

The Competent Minister, Part 2

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 3:4-6

Code: 47-13

I have eagerly waited to go back to 2 Corinthians chapter 3 for our continuing study in the first six verses of this chapter. We have had one message already, we'll have another one this morning, and one more, I believe, next Lord's day in connection with our communion service. Second Corinthians chapter 3 verses 1 to 6 presents for us, I believe, a picture of the competent minister. Without sounding self-serving, let me say that more than any profession in the world the ministry demands the best men, more than medicine, more than science, more than education. The ministry of the Word of God calls for the very highest standards the most qualified, the most skilled and the most careful men. Why? Because the spiritual dimension is more important than the physical dimension. Because serving God is more demanding than serving anybody else, because the kingdom and the will and the glory of God are more important than anything else, because only God's Word is absolutely and always true and transforming and because only that which is spiritual is eternal.

So many reasons to say that more than any other profession, the ministry of Jesus Christ demands the best, the most qualified and the most skilled men.

I remember years ago riding on a train from northern California down to the south, and I purposely took the train because I wanted to read, and it takes a long time to get anywhere on the train and I wanted the time to read. And one of the books I wanted to read is a book by Martyn Lloyd-Jones who is now with the Lord called *Preaching and Preachers*. That book has a chapter in it in which Martyn Lloyd-Jones set forth what he believed to be the required qualities for a competent minister. If, and he would agree with what I just said to you, the ministry requires the most skilled, the most careful, the most well-trained men of any profession, if that is true then what qualifications are necessary? How do we break that down?

Well he wrote in his sixth chapter in that book that a church when looking for its leader or pastor should look for a man with, number one, an unusual degree of spirituality, that is a sensitive man, a man who can feel with his heart, a man for whom the spiritual was the important part of life. Secondly, they should look for a man with a deep knowledge of the truth and an obedient relationship to it. Thirdly, they should look for a man with character, that is his life would be characterized by wisdom and patience and forbearance and virtue. He then said they should look for a man who understands people and human nature. And then fifthly, they should look for a man with an unusual ability mentally with intellectual and mental capacity that is above normal. Sixthly, that they should look for someone with an ability to speak effectively, powerfully, persuasively and clearly. Seventh, Martyn Lloyd-Jones suggested someone who was trained in mental discipline, someone who had learned how to think

and reason systematically and logically, someone who had a general knowledge of many things as well as the Bible, someone who had a grasp of the original languages in order to promote accuracy, someone who was well versed in theology, church history and heresies past and present. He closed the chapter by saying the chief thing is the love of God, the love of the soul, a love of souls, love of the truth and the Holy Spirit within you.

Now the Apostle Paul here in this text offers us his own list of the qualities of a competent minister. He does it in a self-defending kind of text because his own competency has been called into question. Paul's teachers have arrived in Corinth, as you know, they have begun their relentless assault on Paul's credibility. And they have denied that he is a competent minister. They have denied that he is sufficient as a teacher, that he misrepresents his credentials and his teaching as if he were from God and spoke the truth, when in fact he is not. His adequacy, his competency are at issue in Corinth. They shouldn't be. People should have known better but they believed the lying false apostles.

So in this text Paul is dealing with the issue of competency. What triggers this discussion is back in verse 16 of chapter 2. And who is adequate for these things? The word is *hikanos* in the Greek, it means competent, sufficient, capable, or able. Who is an able minister? They claim I'm not, these false apostles, they claim they are? Who is competent? Who has the competency to take the task of ministry on? To take on such a monumental and eternally significant duty as being the human instrument through which the gospel is preached? Who is capable and able to become the container for the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Christ to be manifest in every place? Who has the capability to sincerely with divine power speak on behalf of Jesus Christ in such a manner that people's lives are literally brought to the brink, as it were, of life or death? Who has the ability to be used as such a divine instrument under the careful eyes of Almighty God, fulfilling His eternal purpose and survive the scrutiny?

Indeed, who is competent? Who is capable? Who is adequate? Who is sufficient? And again Paul's sufficiency and competency was being called into question and he was turning the tables and calling in to question the others who had claimed to be sufficient. Who is capable for that? Who is capable to march in the victory and the triumph parade? Who in himself can receive accolades from Almighty God for service rendered to Him on behalf of Jesus Christ? Who in the world is capable for that?

Verse 17 of chapter 2 indicates that the false teachers weren't. They were peddlers who lacked sincerity. But who is competent?

