

TEXT:

So given the granular way in which we're approaching this passage each week - unpacking one word or phrase of it at a time - we gotta remember that: the Apostle Paul is writing to the church in Corinth here to essentially provide an extended defense of his ministry IN ORDER TO recalibrate the division and deviation from the Gospel that had sadly beset the church. The thought being that if the church reaffirms the truthfulness of Paul's MINISTRY, they'll subsequently reaffirm the truthfulness of his MESSAGE - believe again, the Gospel! And so as we saw the last two weeks, Paul's reminded the Corinthians of BOTH the Gospel on which we *depend*, AND His motivation for sharing - we're called to be *outward*. Well, the unfortunate objection Paul faced in sharing that was essentially, "*That's great Paul, but why should we listen to you?*" And it's to THAT to which Paul utters his next words/our next focal section today. He says, "*What we are, is known to God, and I hope it's also known to your conscience.*" "*But what we are is known/or plain to God, he says, and I HOPE it's also plain to you too.*" That's what we're looking at today/this idea that **church can be transparent**, because very simply when Paul says that, what he's saying is, "*My life's an open book. What you see is what you get!*" I love the way the New English and Revised English Bible's translate this: "*To God (and you) our lives lie open.*"¹ Paul is using the **transparency** of his life/and the lives of his fellow-apostles, as both a proof for the validity of the Gospel AND an inherent characteristic of what it means to be the church together - that church, as the family of Gospel-trusting people, rather than being some kind of barbed-wire, fenced-off community in which we go around ducking and dodging how we're really doing, cuz we assume our shortcomings, if known, might be used against us... church can instead and ACTUALLY BE full of openness, vulnerability, authenticity, and **transparency!** So 3 Things We Learn About Transparency here: **What It Is, Why It's So Important, and How We Actually Become Transparent People Ourselves.**

So **First, What It Is:** Obviously, living "authentically"/"transparently" is kinda all the rage these days **right?** Unfortunately, I think we might be settling for a counterfeit version OF it. Because when Paul alludes to this idea of **transparency** here/saying his life is known to God and the church, he's not, as Brene Brown jokes, talking about "*live-tweeting your bikini wax or posting a blow-by-blow of your divorce on Facebook.*"² That's not transparency. No! He's talking about a kind of rejection of, what we might call, the "all-set" mentality that you and I tend to have and even cultivate, maybe ESPECIALLY in the city. Cuz ya know, whether it's cuz of the climate that has us behind closed doors for 6 months of the year, or the competition of the city to where the person next to you is considered a threat to your advancement, or just near-death-experience that is driving and which has us on the defensive all the time,³ we don't let people in and even more, wanna project that we got it all-together/are... "all-set"... when "*we're not.*"⁴

¹ Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 414.

² https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/brene_brown_553090

³ Examples adapted from *What Church Can Be: An Optimistic Vision With Some Blueprints* - Matthew Kruse - p.34

⁴ *What Church Can Be: An Optimistic Vision With Some Blueprints* - Matthew Kruse - p.35

Now, to be sure, if there was anyone who ever would've been "all-set," it was Paul: Extremely educated; previously a rising star in the Jewish community; highly ambitious, author of like a third of the NT, and oh by the way...the resurrected Jesus personally appeared-to and called him into service - I would challenge you to find a better job recommendation than that! That's Paul! And YET, he says here, "*what I am/my life is known to God and you,*" meaning the Corinthians had seen Paul at both his best and his worst. Nothing about who he was had been hidden from them. I think sometimes we elevate guys like Paul to these pedestals of "uber-Saint" and forget that they were also "uber-Sinners" too. Little Bible-fact for you: you know what the one thing the 3 most important figures in Scripture/outside of Jesus all had in common? - So the one thing Moses, King David and the Apostle Paul all had in common?...They were all murderers! Which is one of the many reasons why, in **1 Timothy 1:15**, Paul describes himself as "*chief sinner.*" And that wasn't false-humility, cuz remember he'd been a blasphemer, persecutor, murderer, insolent opponent of Christ and the church; a guy who in his 1st letter to the Corinthians confessed some sort of addictive sin or struggle that he called a "*thorn in the flesh.*" In **Romans 7**, he also confessed to feeling like a, quote, "*wretched man,*" cuz he consistently "*did not do what he wanted to do, but did the very thing he hated, and kept doing it.*" Paul's life - warts and all - was an open-book for people to read. And again, NOT because he held **transparency** as this like virtue unto itself, and certainly not to show HIMSELF off, but because He's repudiating this notion of being "all-set." Basically saying, "*You know my life. I'm not all-set. I need Jesus just like you...And now you know.*" THAT'S **transparency!**

It's like in my Missional Family this week: We're eating around the table, talking about where we see Jesus at work, and one person starts sharing about various things in their life that's provoking alotta worry and anxiety, BUT how they're trying to trust God in it and not take control of things. It was great/wonderful. But then there's this pause and they just say, "*but to be clear, I know I'm still gonna worry.*" And I was like, "*Yes! That's it!*" "*I'm not all-set. I need Jesus just like you. And now you know.*" THAT'S **transparency!**

