

## From The Pulpit Of



# IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH

## Godly Sincerity

**No. 3**

**2 Corinthians 1:12-14**

**Series: 2 Corinthians**

**June 14, 2026**

**Theodore Siu**

### Text

*[12] 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. [13] For we are not writing to you anything other than what you read and understand and I hope you will fully understand—[14] just as you did partially understand us—that on the day of our Lord Jesus you will boast of us as we will boast of you. (ESV)*

### Introduction:

- Arouse Interest:
  - September 26, 1960 was a historic date which radically altered the nature of American politics from that night forward. During that night, Vice President Richard Nixon and Senator John F. Kennedy engaged in the first of several debates in an attempt to win the American public towards their presidential campaign.<sup>1</sup>
    - Nixon was a Republican who assured voters in the midst of a Cold War that he would maintain the peace and prosperity of the Eisenhower administration.
    - Kennedy was a Democrat who promised that he would get the nation moving again and work to resist the threat of communism around the globe.
  - The deck seemed slightly stacked in Nixon's favor. Kennedy was young, inexperienced, and Catholic during a time when the American public favored a Protestant president. As the current Vice President under the

---

<sup>1</sup> "How the Kennedy-Nixon Debate Changed the World of Politics | Constitution Center," *National Constitution Center – Constitutioncenter.Org*, n.d., <https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/the-debate-that-changed-the-world-of-politics>. <https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/the-debate-that-changed-the-world-of-politics> "How the Kennedy-Nixon Debate Changed the World of Politics | Constitution Center." See also "Campaign of 1960 | JFK Library," 31 March 2026, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/campaign-of-1960>. <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/campaign-of-1960> "Campaign of 1960 | JFK Library."

- immensely popular President Eisenhower, Nixon seemed to have a thorough understanding of the complex global political landscape.
- It was a close race with many factors swinging the pendulum left and right. However, several historians have argued that the outcome of the election seemed to have been decided by the results of their very first debate. You see, unlike former engagements, this debate took place when, for the first time in American history, the majority of the voting public were able to watch the candidates live on television. And to the public at large, it was very clear who at least looked like the more competent leader.
    - Kennedy had scouted out the studio prior to the debate. He wore a blue suit to stand out against the grey background of the set. He had his makeup done by his own team, and he directly engaged the camera in his responses.
    - Nixon on the other hand had just gotten out of the hospital having injured his knee. His suit blended into the background. He had no makeup. He had not shaved. He was sweating due to his injuries. And he generally seemed to have a harder time engaging the American public at large.
  - In the end Kennedy ended up swinging the votes by a mere 0.2% margin. It was a close call, but ever since that fateful night, presidential candidates deliberately strategize their campaigns with the looming threat of the watching public in mind.
- Surface Need:
    - Like it or not these days, appearances play an important role in regards to American politics. We may not like to think that our elections are decided by superficial factors such as lighting and figure, but the fact of the matter is that no politician would invest so much money in appearance if it simply didn't matter.
    - When it comes to the church, what are the deciding factors in who wins and who loses? Who are the people that you admire, and what do you admire them for? When you yourself try to show how impressive you are to others, what are the first things that you mention about yourself? And are the things that impress you about yourself and others the same kinds of things that God would be impressed with if he were looking over your life?
  - Orient to text:
    - As we've seen in our study of 1 and 2 Corinthians, the church in Corinth was made up of people who loved to boast. They boasted in their strengths and smarts. In their wealth and status. At times they even boasted that their spiritual teacher was better than the other teachers around them.
    - But according to these standards, someone like the apostle Paul looked weak. He was a good letter writer, but he wasn't necessarily a great speaker. He wasn't impressive to look at in person. If anything, following

the example of Paul more often led to persecution rather than the pleasures of a good life.

