of spirit might teach lessons nowhere else to be learned so well. Trials drive us to the realities of religion. Our afflictions come to us as blessings though they frown like curses.”

He’s right. You see where there’s true spirituality, where there is true revival, righteousness looks down from heaven and God leads his people along the steps of righteousness. Not giddiness, not happiness, not frivolity, righteousness, holiness, true spirituality.

And the second element of spirituality in Psalm 85 and the one I told you last week too is in verse 11. “Truth shall spring out of the earth.” The second element of true revival is truth all of a sudden comes from everywhere. There is a great, deep commitment to the truth. The second principle for measuring the spirit’s work is the truth. After all He is called in the Bible the spirit of what? Truth.

And where there is true revival there is the receiving of the truth and there is the living out of it in righteous behavior. That’s it folks. And it has nothing to do with gifts and signs and ecstasies and wonder and visions and revelations. When they had the revival in Nehemiah’s day, Nehemiah chapter 8 verse 1 began Nehemiah said “bring the book and once they brought the book the revival began” and it will never begin in any other way in any other age and you can’t have people with false doctrine about the Holy Spirit producing right kind of responses to Him.

You can’t have true spirituality with wrong theology. You have to have truth springing from the earth and then righteousness comes down from heaven. That’s what Psalm 85 is saying. And true spirituality will have that deep sense of devotion to the word of God and a deep conviction for sin and a desire for holy living.

Biblical exposition, biblical instruction are the work of the spirit. In Ephesians 5: 18 “be being kept filled with the spirit.” Colossians 3:16 “Let the word of Christ dwell on your wrist.” Those are two parallel passages you know if you study them. Being filled with the spirit is the same thing as letting the word dwell on your wrist you see. You receive the word, you live it out. True spirituality. Nothing to do with any charismatic experience.

So what have we learned? Let me summarize. We said last week that all believers are spiritual positionally. We said that not all believers live up to it practically but that God wants us to live a spiritual lifestyle which is a lifestyle of receiving the word of God and obeying it and that the ultimate end of spirituality is to be like Jesus Christ and it has nothing to do with a gift or an experience or a baptism or a feeling.

It results in obedience. It results in not fulfilling the lust of the flesh. It makes the Christian humble and meek rather than proud. It gives him a deep sense of inadequacy and the misery of sin. It produces a commitment to the word of God. It balances his joy with his conviction of sin and that is the true

spirituality. That's the thing God is after.

I see a lot of so called revival in America but it doesn't have these characteristics. Now I want to add a very important note to conclude our theme of true spirituality and it's very important and I want you to hear me say it. I've been waiting a long time to say this, a long time. Because the charismatics have the wrong view of spirituality they have fallen into the problem of exalting the wrong people, you see.

In order words where you make and experience the criteria, the more fantastic or exciting the experience, the more chance you're going to get to become to super saint, you see. And the truly spiritual people, some of whom I'm sure are in the charismatic movement, but the truly spiritual people who are receiving the word as best it's being given and as best they understand it and living in obedience as best they can and the true spiritual people in the rest of the church who receive the word and live it out, you see, they're pushed into the background because they don't have anything to say. Because in an experiential world where the experience is everything the people who rise to the top are the people who've got the greatest story to tell. You see? So the wrong people get exalted.

And if you've got a great story to tell you'll be up there. You'll be on television. You'll write a book. You'll have the whole show particularly if you happen to be famous also. If you can add to your experience a certain amount of fame you've really got it made and this is really sad. We've created a whole pile of Christian celebrities. I call them super star saints. They have become the models and the spokesmen and the authorities for Christianity. A celebrity cult has begun.

You know I thought we learned our lesson. 15 years ago the church did that with Hollywood people. Used to take all the people that were saved in the Hollywood Christian group and automatically put them up as great great propagators of the Christian faith and they were giving testimonies and singing here and appearing here and this was the big thing. It was really tragic.

