

Chosen Vessel - Abiding in Christ

by Chuck Smith

The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing that our sufficiency comes from Christ, not from ourselves, and that we are to preach Christ and show people the glory of God.

Duration: 1:01:37

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, 2 Corinthians 3:5-7, 2 Corinthians 3:18, 2 Corinthians 4:2, Revelation 10:6

Topics: "Leadership"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the responsibilities and challenges of the ministry. He acknowledges that he is not sufficient for these tasks and relates to the apostle Paul's cry of inadequacy. The speaker emphasizes the importance of setting a good example as a representative of God and warns against diverting attention from Him. He encourages a focus on preaching Christ and beholding the glory of the Lord through the study of the Bible.

Transcript

Paul the Apostle, in his second epistle to the Corinthians, begins to share a little bit about his ministry. Paul had a plague. It followed him wherever he went.

There were those that were so opposed to the message of grace that Paul was proclaiming, that they felt it was their God-given duty to follow Paul wherever he established churches. And as soon as Paul left, move in like vultures to try to discredit the ministry of Paul in the hearts of the people. And they would say, oh, you know, who is Paul? They don't really recognize him in Jerusalem.

And they would challenge his apostleship. They would challenge his authority. And so Paul found it necessary many times to write these epistles to encourage the people not to listen to these smooth-talking deceivers who would follow him.

You know, it is interesting to me that those who have heresy to proclaim never proclaim it to the world. They proclaim it to the church. There's one thing about heretical doctrines, and that is they are rarely evangelistic.

They are always coming to the church to feed off the church. They won't go out in the front lines against the devil, but they'll come to your churches, and they'll try and get a little group, get a little listening audience, and then they'll start to, you know, well, have you, you know, I don't know if you're spiritually

ready for this or not, but, you know, God's been revealing some marvelous things in these days, you know, and they start trying to feed off the body. And so Paul was plagued by these kind of individuals who would follow him and then try to disrupt the saints of God.

They wouldn't go to the cities where Paul hadn't gone. They weren't willing to start their works in new areas, uncharted territory, but they would go to those who had already come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and try to subvert the gospel that Paul had preached unto them. And so Paul is writing to the Corinthians, and these people would come with their letters of authority, you know, and so-and-so recognizes me, etc., etc., etc.

Paul says, hey, I don't need any letters of commendation, for you are really my letters of commendation. You are the living epistles. The very fact that you believe in Jesus Christ is my letter of commendation.

You owe your faith to me. The fact that you're walking in the Lord is my letter of commendation. I don't need to come along and prove myself.

Now, Paul, in considering the ministry, and in these first, or in these third and fourth chapters, really, he's talking about the ministry. In chapter 3, verse 5, talking about the ministry, of course, back in a little bit earlier in chapter 2, the end of it, he said, and who is sufficient for these things? Question. But now he says, not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of Christ.

When I look at the ministry and all that it entails, the dealing with people, and the handling of the Word of God, and being God's representative, and that to me is the heaviest part of the ministry. Knowing that people are developing their concepts of God by what they see in me. They're drawing their ideas of what God is like as they observe me.

For I, as a minister of Jesus Christ, am a representative of Jesus Christ, and it is my duty to represent Him before these people. So they are developing their concepts of God as they observe me. They are developing their concepts of God as they observe you.

As has been pointed out, you're sort of a role model for your people. As the shepherd, they're going to be following you. They're going to follow the example that you have set.

I heard that Greg Laurie and one of his deacons decided to go hunting. And so they got in the pickup, and they had the guns in the rack in the back end there, and went out in one of these areas of Riverside County, and everything was posted closed. No hunting.

Man, they had driven for hours, and so finally the deacon said, you know, the only chance we're going to have to hunt is over there on old man Brown's ranch, but you know, he is the meanest guy in the whole county. I mean, he's got a reputation of being so mean that, you know, he'll be out with his shotgun if you dare pull anywhere near his yard. Well, Greg said, look, we've come this far.