- During this time, many in Corinth were starting to ask the question, why should we follow this teacher, when there are far more impressive teachers who we would be learning from instead? Teachers who boasted of a better resume and superior results.
- Paul wrote 2 Corinthians to respond to charges like these. Here in verses 12-14, Paul begins the formal defense of his ministry. His argument here is simple: ***Real ministry is marked by real love for God and his people.***

### Love for God (12)

- Look with me again here at verse 12:
  - [12] 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.
- This word ‘boast’ here in verse 12 is going to be an important theme for the book. It occurs here in 2 Corinthians more than all the other letters of Paul combined.
- And here in 2 Corinthians, this proclivity to revel in what is flashy or impressive manifested itself in a different form as other pseudo - apostles were showing up and attempting to discredit the ministry of Paul.
- Paul is going to refer to these super - apostles in 11:5 and 12:11. These were teachers who boasted in their external appearances (5:12) and superior eloquence (11:5-6). These were peddlers of God’s Word (2:17) who promised a life of success and grandeur to any who would follow their new teachings instead. Who promised the world to those who would pay a small fee for their wisdom (11:7-11).
- It was because of these new teachers that many within the church of Corinth were starting to question Paul’s own qualifications for ministry. And it’s because of these charges against him, that Paul now writes this letter.
- In contrast to these super - apostles, who boast in their eloquence and wisdom, Paul commends his ministry on the basis of his godly character and conduct. It’s not that Paul couldn’t boast in his accomplishments. As we’ll see, Paul had a great deal of earthly accomplishments, he could have bragged about. But Paul chose to boast in this, that he had a clear conscience before God and man. That he conducted himself before others with simplicity and godly sincerity.
  - The idea behind these terms is that Paul didn’t have some kind of double motive for his ministry.<sup>2</sup>
  - He didn’t preach Christ to gain a crowd. He wasn’t aiming to be esteemed in the eyes of this world.
  - He wouldn’t have been eager to blow up on tik tok or promote his new podcast.

---

<sup>2</sup> Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Eerdmans [u.a.], 2005).

- No, Paul was in this business for one reason and one reason alone. To preach Jesus Christ and him crucified. To make much of Jesus so that others would turn from their sins and find salvation in Christ and Christ alone.
- Paul's next phrase supports this: "not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God." The wording here is very reminiscent of the way Paul talks in 1 Corinthians 1:22:
  - For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.
- Friends, If Paul was in this business for himself, he picked a poor business plan.
  - He could have stayed a prominent Pharisee among the Jews. He could have impressed the Gentiles with his great wisdom and learning.
  - But instead, Paul chose to clearly and passionately preach about the cross of Jesus Christ. And by doing so, Paul was rejected by both Jew and Gentile alike.
- Preaching about the cross led Paul to be mocked. It led him to be scoffed at. It led him to suffer for the sake of his convictions. In the end, preaching Christ and him crucified eventually led to his death.
- Again, if Paul was motivated by riches, he clearly failed. But if his goal in life was to simply love Jesus and help others know and love him, then there really was no better way to do this than to simply proclaim the truth about Christ irrespective of the consequences.
- Yes, Paul's ministry was counterintuitive. It led him to be persecuted and suffer greatly for the name of Christ. But it also led some by the grace of God to encounter the risen Christ in his gospel and to be supernaturally saved from their sins.

#### Application

- Friends, I'm not sure where everyone is coming from or why you yourself are here today. It's very possible that some of you may have a poor opinion of pastors due to your own past experiences. I can't say that I blame you. There are a number of so-called ministers who use religion as a means to build their own platform and positions within this world.
- But at the same time, it would be naive of you to judge the whole of the Christian faith on the basis of her worst representatives. For every hypocritical pastor you meet, there is also another faithful Christian who's life is marked by sincere love for God and a desire for everyone they know to encounter the mercies of Christ for themselves.
  - There are Christians here in this room who have lost career opportunities because they believed it was more important to be a witness for Christ rather than build up their own kingdoms.

