

Confession #1:
We've Failed to Be Authentic

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Text: 2 Cor. 1-2¹

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Series: Confessions of an Imperfect Church (2 Corinthians)

Introduction: Open your Bible this morning to **2 Corinthians**. We begin a new series of messages that is a wake up call to our church.

We're entitling the series, "Confessions of an Imperfect Church" with the hope of expressing what our church is all about, and we want to particularly paint for you a vibrant, breath taking picture of the Christian life that is moving the Gospel of Jesus Christ forward in the lives of everyone.

We understand in the past that Christians in this church and in other churches have at times put on a perfectionistic air and judged people the wrong way, and since it's likely too late to sort it all out, through this series, we want to confess our transgressions and make a commitment to be more like Christ. Tabernacle will never be a perfect church, and we will not pretend to be. However, we do believe that our perfect God can work through imperfect people to bring glory to Himself, so we're excited about seeing that happen!

Context: The church at Corinth was a that did not lack in spiritual giftedness, but they did lack in genuineness. They were a church of people who at times were prickly and proud toward Paul. It was a church that had some spiritual masks that needed to be removed. They could be very legalistic, man-centered, and superficial at times. Actually, there's a little bit of Corinth in all of us, and we want to confront it.

For a taste of what we are looking at, we are beginning a series of ten messages where we will make ten confessions where we need to grow in change. Let me enumerate them to you before we look at chapters 1 and 2.

Confessions of an Imperfect Church

1. We've Failed to Live as Authentic Christians (2 Cor. 1-2)
2. We've Drifted into Legalism instead of True Spirituality (2 Cor. 3)
3. We've Not Depended on the Gospel Alone to Bring People (2 Cor. 4)
4. We've Built Buildings instead of People (2 Cor. 5)
5. We've Failed to Trust Each Other [because of Pastor's Neglect and People's Worldliness] (2 Cor. 6-7).
6. We've Hoarded our Resources (2 Cor. 8-9)
7. We've Looked to Men & Movements Instead of Christ (2 Cor. 10)

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the *English Standard Version* of the Bible.

8. We've Chosen Tradition Over Our Beliefs, Lists instead of Listening to Christ (2 Cor. 11)
9. We've Neglected to Lay Our Lives Down for Each Other (2 Cor. 12)
10. We've Been Afraid to Preach True Conversion (2 Cor. 13)

Now we need to remember that Christ did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. We come into the Christian life and into our local church with a whole lot of baggage that we need to get rid of. In fact there are a lot of broken pieces in our lives.

Which reminds me of a story...

Illustration: As you're opening your Bible to **2 Corinthians 1**, I want to share with you a story about a very interesting well-educated Greek philosopher whose name is Dr. Alexander Popaderos. And Dr. Popaderos every summer on the island of Crete taught a class on ethics for two weeks. And this particular summer just as he was getting ready to close the class, the last few minutes of the class, he said, "Now are there any questions before we go?" And just as he was getting ready to say, "OK then you're dismissed," a little man in the back of the room, a rather timid looking man, sort of carefully raised his hand and said, "Dr. Popaderos," "Yes" "I have a question" "Yes, what is it?" He said, "I'd like to know, what is the meaning of life?"

As you can imagine, people were ready to go home, and they were very irritated by this little fellow's heavy question!

Dr. Popaderos very quickly quieted the group, he said to the class, "You know, if you don't mind I'd like to answer that question." He reached into his back pocket, and took out his wallet. He took out of the wallet a little mirror about the size of a fifty-cent piece, honed down on the edges, kind of sparkling. And then he told this tale, he said, "When I was a child, I began to realize that I could have so much fun with that mirror. I would simply catch the glint of the Sun, and shine that mirror into an otherwise darkened place. As I grew older I began to learn that this is no child's toy. This is really a metaphor for my life. Now I am not the light--I am not the source of the light. I am simply a broken mirror fragment. But if I allow the sun to shine on my mirror fragment, it is amazing what light I can bring into darkness." Then he said, "Ladies and Gentlemen, that is the meaning of life."