I'd like to do some shooting. He says, I think I'll just go up and ask him. Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

Won't hurt to ask the fellow. So Greg went up the door, and he knocked on the door, and he said, sir, he said, my deacon and I decided we'd go hunting today, and we've been driving a long time. We found everything posted closed, and I'm Greg Laurie.

I'm the pastor of the Harvest Fellowship in Riverside, and he said, I was wondering, do you suppose it would be possible we could do a little shooting on your property? And the fellow said, so you're Greg Laurie. He said, that's tremendous. He said, I've been listening to your radio broadcast, and man, do I ever appreciate your ministry.

You don't know what you've done for my family and I. He said, we never miss your broadcast. Honey, do you know who's here? It's Greg Laurie, you know, and just so excited. He said, hey, I would count it a real privilege for you to do hunting on my property.

And he said, but I do have one favor to ask you. He said, that horse out there in the corral, you see him out there? He said, the vet just left and said that he's sick and have to put him to death. He said, would you mind shooting the horse for you going up? Greg said, no, I'll be glad to shoot the horse for you.

So as he headed back to the truck, you know how Greg is. He decided he'd play a trick on his deacon. So as he got back to the truck, he said to the deacon, he says, you know, he said, it's true.

That guy has to be the meanest guy I've ever met in my life. You can't believe what that man said to me. He said, in fact, I'm boiling.

I'm so mad. He said, I just have to do something. I can't, I can't just drive home.

I've got to do something. And so he grabbed the gun off the rack and he leveled on the horse and he pulled the trigger and pow and the old horse falls over, you know. And as Greg turns around to put the gun back, he hears pow, pow.

And the guy says, I got two of his cows. Let's get out of here, Greg. So you're a role, you're a role model.

Your people are going to follow you. And you've got to be careful what kind of an example you set before them as God's representative. Now when I think of these responsibilities, I with Paul cry out, and who is sufficient for these things? When I think of all of the, that the ministry entails, the obligations, the responsibilities, and the accountability of the ministry that I must one day make before God, I with Paul often say, and who is sufficient for these things? And I recognize immediately, not me.

I'm not sufficient for these things. Man, I can't handle it. It's more than what I can handle.

And so it's important for us to again recognize as Paul, not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves. If God has started to bless your ministry, if God has started to use you in a special way, don't think that it is of yourself. Why is it that we always sort of look for something in us as a reason why God finally chose us? He finally came around and realized what he had here.

Isn't that wonderful? God finally knows just what a prize he snagged when he got hold of me. And now God's beginning to use me because God knew that he could trust me. And, and we begin to think that it is something of us when in reality, as Paul says, God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise and the simple things.

So God has chosen you and God has chosen me, the foolish things of the world, the simple things, that he might work through us in order that the wise might be confounded. And they say, well, I don't know, you know, how or why God does it for them. The sufficiency is not of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of Christ.

A couple of scriptures that I have really taken to heart and are more or less models for my life. One is the statement of Jesus to his disciples in the 15th chapter of John, as he's talking about this relationship of the vine and the branches. And Jesus said, apart from me, you can do nothing.

I don't like to hear that, Lord. Surely there is something I can do. And I spent several years trying to disprove that scripture.

I felt that surely there's got to be something I can do worthwhile for God. But there came a day when I waved the white flag and I said, I surrender God, I, I agree. Apart from you, I can do nothing.

But I put that along with Philippians 4.13, for I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me. Apart from him, I can do nothing. But listen, there's nothing I can't do with him.

My sufficiency isn't of myself. My sufficiency is of Christ. And when my sufficiency is of Christ, I have all sufficiency.

I need nothing more than him to accomplish my ministry. But I have no ministry apart from him. I have no sufficiency of myself.

My sufficiency is of Christ, who also hath made us able ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter, but of the spirit. For the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. Now, this is a scripture that has been oftentimes misinterpreted.

I have heard people use this scripture to prove that the Bible can kill people. The letter killeth. And if you just preach the word of God, you're going to kill those people, man, because the letter killeth.