- There are members of our church who have lost loved ones because they loved them enough to tell them the truth about their sins and the salvation which can solely be found in Jesus Christ alone.
- There are those in our community who go out of their way to befriend the poor and destitute. Who show the love of Christ to those who honestly could never really give them anything in return.
- Friends, there are Christians, both out there and in here, who's lives would be inexplicable if not for the fact that they truly love Jesus, and they want others to love him too. My suggestion, if you are going to judge the Christian religion, judge her on the basis of her best representatives. Get to know some real Christian. Let us treat you to lunch. See for yourself what truly motivates these kinds of church people.
- Even if you do come to the conclusion that most Christians today are hypocrites, you still gotta admit that the person of Jesus Christ himself is compelling. What kind of God would be willing to give up his own crown, to give up his own life, to die a humiliating death in order to save rebels like us from our just deserved destruction? You may not be sure if this is true, but if there's a God out there who loves you like that, but you gotta admit that that kind of life has some sort of credibility.
- Brothers and sisters, if you are a Christian here today, I want to challenge you this morning to live in such a way that you too can say with a clean conscience that you behaved in this world with simplicity and godly sincerity.
- To be clear, I do not think you need to be perfect before you can tell people about Jesus at your workplace. But in the same way that Paul expected others to be able to see his love for Christ, you and I ought to have some measure of confidence that our neighbors can see our love for Christ as well.
  - It should be evident in the ways that we resist sin as we struggle to honor Christ. The ways we put in quality work, avoid short cuts, and do all that we can to make much of the name of Jesus in whatever we're doing wherever we're at.
  - It should also be evident in the ways that we repent of sins and demonstrate our weakness and reliance on God. In the ways you and I apologize to our kids, the way we acknowledge our faults to those we're disciplining, the ways we seek the forgiveness of those we've sincerely wronged.
  - It should affect the manner by which we conduct ourselves both outside and inside the church. As the apostle Paul says in verse 12, he behaved with simplicity and godly sincerity both in the world and supremely so towards the church in Corinth herself.
- Beloved, do the people around you know that you love Jesus? Is it clear that the fundamental motivation of your life is to make much of him? If it isn't, then do you really love Christ as much as you think you do? Is it possible that you yourself need to be reminded of just how much Jesus Christ truly loves you?
- As Paul himself will later state in 2 Cor. 5:14:

- [14] For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; [15] and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. (ESV)
- According to Paul, it's not that hard to love Jesus if you truly know just how much Jesus actually loves you.

#### Concern for others (13-14)

- So we've seen how Paul's ministry is marked by his sincere love for Christ above all things. Now we are going to see in verses 13-14, how Paul's ministry is also marked by his sincere love for the people of God as well.
- Paul writes starting in verse 13:
  - [13] For we are not writing to you anything other than what you read and understand and I hope you will fully understand—[14] just as you did partially understand us—that on the day of our Lord Jesus you will boast of us as we will boast of you. (ESV)
- Just as Paul's character was marked by simplicity and godly sincerity, you can also see how his communication to the Corinthians is marked by this same simplicity and sincerity.
- Paul's communication is simple in the sense that he isn't trying to impress the Corinthians with fancy rhetoric or flashy new teachings. No, Paul is just doing what he always does. Saying what he always says. He's communicating the truths of Jesus Christ in a manner that is clear and understandable. Unlike these super-apostles around Corinth, Paul is aiming to preach the kinds of sermons that are more helpful than hype.
- Not only is Paul's communication marked by simplicity, but as we look closer at these verses, we can also see there is a deep sincerity in Paul's love and care for the Corinthian church.
- Several times throughout verses 13-14, Paul states that his aim is to be understood. Notice Paul isn't satisfied with the Corinthians' partial understanding of him. No, Paul wants to be understood completely.
- According to Paul, if the Corinthian church grew to fully understand the implications of his teachings, then they would also grow in their understanding of his heart as well.
- And when the Corinthians finally understand the true heart of Paul, when they realize just how much Paul loved them and sacrificed for them, then according to verse 14, "on the day of our Lord Jesus you will boast of us as we will boast of you."

