

## **10:13–18 *Boasting in the Lord***

**LEGITIMATE BOASTING.** WOLFGANG MUSCULUS: Let us note that Paul does not say, “we will not boast,” but “we will not boast beyond limits.” Thus, he does not claim to eschew all boasting in general. From this we rightfully infer that boasting is not always unlawful for the saints. Certainly, it is unlawful and blameworthy for a person to boast falsely rather than truthfully, to boast about things in which there is no truth, or in what someone else has done, or immoderately, or beyond the limits acceptable to the Lord, or for reasons that are empty and groundless rather than certain and useful, or in one’s own flesh or the flesh of another rather than in the Lord. Nothing of this sort is seen in the boastings of the saints, who boast truthfully, about their own affairs, with moderation and full understanding, and in the Lord.

Next, let us observe that Paul says, “but according to the measure (*tōn kanonos*),” that is, the rule, “by which God has apportioned the measure to us.” ... You see here that God has given not only those things that are good ... but he also distributes his measure to each person, to some more, to others less; no one receives nothing, no one receives everything. In this, you see the rule for assigning this distribution.... Paul does not explain what this rule is by which God apportions his gifts to each person according to his measure. And it is not possible to explain it with certainty. Because it corresponds to the secret of divine providence that God distributes wisely, usefully, sufficiently to each person all things that are necessary for either sustaining life or undertaking ministry. COMMENTARY ON [2 CORINTHIANS 10:13](#).

**PAUL’S BOASTING WAS MEASURED BY GOD’S CALLING.** CARDINAL CAJETAN: Paul employs the metaphor of a measuring cord, which builders use as a rule for their work of construction. For the master builder marks off the parts of the project with a measuring cord (which is called a *regula*) when directing the whole work of construction, or of cultivating the earth, or of building a rampart, and the purpose of the rule is to measure each part of the project. Paul uses this metaphor to indicate that the source for his boasting was measured by the extent of the territory in which he had up till then preached according to the limit [*regula*], determined not by himself, nor by the apostles, but by God. Now the extent of Paul’s territory at that time reached all the way to Corinth. Read the Acts of the Apostles and you will find that Paul was frequently led by the Holy Spirit where he should preach and discuss things with the people. Understand that God assigned to Paul the places where he should preach. At the same time, let the wise reader recognize that Paul was not only preaching by divine appointment, but he was also preaching in a territory according to the limit [*regula*] assigned to him by God and so he went to some places and not to others. That is why the boasting of Paul rested not on himself but was assigned to Paul according to the divine measure [*regula*] and why those rivals were praising themselves as universal teachers, as if they were running throughout all regions. This was the reason for their great boasting. For even if they were boasting about the immense extent of the territory they covered, Paul had not claimed anything from their region. COMMENTARY ON [2 CORINTHIANS 10:13](#).

**GOD GIVES DIFFERENT PEOPLE DIFFERENT VOCATIONS.** TILEMANN HESSHUS: After Paul has touched upon the false apostles’ empty boasting, now, in turn, he demonstrates with apostolic modesty the extent to which it is permissible for us to boast, namely, according to the limits that the Lord has given to us and no more than that. People who boast beyond limits and measure are those who wish to attribute to themselves what God has not given them and who thrust themselves into someone else’s calling. Arius boasted beyond

limits when he attributed to himself greater gifts than he had and strained to expel another from his office. The Roman pontiff wishes to be called “the universal bishop of the whole world” and “head of the church”—authority he has certainly not received from God but has taken up for himself. Therefore, he is praising himself and boasting beyond limit. But the apostle Paul lived within the proper boundaries and was mindful of the limits which the Lord was placing on him.