And I've heard it used to prove that you shouldn't just try teaching the word of God. Paul is talking about a new covenant and an old covenant. The new covenant through Jesus Christ, the old covenant, the covenant of the letter of the law, killeth.

You see, the law has actually condemned all of us to die. The law revealed to us what was God's righteous standard. And none of you have lived up to it.

And having failed to live up to it, the law only has one thing for you, death. No power to justify you, no power to make you righteous. No power to forgive you.

Only power to sentence you to death. And under the law, you've been sentenced to death. The letter killeth.

It has sentenced you to death. But the new covenant in Christ has brought us life. And so Paul goes on and he, of course, so oftentimes our preaching would be corrected if we had just read the context.

But Paul goes on to talk about Moses and the law, the ministration of death. But even though it was a ministration of death, it was so glorious that when God gave the law, it was necessary that Moses veil his face when he met with the people. That which was fading was so glorious.

That which was not to last, the law, which was only to be the schoolmaster to bring people to Christ, was so glorious that Moses' face had to be veiled. But then Paul goes on to say, but we, with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed from glory to glory, even into the same image by the power of his spirit working in us. Originally, man was created in the image of God.

God said, let us make man in our image and after our likeness. There is a scripture in the New Testament that says that we are of the genus of God. A remarkable scripture indeed.

In the beginning, man was God's genus, his offspring, made in the image of God. But man fell from that image of God. Now the purpose of God is to restore man back into that image.

And that is the purpose of the coming of Jesus Christ. That is the purpose of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, to restore to man that which was lost by result of the fall. So man who fell from the image of God because of sin and the fall, through Jesus Christ, the purpose of God is to restore him into that image.

And again now, we with unveiled faces beholding the glory of the Lord. Now here's where you come in. For you see, it is your duty to so preach Christ to your people that they will see the glory of the Lord.

Now if through your preaching people can see the glory of God and the glory of Jesus Christ, their lives will be changed. So many times we are trying to change people by rules and establishing rules for them. The law couldn't do it, but I'll give you a set of rules.

Now you follow these 10 points. And to really be righteous, you've got to do this, this, and this, and this, and you can't do this, this, and this, and this. And then we're constantly writing them for their failures.

What we need to do is so preach Christ that the people get a view of God and the glory of God. And with open faces beholding the glory of the Lord, being changed from glory to glory into that same image. Now that only, that doesn't just go for your people, that goes for you.

And where do we with unveiled faces behold the glory of the Lord? Right here in the book. Too much of our Bible study is purely for the purpose of sermonizing. We don't read it for our own benefit, for our own devotional purposes.

Man, I got to get a sermon. Oh, where can I go? Ooh. And so I start reading with a, you know, sermon in mind rather than just to discover Him and His glory, His beauty, His wonder.

I've heard said, and it upsets me tremendously, we're not interested in doctrine, we're interested in experience. We're not interested in studying the Word, we're interested in experiencing the Word. I would like to say to you that I think that the greatest problem in the church today is the lack of good theology.

People don't know the truth about God. You see, Satan has been lying to people about God for a long time and there are more misconceptions concerning God, His nature, His character and all than any other person in the universe. And what people need to know more than everything else is the truth about God, the nature of God, the character of God.

They need to know good, sound theology, the doctrine of God so that they with open face can behold the glory of the Lord. And as they do, God's Spirit will begin the changes in them. It is a truth of life.

It is a truth of the Scripture that man becomes like his God. David in Psalm 115 said, The gods of the heathen are vain, for they carve them out of wood or silver. And eyes they have, but they cannot see.

Feet they have, they cannot walk. Ears they have, they cannot hear. Mouths they have, but they cannot speak.

And they that have made them have become like the gods that they have made. Why? Because a man becomes like his God. That's just a truth of life.

We with open faces beholding the glory of the Lord are being changed from glory to glory into the same image because a man becomes like his God. Beloved, now are we the sons of God. It does not yet appear what we're going to be.