We had a man in our church who was in that, ballyhooed, made a speaker, a famous Christian, travelled all over, said everything. He had all kinds of credentials and so forth. His life went right down the drain. He came to grace. He was about 42 years old. Brought his family. Went into obscurity in a sense and just came here and learned the word of God. He was only here a year and he died of terminal cancer and I sat in the hospital beside his bed as he was coughing and dying and he said "John" he said, "It's terrible what happened in my life. It's terrible. It's tragedy. They ruined my life by exploiting my testimony because I was somebody known."

See it's a tragic thing. I thought we learned but we haven't. It's going on again and we've got the wrong people being exalted and put up on pedestals to be the spokesmen for Christianity instead of the really spiritual people. TV specials now put on by Christian personalities feature a steady stream of the Christian super stars. When one of them gets saved boy the line starts to book them for their

big event.

I was listening to a deal, an ad, the pastor said “we’re starting a new church” and this is what he said. This is a quote. “It is a fundamental, soul winning, Bible believing church and we’ll be meeting in Costa Mesa and this Sunday our special guest star is” and he named him. And I thought “What is this? Your special guest star?” Another church had a Christian star who charged \$5,000.00 a night to come to a church. There are several who get \$5,000.00. And so they wanted him so they sold tickets for the Sunday evening service.

You know there are several ad agencies that I hear from monthly that send out the list of who’s available and the price is anywhere from \$500.00 a night to \$5,000.00 a night. If we want a famous Christian. All I can think about is 1 Timothy 5:17 that if you’re going to give a lot of money to somebody you know who it should be? It said “the elders who rule well are worthy of double honor. Those especially who labor in the word and doctrine.” See? Who does God absolve? It’s different than who we do.

One Midwestern Baptist church that I know of has a Christian hall of fame and in their Christian hall of fame in the foyer of the church they have the pictures of the ten current best Christians. That’s their super stars. That’s true. Christian magazines feature converted movie stars, singers, athletes and politicians and turning them into celebrities who are given pulpits all over the land. It’s just standard fair. The one permeating last year was promoted by listing the 48 Christian stars you could pray with.

You see this whole – you see the sad part of this people, this whole thing has placed fame in the place of spirituality. People who lead the church are not supposed to be the ones that are the most famous. They’re supposed to be the ones who walk in the spirit and are given the responsibility of leadership by God. I see this especially in music. There are more people getting famous in Christian circles through music than in any other way and the church is spending a fortune to fill the coffers of all these people.

From the super star super saint mentality has come some very tragic results. Manifested in charismatic circles and beyond. I can tell you five or so that I know of who went right into this thing and right out the back door of their faith into disaster. The celebrities like this wind up telling about their experience, their fantastic conversion or their fantastic baptism or their vision or whatever and they get propagated and shoved and pushed to promote this and promote that and they’re soon speaking and writing books and having interviews and appearing on TV and radio, hailed as great spiritual authorities and you know what the Bible says in 1 Timothy? It says “If somebody is a novice don’t even let them serve tables in the church.” That’s right.

See we’re not doing them any favors. It’s all out of whack. Read 1 Timothy 3:6 and 10 and 1 Timothy 5:22. It’s all there. Roger Heidelberg wrote an article in the last issue of *Moody Monthly* this month,

May, and if he hadn't written it I would have. It's titled "Let's Stop Cashing in on Converts." This is what it says. "Supposed Saul of Tarsus had been converted in 1977 on US-60 on route to Denver. Would his conversion experience have been allowed to develop until he became the mightiest exponent of Christian doctrine the church has ever known?"

"Let's see. No sooner would word of such a dramatic newsworthy conversion have hit the wires and the press association than staff men for *People* magazine, theater and TV newspaper cameramen, feature writers and radio producers would have descended on Denver in droves. When the scales fell off Brother Saul's eyes he would have seen his room jammed with these people. The man from *Christian Star Magazine* contending for an exclusive feature against an associate editor of *Time*. The program director for the *Heavenly Light* TV hour trying to out talk to agent from *Meet the Press*."

