

**01/18/26 The Church as a Fellowship of Transparency
2 Corinthians 1:12–2:4**

Welcome...

Last week Adrian preached 1:1-11 and entitled his sermon The Church as a Fellowship of Suffering. We comfort one another with the comfort we ourselves have received from a crucified and risen Savior. And as we do, the watching world sees a community of believers that grieves honestly, loves deeply, prays faithfully, and hopes confidently.

Now, in 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4, we will see the church as a fellowship of transparency.

Let's read 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4...

Are you guilty of assumicide?

That's a new word I discovered this week. It's what happens when you make false assumptions about others so that you can portray them in the worst possible light.

We are so prone to be suspicious. When we become offended or hurt, we immediately begin to look for evidence that someone wrong us.

Assumicide leads to the death of relationships because we end up believing the worst about others. We've all been guilty of drawing wrong conclusions on the basis of tiny scraps of evidence:

He didn't call back so he must not want to talk to me.

I am sure she saw me, but I think she's trying to ignore me.

How could he be a Christian and act like that?

I saw her buying a bottle of wine. She must have a drinking problem.

From a tiny spark of discontent a mighty flame of unhappiness grows. That flame soon becomes a wildfire that threatens to destroy a relationship. Congregations have split and friendships have ended over things that started very small but grew all out of proportion.

Our passage brings us face to face with a strange situation that at first glance doesn't seem like it should be a big deal. The apostle Paul found himself in trouble with a church he had founded in the Greek seaport of Corinth. From Acts 18:1-18 we know that Paul spent 18 months in Corinth winning people to Christ and establishing the church. From a careful reading of 1 and 2 Corinthians it appears that Paul made three different decisions about his trip to visit the church at Corinth:

1. He planned to go to Macedonia and then to Corinth. Look at 1 Corinthians 16:5-7...He qualifies it all by saying in 1 Corinthians, "if the Lord permits" (1 Corinthians 16:7). But that trip never took place.

2. He later planned to go to Corinth, then to Macedonia, and then back to Corinth. He mentions this in our text in 2 Corinthians 1:15-16. "I planned to visit you first so that you might benefit twice" (v. 15).

3. Finally, he decided to postpone his trip altogether. Notice 2 Corinthians 2:1... He says, "I decided that I would not bring you grief with another painful visit"

As a result, Paul's opponents used his changing plans to attack his credibility. "See, you can't trust him. He calls himself an apostle, he says he's coming but he never shows up."

The attack from the church came by some self-appointed false teachers who sought to discredit Paul and destroy his reputation in the eyes of the Corinthian congregation. After the people lost confidence in Paul, they hoped to replace him as the authoritative teachers.

And in our text today, Paul pulls back the curtain on his heart. He addresses accusations, misunderstandings, and relational tension—not defensively, not manipulatively, but transparently. What we see here is not merely a defense of Paul's ministry; it is a model for how the church is to live together before God and one another.

Main point: Because God has dealt with us honestly and graciously in Christ, 2 Corinthians 1:12–2:4 shows us four ways the church is called to live together with loving transparency.

- I. Transparency Begins with a Clear Conscience in verse 12**
- II. Transparency Requires Clear Communication in verses 13-14**
- III. Transparency Refuses to Manipulate Others in verses 15-24**
- IV. Transparency is Willing to Suffer for Love in 2:1-4**

My prayer is that we will fully trust in the Lord and led by the Holy Spirit being a church we each seek to have a clear conscience before the Lord, clearly communicate the truth in love – even if it means being uncomfortable. That we refuse to manipulate others and instead be willing to suffer for Christ's sake and to truly love one another.

I. Transparency Begins with a Clear Conscience (1:12)

Verse 12...

The vocabulary of verse 12 defines the transparency of Paul's life, the openness and vulnerability to which we are called as well. Paul is not afraid to make an example of himself, to be Exhibit A of this kind of transparency.

He begins with unexpected words in verse 12, "our proud confidence." At first, this feels uncomfortable. Scripture regularly warns us against pride. But Paul is not boasting in success, influence, or results. His proud confidence is in something far more vulnerable: his conscience before God.

Paul is saying, "When I stand before the Lord, I know why I did what I did. I know my motives. I know my heart. And my conscience bears witness."

That matters, because integrity is not primarily about how others perceive us—it is about who we are before God.

