2 Corinthians 10:13-18

Measuring Up the Church

13 But we will not boast beyond our measure, but within the measure of the sphere which God apportioned to us as a measure, to reach even as far as you. 14 For we are not overextending ourselves, as if we did not reach to you, for we were the first to come even as far as you in the gospel of Christ; 15 not boasting beyond our measure, that is, in other men's labors, but with the hope that as your faith grows, we will be, within our sphere, enlarged even more by you, 16 so as to preach the gospel even to the regions beyond you, and not to boast in what has been accomplished in the sphere of another. 17 But HE WHO BOASTS IS TO BOAST IN THE LORD. 18 For it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends.

# Introduction

Paul is continuing his concern for the measurement of the church against itself rather than in the sight of God. Verse 12 points to the problem of self-evaluation without context. To illustrate, recall a common occurrence in children: a child stands next to another child and then pulls their hand from the top of their head out over the other child’s head – raising it a few inches – and then declares, “I’m taller than you.” *If we’re not using the proper tool for measurement that is a just standard, we’re not measuring anything.*

*What is the measurement unit of a believer’s conditional righteousness?*

We’re surrounded by various denominations in Christendom, and with that variance comes a diversity of opinions on what conditional righteousness looks like. Phrases like ‘easy believism’ and ‘holy living’ get used along with philosophical extrapolations. Paul tells us what the measure is: 1 Corinthians 4:5 – the measure is what motivates us. It isn’t what the works look like, it is who empowers them. An abiding believer does all the things in an abiding way.

# Measuring Boasts [v 13]

But we will not boast beyond our measure, but within the measure of the sphere which God apportioned to us as a measure, to reach even as far as you.

Paul’s language here is translated a few different ways depending on the translation you have but it fundamentally points to the error of self-measurement without a proper measure. The Greek word translated here as ‘beyond our measure’ means literally, “without a unit of measure.” Measuring yourself against yourself is to be without a measure. He and his cohort will not boast, or glory, within the realm of those who operate without a proper measurement. Instead they will operate within the opportunity that God has measured. God’s measurement is perfect. God’s measurement is empowered, provided, and carried out with His oversight.

The Corinthian boasters were unable to measure themselves in light of God’s provision, but were boasting about it anyway for their own status. Paul isn’t belittling them as much as he is seeking to protect the believers within and without Corinth from arrogance, misunderstanding and the harm that those things bring.

## Even as Far as You

The reach that the Lord had brought to Paul’s ministry had been even to the Corinthians – but Paul’s heart was not to reach *just* the Corinthians. God had called him to reach out to the gentiles, which is a small word for a big idea: to reach every nation under the sun for Jesus.

Paul was given the ministry predominantly to the gentiles, but he started with the Jews first (c.f. Acts 17:1-4) when possible because he knew 1) What they believed, 2) That they had knowledge of the prophecies of the Messiah, and 3) that they would then have connections with Gentiles for further outside ministry. Paul’s measure of reach was calculated, but Holy Spirit led.

*Do we have a reach as a body today?*

# Overextending Ourselves [vs. 14-15]

For we are not overextending ourselves, as if we did not reach to you, for we were the first to come even as far as you in the gospel of Christ; not boasting beyond our measure, that is, in other men's labors, but with the hope that as your faith grows, we will be, within our sphere, enlarged even more by you

The ministry of Paul was wherever the Lord took them, but by having established churches within the routes he took he was able to do the following:

* Have an opportunity to see how the churches were established and growing by the Holy Spirit – he was their parent [1 Thessalonians 2:7, 11]
* Have a safe place to stay
* Possible gathering of funding to reach out to other areas
* Teach further what the Hoy Spirit had revealed to him and deliver further depth of doctrine

*What would overextending look like?*

Overextending themselves would have been a sign of not abiding and not going to where the Holy Spirit had directed them. Paul’s use of exaggeration here should not be interpreted in any way other than to help emphasize the purposeful nature of his ministry, and the direction and provision of the Holy Spirit.

If the church in Corinth had not been visited by Paul the Holy Spirit may have sent others (Apollos, for example) to preach the gospel. Paul’s emphasis here was that the Holy Spirit had made provision for Paul and his cohort to preach the gospel in Corinth.