"Over in the corner Ananias serving as Saul's agent lining up the contracts. Before the first sunset of Saul's new life he would have been scheduled for appearance on every Christian TV and radio network could manage to land him. In the shortest possible time he would have found himself booked for months and even years in advance as the headline attraction of gospel rallies all of Christendom. Evangelistic crusades, youth movements, even Bible conference. See the banners go 'Top Rabi tells how he turned to Christ.' 'Hear world famous Jew preach Jesus.' 'Saul of Tarsus converted Pharisee preaching his famous sermon from the Sanhedrin to the savior.'

Let our morning paper carry the story that Gloria of Goldilocks, top star of stage, screen, and radio has got religion as they put it. Within the week the same paper will announce her fourth coming appearance on the nationwide Pearly Gates revival hour or her affiliation with the Atomic Age Gospel Team. We're no respecter of person's either. Big league ball players, dance band leaders, bootleggers, kingpins of crime, any of these will do just so the name is big enough to draw well and of course so the conversion seems real.

Please don't misunderstand. Each time any celebrity from show business, politics or murder incorporated sincerely calls on the lord for salvation we feel like outshouting the very angels. The problem is our habit of propelling these converted celebrities into the foremost ranks of evangelistic Christianity long long before they've been shown to be spiritually qualified to be there. Why did our girl Gloria get picked for the Pearly Gates Hour? Because they wanted the spirit bathed the message she was capable of bringing or the headline value of Gloria Goldilocks former star? Exposition of the Scriptures or exploitation of the celebrity?

Little can be said in defense of those who are exploiting these named converts to serve our own essentially selfish purposes. What of the ones however who are being used? What will be the result of all this in their lives in the frenzy of dashing from one gospel rally to another little time is available for allowing their conversion experience to take root and ripen into an enriching overflowing testimony? Consequently these converts are likely to do the best they can, pick up some currently

popular pious phrases, string them together into a smoothly flowing testimony, mix in a story of my conversion and all is set for the show. They keep repeating their lines until in time all that conversion glow is gone. With nothing new flowing in to replace it they become powerless play actors saying the right words which land charmingly and quite ineffectively on unconvinced consciences.”

It's a sad thing that we've begun to exalt the wrong people. You know if you say “Tonight we're going to have a Bible study. The pastor will be speaking” nothing happens. “Tonight we're going to have super star so and so” jam the place. See? All the wrong standards. The whole priority is mixed and you know we've even gotten to the place in Christianity today where we authenticate our faith on the basis of the personalities who believe it rather than biblical apologetics. Do you know that?

We publicly defend Christianity on the basis of the testimony of somebody who believes it. They write the books. They give the testimonies. They tell their experience. They appear on television. When's the last time you saw a television special that said “And now we're going to have reverend so and so who is the pastor of such and such a church and he is going to show you why Christianity is true from the word of God.” You ever hear that? Never heard that. “And now here is...” and then the fan fare and the testimony you see.

I'm not against their testimony. I'm not against the fact that they're converted. I praise God. But the point is Christianity is not true because they believe it. Christianity is true because the Bible says it and somebody's got to teach that. We can't continue to authenticate the truth on the basis of personalities.

Have you noticed that the cults have begun to do the same thing? And now they have their super stars defending their view in commercials. You get people on and that's the way they sell coffee. That's the way they sell orange juice. That's the way they sell cars. That's the way they sell everything they sell and that's the way we are selling Christianity. Celebrities are selling it.

This perpetuates experience centered Christianity. “I've experienced it. It's really been satisfying. It's great. Why don't you experience it?” and you set up a whole experiential approach to the faith rather than saying “It is true therefore it is right for you to accept it.”

The apostle Paul went out and he reasoned with them out of the Scriptures and he proved to them why Jesus must needs to suffer and died. And when Jesus walked in Luke 24 on the road to Emmaus he didn't say to them “Now I want you men to believe all of this so I'm going to give you a few wonderful testimonies of some very famous people who believed it.” He began as Moses and the prophets and he taught them the things recorded in the Scripture. How tragic it is when we let experience be the defense.