Here the apostle is warning most gravely that we must diligently consider the limit that the Lord has imparted to us, that is, the work to which the Lord has called us and the gifts with which he has equipped us. For a man or woman cannot assume for themselves anything except what is given them from above. No labor or work is blessed if the Lord has not commanded and motivated it.... God does not distribute equal measure to every person. He establishes some to be apostles, others prophets, others teachers, others pastors, and others rulers. He gives some people the gift of healing, others the faculty of performing miracles—all according to his kindest will. The vocation of Moses was of one sort, whom God established as a “god” to Pharaoh and led God’s people. Aaron had a different calling. Elijah led the church for twenty years, Elisha for seventy years. Jonah was sent to Nineveh in the kingdom of Assyria, the prophet Micah only preached in the kingdom of Israel. Isaiah instructed the church for eighty years, Jeremiah for only forty years. Isaiah advised that Jerusalem not be handed over to Sennacherib; Jeremiah, from the command of God, taught that the city should be handed over to Nebuchadnezzar. John the Baptist performed his ministry for barely two years; John the Evangelist presided over the church in doctrine and authority for almost eighty years. Hence, the Lord distributes different limits to his servants, and he lays upon them various struggles and afflictions. We must consider carefully, therefore, the limit the Lord has given to us. And even if you are not Athanasius, Augustine, or Luther, you should nevertheless serve faithfully in your position, according to the limit which the Lord has apportioned to you. [EXPLICATION OF 2 CORINTHIANS 10:13.](#)

**THE APOSTLES HONORED THEIR DIVINELY SET BOUNDARIES.** THE ENGLISH ANNOTATIONS: For the apostles, their dioceses encompassed the whole world, and they were commissioned to preach to all nations. Yet their journeys took them to different regions as God directed their paths, and they were careful not to interrupt or hinder one another so as to avoid interfering in the labor of another. By contrast, the false apostles traveled wherever they might gain an advantage and arrogated to themselves the conversion of those countries where the true apostles had already planted the faith. ANNOTATIONS ON [2 CORINTHIANS 10:13.](#)

**PAUL BROUGHT THE GOSPEL TO THE CORINTHIANS.** JOHN CALVIN: “For we are not overextending.” Paul alludes to persons who either forcibly stretch out their hands or raise themselves up on their feet when they want to snatch what they do not have in hand, for such is the greedy desire for glory—indeed, it is often more disgusting than that. For ambitious persons not only stretch out their hands and lift up their feet, but they throw themselves headlong to obtain some pretext for glory. Paul indicates that his rivals were like that. He afterward declares the reasons he had come to the Corinthians, namely, because he had founded their church by his ministry. And so he says “in the gospel of Christ,” for he had not come to them empty-handed, but had been the first to bring to them the gospel. COMMENTARY ON [2 CORINTHIANS 10:14.](#)

**PAUL IS CELEBRATING GOD’S GRACE AMONG THE CORINTHIANS.** TILEMANN HESSHUS: Paul shows that he is not boasting in vain, for indeed, the Corinthians were competent witnesses that Paul was appointed a teacher of the Gentiles, and that God was present in his calling and conferred a blessed outcome. Already in his ministry Paul had established many churches in Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia; but because his authority Timothy George and Scott M. Manetsch, eds., *2 Corinthians: New Testament*, vol. IXb, Reformation Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2022). Page 2. Exported from [Logos Bible Software](#), 07:14 17 August, 2023.

was disparaged among the Corinthians, he only appeals to their testimony. “You Corinthians,” he says, “were previously idolaters, ignorant of God, strangers from [spiritual] life; none of you made any mention of the kingdom of Christ and his blessings. And then, God gave to me this measure or limit, that I might extend the gospel of Christ to you and admit you to the fellowship of the church. It is only right and with good reason that I boast concerning you, because I was profitable to you in the Lord. You are my crown, my glory, and my joy.”

This boasting of the apostle is moderate in that he is not proclaiming their works but rather is celebrating the kindness of God, who had granted a blessed outcome to Paul’s ministry as he also converted the Corinthians to faith in Christ. He cautiously admonishes the Corinthians not quickly to forget the greatest benefits of God which they received from the words and preaching of Paul concerning the knowledge of the true God and the mediator Jesus Christ. These things were intended not only to be heard by the false apostles, but also to refute them. EXPLICATION OF [2 CORINTHIANS 10:14](#).

