

## **Boasting on the Last Day**

Westview Church | 2 Corinthians 1:12-14 | Pastor Brett Toney | February 1, 2026

### **Winter Driveway**

You know you are of a certain age when you notice driveways. We've got a neighbor with a fairly steep driveway, and I often think when I drive by how unpleasant it must be in the winter. But not me. We've got a South-facing asphalt driveway. That's right—you're probably jealous. Even though we're on a bit of a hill, a little salt and sunshine, and that driveway gets clear of ice pretty quick. The black asphalt absorbs the sun's rays, warming up even in freezing temps so the salt works all the more effectively.

Now, this morning we are seeing Paul move into his first main topic in this letter. Up through chapter seven, Paul is addressing his apostolic ministry—it's marked by "glory through weakness." The Corinthians had been deceived to question his authority (11:1-6)—if he in fact was "an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God" (v.1). So, he is telling them two things here: first, his conscience is clear regarding his ministry. And second, they are one another's confirmation. But what he is aiming to do is re-establish that they are on the same team. They are united together in Christ. Paul is working on a Minnesota driveway in February. Go with me here. He's writing to melt the icy driveway by pointing them back to the black asphalt of his gospel proclamation in v.12. And the sidewalk salt he spreads on top—that's the proof of their union in v.13-14.

### **Relational Context**

Before we get into how Paul is working to melt their icy relationship, let's step back to remember their background together. Corinth was a prominent Roman city in present day Greece. Lots of commerce. Lots of idol worship. People wanting to move up the social ladder went to Corinth. There were Jews in the city, but it was mostly Gentiles. Paul spent a year and a

half ministering there, teaching and establishing this church. That's one of his longest stays of anywhere he went. And if you were with us when we went through 1 Corinthians about a year plus ago—or if you've read 1 Corinthians—you'll know the church was a hot mess. All kinds of church problems that Paul addressed with gospel solutions. One of the most significant issues was their disunity. The first few chapters of that letter addressed their factions and divisions. That divisiveness carried over to their relationship with their father in the faith. So, we read in 2:1-4 that Paul had made a painful visit. He followed that up with a severe, tear-filled letter that Titus delivered. And he says in 7:6-9 that Titus brought him news of their repentance. The sun is coming out and the ice is starting to melt in the relationship. So, Paul wants the black asphalt to warm up and the sidewalk salt to finish the job.

### **Black Asphalt: The Gospel (2 Corinthians 1:12)**

With that, let's look at v.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." There are a lot of commas in that sentence. What's he getting at? He is saying that his behavior—the way he carried out his ministry—he has no issues with it. His conscience testifies he did nothing wrong. It seems funny to boast about that. Pride *is* something that should prick your conscience. But when he returns to talking about boasting in v.14, I think it's clear he's not saying he his prideful. I think he is using this word with a bit of irony. The so-called "super-apostles" in Corinth who led the opposition against him, *they* were the proud, boastful ones (cf. 11:1-15).

*Paul's* behavior, his ministry conduct, actually looked like weakness. He describes his ministry in three ways in this sentence. First, he ministered with "simplicity and godly sincerity." He taught them with clarity, with no pretense. He didn't just make the gospel *appear* true.

Second, he ministered “not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God.” The word “earthly” could also be understood as “fleshly.” He’s saying he didn’t operate by worldly wisdom but was governed by grace. Third, he ministered consistently “in the world ... and supremely so toward [the Corinthians.]” He wasn’t two-faced. He wasn’t hypocritical.

But how is this clear-conscience approach to ministry the black asphalt of the gospel? Because this is the same kind of way he described his ministry in 1 Corinthians.

“And I ... did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

Paul is reminding them of the foundation of their relationship: the simple, undiluted, full octane gospel of Jesus Christ and him crucified. *That’s* what Paul is all about.