I said to a publisher, vice president of a publishing house in America recently. I said “When are you going to stop defending Christianity on the basis of the testimonies of celebrities and start putting out books that defend it on the basis of biblical authority?” You see you just keep this charismatic, experiential, spiritual thing going and you’ve got all these people who are standing up as if they were the spiritual leaders of the church. They’re the permanent ones. They’re the ones that get the crowd and the fact of the matter is in many cases they may not even be truly spiritual.

We must stand on the word and defend our faith by the word and we must hear from the gifted teachers and the gifted theologians and the godly people. They’re the ones who are to speak. Listen. The church in the New Testament had no super stars. It had no celebrities. It had no media. It had no Madison Avenue gimmicks, no radio, no television and they made an impact on their world strictly on the basis of Godly people living in an ungodly society. And you know what Paul said in Corinthians? He said “Not many noble and not many mighty.” They were just plain folks. But all Christianity has gone into the marketplace and we bought the world’s bag and we sell Christianity just like they sell cigarettes, just like they sell coffee, just like they sell beans, just like they sell anything.

“We are hucksters” Paul says in 1 Corinthians. Larry King wrote an article in *New Times* magazine September 3rd, 1976. He is a cynical non-Christian and I want you to hear his evaluation of the current “Christianity.” “I’m not real big on the Jesus movement, a peculiarity which apparently puts me out of the cultural mainstream these days. The Jesus business is no longer confined to the fruit jar whiskey back woods. You cannot walk through Washington Square Park in Greenwich Village without trembling, bug eyed prophets laying a lot of smarmy sweet Jesus rhetoric on you. Most of them have no foggy notion of what they’re talking about.”

“I’m an old biblical student having been raised among foot washing Baptists and I’m simply appalled at how few of the Jesus folk who solicit me are conversant with the Holy Scriptures. Nor are they informed as to the history of religions, Christian or otherwise. Mention the holy wars or beg information on how the King James Version of the Bible won out over its rivals and all you get is a blank look and the blanket assurance that Jesus loves you. No, my complaint is not against Jesus but against those who misuse the notion of him.”

“I’ve had my fill of high school football coaches praying in his name for victory, of Lion’s clubs soliciting him to bless their annual broom sale, of John Bircher’s beseeching him to keep a wary eye on the North Koreans and of white collar criminals who claim their conversions when prison gates appear to loom in their futures. It would be my modest suggestion that perhaps a working Jesus as well as a supervising daddy might be better occupied in sorting out larger injustices and really doesn’t need the babble of selfish prayers. I don’t pretend to know whether Jesus might have wished it so but personally I think he’s got more class than many of his agents.”

You know when I read that article that really hurt. That really hurts me you see. What kind of Christianity is this guy seeing? Where is the holiness in this? Where is the righteousness here? Where are the godly people in this situation? All he's seeing is the Madison Avenue Christianity. All he's seeing is the gimmicky stuff. All he's seeing is the cheap part of the thing and he's missing the whole point. Where did it go?

You see we've got it all out of whack, the wrong things in the wrong place. We say "Well it works." I hear – this is what people say to me when I talk – I talk like this to other people sometimes. And they say "But it works. Look at the results. Look at the results. People come, the crowd comes and we preach and people get saved. There's no harm. Look at the results."

You know something? Results don't mean anything to me in that sense. See what do you mean? Listen to this. Numbers 20:11. Now don't look it up 'cause I'm just going to talk to you now. Number 20:11 says that Moses was told by God to do what? Speak to the rock. Remember that? But instead of speaking to the rock, what happened? Moses took a stick and hit the rock. And you say "Moses you were disobedient." Right? Absolutely right. And do you know what happened when he hit that rock? He got results. The water came out.