Each of us is a mirror fragment. We are not the Light. We are not the source of the Light. We are simply a broken mirror fragment. But when we permit the glory of God's SON to hit our mirror fragment, and then bounce off into the life of a darkened heart, there can be change, there can be illumination.

We don't come here to do church. We don't come here to put our masks on. We come to see Christ and to shine in this world. None of us is perfect, but we all want to be authentic. We don't want to have anything to do with plastic Christianity.

The letter of 2 Corinthians is all about authenticity. In it, Paul is being attacked by some false apostles that are controlling, proud, know it alls who are taking advantage of the sheep. The Corinthian church is hurting, but they are under the spell of very man-centered, legalistic, controlling leaders.

Paul wants to show tender care, and in chapters 1 & 2, he demonstrates what an authentic Christian is through his own life.

It's written about 56 AD.

This letter is a call to authenticity. It's a call to be who you can be in and through the Spirit of grace. We can all put on airs and plastic masks and work at "pretending" to be Christians. But we need the power of the Spirit to live the real thing. Let's walk worthy of our calling saints.

Paul opens up the epistle by identifying himself. **2 Cor. 1:1-1**, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God". "Paul" means "little". He's being compared to the false teachers that have entered the church at Corinth. They are bold, proud, and eloquent compared to Paul.

Paul wants to demonstrate that true Christians are humble and small, but they have a big God.

I. Experiencing God's **comfort** in confusing trials is vital to being real in your Christian life (2 Cor. 1:1-11).

If you are saved, understand that you will suffer with awful trials and afflictions at times that are very confusing. You are to count it all joy WHEN you fall into trials of all sorts. Babies are selfish and complain and whine and moan. God uses suffering to draw us near to Him. It's easy to be beaten down by suffering, but an authentic Christian will not wilt, but shine when the heat of trials and tribulations come.

We are all called to be comforters—to get involved in the lives of others and feel their pain. The Corinthians were selfish and self-centered. If we fail at reaching out to others in need, we fail to be authentic.

The God of All Comfort

2 Cor. 1:1-11, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. 5 For as we share abundantly in Christ's

sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. 6 If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. 7 Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort. 8 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. 9 Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. 10 He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. 11 You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.”

- A. God’s comfort in our suffering is preparation for authentic **service** (vs. 3-4). **Verses 3-4**, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God”

God has all of us in the ministry. He’s given us a ministry of reconciliation. He’s given every one of us a ministry of counseling and exhortation and mentoring. We are to build each other in the faith.

- B. All our suffering is to conform us to Christ (vs. 5). **Verse 5**, “5 For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.” Sometimes the hardest question in trials is WHY? At least on the most foundational level we can say, to conform us to Christ. Suffering makes us more like Christ and better servants of Christ.

Paul said in **Philippians 3:10**, “that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,”

All our trials are meant to conform us to the image of Christ (**Rom. 8:28-29**).

- C. Comfort comes from God when we are **without strength** (vs. 8b). God comforts us when there’s nothing left in us. That’s the point.

Context: Some of the greatest trials Paul faced were brought on by this church at Corinth. There were other trials where Paul said he had no strength in himself to deal with it. **Verse 8b**, he said, “we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself”.

Remember **Romans 5:6**, “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.”

So often our first reaction to suffering is to say: REMOVE IT! No one likes suffering or should like suffering, but we should grow in grace to the point where we see God's larger purposes in suffering. There is a sense in which we should actually **thank** God for suffering. We thank Him because He's using it to reveal idols in us. He's using it to make us more dependent on Him.

- D. God's purpose in our suffering is to build an authentic faith (vs. 9-10). Verses , “Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. **But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. 10 He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.**”

Are you relying on God's comfort to get you through? It's ok to struggle. But make sure you get the point. God wants you to feel your weakness, but grow in your faith that He most certainly will deliver you from every trial.

