From The Pulpit Of

IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH

Boasting

No. 24 **2 Corinthians 10:7-18** **November 15, 2026**
Series: 2 Corinthians **Nathan Carter**

Text

7 Look at what is before your eyes. If anyone is confident that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ's, so also are we. 8 For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed. 9 I do not want to appear to be frightening you with my letters. 10 For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account." 11 Let such a person understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present. 12 Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.

13 But we will not boast beyond limits, but will boast only with regard to the area of influence God assigned to us, to reach even to you. 14 For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you. For we were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ. 15 We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, 16 so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence. 17 "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." 18 For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

Introduction

Have you ever daydreamed about your own funeral and what people might say about you? We have a deep desire to have our greatness recognized and get some credit for all we've done, at least eventually.

I heard someone recently talk about having a funeral for a friend *before* he died so that he could hear what everybody said about him and how loved he was. I thought to myself, "Isn't that basically a birthday party?"

Why do we love our own birthday parties where we are the center of attention and honored and appreciated?

But it's hard to wait until our funeral or once a year celebration. Why do we make sure our LinkedIn profiles are up-to-date with every new certification or accomplishment? Why do we always introduce ourselves by what we do, and try to remind people (and ourselves) how good we are at it?

Do you remember when you first got social media and made a post, how you'd keep constantly re-opening that app to see if anyone saw it, liked it, commented on it, shared it? Maybe you still find yourself doing that today. If you've ever been published or gotten press of any kind, have you noticed an impulse to want to re-post it so others know? What is that?

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It's what the Bible calls boasting. And it's what we're talking about in today's Bible passage. But where does that impulse come from? Why do we need to get people to notice us? It comes from something broken within us. We were made to know God's love, love him back, and love other people. But we've gotten ourselves all twisted up. We've baselessly distrusted God and disobeyed him, incurring God's righteous anger. And so we no longer love God, we resent him and try to be him ourselves. Which means that other people just become accessories to our own project of trying to prove ourselves. We don't live to serve them, we're living to serve ourselves, because we're deeply insecure. We've got to carve out some significance for ourselves, because we think we're all alone and it's all up to us. It's all messed up. And that's why we're all prone to boasting, to bragging about ourselves and our accomplishments, making sure someone sees what we've done.

But there are some people who are different, people like the Apostle Paul, who can have moments when they operate with great security and a genuine desire for God's fame and give themselves altruistically to the service of others. What does that look like? And what makes the difference? Let's look at that today from this text of Scripture – 2 Corinthians 10:7-18. In short, what we're going to see is just this: **we can stop boasting about ourselves and start being all about the good of others and the glory of God when we get the grace of the gospel**.

Let's pray…

The Good of Others (vv. 7-12)

The first section of today's text is vv. 7-12. As we get into those verses, let's remind ourselves where we're at in this book of 2 Corinthians, which we've been going through on Sundays for the last 23 weeks.

Last week we covered vv. 1-6 and we said that at the start of ch. 10 we have come to a turning point in the letter. Up until this point Paul has been primarily dealing with the regenerate, repentant majority of the Corinthian Christian community about various matters. By and large this was a church that knew the Lord, even though they had major struggles. Every church will have struggles. Being a real Christian doesn't mean you have everything together. It means you're responsive to God's Word though and you're growing. That was true for most of the Corinthian church.

But there was a dangerous group that was trying to infiltrate and influence the church there. They were worldly. They were false teachers espousing erroneous ideas. For the last three chapters of this book Paul has these outsiders primarily in mind and he's telling the true believers how to stand up to them.

Last week we saw that Christians should try not to be offensive, but still be on the offensive. Paul, without being un-Christ-like and mean, called for the true Christians not to just sit back and let bad ideas take over. They needed to push back and climb up into those mistaken worldviews and show how they have no foundation and tear them down. Unbiblical ideologies are incoherent and unstable and we love people by demolishing those errant ideas.

Now in vv. 7-12 Paul is talking to the Corinthian Christians about how his use of authority differs from these false teachers. They were all about themselves. Paul was all about helping others. Later in 11:5 and 12:11 he will call them "super-apostles". They

thought they were other-level awesome. They were slick and self-promoting. They projected a sense of superiority. They were boastful. But Paul, on the other hand, was weak and suffered and didn't tout his successes. Why? Because he wasn't seeking his own reputation and using people like the Corinthians to boost it, but rather he was endeavoring to genuinely help people like the Corinthians. Let's look at what he says here.