Did the results make what he did right? You couldn't convince God because God never let him enter the Promised Land. He forfeited that because he disobeyed God. He got results in his disobedience. That's never a criteria. Never. What God wants is results according to obedience. The results may come in disobedience but that does not alter the fact that disobedience is still disobedience. So we say "Well it gets results." Well that doesn't prove anything. What would happen if we did it God's way? We're not around to find out doing it his way.

Who are the real leaders of Christianity? Who really has a right to set the pace for the church? You see if we make experience the standard of spirituality then anybody with any experience gets shoved into the lime light and especially if they're famous and we get a Madison Avenue brand of Christianity. And boy the more crazy your experience the faster the publishers are on your tail to get it in print and the faithful and godly people sit in the background and plug along with what they can have and those people get rich off of their experience. Now maybe I sound a little bitter. Well I don't mean to be. I just mean to speak to the spirit of the age. Who are the leaders? Are the neophyte ex-whatever, celebrities, personalities or the truly spiritual godly people?

Now I want you to – I've got to tell you this. This is the most important thing I've said. Forget everything I've said but remember this. Turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 10. I'm going to tell you this 'cause I've been waiting so long to say this. Now I want you to hear this. Second Corinthians 10, 11, 12, and 13, the last four chapters of 2 Corinthians are as clear an indication anywhere in Scripture of this whole idea that you can get spiritual by some experience or that you're qualified to be a spiritual leader because you've had some experience. These chapters really deal with it. Now let me give you

the scene. This is a fascinating section. Now listen.

City of Corinth, Paul of course founded the church had written them several letters, had ministered in their lives but in the meantime some really new hot super apostles had come to town. In chapter 11 and verse 5 Paul calls them super apostles, super apostles. They had come into town and said "Hey guys. We are the new breed." See? "God is doing a new work. There is a new revival breaking out. The old stuff's got to go. This is the new age." See, they came in with a whole schmear. This was the 2 Corinthians 10 charismatic movement.

These guys came to town. They were the new super apostles. They commended themselves like gangbusters. chapter 10 verse 12 Paul says "The commend themselves." chapter 10 verse 18 he refers to their commended their selves. They came in and patted themselves on their own backs and said "We're the new prophets. We're the new apostles. We're the new tools and instruments of God and we've come to town." And they had experiences and they had visions and they had ecstasies and they had charisma and they had charm and they had all of the stuff and so they came in and overwhelmed the Corinthian church, just knocked them off their feet and they were just saying "Oh this is it guys. These are super apostles."

And they questioned Paul's spirituality. Naturally if they were going to take over they had to undermine the true leader, Paul. And so the Corinthians wanted to know why Paul thought he still was their leader, why Paul thought they should still listen to him. Look at chapter 13 verse 3. Here's the key to the whole section. In 13:3 he says "Since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me." Let me stop right there. He says in other words "You are trying to get from me some proof that I have the right to speak to you, that I'm still the voice of God, that I'm still the apostle of God, that I'm still the messenger. You want me to prove that to you."

You see they were saying "We got some new guys and Paul, boy, they've got some visions. Oh man. They've got some ecstatic experiences. They've got some revelations. They got some charm and some charisma. They are smooth and they are the new apostles and they've got what it is for this age. And Paul we really question whether you might be out of date."

So he says "So you seek proof that Christ is still speaking in me? You're going to compare me with them?" And what was their criteria? Look at chapter 12 verse 1. "It's not expedient for me doubtless to glory" he says "But I will come to visions and revelations of the lord." He says "Look. I know what you want. Your criteria is visions and revelations. All right. I'll talk about that. That's your thing. Super spiritual people have revelations and visions. I'll talk about that."

They had come into town and told about their revelations but you know what Paul said about them in 11:13? He said "For such are.." What? They're not super apostles. They're what? False apostles, deceitful workers transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. They're not the true ones. Don't

be surprised Satan himself has transformed into an angel of light so if his ministers be transformed into ministers of righteousness it's no great thing.