*Now that Paul had reached the church in Corinth how did he hope this would impact his ministry?*

# Preaching Beyond Corinth [v 16]

16 so as to preach the gospel even to the regions beyond you, and not to boast in what has been accomplished in the sphere of another.

Instead of seeing themselves as enablers of the gospel being preached (both within the Corinthian community, and without), and being a place that could enable Paul to reach further, they were thinking about themselves, and Paul wants to counter act that.

The Corinthian church, due to its very strategic location could have increased the spreading of the gospel throughout the entire Roman empire (and possibly beyond) because of their trade route location.



Corinth, being located at a shipping crossroads, would have been able to preach the gospel to travelers going both across the isthmus of Corinth from Athens, but also to the ships that would save time by either hauling their cargo across the isthmus or by having their entire ship hauled across the land [The ithmus is 4 miles wide at its narrowest point]. The church there, in submission to God’s direction, could have reached a much larger audience than the average church body at the time.

Furthermore, Paul doesn’t want to try to boast where others have been used by the Lord for sharing the gospel on various journeys. Paul is not boasting in Apollos or Peter or Thomas (who went East into Asia).

*Why does Paul not want to reach where others have already reached?*

It is critical to Paul that the gospel be preached to every person under the sun, and going in where others have preached was not entirely bad (he does encounter believers on his missionary journeys), but he is interested in new ground for the maximum number of souls saved. It is his special calling as an apostle.

*Do we as believers have the same ‘fresh soil’ calling?*

# Boasting in the Lord [vs 17-18]

*17 But HE WHO BOASTS IS TO BOAST IN THE LORD. 18 For it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends.*

Paul summarizes Jeremiah 9:23-24 here. It’s worth noting that the summarization that Paul does here – while different from the literal words of the Jeremiah passage – carries the weight and meaning forward and ties the doctrine to the culture that would have been common at the time in Corinth. Boasting like those in verse 12 who are boasting in themselves carries no value eternally.

*Who does the Lord Commend?*

1 Corinthians 4:5 and 1 Peter 1:7 talk about God’s praise and in both cases they’re rooted in abiding and being motivated by the Holy Spirit. The difficulties are there to prove God’s faithfulness and they prove out the measurement of His work in us as we abide. The Lord then commends those who are abiding eternally.

*How do we know we’re living the Christin life in a biblical way?*

When we read imperatives in the New Testament such as in Romans 12 we are challenged to be in an abiding state and have the Holy Spirit direct our actions. When we read the imperatives we may consider several things:

* If we’re not abiding we’re not doing them with the right motive and we’re being legalistic. Legalism is getting in God’s way.
* If we think we’re abiding, but not doing them, we may not be abiding, but we also may not be called to always do all the things all of the time [example: hospitality 365 days of the year].
* We’re likely going to be growing in these imperatives as the Holy Spirit grows us in Christ. Recognizing we’re not doing one of the imperatives may be a place the Holy Spirit is specifically growing us for future edification of the body.
* When the Holy Spirit moves us to do the imperative the source of the work will be undeniable.
* In the context of imperatives think about it as a place to add in your mind, “… by the Holy Spirit.” For example, from Romans 6:11, “Even so consider [by the Holy Spirit] yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

# Conclusion

God has setup a unit of measurement that Paul is re-emphasizing: abiding. When we walk by the Spirit we know for certain we’re doing God’s work [Ephesians 2:10], and when we do God’s works we know we will be rewarded [1 Corinthians 3:13-16], and we know those rewards will bring glory to God and we will boast – in God – of His kindness, His love, and His generosity in Grace for all eternity with those rewards.

*Should we be afraid to measure ourselves in a biblical context?*

There’s a careful subtext in Paul’s writing here about measuring: it isn’t that the self-evaluation is wrong, it is that what the Corinthians were evaluating was wrong. We should consider as we study God’s word whether we’re living the Christian life as is described in the text of the scripture and then if we are not we should seek to be abiding in those stewardships if we clearly understand that they are for us. Paul emphasizes many times that not everyone is gifted the same way. Don’t try to be a hand if you’re an eye. Taking time to reflect on your walk and seeking prayerful guidance as you mature is not bad, but resting in Him is the key.

Spiritual growth happens when we recognize who we are in Christ and rest in those things as the Holy Spirit impresses those truths upon us, conforming us into the Image of Christ conditionally where we are already conformed positionally. That’s a measurement we can trust.