Consider it. “What you win them *with* is what you win them *to*.” If you want your kids to follow Jesus but fill their attention and imagination with trivial things, the death of a first century Jewish man isn’t very interesting. If you want to make disciples of your neighbors, but all you ever do is be “nice,” how will they be faced with the inconvenient truth that they must repent and believe on Jesus who died and rose again? We cannot be about entertainment and comfort and ease and no awkward conversations. If we are, those around us will only ever want those things. But if we hold out the unvarnished gospel of God taking on flesh to die in the place of sinners only to conquer death by his own resurrection, then we have the foundation. Then when a relationship is icy, we remember together that in Christ we have been restored to God. So, there is hope to be restored to one another.

**Sidewalk Salt: Proof of Our Union (2 Corinthians 1:13-14)**

So, Paul's clear-conscience ministry of the gospel among the Corinthians established the gospel basis of their relationship. And in v.13-14, he scatters on the sidewalk salt. He spreads out on the driveway the proof of our union in Christ. This is another complex sentence. He's saying that what he's writing is no different than what they heard from him before. If you have an older copy of the ESV, it probably reads "acknowledge" three times. They adjusted that helpfully to read "understand." The Corinthians "acknowledging" makes it sound like they are the decision-makers. They call the shots on if Paul is true. But what Paul is after is their growing "understanding." They have more to learn. They understood in part about Paul and his ministry. His hope is that they will mature to fully understand the dynamic of their relationship.

What does he want them to understand? It's at the end of v.14, "That on the day of our Lord Jesus you will boast of us as we will boast of you." When all is said and done, and they are standing in glory, the Corinthians will say, "Paul! The very one who brought us the gospel!" And Paul will say, "Corinthians! Brothers and sisters, the 'seal of my apostleship'!" (1 Corinthians 9:2). They will stand before the Lord Jesus and rejoice together that he united them in himself. This is the truth Paul is driving at and states explicitly in v.21, "It is God who establishes us with you in Christ."

Since we are so united together in Christ, how can our relationships remain icy? How can we persist in dividing what Christ has brought together? If we will stand together, side by side, on the day of our Lord Jesus, how can we persist in being so cold towards one another now? It is so easy to assume motives. It is so natural to draw quick conclusions. It is such a mark of earthly wisdom to attribute guilt by association. The LORD hates "one who sows discord among brothers" (Proverbs 6:19) because his Son gave his life and poured out his Spirit to unite us.

One tangible way we can scatter this salt of the proof of our union is to pray together. Last week Pastor Michael shared this quote along these lines, “There is an irresistible impulse to pray for those whom we love; and not only to pray for them, but with them. There is a natural as well as a gracious prompting, to pray with those who are near to us ... It is this principle which leads to the united devotions of church assemblies.”<sup>1</sup> In prayer together, we walk in the union Christ has brought us into, practicing our boast for the day of our Lord Jesus. It is really hard to pray *for*, let alone *with*, someone you are in conflict with. You need to grow to understand fully what Paul has written about. Do you have a brother or sister here, sitting in this room now with you, that you cannot fathom praying for? You cannot imagine praying with him or her? Walk in the simplicity and godly sincerity of the gospel. Be reconciled in Christ that you may learn to boast in one another with the help of the Spirit.

### **The Table**

Church, we should aspire to follow Paul in having the same clear conscience regarding our ministry. As we share the gospel out there *and in here*, we do so with clear sincerity: Christ and him crucified. We do so not with the cleverness of worldly wisdom but in the grace of God. That is how we walk in godly weakness on the way to the glory of the day of the Lord Jesus. As we minister the gospel to one another, we will all the more enjoy the proof of our union together in Christ. There will be times when tear-filled, severe words need to be shared. Paul had to do that with these brothers and sisters for the sake of the gospel and their good. But that black asphalt of the gospel, coupled with the sidewalk salt of our future glory in Christ—they work together to thaw the tensions and maintain a robust relationship together. May we so help one another by prayer in the comfort of Christ.

<sup>1</sup>J. W. Alexander, “Thoughts on Family Worship”