We know when he appears we're going to be like him. Why? Because a man becomes like his God. That is why it is so important that your people have a true and proper concept of God.

And there are two places where they're going to develop their concepts of God. One is by the word that you preach, and second by the life that you live before them. And God help us, they need to be consistent with each other.

Now Paul says, therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not. Man, if it weren't for God's mercy, I'd faint. I'd check out.

I'd say, Lord, you better get someone else. That's too much for me to handle or to try to handle. I don't want to try to handle that, Lord.

But as we have received mercy, we faint not. But we have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty. Not walking in craftiness, nor handling the Word of God deceitfully.

But by the manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. Now, notice how we are not to handle the Word in craftiness or deceitfully. You're aware of the fact that you can make the Scriptures say almost anything you want them to say.

We see that all the time. Every cult tries to prove their points with the Scriptures. And so often we hear a person say, but in the Greek, you know.

And there is a lot of deceitful handling of the Word of God. Honest exposition is hard to come by. Even some of the greatest Bible expositional ministers today have those areas of Scriptural prejudice where they become dishonest in their exposition of the Word.

Men that I highly admire and respect as far as their teaching abilities. But when you get to the areas, certain areas where they have their blind spots, they are not honest in their exposition of the Word. They have certain things that they don't believe.

They have certain things that they've relegated to the period of the Apostolic Age. And they are certain that they no longer exist. And anything that happens, anything close to, like what's in the Scripture, has to be of Satan.

And they are dishonestly and deceitfully handling the Word of God. And so they have taken, and that which is perfect is come. And dishonestly and deceitfully have tried to make that refer to the full revelation of the Scriptures when there's no real possible way you can come to that.

And they didn't even do that up until the present century when they tried to disprove the modern Pentecostal movement. Let's go back to Thayer's lexicon. Go back to the expositors before the modern outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

And every single one of them, Dean Alford and all of them, say that this has to refer to, in context, to the coming again of Jesus Christ. That which is perfect. But because it opposes their theology, they handle the Word of God deceitfully.

Now that's one thing to see what they are doing and point my finger at them. But I've got to look and say, hey, do I have a blind spot? You know, am I approaching the Word of God with a presuppositional base that causes me to twist the Scripture to support my theology the way I believe it to be? I was at a Bible conference one time and one of my favorite Bible teachers was ministering. And he got to that verse of Scripture in Revelation chapter 10.

He was ministering to ministers. It was a pastor's Bible conference. And he got to that Scripture in Revelation chapter 10 where it says, and time, you know, the angel from heaven and all put one foot upon the sea and one upon the earth and held the scroll up and said, time shall be no more.

And he was of a Pentecostal background and had some Pentecostal ministers. And so they have a way of taking a phrase and repeating it and repeating it, you know, getting people stirred up each time they say it with a little more verve. And, you know, it gets a little more exciting.

Everybody gets a little bit more excited about it. And so, you know, time shall be no more. Bless God, you pastors.

You've been having so much trouble. You know, you always, your schedules, you never have enough time to do these things, you know. And bless God, you're not going to have any schedules.

Time shall be no more. And he kept building things up until everybody was just really excited. Oh, bless God, throw away our watches, you know.

Time shall be no more. Very close friend of mine, we were, had the kind of relationship where we did a lot of traveling together. And we would often go out together after the services.

And he was an older man. He liked me. I was a young fellow.

And he sort of took me under his wing and tutored me along. And so when we were out afterwards getting a piece of pie at the coffee shop, I said to him, it's my understanding that in the Greek, it really is declaring there shall be no more delay. In other words, the rest of the things are going to move on in quick fashion.

And the kingdom is now going to be set up without any more delay. And he smiled rather sheepishly and said, I knew you were the only one that would catch that. But I had some problems with it though.

Because that's handling the Word of God deceitfully. You know, to get the people excited and all. It isn't a true exposition of the Word.

We've got to be careful how we handle the Word of God. That we are honest in our exposition. Now let me share with you this.