Which leads to **Why This Is So Important:** And the short answer is, because Paul knows that the **transparency** of HIS life, actually serves to establish the Gospel in the lives of others! Remember the reason he's writing: he's giving an extended defense of his ministry so that those to whom he's ministering would re-trust his message/the Gospel. As one commentator says, "*If Paul had been rejected by the Corinthians en masse, the progress of the gospel in Corinth and elsewhere would've been hindered. On the other hand, if his sphere of influence among the Corinthians became enlarged through their recognition and defense of his apostolic credentials, they could form a base for the expansion of the gospel beyond Corinth.*"⁵ Paul's concern is that the Corinthians accept NOT him for his sake - ya know to grow his status or build his power or something - but accept him for the sake of his message. And so to help the Corinthians do that, he appeals to his life that they've all observed; namely, a life of showing off the sufficiency of Jesus, by in many respects being open about HIS insufficiencies!

⁵ Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 413.

Cuz see here's the irony of **transparency**. WE assume that if people knew our sins and shortcomings, EITHER they'd leverage those against us, OR they'd reject what it is we're about - ya know, *"I'm not gonna listen to you, cuz you're a hypocrite."* And to be sure, that does happen and where we are willfully sinning/living for ourselves in some way, and NOT repenting, that SHOULD happen...But ironically, what ALSO happens - at least when there IS continual repentance - is that people who see our lives, specifically that we're NOT "all-set," but that we're trusting One who is - what happens is they're implicitly given permission to not have to be "all-set" themselves. And thereby given opportunity to trust Jesus to be all-set on their behalf!

I remember the first time I really experienced this. Many of you know my story and some of the significant ways in which I've been a stubborn, sinful idiot/If you don't happy to share with you one-on-one, but for the sake of time, I'll tell you that, years back some mistakes I'd made in my personal life lead to a job change that had me working in retail - for Apple - And one day I'm on the sales floor and a gentleman comes in to buy an iPhone. So I ask him the requisite questions: What model, who's your carrier, etc and he tells me, *"I'm on a family plan with my girlfriend but I need to get a single line."* And I'm not really thinking, so I say, *"well actually I can save you money if we keep you on that plan with your girl."* And he says, *"No, I really need to get my own line...we aren't doing well."* And obviously I coulda breezed past that and just said, "I'm sorry, yeah no problem," but for one reason or another, it was like the Spirit was pushing me to see this as an opportunity to be **transparent** with him in hopes of him maybe grabbing onto something of the Gospel. So I just look at him and say, "Joe," His name was Joe! *"I'm really sorry man. For what it's worth, I'm married and I just want you to know that because I'm kind of an idiot, I've made a bit of a mess of my marriage recently. So I really am sorry."* And he looks at me a little confused and just says, *"really?"* And I say, *"yeah,"* and proceed to share with him some of my shortcomings and even sins, which apparently freed him up to likewise be transparent and tell me that the reason he and his girlfriend weren't doing well, is cuz they were scheduled to get married in a month, but she'd, rightly, called it off cuz she'd found out he'd been cheating on her for a year prior. So by the end of that conversation he and I were standing in the middle of the Apple Store with Bible App in hand reading and praying together through one of the Psalms. And I'll tell you, two things happened in that moment. **One**, I've never felt more free - and not because I'd been "authentic" or "true to myself" or something, but because of exactly what the Apostle John says in **1 John 1:7**, *"If we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, AND the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin."* Felt totally free, really for the first time, from a lot of that sin and stupidity, but ALSO free to just be present with and friends to this guy Joe/without any pretense or prerequisite. Really, the Gospel got established in me! But **Two**, It got established in Joe as well, cuz after that conversation, at his initiative, he and I developed a friendship for the next couple years that revolved around just reading and sharing Scripture together, which was especially cool since he told me after we met that first time that he wasn't really into the whole "Bible, church, God thing," but because he saw that I was **transparent** about not being "all-set" he, not only felt he could be **transparent** too, but was open to hearing about the One in whom NON "all-set" people can trust! The Gospel got established in him too, which is **WHY transparency is so important**.

So ***Third and Finally, How Do We Actually Then Become Transparent People Ourselves.***

Cuz obviously ***transparency*** is not our natural inclination. Ever since the Garden of Eden when we covered our nakedness and shame with fig leaves and as Allen Ross says, “*mistrust and alienation replaced security and intimacy,*”⁶ we’ve been hiding...behind things like perfectly curated social media feeds, beauty products, resumes and the like. So how DO we actually become ***transparent*** people, who as a result see the Gospel established more in us and those around us? And the answer’s just that - by believing the Gospel! Or as Paul says it here, “*knowing that what you are is known to God.*” See, when Paul says that, he’s not only saying that his life is an open book - ya know, he’s living with integrity/God sees him for all he is - but BECAUSE God sees him for all he is, he’s therefore free to be ***transparent*** with others.