Paul starts by saying, "Look at what is before your eyes." This is most likely saying, "Look at what is patently obvious!"[1] Don't get the wool pulled over your eyes. Don't be confused. False teachers can muddle things up and make you miss seeing things that are actually quite clear, right in front of your face.

"If anyone is confident that he is Christ's," Paul says. Some people seemed to be bragging or wearing proudly some badge of distinction that *they* were "of Christ." Perhaps the false teachers Paul's taking aim at here were the leaders of the Christ faction that was mentioned at the beginning of 1 Corinthians – "'I follow Paul'… 'I follow Apollos'… 'I follow Cephas'… 'I follow Christ'" (1Cor. 1:12). It seems that they had gotten some people to think that by following them, *they* were the ones who were *really* following Christ.

There was a movement a few years ago called the "Red Letter Christians." Some translations have sometimes printed the words of Jesus in the Gospels in red ink. And these people were trying to prioritize those words over against other parts of the Bible. It gave the impression that they were the real Jesus people. But they were still ignoring some of the red letters. And they were ignoring the fact that the red letters are set in a larger narrative of Jesus' redemptive work on the cross and his resurrection and ascension and sending of the Spirit and establishment of the church through his apostles. They actually turned out to be for a lot of things that Jesus is against. You've got to be careful.

Paul says, "If anyone is confident that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ's, so also are we." Paul and his apostolic entourage were true Christians, authentic Jesus followers. Let's not forget that Paul himself saw the resurrected Jesus and received a commission from him to be one of his select Apostles. So Paul's essentially saying, "Don't let these 'super-apostles' trick you and turn you against me. You know that I'm with Christ." Paul was the one who first brought the message of Christ to Corinth. He had introduced them to Christ and instructed them in Christ. It was undeniable that Paul knew Christ. They shouldn't pay any attention to people who questioned that and boastfully billed themselves as the real Christ guys, if their teaching contradicted Paul's and the other Apostles'.

In v. 8 Paul says, "For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed." Paul's not embarrassed or shy; he's not sheepish about acknowledging his apostolic authority. Sometimes we think that humility means hiding who you are, that you can't ever use your title or something like that. But that's not necessarily true. It matters how you understand how you got your authority and how you understand what your authority is for.

First, how does Paul understand how he got his authority? He describes it this way – "…which the Lord gave." Paul is certainly not a self-appointed Apostle, like Robert Duvall's character in the movie *The Apostle*. Paul didn't confer the position on himself, he was given it by Jesus. And Paul didn't earn his position. Remember: Paul

had been a "blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent" of Jesus and his church (1Tim. 1:13). The designation was given to him entirely of grace. He didn't deserve it. And Paul never got over that. He was well aware that any authority he had was *given* to him.

Second, how does Paul understand what this apostolic authority was for? It wasn't a privileged position that meant he would make a lot of money and get special treatment. He wasn't wielding power for his own profit and prestige. Like Jesus, he took the form of a servant. He used his authority, he says here, "for building… up and not for destroying." If you think authority means you can exploit and step on people and use them for yourself, you have it all wrong.

Jonathan Leeman has a great book about this that came out a couple years ago called *Authority: How Godly Rule Protects the Vulnerable, Strengthens Communities, and Promotes Human Flourishing*. In an age where there have been so many abuses of authority, we're tempted to throw away the concept entirely. But we can't do that. God has given certain people authority. But we need to be so clear on how that authority is meant to be used for building people and institutions up, not tearing them down. Have you ever experienced anyone in authority doing that? Using their position to serve and protect and promote your good? It's a lovely thing. As the last words of King David put it in 2 Samuel 23:3-4 – "When one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God, he dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth."

So Paul's not doing a bad kind of boasting when he makes it clear that he is an authentic Apostle of Jesus. He's acknowledging that it is entirely on account of God's grace, owing to nothing in himself. And he's not using the office in a self-serving way, but to build up people. He's not all about himself. He's all about **the good of others**.

He says in v. 9 – "I do not want to appear to be frightening you with my letters." Paul's not a bully. He's not trying to intimidate them and manipulate them, verbally abusing them.

Then he quotes the false teachers that were trying to discredit Paul, v. 10 – "For they say, 'His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account.'" It's interesting that even Paul's opponents seemed to have acknowledged that Paul's writings *do* have a weightiness to them. I mean, we're still reading them today because there is a unique kind of gravitas to them that we recognize. But they were trying to dismiss him because he also had a tender, meek demeanor, whereas they prided themselves on having strong and confident and imposing presences.