Down in verse 6 of chapter 3 we really have the straightforward answer. The end of verse 5 we notice the word "God." "God," then verse 6, "who also made us adequate." Only those are adequate who've been made adequate by God. That's the answer. Colossians chapter 1, Paul says in verse 23, "I was made a minister." Verse 25, "I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed upon me."

The only person who is competent is one whom God has made a minister. Self-made ministers are incompetent. It wasn't that God selected Paul because there was something in his human life that made him desirable. In fact, in 1 Timothy 1:12 he said, "Christ Jesus our Lord strengthened me, considered me faithful, put me into the ministry even though I was a blasphemer, a persecutor and a violent aggressor." And He did it just to show His mercy, Paul says, and just to show His grace.

Against everything that I was, He chose me so that all the glory would go to Him. Paul says God made me a minister. I was a blasphemer, I was a violent aggressor against Christianity. I was demonstrating hatred toward Christ and hatred toward God. He said I am the chief of sinners. Against everything I was in order to display His grace, God chose me and made me a minister.

The term "adequate" there in verse 6 is from the same root word as the term adequate back in chapter 2 verse 16, who is adequate? Only those God makes adequate.

Now all through this letter, just as a footnote, Paul defends himself. And you get the feeling that he's a bit embarrassed to do this. He doesn't want it to be misunderstood and yet it's necessary. Not because he was trying to preserve his own reputation for the sake of his own mental health, not because he wanted to feel good about himself and self-esteem is important for everybody. Paul was not defending himself for any other reason than the fact that it was imperative that the Corinthians believed in him because he was the pipeline of divine truth. And if they lost their confidence in him, then they would lose out on the Word of God. It was imperative that the Corinthians continued to trust him as Christ's Apostle and as the inspired writer of Scripture for their own sakes so that they would hear the Word of God.

So, for the sake of the churches that he loved he defends his apostleship. In so defending he deals with this issue of competency, sufficiency, ability, capability in ministry. And as he does that, in these opening six verses of chapter 3, he gives us a profile of a competent minister. And as I said to you a few weeks ago, next time you look for a pastor or minister in this church, here are the things you should look for. We covered two of them last time, let me review them.

First of all, a competent minister of Jesus Christ is known because he has established a reputation for godliness...he has established a reputation for godliness. Look at verse 1. Paul, feeling almost shocked by the rejection of the Corinthians, says, "Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need as some letters of commendation to you or from you?"

What is he saying by this? Well as I told you, he is simply saying...Do I have to start all over again with you to let you know what kind of a man I am? Do we have to begin this thing all over again? Do you need secondhand letters when you have had a firsthand relationship with me? Does nearly two years count for nothing? Two years in your presence, nearly two years in your presence? You know

me. You know my life. You know my character. You know my godliness. You know my personal habits. My life among you was an open book. You know the priorities of my life. Do we have to begin that all over again like you didn't know anything? Do I have to go back and start a new to commend myself to you? That is ludicrous. You already have established in your minds my reputation for godliness. You know the kind of man I am.

Then he adds a second question. "Do we need as some letters of commendation to you or from you?" These false teachers were saying Paul didn't have the proper letters of commendation. They were into bringing letters of commendation to validate themselves and then taking with them...with them when they left a certain area to accumulate more commendation. They were dependent on secondhand letters. Paul is saying, "Do you need secondhand letters when you've had a firsthand experience with my life? You know me. You don't need secondhand testimony. And we don't need to begin this relationship all over again.

A confident minister is one whose virtue is well known. A competent minister is one whose godliness is obvious. When you look for a pastor, look for someone who doesn't need letters, whose virtue and godliness is well known.

And then secondly, still reviewing, a competent minister is known because he has been used in a transforming ministry. He has been used in a transforming ministry. Verses 2 and 3 say, "You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men, being manifested that you are a letter from Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts."

Paul again alluding to these supposed necessary letters says why in the world are you asking me for a letter, you're the only letter that matters. If somebody wants to know about my life, let them read you. And here he introduces this whole idea of impact. God had used him in the salvation and the sanctification of these people and their lives were the most articulate and eloquent letter of commendation possible.

It amazes me how through the years when churches look for a pastor they send for the pastor that they want to come. And they talk to him. When what might be a better strategy is to send a whole bunch of people from the church to go to talk to the people that his life has influenced. You're the letter. Let them read you.

