

Confession #6:
We Are Often Too Insulated as a Church

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Text: 2 Cor. 5:17-21

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Series: 2 Corinthians

Introduction: Open your Bible this morning to **2 Corinthians 5**. We are in a series in 2 Corinthians called “Confessions of an Imperfect Church”. Our confession today is: “We Are Often Insulated as a Church”.

Illustration: Have you ever seen the Amish? They have no phones. No electricity. They have buggies instead of cars. They do laundry and hang it outside! They don’t have dryers. Just so you know, people did things this way for thousands of years before we learned how to harness electricity. The wind does work!

The Amish are an insulated culture. They are unaffected by the world, and they are not affecting the world. The world is passing them by. They are not trying to make people Amish. They’ve cut themselves off from the world. They do not care about evangelizing the world. They are insulated.

The monks of the middle ages did the same thing. They cut themselves off from the world. Now we don’t go to that extreme. But we are all tempted to buy into the culture of being insulated in our little castles and never talking to our neighbors.

People don’t know each other today. That’s true in your neighborhood and in your church! 2 Corinthians 5 does not allow for that to happen. If we are going to be obedient to the Bible, we cannot remain insulated. We have to break out and spread the message. We are called to “make disciples of all nations”. We cannot remain comfortable. The status quo must go! We are called to make a difference in our world.

We exist not for ourselves, but for others, for the world. We do not exist for our own mission, but to accomplish the mission of Jesus in the earth. That’s what this chapter (2 Cor. 5) is all about.

Corinth was known as being a very selfish and self-focused church. It was a church known for its own infighting. It was a church that was very much focused on itself. There was an unhealthy focus on leaders. The sheep often were neglected. They went on sinning with no church discipline at times.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5, and tells us three things to put our focus where it ought to be. We are so prone to want to build the perfect church and to think only on ourselves.

I want to mold your mindset this morning. We are not here for ourselves. We are here for others. We are here to carry out the mission of Jesus to the world. We exist to reach people who are far from God and bring them to wholeness in Christ.

We don’t want to be the “Feed Me and Bless if You Can” club. I want to give you something that is going to grow you today. This is like the most powerful spiritual protein.

What happens if a person just eats and eats and eats, and never exercises? They get FAT. We can fill our head with Bible and have enormous amounts of Bible knowledge, but be very proud, small-hearted, growth-stunted people.

Matthew 7:24-27 (ESV) — “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and **does them** will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. 26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and **does not do them** will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

Both sets of people HEARD Jesus’ Words. Both had a deep understanding of the Bible. But the ones who actually DO something with Jesus’ Word and Mission are the ones who will never fall. What are you doing to accomplish Jesus’ mission in the earth?

We are not just called to feed ourselves, but to feed others! Our mission to the world begins with a metamorphosis!

I. **Something New** (vs. 17) – a *metamorphosis*.

If you are going to take part in Christ’s mission, something radical and new must have taken place in you.

2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV) — “Therefore, **if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation**. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

This is the blazing center of what makes us hopeful for this world. Are you born again? Are you a new creation?

A. You are a new **creation** (regeneration). You must begin somewhere with God.

Regeneration means a new genesis, or a new creation. This is something new that God has started. Philippians 1:6 (ESV) — Paul says, “I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” Christ began the work. He’s commenced the NEW GENESIS.

1. ***The power of sin has been broken***. In the old creation of my flesh, nothing good in it dwelt. Paul said, “In my flesh dwells no good thing”. All I could do before I was born again was sin! Now the law of Christ is in my heart, and the love of Christ controls me.

So, even when we begin with ourselves, we must ***look outside*** ourselves to see what’s happened. Paul uses the language of CREATION. This is something God alone does. This points us to the future hope at the end of the world, when God is going to bring a new creation to the heavens and the earth. He’s going to make the whole universe a NEW CREATION. And the NEW HUMANITY, all those are going to inhabit it.

2. ***This is God's work.*** I cannot create anything. I didn't create a new heart in myself. I didn't convert myself. God converted me through the imperishable Word and the preaching of that indestructible Word. I am powerless to save myself, and I am powerless to convert the lost. We are completely dependent on God. **1 Cor. 3:5**, "Some plant, some water, but God gives the increase" (*paraphrase*).

Illustration: The cycle of **life** always begins with birth. It always begins with a new creation. Once Barack Obama was a baby. Some didn't know **where** he was born for a while, but he was definitely born! Had he been stillborn, I can guarantee one thing: he wouldn't be president. But life gives us the potential to grow, to change, to mature. A dead person does not grow. If you are lost here today, you can only decay deeper into sin and selfishness. "You must be born again" (**Jn. 3:3**).

This church must be committed to making sure that every member is a new creation. If there is a serious lack of growth for an extended time, there ought to be an alarm. There are young people in our church who have attended this church all their lives, but are still lost. They are still dead in their sins. That's a tragedy! Parents, it is your responsibility to point out the spiritual deadness of your children to them. Do it now while you still have them in your home. If your children are not showing signs of life, you need to take some time today and have that hard talk with them.