Our English word conscience comes from two Latin words: *com*, meaning "with," and *scire*, meaning "to know." Conscience is that inner faculty that "knows with" our spirit and approves when we do right, but accuses when we do wrong.

The conscience functions like a skylight, not like a lamp; it does not produce its own light, but merely lets moral light in. Because of that, the Bible teaches the importance of the Bible informing your conscience and our responsibility to keep a clear or good conscience.

We hear Adrian read what Paul wrote to Timothy “The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” 1 Timothy 1:5. A few verses later in 1 Timothy 1:19 Paul stressed the importance of “keeping faith and a good conscience, which,” he warned, “some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.”

Recently, I met a Christian man who shared his testimony with me and I was amazed at his honesty, humility, and transparency. This man realized at salvation, God cleanses the conscience from its lifelong accumulation of guilt, shame, and self-contempt. Hebrews 9:14 says “the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, will cleanse the conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”

I believe this man fully loved and leaned on Jesus and truly believed what we just sang,
 “The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose
 I will not I will not desert to its foes
 That soul though all hell should endeavor to shake
 I'll never no never no never forsake”

But your conscience it is not infallible. Like David in Psalm 139:23-24, we must constantly pray, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.”

Notice again verse 12...

The word translated as “godly sincerity” describes something that passes inspection for defects when held up to the light of the sun. In Paul’s day, unscrupulous potters would fill the cracks in their pots with wax before selling them. Careful buyers would hold the pots up to the sun, and if there were wax-filled cracks they would be clearly visible.

Paul says he lives his life genuine as a follower of the Son, Jesus Christ. There is nothing hidden in Paul’s life no cracks filled with wax.

Paul is not claiming sinlessness. He is claiming consistency. His outer life matched his inner convictions. His public ministry flowed from private faithfulness.

Biblical integrity does not mean perfection. It means that our words, actions, and motives move in the same direction.

Paul is saying in verse 12, “My ministry was not carefully developed to impress you. It was shaped by God’s grace. That is, he was guided by a Christlike love for others and sought what was in their best interests.

Transparency begins with a clear conscience.

II. Transparency Requires Clear Communication

Verses 13-14...

Paul’s letters were like his conduct: simple, sincere, not in man-made wisdom but in God’s grace. Paul had no hidden meanings or ulterior motives in his correspondence with the Corinthians. He means what he says, and he says what he means! He was aboveboard and straightforward in person; and he was the same way in his letters. His critics asserted that Paul wrote one thing and meant something else by it. They charged that Paul’s expression in writing and in actual behavior did not match.

But Paul wrote only what his readers could understand clearly. They did not have to “read between the lines” to get his true meaning. The usage of the two verbs “read” and “understand” refer to written and oral testimony respectively. What they both read and heard from Paul were consistent. What they read from Paul and what they heard from Titus or Timothy about Paul also matched.

Christian transparency means to love Christ and:
Say what you mean
Mean what you say
And say it in love

When communication lacks clarity, trust erodes. When words are honest and direct, even difficult conversations can become redemptive.

Paul then lifts their eyes beyond the present conflict and says in verse 14...:

Transparency is sustained by eschatological hope—the confidence that one day Christ will make all things clear.

If we believe that we will stand together before Christ, then honesty now matters more than comfort or control. We do not need to win every argument in the present. We need to walk faithfully toward that final day.

Transparency begins with a clear conscience; transparency requires clear communication.

III. Transparency Refuses to Manipulate Others

Look at verses 15-17...

Paul now turns to the specific issue that sparked suspicion: his change of travel plans. He had intended to visit Corinth twice. He did not. And that disappointment became fuel for criticism.

Paul acknowledges the charge directly when he asks, “Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this?”

He does not deny the disappointment. Faithful people can still disappoint others. But changing plans does not automatically mean changing character.

Christian integrity does not mean rigid adherence to plans. It means faithfulness to God’s purposes and concern for people’s spiritual good.

Paul asks another probing question in verse 17, “Do I make my plans or purpose according to the flesh?”

In other words: “Was this decision selfish? Careless? Manipulative?” The implied answer is no. Paul’s critics interpreted flexibility as duplicity. Paul insists it was godly discernment that led to his decision not to visit them.

Over the holidays I had some medical tests done and my doctor had proposed a treatment plan. But after receiving the test results the doctor revised the treatment plan. Now, am I frustrated at the doctor and come to the conclusion that he is vacillating and indecisive. Not at all, because the change in treatment by my doctor reflects care and not deceit.