And this letter, this living letter isn't carried around in my pocket like those letters are in the pockets of the false apostles, but in my heart. And it isn't read only by the few who can read and can see what needs to be read, but it can be read by everybody who touches your life. And it wasn't written by some earthly friends, it was written by Christ and it wasn't written with ink that fades but by the eternal Spirit and it wasn't written on stone but it was written on the heart.

So, Paul is saying you want to know about my competency, don't look for letters, look at your lives. On the basis of personal reputation for virtue and godliness, on the basis of usefulness to God in a transforming ministry, the competent minister is demonstrated.

Now that takes us to a third point and a new beginning. Thirdly, the competent minister, this is so important, has confidence in his gift and calling. The competent minister has confidence in his gift and calling. Notice verse 4, "And such confidence we have through Christ toward God." Paul is saying I have confidence in my ministry. I don't need to come out defending myself for my own sake. I'm not trying to prove anything to me. I'm not trying to convince myself.

Paul never vacillated about his calling from God. He never vacillated about his giftedness by the Holy Spirit. This, beloved, is a great and necessary strength in the ministry. To be confident of your giftedness, to be confident of your calling so that nothing however hard can make you question your life work. It's that kind of resoluteness, it's that kind of courage, it's that kind boldness, it's that kind of narrowness that makes for an effective ministry. People often ask me, I mean often, if you weren't in the ministry what would you do? What would you be? And I can never answer that question because I cannot conceive of myself as being anything other than I am. Some people think, "Well, you should be a lawyer because you like an argument." Some people say, "Well you should run a company because you have a standard of excellence and you know how to work with people." And other people have told me through the years, "You should be a coach because maybe you could motivate people with the enthusiasm that you have."

I never thought about any of those things for a millisecond in my life. I have no concept of myself other than what I am. There are no alternatives for me. This is it, this is the groove God has me in and that's it. I cannot imagine myself doing something else because this was never the best of a group of options. I understand what Paul meant when he said, "Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel," this is what I've been made for, designed for and called to. And when a man has that kind of conviction that there are no alternatives, there's a certain boldness, there's a certain forthrightness that characterizes his ministry. Look at chapter 4 and verse 7. Paul casts himself as an earthen vessel, sort of depicts himself as if he were a homely clay pot. And he says in these clay pots called preachers is the treasure of divine truth that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves. We're a bunch of homely clay pots but in us is this tremendous power and all the credit for it goes to God.

And he sees himself as a clay pot with nothing to do in life but to carry about the truth and power of God. And so he says in verse 8, "We're afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not despairing, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed. Always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body, for we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake that the life of Jesus also may be manifest in

our mortal flesh, so death works in us but life in you."

What is he saying? He's saying...Look, we're afflicted, we're perplexed, we're persecuted, we're struck down, we stand on the brink of death all the time. But that's all right. Verse 13, that's all right, I believe, therefore I spoke. We also believe, therefore also we speak. We just keep doing what we know we have to do, whether we're standing on the brink of death or not. I have the same spirit of faith as was demonstrated by the psalmist who said, "I believe therefore I spoke."

Paul was a one-track person. There weren't any options. There weren't any alternatives in his life. He never vacillated about his calling or his giftedness. It must be hard for people in the ministry who do that because every time things get difficult they question the validity of what they do. Should I be here, shouldn't I be here? Should I get out? When you have the confidence that you're called and gifted for ministry, nothing becomes a threat to that. Everything just becomes an opportunity for God to demonstrate His power.

So in verse 4, what does Paul say? "Such confidence we have." The word "confidence," *pathos* can even mean "to win." Confidence is that resoluteness that keeps moving toward the goal, the triumph, the victory. I never met a man who was successful in anything in life who wasn't competitive, who didn't want desperately to win. And that's certainly true in ministry. The Apostle had an unwavering confidence in his divinely given and empowered ministry. He believed in the call of God. He believed in the gift that God had given him. And he believed in the power of God in his life. And even though he was nothing more than a clay pot, he was committed to the fact that God had set him apart to serve.

And I think he wasn't alone. Going back to the early church, go back to chapter 4 of Acts. It struck me as I was going over the book of Acts in the last few weeks that the early Apostles ministered with the same kind of confidence that Paul had. Chapter 4, and you remember that they brought in the Apostles before the ruling leaders of Jerusalem. And they wanted an explanation, so they had them in jail and they brought them to trial. And verse 13 says, "As they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling." What really made them wonder was this incredible confidence and it didn't come from erudition, it didn't come from education, it didn't come from scholarship, it didn't come from training in the finest Judaistic schools. They believed what they were saying. They believed and therefore they spoke. And they had a raging confidence. And whether they faced death or not, it didn't change their confidence.

