

10. Authentic Christian Ministry (3Q 2026 1 and 2 Corinthians)

Biblical material: 2 Cor. 3:1–9, 2 Cor. 4:7–18, 2 Cor. 5:11–15, Col. 1:19–23, Eph. 2:13–16, 2 Cor. 6:11–7:1, 2 Corinthians 7.

Quotes

- The great challenge for the future church won't be filling pews on Sundays, but rather living and speaking authentically into the cultural pain and ache of our day. Jesus is leading the church where religious hype and cultural callousness cannot go. Our worship before God can never justify our poor relationships. Jesus calls us to restore the broken altars of our families, friendships and relationships before we bring our worship to the altar of God. Reconciliation begins with hearing. Healthy church creates safe, vulnerable, disarming space to hear and be heard by others. A wounded church desperately needs a revival of hearing. *Nathan Edwardson*
- I'm coming to the conclusion that to be used by God we must be weak and foolish rather than all-conquering heroes. I reckon God is sick and tired of people posing as overcomers with permanent grins, as if they somehow avoided the Fall and went hang-gliding instead. *Pete Grieg*
- There is a company of believers, and the number is growing, who have been stripped down to nothing. And in this place have found everything. Everything that is pure, authentic, and raw. Where the shiny lights of ministry and showmanship have lost their flavor and become a clanging symbol in the midst of a world in pain, that are hungry and thirsty for authenticity. For love. *Cindy Bultrow*
- Ultimately there is no power to narcissistic, self-indulgent thinking. Authentic thinking originates with an encounter with the world. *Abraham Joshua Heschel*

Questions

How would you define authentic Christian ministry? How do we measure success in ministry? How has the church lost authenticity in its mission to spread the gospel? Did Jesus intend the church to operate along the lines of human organizations, and how could this be different? What of the issues in the great controversy—how do they relate to authenticity in our message?

Bible summary

In 2 Corinthians 3:1–9 Paul asks if he is “speaking well of ourselves again,” but makes the point that there needs to be no personal recommendation either way. Despite attacks and persecution we don't give up, says Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:7–18. In 2 Corinthians 5:11–15 Paul speaks about how we try to convince others. Colossians 1:19–23 and Ephesians 2:13–16 describes how God turns us from enemies into friends. Paul addresses the Corinthians bluntly in 2 Corinthians 6:11–7:1. In 2 Corinthians 7 he explains why he had to do so..

Comment

Why the stress on authentic Christian ministry? Because even in Paul's day there were supposed Christian leaders going around promoting false beliefs and exploiting members for their own gain. Paul addresses this in the Corinthian church, and also in other letters. For example:

“They... will surround themselves with teachers who'll tell them what they want to hear. They will stop listening to the truth and wander off following myths.” 2 Timothy 4:3, 4.

“For there are many rebels around who talk a lot of deceptive nonsense, especially from the circumcision group. Their talking must stop, these people who throw whole families into turmoil, teaching things that aren't right for the sake of making money.” Titus 1:10, 11.

Such *inauthentic* ministries caused real problems for the early church, which is why Paul writes against them, and in the context of Corinthians is at pains to remind them that he did not personally

profit from his ministry. Instead he recounts all the sufferings he had to experience for the sake of sharing the gospel.

Such “exploiters of the gospel” used deceptive words and practices to convince believers. They wore spiritual masks to hide their true purposes. Paul is arguing for a ministry without masks!

Yes, in some ways we all wear masks. We can all keep a mask on our face and pretend to be good when all is not well in our lives. But when we have troubles then the mask slips, and our real character is revealed.

I stared at Pharaoh Tutankhamun’s famous mask a few years ago, there in Cairo Museum. I stood and looked for ages. Hardly anyone else seemed too interested, and when they did look, it was just a quick glance before they moved on...

And I wondered what his mask was for. To continue the idea that he was a god? Strange, when this mask was attached to a dead body! I stared into the sightless eyes and thought of this pharaoh, the most powerful king of all the earth at that time. Tutankhamun was worshiped as a god during his lifetime. No doubt he wore many masks in his dealing with different people—with his worshipers, his servants, his advisors. But he is famous for that last mask, the one made to cover his face in death.

We all wear masks, and we need to take them off and face the truth. We also need to look behind the masks of all around us, to see what reality really is. Most of all we need to deny all the foolishness, which is what the mask is trying to hide. For as the Roman poet Ovid observed, “In our play we reveal what kind of people we are.”

Instead of living a life that is a sham, how can we be authentic Christians representing our Lord? In the words of Brennan Manning, “What makes authentic disciples is not visions, ecstasies, biblical mastery of chapter and verse, or spectacular success in the ministry, but a capacity for faithfulness. Buffeted by the fickle winds of failure, battered by their own unruly emotions, and bruised by rejection and ridicule, authentic disciples may have stumbled and frequently fallen, endured lapses and relapses, gotten handcuffed to the fleshpots and wandered into a far county. Yet, they kept coming back to Jesus.”

In the church today we have similar challenges to those that Paul faced. “Many pastors have been reduced to secular ‘mentors’ and ‘coaches’ in exchange for authentic disciplers of men,” comments John Paul Warren. Our great need is a truly *authentic* ministry that reveals Jesus to this sad and dying world, one that speaks well of God as we represent him. We are to be “a public show before the entire universe, to angels and to human beings.” 1 Corinthians 4:9.

What has happened is that the Devil has taken his demonic face mask and put this mask of evil over God’s face. He has charged God the Father with many “crimes.” Here’s a partial list: Arbitrary. Severe. Harsh. Exacting. Selfish. Unforgiving. Self-exalting. Inflexible. Unsympathetic. Revengeful. Stern. Cruel. Unjust. Unmerciful. The only way God can respond is to demonstrate that these charges are not true. Through his actions he proves that these are lies, and that he is not the kind of person the Devil has said he is.

Our privilege is to witness to this in the lives we lead, to follow God’s truth and not the deceptive lies of the Devil.

Ellen White Comments

The lives recorded in the Bible are authentic histories of actual individuals. From Adam down through successive generations to the times of the apostles we have a plain, unvarnished account of what actually occurred and the genuine experience of real characters... The inspired writers did not testify to falsehoods to prevent the pages of sacred history being clouded by the record of human frailties and faults. The scribes of God wrote as they were dictated by the Holy Spirit, having no control of the work themselves. They penned the literal truth, and stern, forbidding facts are revealed for reasons that our finite minds cannot fully comprehend. {4T 9}

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