Paul changed his plans not because he was unreliable, but because he was pastoral.

This is how Paul sums up the glory of Christ in verse 20 by reminding the Corinthians that as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes.

All of God's salvation promises—of blessing, peace, joy, goodness, fellowship, forgiveness, strength, and hope of eternal life—are yes, meaning they all come true, in Christ. They are all made possible by His person and work.

After His resurrection, Jesus told His disciples in Luke 24:44, "All things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." In 1 Corinthians 1:30 Paul declared that "Christ Jesus ... became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption."

In Philippians 3:8 it was the realization of "the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus [as his] Lord" that made Paul willing to suffer "the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that [he might] gain Christ." Paul grounds his integrity in the faithfulness of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

"For the Son of God, Jesus Christ...was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes."

This is one of the richest affirmations of the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ in the New Testament.

Jesus is not ambiguous.

Jesus is not unreliable.

Jesus does not change or hedge God's promises.

Every promise God has made finds its fulfillment in Christ.

Does God promise to forgive our sin? Yes, in Christ.

Does God promise to reconcile us to Himself? Yes, in Christ.

Does God promise to save us from the penalty of sin, save us from the power of sin, and one day save us even from the presence of sin? Yes, in Christ.

The word Christian means follower of Christ. It is not merely a label or religious affiliation; it describes a life oriented around Jesus Himself. Acts 11:26 tells us, "And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." They were identified by their visible devotion to Christ.

To be a Christian means you adore Jesus—to treasure Him above all else. Jesus said in Luke 9:23, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." Following Christ involves allegiance, affection, and obedience. It is loving Him not only with words, but with the whole life. In

John 14:15 Jesus says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

The apostle Paul captures this devotion when he writes in Philippians 3:8, "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" To adore Jesus is to see Him as supremely valuable—worthy of trust, worship, and surrender.

When I was flying in the Navy in the country of Spain, I used to drive pass a sunflower field. In the morning the sunflower was facing east where the sun rose. But in late afternoon it was facing west where the sun set. I noticed that every sunflower turns instinctively toward the sun, following its movement across the sky. The sunflower doesn't strain or calculate—it simply orients itself toward the sun as the source of light and life.

In the same way, a Christian is someone whose life turns toward God's Son, Jesus Christ. Our desires, decisions, and direction are shaped by Him because He is the source of our life and hope (John 8:12). When we adore Jesus, we naturally follow Him.

Then Paul drove home the point of his argument by reminding the Corinthians at the end of verse 20, Therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us. Amen is a solemn affirmation of the truthfulness of a statement. When Paul, Silas, and Timothy preached the gospel, it was all about Christ, who by His glorious work brings to pass all salvation realities. The Corinthians probably even had joined in saying Amen to the glory of God.

And here is the glorious good news in verses 21-22...

At the moment of belief, God anoints each believer with the Holy Spirit so that like Christ (Christos means “the Anointed One”), you may glorify God by your life.

In addition, the Holy Spirit’s presence in your life is the seal of ownership. A seal on a document in New Testament times identified it and indicated its owner, who would “protect” it. So too, in salvation, the Holy Spirit, like a seal, confirms that Christians are identified with Christ and are God’s property, protected by Him.

A third work of the Spirit at salvation is His confirmation that what God has begun He will complete. Present redemption is only a foretaste of what eternity holds, and the presence of His Spirit in our hearts is like a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

Paul now reaches the most personal explanation of all. After defending his integrity, clarifying his communication, and grounding everything in the faithfulness of God, he finally tells the Corinthians why he did not come as planned in verse 23...

This is an extraordinary statement.

Paul places himself under oath before God. He is not merely offering an explanation; he is appealing to the highest authority. And what he says overturns the assumptions of his critics.

They assumed Paul stayed away because he was careless. Paul says he stayed away because he was pastoral. Paul’s decision cost him dearly. It damaged his reputation. It created misunderstanding. It exposed him to criticism.

But he chose that cost because the alternative would have been worse for the Corinthians. The words “To spare you” in verse 23 means Paul believed another visit at that moment would have caused harm rather than healing. His presence, with all the authority it carried, would have intensified the situation rather than redeemed it. This is love that absorbs pain rather than inflicting it.

Paul clarifies the nature of his leadership in verse 24...