But Paul asserts that he is not inconsistent – one person when he can hide behind pen and paper, but another person in-person. He says, "Let [such people who accuse me of that] understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present" (v. 11). When he is present in-person in Corinth he will say the same truths, which are sometimes hard to hear, but he will always seek to do it in love, in order to build up the church for their own good, not in anger and for his own power trip. He's not just full of rhetoric and hot air. He really does care and is willing to come and get personally involved in working for the good of the church.

We see here that Paul's not using ministry to find an identity. He's not using people to prop himself up as more important than other people. None of those things are his concern. He is simply concerned about the Corinthians, not himself and how he

compares and stacks up against these "super-apostles" that were trying to expand their platforms. That's basically what he's getting at in v. 12 when he says, "Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding." Paul didn't want to compete against other leaders. He didn't want to play those games of comparing and commending himself. Those who view ministry that way "are without understanding," they don't get what ministry is all about. It's about **the good of others**. That's the main thrust of vv. 7-12. Paul was **all about the good of others**.

How much of what you do ostensibly in religious activity is honestly done for the sake of people and how much of it is to find some sense of self-worth, get some recognition, outdo someone else?

The Glory of God (vv. 13-16)

Next, in vv. 13-16 we see that Paul was also **all about the glory of God**. He wasn't seeking his own glory. He was ultimately concerned to see Christ magnified by more people in more places.

Pay attention to what Paul is saying here in these verses. He's saying that he's not just trying to get his fame to spread as far and wide as he can. He's all about Christ's name being named in places where it hasn't been yet. He's not looking to increase his market share; he's looking to tap into new markets (so to speak) for the sake of Christ. He's not trying to maximize his influence, but simply do his part to maximize the gospel's reach.

Verse 13 – "But we will not boast beyond limits." Paul and his team are not claiming to be involved in anything more than what they were actually involved in. "[W]e will not boast beyond limits, but will boast only with regard to the area of influence God assigned to us." Paul does not lie and say he hasn't done anything. He has. But he's always careful to make clear that he's just doing what God has assigned to him. He's content to just do what God has assigned him to do, whatever it is.

And even there, he is well aware that any results are the result of God's gracious work through him. For example, in Romans 15:17-18 he writes, "In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me." This is also really clear in Acts 14:27 when Paul and Barnabas return to their sending church in Antioch after their first missionary journey. It reads – "And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that *God* had done with them, and how *he* had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles." Paul's just doing his assignment and acknowledging that any accomplishments are really God's work through him.

It was on his second missionary journey that God brought Paul to Corinth and used him to plant this church there, where the gospel had never before gone. That's why Paul says at the end of v. 13 – "…to reach even to you." Corinth was one of the furthest west places that the gospel had gone at that point. Verse 14 – "For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you. For we were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ." He's not exaggerating his accomplishments. He's content to stay in his lane. But his assigned lane from the Lord included being the first to bring the gospel to Corinth.

And so he says in v. 15 – "We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged," v. 16, "*so that* we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you." What godly ambition! Paul wants the Corinthians to be part of getting the gospel further west to new frontiers. He's not trying to plant his flag in Corinth. He's planted the gospel flag and now he wants that to be a beachhead for further expansion into unreached territory for **the glory of God**.

And he adds – "…without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence." He says something similar in Romans 15:20 – "[T]hus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation." Paul wanted more people to be told of the wonder of Jesus. He wasn't interested in building his own kingdom, but expanding Christ's. Think about what these "super-apostles" were doing. They were going into churches that had already been planted and trying to poach. They were parasitic, coming in behind pioneering gospel work and trying to get a following for themselves among the new religious market there. That's not what Paul was about.

This has missiological implications for us today. First, we should still be focused on getting the gospel to unreached places. "The latest numbers indicate that somewhere between 3,200 – 3,500 language groups are still without [S]cripture, a gospel witness and above all [have] no church in their language. It's not by accident that these particular language groups remain unreached. They live in hard-to-get-to places, they speak hard-to-learn languages and it will require an uncommon level of dedication to see a mature church planted among these groups."[2] But we must try. We want God to be glorified in every tongue!

Second, when we think of evangelism and church planting in places that are considered reached, like here in Chicago, we must be careful to keep our focus on reaching non-Christians. How easy it is, but sad, when churches grow by gobbling up other churches. We shouldn't be competing with other churches for a limited set of spiritually-minded people. We should be going after the unchurched. A church's strategy shouldn't be transfer growth, but conversion growth.