By the way, in the same chapter I might even point out again in Acts 4 verse 29 because Peter here demonstrates the same kind of confidence that they saw when they were on trial. "And now, Lord, take note of their threats and grant that Thy bondservants may speak Thy Word with all confidence." This, of course, is Peter leading the early church in prayer when they'd been told not to preach they pray and say, "Lord, give us more confidence, give us greater confidence."

That was part of the strength of the early church. Their confidence didn't rest on their personal talent, or their personal ability. It wasn't self-confidence. Self-confidence is arrogance. It was a strong and unwavering belief in the reality that they were called and gifted.

And you'll notice that in verse 4 of 2 Corinthians 3, "And such confidence we have through Christ toward God." Their confidence went right back through Christ toward God. They knew that the only reason they had power and calling and giftedness was because of Christ and because of God. Romans 15:18 Paul says, "I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed." I'll never say anything about my own ability, my own talent, I will speak only of what Christ has wrought through me, or accomplished through me.

The false teachers came along with self-confidence, they came along with arrogance. They thought they were adequate. They weren't, verse 17, they were peddlers of the Word of God, corrupters, hucksters, insincere. Paul says, "On the other hand, we affirm God and we speak in the power of Christ in the sight of God." He's saying affirm God through Christ back to God our service is rendered. And that's exactly what he's saying in verse 4, through Christ to us and then back toward God. He ministered not in his own ability and not to satisfy himself, but in the ability God gave him through Christ and with a goal and motive of going right back and pleasing the God who gifted him in the first place.

God was not only the ultimate source of his gift and calling, God was the ultimate goal of his service. God called him with a high and a holy calling and God was the one he desired to please in that service which he rendered. Yes, verse 7 of chapter 4 says, "The power is of God." Verse 18 of chapter 5 says it was God who reconciled Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

Chapter 6 verse 4, "In everything we commend ourselves as servants of God in much endurance, afflictions, hardships, distress, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, sleeplessness--sleeplessness, hunger. We go through all of that. Why? Because God called us, God gifted us through Christ and we render our service back to Him. Paul's confidence was in God's calling not his own abilities. I am what I am...he said to the Corinthians in chapter 15 and verse 10 of the first letter...by the grace of God. And so he could...he could minister on the brink of death with all the stuff that he endured and never waver because he was so confident in his calling, his gifting and the power of God operating in his life. Competent minister should be known as one who has a bold confidence in his calling that never wavers. It gives courage, it allows him to take whatever comes, even to stand on the edge of death in unwavering faith.

Who is the able minister? Who is the authentic minister, the one who has a reputation for holiness untarnished, the one who has a living commendation, a letter written in the lives of those whom God has used him to transform and the one who has a bold confidence in his calling who doesn't waver no matter how severe the opposition?

Fourthly, and this progresses right along with the last one. The competent minister is known is because he has humble dependence on the power of God. He has humble dependence on the power of God. Immediately Paul says in verse 5, "Not that we are adequate in ourselves." Please...he says...don't misunderstand me. Though confident in my calling and confident in my gifting and bold and courageous and indefatigable in my service because I am confident in the power of God that works in me. I am not adequate in myself. And if left to myself, can accomplish absolutely nothing. In fact, in chapter 12 of this same epistle he says the more I get out of the way the greater my usefulness. He says, verse 10 of 2 Corinthians 12, "I am well content with weaknesses, insults, distresses, persecutions and difficulties for Christ's sake for when I am weak then I am strong." When I come to the end of my own human resources and I am depleted and weak and without strength, then the unmitigated, unadulterated, unmixed power of God flows through my life. We are not adequate in ourselves.

People are not in the ministry because they have the gift of gab, because they're talented communicators, because they have a flair for the dramatic. That stuff tends to corrupt more than help. The Apostle Paul does not want to be misunderstood. He had a great mind but he didn't depend on it. It was a trained mind and he used it and God used it mightily. But left to itself it would be purely an instrument of human wisdom. And in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 he said, "God will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the cleverness of the clever he will set aside." Paul said, I preach the word of the cross which is foolishness to most people. In chapter 2 of 1 Corinthians he said, "I determine to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I didn't come with superiority of speech or wisdom, I was with you in weakness and fear and trembling and my preaching and my message were not in persuasive words of wisdom but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men but on the power of God."