I believe that we need to be as honest as we possibly can. And I believe that we, if we are sincere, and of course it does speak of sincerity. And if we are sincere, though we may not be interpreting a scripture correctly.

If it is my understanding that that is the way it is, and I'm sincere in it, I believe that God is gracious and merciful to me. My position has changed over the years on many scriptures. There are a lot of sermons that I wish I could retract.

But over the years and maturing in the Word and in the understanding of the Word, there are some scriptures that I have come to a fuller understanding. And it has changed from my earlier understanding of those scriptures. In seminary I had a professor who said, do not attempt to preach from the parables until you've been pastoring for at least 25 years.

And I thought, oh come on. You know I understand those parables. I'm ready to preach on them now.

And I started preaching from the parables. I wish I had some of those sermons back. How many sermons have you heard on the prodigal son? Where the whole sermon is predicated upon the Father waiting to receive the prodigal home.

Oh the Father watching daily, you know, waiting for him in the distance. Watching for him, waiting and oh how God is waiting and watching to receive you. And the whole sermon is based upon God's receiving and the forgiveness of the prodigal.

That's not the purpose of that parable at all. Jesus was eating with the sinners and the publicans and the Pharisees were finding fault with him. And they said, look at him.

He's eating with the Pharisees and the publicans. And Jesus spoke a parable against them saying, there was a little widow woman who lost a coin. And she swept and searched her house until she found her coin.

And she said to her friends, rejoice I found the coin that I lost. The shepherd had 99 sheep but one was lost. And he left the 99 and went out to find the one that was lost.

And when he found it he said, come rejoice with me for the lost has been found. And Jesus was now getting to the purpose of his parable. You see, he was showing first of all that the natural result of finding something that is lost is to rejoice.

They were unnatural in their reaction saying, oh he's eating with publicans and sinners. They should have been rejoicing that the lost were being found. But they were finding fault.

They were the elder brother and the parable was spoken against them. But I had some tremendous evangelistic sermons out of that parable. So God used it.

You know people were saved. But I could never preach it that way again. The kingdom of heaven is likened to a man going through a field discovering a treasure.

And who for the joy thereof immediately goes out and sells everything he has so that he can buy that field and obtain the treasure. How many times I've preached that parable. How glorious it is to discover Jesus Christ.

I'll tell you, you have such glorious riches in Christ, you're willing to give up everything in order to have this glorious richness in Jesus Christ. And I had some really neat little illustrations on this. You know, I mean I would modernize it.

You know, always modernize it. Jesus was talking about things that were modern in his day. They understood them.

So you're going through a field. And you trip. And you pick yourself up and you look down and you tripped over a piece of metal and you start kicking the thing.

And hmm, looks like a bigger piece of metal than I thought. You take and scrape it with a stick and all. It looks like it's a lid.

And as you get a shovel and you dig and hey, you open the crazy chest here, all kinds of jewels. What do you do? You cover the thing over. You put the bushes back in place.

And you go down to the hall of records and you find out who owns that field. And you go say, hey fella, how much you want to sell your field for? You get him to give you a price. And then you go out and you sell your Chevy.

And you hawk your watch. And you sell everything you have in order that you might buy that field so you could obtain the treasure. And then, once you've obtained the treasure, do you go back and buy your old Chevy back again? No way, man.

You go down to the Mercedes dealer and get you a new Mercedes. You're a rich man now. And so, how that we give up things to receive Christ and now we have the glorious riches.

We don't go back and pick up the old things again. But our life is so rich and so full in Christ. We don't moan.

You say, oh, I sold my old Chevy to have all of this. No, you say, man, I think it was a wreck anyhow. I think some sucker got up a man and now I'm enjoying my Mercedes, you know.

And, and so I would modernize the story. But after years, I discovered that the field is the world. And Jesus is the one who sold everything to purchase the field.

And the treasure was me. So, a couple more good sermons out the window. And where I used to be able to really prove a good point and encourage a lot of people.

If I would use that scripture like that again, it would be deceitful because I now have a proper understanding. So, we don't handle the Word of God deceitfully. We've got to be honest in our exposition of the scriptures.