Later on in **2 Cor. 12:9-10**, Jesus says to Paul, “**My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.**” So Paul replies, “**Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**”

- E. We can help hurting people by simply **praying** for them (vs. 11). Verse 11, “**You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.**”

COMMITMENT: Instead of being beaten down by our struggles and failures, we'll testify about the comfort, grace, and love God has provided!

- II. **Experiencing a clean conscience is vital to being real in your Christian life (2 Cor. 1:12-24).** Your own conscience will prove whether you are real or not.

Paul had said if it was God's will he'd like to winter with the Corinthians. God changed Paul's plans, and the Corinthians accused him of being deceitful.

Verse 12 – Paul was accused of operating by earthly wisdom and

Verse 17 – being careless with the will of God, making plans to simply please himself.

Verse 15 – His only motive though was to build up the Corinthians in God's grace.

Conscience—what is it? It means “with knowledge”. Generally speaking, our conscience gives us the knowledge that we will appear before God one day for all our actions. Our conscience either excuses or accuses us whether we are God-pleasing or not.

- A. A clean conscience will always help with **misunderstandings** with God's people (vs. 12-14). Paul had a change of plans and had to cancel his winter with the Corinthians, and he was accused of not being honest.

Paul's Change of Plans

2 Cor. 1:12-14, "For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you.

Paul's godly sincerity and simplicity was apparent to the Corinthians. There was no "shifting of the story" or "passing responsibility to someone else". We are all good at blame shifting.

If you want to be authentic, you've got to live in the light. Your conscience will help you do that. Do you have a clean conscience?

- B. When you have a clean conscience you will live in the light of Christ's **return** (vs. 13-17).

2 Cor. 1:13-17, "13 For we are not writing to you anything other than what you read and acknowledge and I hope you will fully acknowledge-- 14 just as you did partially acknowledge us--that on the day of our Lord Jesus you will boast of us as we will boast of you. 17 Because I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a second experience of grace. 16 I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on my way to Judea."

We must treat each other as will want to have treated them on the day of Christ's return.

- C. A clean conscience helps us to keep our **word** (vs. 17-24)

Paul did not make excuses for coming—he gave solid answers. His true motives were to do them good. He wanted to spare them and wait for them to get to the point they were ready to hear what He said.

He could have lorded over them. He could have come and demanded they conform and repent. He waited for them. He loved them instead. He cared for them and was gentle.

2 Cor. 1:17-24, "Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to the flesh, ready to say "Yes, yes" and "No, no" at the same time? 18 As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. 19 For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you,

Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. 20 For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. 21 And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, 22 and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. 23 But I call God to witness against me--it was to spare you that I refrained from coming again to Corinth. 24 **Not that we lord it over your faith**, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.”

Do you sincerely love the brothers with a clean conscience?

III. Having a **forgiving heart** is vital to being real in your Christian life (2 Cor. 2:1-11).

2 Cor. 2:1-4, “For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you. 2 For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? 3 And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all. 4 For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you”.

Forgive the Sinner

2 Cor. 2:5-11, “Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure--not to put it too severely--to all of you. 6 For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, 7 so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. 8 So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. 9 For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. 10 Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, 11 **so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.**”

If you are not one to forgive and accept your brothers and sisters here, but also the wider body of Christ, you are falling into Satan’s designs.

IV. Having a **compassionate heart** is vital to being real in your Christian life (2 Cor. 2:12-17).

We don’t come up with gimmicks to get people to join our “club”, but we lift up Christ alone. That’s what this church has to be built on.

Christians are not ultimately attached to men and movements, but to sound apostolic doctrine, to Christ, and to faithful churches who serve and lift up Christ.

Triumph in Christ

2 Cor. 2:12-17, “When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, **13** my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia. **14** But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. **15** For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, **16** to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. **Who is sufficient for these things?** **17** For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.”

Conclusion: We want to be an authentic church. We want to take off the masks!