We will never be motivated to reach our world if we are not seeing the power of the Gospel function in our own home and in our own lives.

- B. You are forming new **habits** (progressive sanctification). If you've begun with God, and God is now in you, you will begin to see real change in your life.

2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV) — "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

- "has passed away" – aorist, active, indicative. Event began in the past but continues and is active in the present. ***The old has passed and continues to pass away!***
- "the new has come" – perfect, active, indicative. ***The new has and continues to take place!***

"Here Paul is clearly emphasizing the radical discontinuity between the pre- and post-conversion states."¹ In conversion, God gives us a **heart** to love God (Eze. 36:25-27). God says, "I'll take out the old heart and put in a new heart" (*paraphrase*). Peter says, we have been made "partakers of the divine nature" (**2 Peter 1:4**).

¹ Harris, M. J. (2005). *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians : A commentary on the Greek text* (434). Grand Rapids, Mich.; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press.

1. We can only produce what is already in our heart (Mat. 7:16-20; 12:24; Pro. 4:23). In the new birth, God creates in us the capacity to produce godly fruit. We did not have that capacity before.
 - **Matthew 7:16-20**, “You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. 18 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.”

Every moment we are producing fruit. We can only produce what is in our heart.

 - **Mt 12:34**, “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks”.
 - **Proverbs 4:23**, “Guard your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life” (*personal translation*).

2. No one who is truly born of God can make a practice of sinning. **1 John 3:6-9**, “No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. 7 Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. 8 Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. 9 No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.”

Pig Illustration²: *Let me give you an illustration from Charles Spurgeon. Let’s say that in the back of the auditorium I have two pigs, two dirty, nasty stinky pigs. Boy, that sounds bad in that way, that language. And I tell you, I say, “Let the pigs go.” And you let them go.*

And on this side of me I have a big, big table full of garbage and filth. And over here I have a table of the best food in Holland. And we let the pigs go. Where are they going to go? You know exactly where they are going to go. They are going to go straight for the garbage. Not only are they going to eat it, they are going to jump in it. And they are going to be eating it and eating it. And they are going to be very happy. They are going to be wiggling their little tails. Why? Because they are pigs. It is their nature. Pigs love garbage. And they are not ashamed of it.

But let’s say that I look at those two pigs and I have the power to change them into men. And I look at one of the pigs and I say, “Become a man.” The moment that one pig becomes a man what is going to happen? He is going to throw himself out of that garbage. And he is going to begin to vomit up the garbage that he was eating with delight. He is going to be sick and repulsed by what he sees. And he is going to turn around and look at you and be ashamed.

² From Paul Washer. <http://media.sermonaudio.com/mediapdf/71082339487.pdf>, “Justification and Regeneration”.

I just described your conversion. Before becoming a Christian we were sinners by nature. By nature we were children of wrath, sons of disobedience, children of the devil.

We might not have been aggressively hating God, but we ignored Him, and in a passive way, we hated God, we hated righteousness and we loved sin and our own selfish ways. We loved moral filth. But the moment we were changed the very things that we loved we began to hate. And the God that we ignored we began to love. We became new creatures with a new heart.

The idea here is the old has passed and continues to pass away, and behold the new has come and continues to come. Here we see the germ of life growing greater in the Christian. This is necessary if we are going to reach the world and accomplish Jesus' mission.

Ask yourself: Does the life of Jesus' possess me to such an extent that I can see changes in my life every day?

Practical tests of growth

3. Are you crippled by depression and discouragement? Can't get out of bed?
4. Irresponsibility? Can't get to work on time?
5. Are you quick to be angry?
6. Do you waste time?
7. Do you have a sin problem – lying, lust, idols, some addiction, unholy vocab?
8. Relationship difficulties

What are you doing about these bad habits? Are you tackling them with the all sufficient Word of God? If you are not growing, you're going to be worrying about yourself and not others.

Illustration: I can't tell Evan to go to the store and get some milk. He wants me each morning to fill his sippy cup with milk. I told him, he's three now, no more bottle. I would be shocked if he woke up tomorrow and said, "Hey Dad, you know, you and mom work way too hard on the grocery thing. Give me the keys and I'll take care of picking those up this week. I'm not expecting that. Why? Because my son is immature, and those who are immature require a lot of attention.

Do you require a lot of attention? Are you growing spiritually to the point where you are able to feed yourself? Are you growing to the point where you are able to feed others?

C. You are part of a new **humanity**. "New creation..."

Paul uses the language of CREATION. This points us to the end of the world, when God is going to bring a new creation to the heavens and the earth. He's going to make the whole universe a NEW CREATION. And the NEW HUMANITY, all those are going to inhabit it.

If you are accomplishing Jesus' mission, you are NOT this insulated person who is asking, what can I get from this church? What 59 Bible studies do you have? No, you are here to offer yourself to the world. Yes you need to grow here – but the way you grow is by YOU ministering. In order to DO something you have to BE something. In order to DO God's will you've got to BE in Christ. You have to be born again. You have to be crucified with Christ. The old life has to have died. The new has to be dominant.