This single sentence exposes a deep temptation in ministry. There is always a temptation to use authority to secure compliance rather than cultivate joy. To press for outward conformity instead of inward growth. To demand submission rather than invite repentance. Paul rejects that model entirely.

True spiritual authority does not control faith; it serves faith.
It does not dominate conscience; it strengthens conviction.
It does not coerce obedience; it cultivates joy.

Paul understands that faith cannot be forced. Joy cannot be commanded. Repentance cannot be manufactured by pressure. Pressure can change behavior temporarily. Patience changes the heart permanently.

A farmer cannot pull on a plant to make it grow faster. Growth comes through time, nurture, and care. Paul refuses to yank at the Corinthians' spiritual condition. He waits, trusting God to work. That kind of restraint requires immense faith.

Paul says in verse 24, "Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy."

This is the heart of transparent leadership.

Paul does not control through authority.

He does not coerce through guilt.

He does not manipulate through emotional pressure.

Paul is not standing above them; he is bound to them.

This is not leader versus congregation. This is shepherd and flock.

Instead, he speaks honestly, explains clearly, and acts lovingly—even when misunderstood.

Transparency begins with a clear conscience, it requires clear communication, it refuses to manipulate others, and fourth:

IV. Transparency Is Willing to Suffer for Love

Read 2:1-4...

It took real love, not sentimentalism, for Paul to confront the Corinthians' sin. Writing the first letter to the Corinthians caused him much affliction and anguish of heart and many tears. Nothing is more painful for a pastor than confronting sin in his beloved congregation. The letter was painful to write, and it was painful to receive.

But Paul's goal in writing was not so that they would be made sorrowful, but that the Corinthians might know the love which he had especially for them. He took no pleasure in their sorrow but desired that it would bring them to repentance and joy.

The apostle Paul exemplified the truth of Proverbs 27:6: "Faithful are the wounds of a friend."

Here Paul lets us see the cost of transparency.

Honest love is not painless. Speaking truth can wound before it heals. Proverbs 27:5-6 says, "Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy."

The wounds represent painful and plain words that must be spoken in true friendship in order to help someone see their sin before they become hardened in it. Those bruises are redemptive. They love you enough to tell you the truth about yourself. Love and correction go hand in hand.

Avoiding hard conversations might feel kinder in the moment, but it ultimately withholds love.

Paul's transparency is not harsh; it is heartfelt. His goal was not to win an argument, but to win his brothers and sisters to follow Christ.

He doesn't avoid the problem.

He doesn't call names.

He doesn't assume motives.

In verse 4, Paul opens his heart completely. He writes, “For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears...”

This is astonishing honesty. Paul does not present himself as a stoic apostle unmoved by conflict. He writes of affliction, anguish, and many tears.

These are not tears of frustration or wounded pride. These are tears of love.

Paul’s tears are evidence that his correction was motivated by love, not irritation or control.

It has been said that Truth without Love is brutality. But Love without Truth is hypocrisy. Paul holds both in balance, Truth and Love.

In short, Paul does not commit assuicide. He doesn’t do to his critics what they had done to him. He simply and clearly explains himself, his change of plans, and in the process, he reveals his heart to his readers. That’s all any good man can do in a situation like this.

This is a vital word for the church today.

Transparency does not delight in confrontation.

Transparency does not weaponize truth.

Transparency speaks with tears, not triumph.

A fellowship of transparency is a place where love is strong enough to speak and humble enough to grieve.

Why can the church live this way?

Because God has not dealt with us indirectly, ambiguously, or deceptively.

In Jesus Christ, God has shown us His heart openly. As verse 20 in our text says, “For all the promises of God find their Yes in Him.”

Have you fully trusted in Christ? Have you repented and surrendered to the Lord? Will you love Him, adore Him, abide in Him, and follow Him?

At the cross, there was no manipulation—only sacrificial love. No hidden agenda—only redemption. No mixed message—only truth and love fully revealed.

Jesus did not protect His reputation; He gave His life.

He did not avoid pain; He entered it.

He did not conceal His love; He proved it.

And now, by the Spirit, God has sealed us, anointed us, and called us to walk in the light together.

So what kind of church will we be?

A fellowship of appearances—or a fellowship of transparency?

A community of guarded distance—or of honest, grace-filled truth and love?

May God make us a church where consciences are clear, words are truthful, love is abundant, and Christ is trust above all. A fellowship of transparency—for the glory of God and the joy of His people.

Let's pray...