These aren't true apostles. These are apostles of Satan. They commended themselves, they offered themselves and so in 11 Paul says this in 5. He says well, 11:5, "I was not a whit behind the super apostles." He's not talking about James and Peter and John there. He's talking about these super apostles who had these visions and revelations and mystical experiences. He says "Look. I'm not behind that. I'm not taking a back seat to them. They are false apostles.

How do you know that? Verse 4 "For if he that comes preaches another Jesus" something wrong with him. Their doctrine isn't right." Now you know what they were saying? They were saying "Hey. Paul can't – he can't measure up to us." Now look at 10:10. They said "His letters they say are weighty and powerful. Boy is a great writer. Oh yeah. Heavy stuff. "But his bodily presence is weak and his speech stinks. The guy is really homely and he's a lousy speaker. I mean his writing heavy stuff but personally he's strange looking and doesn't talk clearly. Can't match our charisma and oratory and class and polish."

Poor little old Paul. He's going to have to defend himself against all these super shots, see. You know boy I see a parallel in this today. So many of the truly godly people are just a whole lot of nobodies and the people who are up there, the biggies, big super stars, you just really wonder.

And so Paul says "Hey I'd like to compare myself with these, with the visions and the revelations and handsome and charming and charisma. I'd like to. Could I tell you about me? I'd like to give you my credentials." Here they come. Are you ready? chapter 11 verse 23. "Are they the ministers of Christ?" I speak as a fool of course. This is sarcastic. Here are my credentials "labors more abundant, stripes above measure, prisons more frequently, deaths often, of the Jews five times received I have forty stripes except one. Three times I was beaten with the rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. A night and a day I've been in the deep, journeying off in peril of water, robbers, countrymen, gentiles in the city, in the wilderness, in the sea. Perils among false brethren, weariness and painfulness. Hunger, thirst, fasting, cold, nakedness and I had to mess with all the churches. Those are my credentials. And if you'd like to hear about one of my great exalting experiences" let me tell you. Once verse 32 says "I was put in prison by Aretas the king of Damascus and they had to let me out through the window in a basket and I ran away.

So I'll give you one of my real solid credentials. I was a poor old humbled fossil huddled up in a dumb little basket, lowered out of a window, running for my life. Big stuff, huh? You see this is such a shot at them. Paul said, "You've got it all wrong. You've got it all wrong. Your foolish pride is proof enough that you're not the apostles of Christ. You heard of the triumphant deeds of the super apostles. Let me tell you about me. I was lowered out of a basket once I was in jail and I had to run for my life." What kind of a dumb testimony is that?

You see the point with Paul is that he would glory not in his strength but in his what? In his weakness. You can always tell a true apostle of Christ 'cause that's right where he is. And when somebody comes along and glories in their vision and in their experience and in their revelations and in all that kind of stuff you can write them off in Paul's eyes. So we say "Well he brought it up."

Look at verse 1 of chapter 12. Oh he did but I love this. I want you to see this. He says "Well I'm going to come now to visions and revelations. I do want to say a word about this" and I like this. He says, "I knew a man in Christ about 14 years ago whether in the body I can't tell or whether out of the body I can't tell. God knows." This is terrific. Did you get the point there? He says "Oh yes. Back to my visions and revelations. Let's see. The last one I had was 14 years ago." 14 years ago Paul? You're not a very good charismatic. You've got to get slain in the spirit every week man. 14 years ago Paul? "Oh yeah. And I don't even remember if I was in the body or out of the body. I can't remember too well about the thing. In fact I don't know what was going on. I just remember kind of what happened."

Paul, no editor would accept that. You've got to have it clearly written out Paul. If you went to heaven and came back you know how it's being done. "I think I was caught up in the third heaven in this deal. I don't know whether it was real or not. I might have been dreaming. It was so long ago. 14 years is the last one I had." He says, "By the way I'd like to leave this anyway. It's not interesting at all." Verse 5 "I'd rather glory in" what? My infirmities. Oh I love that. Isn't that terrific? That isn't the issue. I'd rather glory in my infirmities.