We've got to deal with the Word of God honestly. Not walking in craftiness. I do not believe in the use of psychology or psychological little ploys in order to get people to make a commitment to Jesus Christ.

There are a lot of gimmicks that have been introduced. We know, we've learned how to manipulate people. We've known how to get them excited.

We know how to get them stirred up. I don't believe in it. I think it's wrong to use psychological ploys, craftiness.

You may get them forward, but you've got a shallow commitment. I remember one time, I was still in seminary, but I was holding a meeting up in Ventura. And I heard of this clever little ploy that this

evangelist used.

When he was ready to give his invitation, he said, how many of you want to go to heaven when you die? Stand to your feet. Naturally, everybody stood. Then he said, how many of you know for sure at this moment, if you would die right now, you'd go to heaven? Sit down.

And a bunch of people sat down, and a bunch of liars sat down. And the only one who remained standing was actually my uncle. And I was embarrassed, silly, because he was honest enough.

And I could see, when I saw the look on his face, he thought, I've been had. And that's the last time he's been to church. And that haunts me.

Crafty, oh yes, very crafty. God doesn't need our craftiness. God doesn't need psychological ploys.

We know that people like recognition. We know that people are carnal and walk in the flesh. So why not appeal to their carnality? We really are needing funds now.

How many will commit to give a hundred dollars this next month, you know, over and above your tithes? Stand up. We know that people want recognition. We know that it's a good way of raising funds.

Of course, nowadays they start with ten thousand, you know. And then when they get down to the hundred, you feel like a piker, you know. But as people stand, you know, all right, cheer, hooray, hurrah, you know.

Bless God, isn't that wonderful? Of course, Copeland starts with a million. That's right. Of course, they believe in prosperity.

And the big to-do, the holding up of the people, look, friends, look, bless God. There's Brother Jones over there. Look at that.

Bless God. He always comes through. Isn't he marvelous? Oh, give him a hand, folks.

Give him a hand. A million dollars for the work of God's kingdom. Bless God, you know.

Brother Jones is over there, you know. He's been had by a clever evangelist. Been taken by craftiness.

Oh yes, you can do it that way. But it's going to be shallow. And there's not going to be any real reward for it.

And the saddest thing at all, Brother Jones isn't going to get any reward for it either. He's had it all. Take heed to yourselves that you do not your righteousness before men to be seen of men.

For I say unto you, ye've, you've had your reward. Where, Lord? In the praise, the acknowledgement, the recognition by man. You've had your reward.

For in that day the secret hidden things will be revealed and our works are going to be judged by fire of what sort they are. That is what motivated them. And many of the works that people have done that have been motivated by the flesh are motivated by their desire to receive glory and recognition by men will be consumed in the fire and there will be nothing for them from God.

Many of my works, wood, hay, and stubble, burned. I've already received my reward. I desire glory in my flesh even in spiritual things.

Now for years I sought glory for my flesh in the physical things, in the athletic achievements. Then when I got over the hill I started looking for glory in my flesh in spiritual things. And you know what my flesh enjoys almost more than anything else? I enjoy people saying, oh, you're so deeply spiritual.

You're so deep in the things of the Lord. My, you walk so close to God and I'll tell you my flesh just loves it. Isn't that wonderful? Because I like people to think that I am more spiritual than I really am.

I like people to think that I pray more than I really do. I like people to think that I read the Bible and I know the Bible better than I actually do. And so I have dirty little deceitful ways of dropping clever little statements or hints here and there so that you'll know how deeply spiritual I really am.

So you'll know how much I really pray. So you'll know how close I really walk to God because my rotten lousy flesh wants glory. Now I'm going to say some things that could possibly hurt some of you that are here tonight.

I'd like to preface them though by saying, if it was really done from a sincere heart in the Spirit, then please accept what I'm saying in that Spirit and it won't bother you. You will still love me and you'll accept it in the Spirit. But if you were doing it in the flesh, then you're going to get very upset with me.