The point is: you can turn religion into yet another way to be an influencer. There's a niche for it. You can get followers. The algorithm can get you into those people's feeds. But that's not what this should be about. We're not trying to get a name for ourselves among the Christian sub-culture. We're trying to get Christ's name out there and honored among all cultures. And each of us just has our small part to gladly play for the greater goal of **the glory of God**. There was a charge that was given to the Moravian missionaries in the 1700s as they were sent out for the sake of the Name that encapsulates this concept – "Preach the gospel, die, and be forgotten."

The Grace of the Gospel (vv. 17-18)

How can you do that? How can you truly feel and live that way, without this incessant clamor for acknowledgment, this insatiable desire to be recognized, this insecure, sublte scheming for receiving congratulations? **We can stop boasting about ourselves and start being all about the good of others and the glory of God when we get the grace of the gospel**. Let's close out by looking at vv. 17 and 18.

Paul paraphrases Jeremiah 9:23-24 in v. 17. The full text in Jeremiah reads – "Thus says the LORD: 'Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.'" Paul summarizes it succinctly – "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." Don't brag about what you've done; brag about what the Lord has done.

And what has he done? He has saved sinners entirely of his grace. As the fulfillment of all the OT hopes, Jesus has come and lived the only impeccable life of uncompromised love of God and love of neighbor. He lived a remarkably perfect life, but then he died a shameful criminal's death. What for? To take the punishment that people like us should get, in our place. And so instead of us bearing the condemnation we deserve, Christ bears that for us. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

But there's more! That's just the half of it. There's not just no condemnation, there's also complete commendation. Not for anything we've done. Not even for our humility in putting our faith in Christ (that faith is itself a gift from God). What are we commended for? We are credited with the impeccable record of Christ. We are clothed in his righteousness. We are completely and irrevocably accepted and approved by God on account of Christ. This excludes all boasting in ourselves and produces ecstatic boasting in the Lord. *Can you believe what he's done!!!*

"'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.' For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends." There's a sense in which our works, which the Lord worked in and through us, will receive a commendation, a recognition and reward, on the Last Day. But Paul's got to be talking about something even deeper here. Not infused righteousness, but imputed righteousness. Human boasting can only be silenced by knowing you're 100% approved on account of 0% of your own doing. Otherwise, you'll have some insecurity, some need to try to justify yourself. *Have I done enough? Am I really okay?*

But it's so amazingly better to be loved by God because of Christ and not your performance. It's so much sweeter to hear God say, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Mt. 3:17), and know he's talking about you because you're in Christ by faith, than to hear yourself saying, "I've done this and I've done this and so you should be pleased with me." People who toot their own horns sound sad and pathetic.

The only way **we can stop boasting about ourselves and start being all about the good of others and the glory of God** is **when we get the grace of the gospel**. Only the gospel of free grace will make you stop talking constantly about yourself and be consumed with Christ. Only the gospel of justification by faith alone will free you from needing other people to puff you up so that you can actually get to work serving them. You'll never actually do a good deed until you know that you're not approved by them but because of Christ's work for you, because until then you'll really be doing the good deeds for yourself, to earn something for yourself, and not actually for other people. Only the gospel can make you preach the gospel, die, and be forgotten, because you know that you'll never be forgotten by God, you're seated eternally at his right hand, not because of anything you've done, but because of what Jesus has done for you.

That's something to boast about, to sing and shout about!

The Lord's Table

Are you in Christ? Have you disavowed all notions of being able to stand before God in your own merit and thrown yourself entirely on his mercy? And have you heard his word of justification, his pronouncement of total approval over you? If not, you can do that right now. Cease your futile attempts at shoring up your own resume to present to others and to God. And accept the free gift of salvation in Jesus.

And for those who have already done that – they are in Christ and they have been baptized as a picture of that and they are in a church as a member – then you are invited to this meal as a way of continually being reminded of **the grace of the gospel**. It's a chance once again to remember what God has done in Christ to reconcile you to himself. You bring nothing to this table but empty hands to receive his sacrifice applied to you, but you leave knowing that you have everything in him.

This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Immanuel Baptist Church, Chicago, Illinois, by Pastor Nathan Carter on Sunday morning, November 15, 2026. It is not meant to be a polished essay, but was written to be delivered orally. The mission of Immanuel is to be a multiplying community that enjoys and proclaims the Good News of Christ in the great city of Chicago.

End Notes:

[1] Colin G. Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 176.
[2] https://www.missionary.com/articles/why-training-is-so-important