#### Application

- In the midst of the mess of church life, verses like these can be very encouraging. It was actually this verse that Jonathan Edwards used to preach his famous "Farewell Sermon" right after he was voted out of his church. Edwards encouraged the church that had just fired him, that as deep as the divisions felt

- between him and his congregation in the moment, one day they would meet in heaven and they would be together in harmony.<sup>3</sup>
- Brothers and Sisters, it is nice to know, that as deep as the divisions may be, in spite of the pain, in spite of the misunderstandings, in spite of the many avenues Satan uses to exploit our weaknesses and divide our assemblies, the love of God is stronger still. And just as God was able to accomplish the miraculous by reconciling sinners like us back to himself through the blood of Christ, one day God will again work a miracle, and reconcile as the factions of our messy church back together again as one united people of God. And I can't wait to see what the church will look like then.
  - But let's really think about what Paul is saying here. Paul is saying that one day he will boast in the Corinthian church.
    - This is the same Corinthian church that was all in in sexual immorality.
    - This is the same Corinthian church who's members were arrogant and proud
    - This is the same Corinthian church who just a minute ago were questioning the validity of Paul's ministry because he seemed weak and spoke simply.
  - And Paul is saying that one day, he will brag about how well they did. About how much God has done in their lives to save them and sanctify them. As a matter of fact, throughout 1 and 2 Corinthians, Paul has consistently been saying that the Corinthians were truly his pride and joy (1 Cor 15:31; 2 Cor 7:4, 14; 8:24; 9:2-3).
  - Paul, why would you ever boast in these kinds of people?
  - I think the very simple answer is simply that Paul loves these people. Even if they mess up, even if they're flawed, Paul still loves the Corinthian church enough to notice the good that God is producing in their lives. To encourage them. To be proud of them, even if to us their accomplishments seem small.
  - Friends, if you have a hard time understanding Paul's love for them, you're probably going to have a hard time really grasping just how much God himself truly loves you. Jesus says in Matthew 25:21 that one day those who belong to him will be face to face with God himself. And God himself will say to you:
    - Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' (ESV)
  - This is an incredible thought. In spite of all of our sins. In spite of all the ways we've let God down time and time again. For those of us who are in Christ, we can know that God himself loves us and is actually pleased with us when we try to serve him.
  - Friends, if God is like that towards us, how much more ought we be encouraging those around us as our brothers and sisters in Christ struggle to serve the Lord today? How much more ought we be quick to boast about one another?

---

<sup>3</sup> Iain M. Duguid, *ESV Expository Commentary (Volume 10): Romans-Galatians*, ESV Expository Commentary Ser (Crossway, 2020).

- Don't get me wrong, Paul sharply rebukes the Corinthians for their sin. But at the same time, it's honestly kind of amazing just how encouraging he is towards potentially one of the worst churches throughout all of the New Testament.
- Not only ought we be quick to encourage one another, but we also ought to be quick to thank our spiritual mothers and fathers in Christ who have done so much to love and care for us, even when we ourselves really never appreciated it.
- According to Paul, one day the secrets of all our hearts are going to be revealed. The true intentions of our actions will be laid bare for all to see. And on that day, you and I are actually going to be a lot more thankful for the little people that God used in our lives to spur us on in our Christian life.
- So many of us today are enamored by the ministries of famous pastors or big name preachers. And that's not necessarily wrong. I myself have my own set of spiritual heroes. But let's be honest here. For most of us. For most of us, these guys don't really know who we are.
- Again, I'm not saying that we shouldn't thank the Lord for the ways he's used famous pastors such as these. But perhaps it is possible that you and I have overlooked some people in our lives that we really ought to be praising God for.
- Because without these little people, the people who loved us when it was hard, who prayed for us in the middle of the night, who told us the hard truths we needed to hear even when we didn't like them for it, friends without those people in our lives, we probably never would have made it as far as we have in our walk with the Lord.
- Friends, are there parents in your life you need to say thank you to today? Are there former pastors or mentors or just simple brothers and sisters in Christ that you need to do a better job appreciating for the immense blessing they were to you and your faith?
- They may not have been perfect in their discipleship of you. They may even have done some things that you sincerely think are wrong. But at the same time, they did their best to love you, to pray for you and to point you to Jesus. And you wouldn't be where you are today without their sincere love and devotion given to you.
- Church, when the Lord returns, and the secrets of the heart are revealed, you and I are going to be surprised at who the real ones were among us who loved us with simplicity and sincerity.
- This is the way that real ministry works. It isn't flashy. It isn't always impressive. The right people don't always get the credit until the end.
- And often the best ministers are those who are simply faithful in loving God and loving you behind the scenes of a watching world. But that's the kind of ministry that best honors the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the kind of ministry that Christ himself will honor in the day of his return.