Let me tell you about the real credentials of an apostle lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations. Just to make sure I never gloried in those the lord gave me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me so that I wouldn't be exalted and I prayed three times that God remove it and he didn't but he said to me "my grace is sufficient for thee. My strength is made perfect in weakness and most gladly. Therefore I would rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest on me. I take pleasure in infirmity, reproach, necessity, persecution and distress for Christ sake for when I am weak" what? Then I am strong. You see?

You know what God wants today? You know who the real stars are? You know who the really truly spiritual people are? The people who manifest it in humility. Do you see that? Did you know that Zachariah had a vision to start that one night when he had those visions and it was two years before the voice of God ever spoke to him again?

And do you know there were many prophets in the old testament that heard the voice of God once in their entire life and that was when they got their prophecy and never again. That is never God's standard for living. Paul says "My life was weak and wretched and desperate and humble and I was in misery from the time I came to Christ until my head was chopped off. I was in misery and

wretchedness and humility and meekness and it was in that that God could absolve himself.”

Now that's true spirituality. And we've got it all fouled up. In Luke chapter 5 our dear lord is talking to Peter and it says in verse 8 Simon Peter saw it, fell down at Jesus' feet saying "Depart from me for I am a sinful man. Oh lord." And verse 11 says "They forsook all and" what? "Followed him." You know the kind of people the lord wants? People to say "Depart from me for I am a sinful man." See that?

Then the lord said "Hey you. That's the kind of guy I can use." He came to Isaiah, he called Isaiah and Isaiah said "Oh I am a man of unclean lips. You don't want me." And it's always been so with God's choice of servants. They never have a high view of their status. They never put a price tag on themselves. They have a low view and see themselves as powerless and sinful and weak and humble.

Walter Chantry said "In our biblical desire for revival we must refuse to seek any experience which proposes to eliminate our natural weakness. God does not need your talents, wisdom, holiness and strength but rather you in weakness desperately need the power of his spirit in your labors. You need not be wonderfully transformed by a second work of grace to be a suitable instrument of God's spirit. The lord delights in exalting his gracious power by using weak instruments." True spirituality, receiving the word, living in holiness, manifesting humility.

Listen. In the Christian church let's get the thing squared away, huh? People will say "Oh since I had my experience I'm so happy, so happy. I've arrived spirit." Let me show you something. I want to close with this. Matthew chapter 5, just so you get the word right out of the mouth of Jesus. Matthew 5. "And seeing the multitudes" verse 1 "he went into a mount and when he was seated his disciples came to him and he opened his mouth and he taught them saying." Do you see the word blessed here? This is the Beatitudes.

Do you know another word for the word blessed? Happy. You want to see who the happy people are? "Happy are the poor in spirit" verse 4 "Happy are they that mourn" verse 5 "Happy are the meek. Happy are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Happy are the merciful. Happy are the pure in heart. Happy are the peacemakers. Happy are they who are" what? "Persecuted for righteousness sake. Happy are you when men shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice. Be exceedingly glad for great is your reward in heaven for so persecuted they the prophets who were before you."

Who are the really happy people? I'll tell you who they are. They are the humble people. Who are the humble people? They are the holy people. Who are the holy people? They are the ones who hear and obey the word of God and the sum of it is they are the spiritual people. And let it be said beloved that there is a standard of true spirituality and I'm so grieved in my heart that when we accept a counterfeit standard we become poor because we lose the true standard. Beloved don't seek some

experience. Don't pursue some vision. Don't seek some revelation or some deal like that. You pursue holiness and that will be sufficient and you pursue in that holiness, humility and God will exalt you beyond your imagination.

Let's pray. Our father thank you for our fellowship this morning, for speaking to us pointedly and directly and we pray father that we might forget what is human and recall in our hearts what is from you and so we ask that you would bless the word to our hearts. In Jesus name. Amen.

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