Has something NEW occurred in your life? Are you growing and putting away the old life to such an extent that you are now able to help others? Or are you insulated? Are you still immature, and still in spiritual diapers?

In looking outside ourselves, we see...

II. **Something to Do** (vs. 18-20) – a *ministry*.

God did something amazing in us. We have undergone a metamorphosis like a butterfly. And when this kind of change occurs, we need to do what God wants us to do.

2 Corinthians 5:18–20 (ESV) — “All this is from God, who **through Christ reconciled us to himself** and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”

Reconciliation means that God is no longer our enemy but our friend. God was at one point our enemy, and we were His enemy. God was provoked and offended at our sin. We were hostile toward God, constantly transgressing His law and falling short of His perfect standard of righteousness (“dead in trespasses and sins”, **Eph. 2:2**).

But now, there is no longer hostility, but there is love and longing to be together. God loves us and reconciles us to Himself. He restores us to a favorable standing in Christ. We are declared righteous through Christ's death. God replaces fury with friendship. We who were His enemies are now called “friends of God”.

A. First we see Christ's ministry! Christ did something for you (vs. 18a, “All this is from God, who **through Christ reconciled us to himself**”). Salvation is God's idea. “All this is from God”. This is how good God is.

God clarifies what He's saying in verse 18a. **Verse 19**, “that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, **not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.**”

Christ DID something for you! It is not by our efforts, but by His effort! **Titus 3:5** (ESV) — “he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit”.

Christ didn't say, “I've started this, now you finish it”. No, He said, “It is

finished!”

RECONCILIATION – We were once enemies, but we are now friends! **Romans 5:10–11** (ESV) — “For if **while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son**, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”

Illustrations:

- Think about **Abraham** – He was once a pagan in old Babylon in the city of Ur. But God called him out and he later came to be called the “friend of God”. That’s reconciliation.
- Think about **Nebuchadnezzar**, king of Babylon. He hated God’s people, but God humbled him and He became a friend of the Most High God.
- Think of **Matthew the Tax Collector**: he was an enemy of Israel. A traitor, yet Christ said, “Follow Me!”
- Think about **Saul of Tarsus**! He hated Christ and Christians. But he became the greatest of all the apostles. He was God’s friend!

Colossians 1:21–22 (ESV) — “And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.”

Illustration: Reconciliation is a great surprise. It is utterly unlikely and shocking.

It would be the equivalent of **Osama bin Laden** surrendering to the USA, and wanting to put on an American uniform and have his allegiance for America. It’s unheard of!

It would be like **Adolf Hitler** becoming a friend of the Jews, and instead of killing them, he would be defending and protecting them.

Application: What does this mean? It means that when you think about carrying out Christ’s mission, you must have hope for the most unlikely of people. God saves His enemies, not His friends. He did NOT come to call the righteous, but SINNERS to repentance.

Consider your own story. How likely is it that you are sitting here this morning loving God and listening to His Word? How many millions are outside these doors like you, that God is going to reconcile?

B. Christ gave something for you to do (vs. 18b, “gave us the ministry of reconciliation”). This is equal to the great commission. We are to mentoring and making disciples. We are to bring people into a friendship with God.

2 Corinthians 5:18–20 (ESV) — “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and **gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them,**

and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

God makes His appeal through us. We are all called to be evangelists. We are to be carrying out this “ministry of reconciliation” everywhere we go. We are Ambassadors for Christ!

In looking outside ourselves, we see...

III. Something True (vs. 21) – our *message*.

2 Corinthians 5:20–21 (ESV) — **“For our sake he [GOD] made him [CHRIST] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”**

A. Christ made to be sin for us – my sin ***imputed*** to Him.

Now we have to ask ourselves a question. How did Christ become sin on the cross? Did he become corrupt on the cross? Did his nature become sinful on the cross? Absolutely not. On the cross he remains a pure and sinless Son of God. But what did happen is this.

Our sin or our guilt was ***imputed*** to him. The guilt that you carried as an unbeliever, the guilt because of your sins even after believing, all the sin you have ever committed, all the sin you commit now, all the sin you will ever commit was imputed to him. He carried it. That guilt was placed upon the Son of God. And then all the judgment and wrath and anger of God that you and I deserved fell upon the Son of God. When he died under the wrath of God he paid for all of your sin, past, present and future. He took away all your guilt forever so that the Christian can no longer be guilty ever again. And he extinguished all the anger or wrath of God against you.

B. We are not just tolerated, but truly righteous. – I am dressed in Christ’s imputed righteousness!

If you are a Christian you are not only forgiven, you not only stand before God completely forgiven, but you stand before God in perfect righteousness. He sees you as righteous. He has declared you to be righteous. Once and for all and forever. You can only be in one of two spheres. If you are in the sphere of Adam you are condemned. But if you are in Christ you are pardoned of everything and you are not only pardoned, but you are declared righteous before God. That is the way he sees you. **Romans 8:1** (ESV) — **“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”**

Conclusion: Have hope for your lost loved ones and friends. You are a minister of reconciliation.