You're going to be hurt. You're going to be offended. But if you're doing it in the flesh, you should be offended and hurt and whatever.

Do you know that I am almost fearful in opening up a meeting to the real moving of the Spirit? Because whenever God's Spirit begins to move across a group of people and people start to really worship the Lord and getting in the spirit of worship and praise, do you know that the flesh, getting caught up in this thing, everybody's worshipping, praising, there's this height, there's a movement, there's a height that is building? And do you know that someone in the flesh is going to try and take glory from God and going to try and bring attention to themselves by either a loud outburst, a scream, a cry? Now when that person makes that loud outburst and goes, oh, what happens to me? My mind has been on the Lord. I've been worshipping God. I've been drawn by the Spirit.

I'm beholding God and the glory of God. And now someone lets out with an outburst. And what happens to me mentally? My mind is immediately taken over to the person who is screaming, over the person who's shaken and fall on the floor and flopping, you know.

Or to the person who is suddenly standing up with hands raised and eyes closed, though the rest of us are still sitting. My attention is now diverted from the Lord and I wonder, oh, why is he standing? Oh, it has a way of drawing attention to you. It takes the attention now off the Lord and now attention is drawn to you.

You say, well, that wasn't my intent. Well, that's what happens. Now God help us that no flesh should glory in his sight or no flesh should seek glory in his sight.

When we are worshipping God and our hearts are being drawn and lifted by the Spirit into that presence of God where we just, in that conscious presence of God. We're always in his presence, but the conscious presence where we really are beginning to enter in. Watch it.

Observe it. It seems that there always is something that'll come in to distract us from the Lord and get our attention upon some individual or some manifestation, some thing that is going on. And that is why I'm almost fearful to see a moving of God's Spirit because someone is apt to do something that is untoward to take attention away from God and bring it on to themselves.

Be careful. I would not want the responsibility of having taken attention away from God and placed on me. The heart's taken from that devotion and praise and worship of God and suddenly wonder what am I doing over here.

I don't want that kind of a responsibility of having diverted anyone's attention from the Lord. You see, the purpose of my ministry is to focus people's attention on him. Not to divert attention from him to myself.

For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. And there it is. What do I preach about me? I am your servant for Jesus' sake.

I'm preaching the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is Lord. You're to serve him.

You're to honor him. You're to glorify him, not his instrument. Now, God help us.

You know as a pastor that people so often are coming to you because God used your life to help them in a time of need. God used your life to touch them with his word and they come to you and they begin to pour out upon you their praise and their devotion and their love and all. I had a funeral service the other day and a lady came up after and said, oh Chuck, you're just so wonderful.

Oh Chuck, you're the greatest. Oh Chuck, you are marvelous. You're just one hell of a guy.

And my old flesh was going until she got to that hell of a guy. I knew then she didn't know what she was talking about, you know. There is unfortunately a mentality that goes often with the ministry.

It is developed fully within the Catholic system. The Nicolaitans, the priesthood over the laity. Of, you know, we're just sort of one little notch closer to God or one little step higher.

And so I am your instrument through which you can touch God. There is an interesting poem and I can't remember it. I'm gonna have to memorize it.

I love it though. It's about this preacher who every day was going up into the top of the steeple that he might be closer to God. And that he might get God's message that he might call it down upon the people.

And one day as, you know, he was up there in the steeple seeking to hear the voice of God. He cried, oh God, where are you? And God spoke to him and he heard the voice from down below saying, I'm down here among the people. And sometimes we put ourselves above the people.

Where Jesus walked among the people. We preach ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. Not your Lord's.

Not this doctrine of shepherding. I'm not the Lord over you. Jesus Christ is the Lord.

I am your servant for Jesus' sake. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels. What treasure? The gospel that we are proclaiming.

The glorious treasure. It's the greatest news that man ever heard. It's the greatest treasure anybody could ever have.

It brings man to eternal riches. This glorious treasure is actually the gospel of Christ in you. The hope of glory.