He had some ability, both in terms of speech and in terms of intellect. But left to himself it was useless. I don't trust myself. When I'm weak and when I'm persecuted and insulted and distressed and when I'm at the end of my rope and have nothing left, then I am most powerful because then I'm out of the way.

Look what he says, verse 5, "Not that we are adequate...follow this...in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves." Again the editorial plural is used here, it's a mode of expressing something humbly. And the word here that I want you to notice is the word "consider," *logizomai* from which we get logic and it means to reason. He said I am not even able to reason in my own mind and determine anything. I'm not adequate to reason anything from myself out. He's disdaining the ability

to reason anything or to think anything on his own in such a way as to judge or assess truth, reality. Left to myself, he says, I'm useless, I am absolutely powerless.

Take the Word of God away from me, take the Spirit of God away from me, I have nothing to say. The truth is not in me no matter how intelligent I might be, no matter how brilliant, no matter how skilled oratorically, apart from divine revelation and the impartation of the Spirit of God in my life, I know nothing, I have nothing definitive to say about the spiritual dimension, about reality, about God, about ultimate and eternal truth. I'm not here because I'm a clever speaker. I'm not here because am a learned individual. I'm here because God has placed me here and God has humbled me before His truth and the power of His Spirit and the truth and the Spirit bring to you what God wants you to hear.

Paul is saying there isn't even anything in my life that I can reason properly. I don't have the ability. You take the Bible away from someone like me, take the Holy Spirit away from me and I'm the world's biggest ignoramus. I'm just like everybody else poking around out there trying to figure out what's going on. I don't have any answers. Paul says I wouldn't even reason anything out of myself about anything.

People say to me, "What are your long-range plans, John?" And I always say, "I don't have any long-range plans." And they will ask, "What are your short-range plans?" "I don't have any short-range plans."

"Well how can you plan your life?" "I don't have any plan for my life. I don't have a life. I am not my own. I am bought with a price and someone else has a plan for my life and He never seems to reveal it very far in advance. I don't have any long-range plans and I don't have any short-range plans. Well I do, my long-range plan on Monday is to prepare a sermon for Sunday. On Friday it becomes a short-range plan." That is it.

Somebody said, "You know, in what you said a few weeks about the next time you choose a pastor, follow these principles, people think maybe you're going to leave Grace Church." If God wants me to leave this church, I suppose I will, but I don't have that word yet. I don't have any information from the Lord. I don't know what His plan is for my life, any longer than the day I live it and to prepare for the next privileged ministry. I wouldn't even trust my own judgment. How in the world would I know that I could be right if I decided to concoct my own plan? Paul says I wouldn't even consider anything as coming from myself worthy of anything. I just want to recognize God's plan when He lays it out and I'll wait till God reveals His plan and then I'll follow His plan.

Paul learned that. You remember back in Acts 16 he had some plans. He was trekking along and says he passed through Phrygia and Galatia, Acts 16:6, and he was forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the Word in Asia. He went to Asia and he thought...We're going to Asia, guys, I'm going to preach. He got to Asia, the Lord said no, I don't want you to preach. So much for that long-range plan.

And then he came to Mysia and said, "Guys, we're going to Bithynia." And the Spirit of Jesus said, "No you're not." So much for that long-range plan.

No, Paul said I don't make my plans. I just live my life a day at a time as God unfolds His purpose. I have confidence that the Lord knows my life and that He's called me and gifted me and He set me on a course and He knows what the course is. And in His own due time He'll reveal it.

I'm not adequate for anything. So please...and this again is that self-effacing...almost...effacing, almost embarrassed demeanor of Paul as he defends himself and says, "Please, don't think that in myself I'm adequate for anything, I'm not. Our adequacy...end of verse 5...is from God."

In the Old Testament the great name of the Almighty, El Shaddai is six times in the Septuagint, ha hikanos, the sufficient One, the competent One. My adequacy, says Paul, is from ha hikanos. I'm not competent, I'm not adequate, but He is. And I will do what He tells me to do.

Verse 6, He is the one who made us adequate. He's the one who made me what I am. And you can go back to Acts chapter 9 and you see the Apostle Paul, he's got in his little hot hand the papers from the officials in Jerusalem that give him authority to go to Damascus and round up Christians and throw them in prison and kill them. And he's on his way to Damascus. And what happens? A light comes out of heaven, he's struck blind, he falls in the dirt. The Lord Jesus is revealed to him in that moment. He is marvelously converted. In his blindness he is taken away. A vision comes to a man named Ananias, he's a Christian in the church there in Damascus. And the Lord says to Ananias, "I want you to go this house, there's a guy there named Saul, and I want you to go meet him because I have a message for him." And Ananias' response is, "I know the guy, he kills Christians, why would I want to go there? He'll kill me."