**WEAK FAITH SLOWS THE ADVANCE OF THE GOSPEL.** JOHN CALVIN: Paul again indirectly reproves the Corinthians because they had been an obstacle to his making greater progress in advancing the gospel. For when he says that he hopes that, with their faith growing, the boundaries of his boasting will be enlarged, he intimates that the weakness of their faith, with which they were struggling, was the reason why his progress [in proclaiming the gospel] was somewhat hindered. It is as if he were saying, “I should now have been occupied in gaining new churches—and that with your assistance, if you had made the progress that you should have—but now you delay me by your weakness. Nevertheless, I hope that the Lord will enable you to make more progress in the future, and in this way the glory of my ministry will increase according to the limit of my divine calling.” COMMENTARY ON [2 CORINTHIANS 10:15](#).

**PAUL BOASTS IN THOSE WHOM HE’S DISCIPLED.** NIELS HEMMINGSEN: With this comparison by antithesis, Paul gravely rebukes the false apostles who were boasting in the labors of others and beyond the limit assigned to them. It’s as if he were saying: “Those people boast outside their limits, but I boast according to the measure [set by God], and so I hope that, with your faith maturing, I will be magnified in you as your progress in faith shows itself all the more. For the boasting of teachers is in the progress of their students. And I do not hope for just this, but much more, namely, that I might extend my sphere of influence well beyond you, to those who have not yet heard the gospel, lest I should boast in those who have been prepared through the influence of others—that is, lest I claim for myself what the Lord has measured out to others. That is just what your false apostles are doing; but since I boast in my sphere of influence, I will evangelize among those who have not yet heard the gospel.” COMMENTARY ON [2 CORINTHIANS 10:15](#).

**NOT BOASTING IN THE LABORS OF OTHERS.** ANDREAS HYPERIUS: A certain enlargement of his boasting would seem to be from his hope of obtaining more boasting in the future. It is as if he were saying: “Not only can we rightly boast about you, but I hope soon in the future to boast also in other neighboring regions where I have decided to announce the gospel. And then, indeed, I will not be boasting about someone else’s limit (i.e., area of influence), nor will I claim for myself praise for someone else’s labor, but I will be boasting according to my personal limit and from my own labor and according to those things that I myself have acquired by my own effort.” And here he is still reproaching the false apostles for foolishly claiming the right to boast in someone else’s labor. Paul uses an elegant metaphor when he speaks of faith “growing up,” that is, increasing or becoming larger. For he was hoping that, in the future, the faith of the Corinthians might increase greatly, so that his boasting in them might be magnified in abundance, that is, it might grow

Timothy George and Scott M. Manetsch, eds., *2 Corinthians: New Testament*, vol. IXb, Reformation Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2022).  
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up in a wonderful way—yet still remaining within its limits, that is, without going to excess and within the measure prescribed by God. Now this would especially occur when their neighbors will be encouraged to embrace the gospel since it was customary for neighboring regions to leave behind their customs and manners when Paul taught them. Then, truly, he might boast rightly concerning these things that had been prepared for him, that is, which had been accomplished by his own labor. And he would not boast in someone else's area of influence, nor would he exceed his own limit and seize anything for himself from another person's boasting. COMMENTARY ON [2 CORINTHIANS 10:15–16](#).

**PAUL'S EXPANSIVE MISSIONARY TRAVELS.** WOLFGANG MUSCULUS: "So that we might preach the gospel also in those regions beyond you." Paul does not specify those regions beyond Corinth where he was hoping to preach the gospel.... If you consider the route by which he traveled from Jerusalem all the way to Corinth, beyond Corinth there was especially Macedonia, where nevertheless he had preached Christ before he had come to Corinth. As a matter of fact, in [Romans 15](#), Paul boasts that he had proclaimed the gospel of Christ all the way to Illyricum, which is on the far end of Macedonia. Finally, Paul also traveled all the way to Rome, though as a prisoner, and he evangelized there for two years. COMMENTARY ON [2 CORINTHIANS 10:16](#).