The mystery of God revealed now through the church. This glorious treasure, the richness of the kingdom of God, the glories, the infinite eternal Jesus Christ will come and dwell in your heart and life and transform you and make you into the image of God. This glorious treasure.

And where does God put it? In earthen vessels. Or in clay pots. Now, Jesus Christ is surely the greatest treasure in all the universe.

The knowledge of Jesus Christ is the greatest treasure in all the universe. Paul said concerning the past, the law, those things which were gained to me, I counted loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. Glorious treasure.

Willing, you know, to count everything lost for this glorious treasure. Excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, for whom I suffer the loss of all things. Count them but refuse that I may know him, be found in him.

Now, God takes the most valuable treasure and he puts it in the most common thing, a clay pot. We have this treasure in earthen vessels. Our problem is too many times they're cracked pots.

This treasure in earthen vessels. Why? Why, listen, that the glory of the excellency or the power of the excellency may be of God and not of us. In other words, God has done something that's absolutely ludicrous.

He has made you the instrument to contain the treasure. This glorious, valuable treasure, he's placed it in you. He's done something that's totally ludicrous for the purpose that the attention and the honor and the power and the glory might be of God and not of us.

Now, if I try to reverse that, if I try to magnify the earthen vessel, if I try to bring glory and honor to the earthen vessel, God will put me on the shelf. You see, I am to contain God. Norman Grubb in his book, *The Deep Things of God*, said the highest capacity of man is that of a container, that we can actually contain God.

I heard him speak on this subject at Forest Home several years ago. I was deeply impressed. Bought all of his books, went home, read them, and was not impressed.

But that's good. God, you know, removes our idols in a hurry. Because I began to see a flaw in what he was saying.

As he developed his message, I was just, went out of that service floating. I am a container. I contain the God that created the universe.

God who called the light to shine out of darkness is now shining in my heart. I'm containing God. Hallelujah, you know.

Come to the ultimate intention and purposes of God. I'm his container. I'm containing the eternal God in this earthen vessel.

Thrilled. But as I began to think about it and pray about it and I thought, hey, wait a minute. No, no, no.

That isn't true. That's not what the Bible really teaches is the highest capacity of man to contain God. The highest capacity is that God might flow forth from my life to others.

You see, God isn't satisfied with me being a container. The contents must flow out in such a way that it will help and minister to those that are in need. So, we have this treasure in earthen vessels.

I'm just the container, yes, from which God is to flow forth into the lives of others. And as a container, I must be careful that as the contents flow out from me, that they flow out in as pure a form as possible. I preach not myself but Christ.

I don't want the contents to taste of me. If you have a container in your refrigerator in which you keep water and that container has a weird taste to it. You had cantaloupe in it at one time and the cantaloupe still is impregnated a bit into the plastic so that every time you go to get a drink of water, you get a taste of stale cantaloupe.

You're thirsty. You're wanting to get a drink and you go to the refrigerator and here's some water and all right, you know, and you drink and then yuck. You get the taste of the container, not the pureness of the water.

You get now the taste of the container. You say, get rid of that thing. I can't stand that taste.

Too often as the contents flow out from us, the thirsty world looking, dying for something to drink and they come to here and as the contents flow out, it has such a taste of me. People say, yuck. I don't like the aftertaste.

Let the contents flow out in as pure and unadulterated form as possible. Not handling the word craftily, deceitfully, but honestly and let the content flow out from you in a pure form. For we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.

Who is sufficient for these things? Not me. Responsibility is too great. I can't handle it.

My flesh is incorrigible. I'm, I really can't control it. My only hope is to fasten my eyes upon him and allow his spirit to work in me, changing me from glory to glory into that same image.

And his sufficiency being given unto me. I've got to trust in Christ for every phase of my ministry. I've got to trust in Christ for every message that I bring to my people.

I've got to trust in Jesus Christ for my every action before the people for the moment I think I can do something in myself. I'm going to stumble and I'm going to misrepresent God before them. Yes, we do have a tremendous responsibility.

And yes, we must depend upon the Lord completely or we're going to blow it.

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