And what is the Lord's answer? The Lord's answer is absolutely sovereign, absolutely mighty. The Lord simply says, "He's a chosen instrument of Mine to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel." I chose him and I'm making him a minister.

When Paul gave his testimony in the twenty-sixth chapter of the book of Acts, he reiterated what the Lord said. The Lord said, "Arise, stand on your feet. For this purpose I have appeared to you to appoint you a minister." I'm making you a minister, and a witness. And that's how it is. No wonder Paul said, "Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel."

So Paul defends himself but it's certainly with humility, isn't it? And the competent minister is not anxious to impress you with his credentials. You would be amazed to see some of the applications that I get for people who would like to serve at the church or teach at the college or teach at the seminary or minister at Grace To You, and some people can really pile up the stuff trying to impress you. But a most impressive application would run something like this:

I have a hunger for godliness, God has in His mercy and grace used me for the salvation and the sanctification of many. I am unwaveringly confident in my calling and willing to stand on the edge of death on behalf of Christ. And I am humbled that He ever would give me the privilege of ministry and whatever has happened in my life has happened through His power.

That's the kind of stuff that reveals the competent minister. The able minister, able because of personal virtue, able because he is imbued with the power of God by which he has become an instrument in the divine miracle of salvation and sanctification, able because of his calling and giftedness giving him a great boldness, able because of his humble recognition that everything that ever happens in his life that has eternal consequence comes by the power of God. That's competency.

There's one last point, I don't have time to give it to you, I'm going to cover it next time. But let me just suggest it so you'll have your list complete in case the Rapture should occur this week. Fifth, a competent minister is known because he has a New Covenant message...he has a New Covenant, or a New Testament message. Verse 6 also says, "We are servants of a New Covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit, for the letter kills but the Spirit gives life." This gives us an insight into the kind of thing the false teachers were propagating. They were propagating legalism. They were propagating the Judaizing heresy that you had to have circumcision and keep the Mosaic Law in order to be saved. They had deceived the Corinthian church like the Galatians were being deceived that you were perfected in the flesh. And the Apostle is saying a competent minister preaches New Covenant truth in Christ. The Spirit that gives life, not the letter that kills.

Now there's much more to say about that and, Lord willing, we'll say it next Sunday. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, again we are so reprimanded in our own hearts, we who serve, we who minister, that we fall short of the highest standard for the noblest work in the world. And we are then awed by Your grace that You would consider us faithful enough to put us into the ministry who are indeed the foremost of all sinners. We're not worthy to even be called Your servants. We're not worthy to even be called Your ministers. And yet to demonstrate Your grace and to show Your mercy, You have picked the worst of us to become Your agents, Your tools. You have made us those containers, those earthen vessels that hold the treasure, those perfumed bottles from which the aroma of life unto life and death unto death exudes. You've made us preachers, teachers to display Your grace toward sinners. And we give You glory and thanks. We know what a high calling it is, what a holy calling it is. We know that it calls for virtue that only You can give and transforming power that only You can give and confidence and courage and boldness that only You can give, and humility that only You can give, and truth, New Covenant truth that You have revealed. At best we are nothing but slaves and servants who when we've done all have only done what we ought to have done.

Father, we pray that You'll raise up many men who are competent by Your standards, that they would fill Your church around the world, that they would replace those who are peddling the Word of God, those hucksters and charlatans and frauds, those who lack holiness, those who lack real transforming power, those who lack a holy boldness and confidence, those who lack humility and those who preach a warped message. We pray, Father, that You would replace those people with those who are competent by Your standard. We thank You for the young men in the Master's Seminary and the College who are training and preparing to be what You would want them to be. We pray that You'll raise up many more.

And then, Lord, for all of us in this congregation, we too are to be godly, we too are to have our lives be instruments in transforming the lives of others, we too are to be courageous in our Christian testimony, humble in our lives and we too are to speak the truth so that our preachers and pastors and leaders are really modeling for us what in our small frame of influence we are to be as well. Mold and shape our leadership and then mold and shape our people into what the leaders are to be. As we follow Christ, may they follow us and may You be pleased. We thank You for this wonderful time of worship, for the proclamation of Your truth. May we worship You even as we leave here in what we are, what we say, what we do. We give You praise in Christ's name. Amen.

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