**PAUL PLANTED MANY NOTABLE CHURCHES.** TILEMANN HESSHUS: Paul had been commissioned by God to gather the church from the whole world through the ministry of the gospel. And he established very notable churches in many places: Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica, Iconium, Derbe, Lystra, Antioch, Pisidia, and in many other places. And finally, he brought the light of the gospel to the imperial palace in Rome. Thus, Paul's boasting was not limited to Corinth, but extended itself also to other churches. And indeed, in many places, Paul gathered a church in which the message of the gospel had not been heard previously. Therefore, he was not boasting in the labor of others or in fields harvested by others, but he was rejoicing in those regions where the Lord had worked through him. EXPLICATION OF [2 CORINTHIANS 10:16](#).

**EMPTY BOASTS OF VISITING FOREIGN FIELDS.** JOHN TRAPP: "In the regions beyond you." This was part of the braggadocio of the false apostles. And it is also now seen among the Jesuits, those peddlers and wandering beggars [*Agyrtae*], who cross sea and land, proud of the conversions that they have achieved in India and Africa, and like Dampadius, they become upset whenever people don't commend them every time they spit on the ground. The emperor Caius was ready to destroy the whole Senate because they did not deify him for marching with his whole army to the ocean to fetch a few oyster shells. COMMENTARY ON [2 CORINTHIANS 10:16](#).

**PAUL DOES NOT INTRUDE IN OTHER PEOPLE'S LABORS.** THE ENGLISH ANNOTATIONS: "Not boasting in another person's rule." A metaphor taken from builders who stretch out their line where they mean to build. And the apostle's meaning is that he would not intrude into any other person's work, nor desire to sow the seed of the Word in those regions and countries which other people had prepared and husbanded with the preaching of the gospel. ANNOTATIONS ON [2 CORINTHIANS 10:16](#).

**PAUL'S PRIMARY OBJECTIVES.** DAVID DICKSON: [It is as if Paul were saying,] We do not boast in the labors of other people, as if we had converted to the Christian faith those whom we never did, which is what these Pretenders do when they boast in you Corinthians, whom they did not convert. But we hope that, after you are further established in the faith, you may be confident and seek to propagate our gospel and share with your neighbors so that they may also hear my preaching. For truly, I hope that the borders of our

ministry through you will be greatly enlarged in accordance with the purpose of my calling, to whom God committed the apostleship to the Gentiles. I hope, I say, that it will come to pass that we have the opportunity to preach the gospel also in those regions that are beyond us. In so doing, I will not need to boast in another's harvest, prepared by the efforts of other people, as the false apostles are now doing as they boast about you Corinthians, whom I converted to salvation, not them. EXPOSITION OF [2 CORINTHIANS 10:16](#).

**WE SHOULD BOAST IN GOD ALONE.** HULDRYCH ZWINGLI: In all these things, may all of us seek the glory of God alone, whose work we are performing. And truly, whoever wishes to boast, let them boast in the name of God, who makes his grace known to the world through us, as his ministers. ANNOTATIONS ON [2 CORINTHIANS 10:17](#).

**THE NATURE OF BOASTING.** WOLFGANG MUSCULUS: Paul intends this general advice to pertain to all people commonly. For he says, "Whoever it is who boasts, and whatever he boasts about," from such a person it is required that "they should boast in the Lord." In the first chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul attributed this same advice to Scripture, saying, "As it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord' "—referring back, I think, to [Jeremiah 9](#). For to boast in the Lord, is not to boast about all those things we ascribe to our own strength, wisdom, or righteousness, but, rather, we attribute all things to divine providence and seek to boast about that rather than our own glory. People who are thus inclined cannot boast according to the flesh, and therefore they do not boast beyond their own capacity, or about what is false, or about what someone else has done—which is the very thing the false apostles were doing who, since they were zealous for vainglory, could not boast in the Lord.