My lovely wife’s obviously given birth to 3 kids. And one of the things I’ve come to learn about the labor and delivery process/other than it being yet another thing revealing just how much you moms deserve honor, not just on Mother’s Day but EVERY day, is that it’s obviously a pretty vulnerable/***transparent*** experience/nurses, doctors, everyone-in-between seeing you BOTH when you’re “all-set” and when you’re not. But what’s amazing is/and I’ve heard this now from, not just my wife, but a number of moms, is that, when you’re “seen” like that; after-the-fact, a lot of the superficial ways in which we’d otherwise continue to seek to be seen as put-together, lovely, or just not reveal where we’re un-lovely; those things get stripped away...Cuz you understand much of our projection and lack of ***transparency*** is in an attempt to garner for ourselves, love. We assume that if we put forward our most lovely selves and by extension withhold our most UNlovely selves, we’ll BE loved. But the reality is, being loved without being known is superficiality. Ironically, in an attempt to keep ourselves from being rejected - known but not loved - we end up being loved, but not known. And YET, it’s in being “*known for what you are*” and still loved that frees you to be ***transparent*** with others.

Friends, that’s EXACTLY what you have in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Because in the Gospel, you see two things. ***Number 1:*** that you are far more wicked than you ever dared think. But ***Number 2:*** at the very same time, you are far more loved than you ever dreamed to hope. Which is to say, on the one-hand, you’re NOT “all-set.” I know that goes against our “self-esteem” culture and you might be able to impress others with your looks, charisma, achievements, even religious aptitude, but before God/as a sinner, you’re NOT impressing Him! Scripture tells us that our sin is an offense to God and our attempts to cover-up or make-up for that sin/our self-righteousness, that’s even worse. Before God and left to yourself, you and I are NOT “all-set.”... HOWEVER...at the very same time, you ARE “all-set.” Because, you understand, when the Father sent His Son Jesus to pay the penalty for your sin, declaring on the cross, that payment to “*be finished,*” it proved that God’s unbreakable, never-ending love for you, not only washes you “*white as snow*” and makes you as “all-set” as you could ever be, BUT it’ll never be taken FROM you. Even now, you are held by a love that’s already yours - a love that simply requires receipt OF it in order to be brought into the enjoyment and security that comes FROM it. And I say security, because for those who are in Christ/you’ve placed your faith and confidence in the

⁶ *Creation and Blessing* - Allen Ross, p.137

person and work of Jesus, no matter how much you continue to struggle and sin and prove yourself to NOT be “all-set,” you’ll still NEVER be snatched from the sovereign love and grace of God the Father. As **Romans 8** says, “*There is therefore now NO condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...Nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus your Lord.*”⁷...So you see? Because you already have the love of/let’s be honest, the only person who’s opinion really counts - and not a superficial love, but the love of one who sees you in ALL your NOT “all-set’ness,” - because you have that - you can therefore, not only be free from having to garner the love of others, but free to NOT always have to be all-set BEFORE others...free to be **transparent**. As Tim Keller says, “*it’s simple love economics.*”⁸ Like if you’re an incredibly wealthy person/Jeff Bezos-level billionaire, and there’s people around you who have some idea for an investment and ya look at the business plan and it seems pretty okay, but you really don’t know, cuz you could lose some money, but you could also gain a lot. What are you likely to do? You’re gonna invest in em right? Why? Because you can afford it. You can afford to take a risk and even lose the money. You can afford to be VULNERABLE with a portion of your finances...That’s EXACTLY the way it is when Jesus Christ’s love is a thing that fills the account that is your heart. You can afford to open up and take the risk of being **transparent** with other people, cuz worse case scenario, they reject you/you lose their love - it doesn’t matter/that’s like a hundred bucks to a billionaire. But best case scenario, you made an incredible investment of the Gospel getting more established in your life and theirs!

Hub, that’s **how we become transparent people**. Not through practicing it as some secular therapeutic exercise to help us feel better. And nor as some “badge of honor” to show that “we’re keepin’ it real around here.” No! Through simply beholding and believing that “*what we are is SO known to God,*” that He was willing to send and ultimately expose His own Son. So that in being utterly vulnerable and exposed in your place, YOU would never find yourself exposed to anything but unbreakable love of God...That is WHY Friends, Jesus church shouldn’t ever be where everybody has it all-together and is “all-set.” But should be where everybody doesn’t have it all-together, and nobody tries to hide it...Because in not hiding it, we begin to experience the joy of seeing the Gospel get more-and-more established in our lives and in the lives of those around us. **See? Church Really Can Be ___ Transparent! Let’s Pray...**

⁷ Explanation adapted from <https://www.justindeeter.com/articles/archives/1987>

⁸ Kindness - The Real Signs of the Spirit - May 9, 2010 - John 15:6-15 - Timothy J. Keller, [The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive](#) (Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013)