Anyone who boasts, boasts about these three things: First, a person finds delight and exults within themselves concerning what they are boasting about. None of us boast about the disagreeable things that grieve us, but we boast about things that are auspicious, good, and excellent. (I am speaking here about the hearts of honorable people; for carnal people rejoice in carnal things, and wicked people rejoice in wicked things.) Thus, [Proverbs 2](#) says, "[Evil people] rejoice in doing evil and delight in the perverseness of evil." Second, people do not confine their gladness to the secret place of their consciences, but they discuss it and proclaim it among other people.... And they do not make their boasts mildly but brashly, not every now and again but frequently. This is especially true of those who boast about things that are false and useless. Third, by their bragging they seek praise and glory.... And here the zeal of the godly is distinguished from the zeal of the wicked. For godly persons do not seek to glorify themselves but seek the glory of God, even as they delight in him; and they do not proclaim their own virtues but proclaim God's grace and goodness and thus they boast in the Lord rather than in themselves. But when wicked people boast, they hunt after glory and praise for themselves, and commend themselves rather than God. COMMENTARY ON [2 CORINTHIANS 10:17](#).

**GOD ALONE COMMENDS.** HEINRICH BULLINGER: Paul now breaks off this discussion and says, "Unlike those [false apostles] who have left the truth, we seek all the glory for God alone, whose affairs we undertake." "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." Paul also quotes this statement in [1 Corinthians 1](#). Moreover, he adds a general statement, by which he teaches that the only person approved is the one whom God commends as holy and virtuous—not that person who extols himself and trumpets self-praise. We also read in [Proverbs 27](#), "Let another person praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips." COMMENTARY ON [2 CORINTHIANS 10:17–18](#).

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**THE CENTRAL PRINCIPLE OF BOASTING.** NIELS HEMMINGSEN: Paul is thinking here of both himself and the false apostles as he appropriately passes on this principle which is necessary for all godly people to follow in their actions: “Those who boast must boast in the Lord,” that is, with deeds both honorable and noble. First, he assumes that all boasting before God is genuine. Second, that whoever has received the grace of God should give back boasts to God. In the first principle he has in mind pride, in the second greed—two vices which horribly defile the otherwise excellent gifts of God. Paul adds the reason for the principle by comparing their causes: one of them causes ruin, the other is productive. Persons who commend themselves to others, become filthy and deserve contempt, for their commendation is not true. But those whom God commends are approved by God and other people. But who is commendable to God? Those persons who test and examine that all things are rightly done according to Paul’s principle. COMMENTARY ON [2 CORINTHIANS 10:17–18](#).

**TRUE EVIDENCE OF THE LORD’S COMMENDATION.** WOLFGANG MUSCULUS: Paul does not say, “the one whom other people commend,” but “the one whom the Lord commends.” Human commendation does not render a person approved. The false apostles were being commended by letters of recommendation from other people, as we saw in chapter [4](#) above, and yet nevertheless they were not approved [by God] but were rather condemned as imposters.... Now when the Lord commends someone, he does not make a mistake, nor does he mislead anyone—that is why it is necessary that a person should be approved by him. The Lord’s commendation is not like that of human beings ... for he does not commend with words, but with clear evidence, namely, with his works and gifts, by which he gives to each person what he wishes them to possess. Thus, the Lord was commending Paul as an exceptional apostle, and declared him approved through the great power of his apostleship. The false apostles did not possess this kind of commendation, so why was it that they seemed approved? They were showing off their great reservoir of knowledge, wisdom, and eloquence, and they were snubbing Paul as humble and ignorant in speech, considering themselves superior to him. Let us draw the conclusion from this rule of divine commendation whether or not ministers of Christ have been approved. If they have been equipped for the ministry with the necessary gifts of God, and have demonstrated it with clear evidence, we recognize in them the commendation of God and we hold them in high esteem as approved. No tree is judged to be good from the commendation of words, but it is judged by the abundance of its good fruit. So too when judging and testing ministers, we are able to recognize the tree by its fruit. COMMENTARY ON [2 CORINTHIANS 10:18](#).