

Why Boasting is Important—Romans 15:17-18—2/3/2013

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Today in our study of Romans we come to verses 17-18 of chapter 15.

And in God's wise plan for our lives, that text addresses boasting on Super Bowl Sunday of all days.

When our culture is focused on one of the year's pinnacle sports events and terms like pride and bragging rights are common language, it's appropriate that we see what God has to say about such things.

We'll study further tonight on the topic of pride, but one basic biblical truth is that God hates pride.

Haughty eyes, or a proud look, are first in the list of things God hates in Proverbs 6, for example.

And James 4:6 and 1st Peter 5:6 state that God is opposed to the proud, using military terminology of battle alignment of God in war against the proud.

Pride manifests itself in many ways, but one of the more obvious is in the area of boasting in self, of bragging about me and what I've done.

Or on Super Bowl Sunday, pride may boast of how great my team or favorite player is or how much others were in the past.

You know how the debates can start and how it is pumped out as entertainment through all the talking heads of media hype.

And GLORY is another key word—the glory of getting a championship ring or of going down in history as great.

What are we supposed to think of such glory seeking?

Are there biblical categories in which to view boasting?

And is there any kind of boasting or bragging or glorying that God Himself would actually affirm as good?

I mean—you know you feel good when you achieve some goal in your life—what should you do with those good feelings?

Should we suppress them as totally evil and feel guilty about them?

Should we beat our chest and proclaim our own greatness?

Or is there some other option?

Kids—how should you respond when you do something well?

Is there a God-honoring way to celebrate it and share about it?

That's what I mean by this word boasting—celebrate & share.

As you may notice in my sermon title, I think we'll find today that the Bible does speak about boasting and it is important.

What we boast in and how we boast are very important.

So I pray that God will help us as we ponder 2 points today about why boasting is important from Romans 15:17-18.

We're going to see 2 points about why boasting is important that can revolutionize our boasts into tools for God's glory like we never imagined.

The Apostle Paul found reason to boast and he was very careful how he did so, especially in 2nd Corinthians where he boasted much more.

But today we get a small peak into his approach to boasting as we continue in this last big section of his letter to the Romans.

So turn with me to Romans 15 & let's read Romans 15:14-21. [READ]

Recall that verse 14 transitions into the lengthy closing remarks of this theological treatise.

So Paul is getting personal, first in verse 14 about the Romans and then in verse 15 he began explaining his own boldness.

You need to know that he was still explaining that boldness in verses 17-18 that we cover today.

The same root word for ‘more boldly’ in verse 15 is used in verse 18 when he wrote that he did not presume or dare or venture to speak.

He would not be so bold to speak of anything except what Christ had accomplished through him.

And in verse 17, the idea of boasting connects with boldness.

So like last week, we are learning again about Paul’s ministry perspectives that made him so bold.

We’re learning how he framed his approach to God and people that gave him motivation and direction in what he did.

With that context, it might be surprising to find him boasting.

But we actually find him modeling for us how boasting is important.

And yes, I did say that boasting is **IMPORTANT**.

I don’t like the ESV translation of verse 17 because it translates this as reason to be proud and that misses the point.

The point is not to be puffed up with pride, but to feel pleasure and to say something about it.

The outward vocal vent of these feelings is the focus.

Other terms refer to the inward sense of confidence or trust or assurance that can be rightly in the Lord or wrongly in self.

But this term for boasting is used for speaking, for words coming out, for the speech of what we value that comes out of our hearts.

And you also need to know that this word ‘boast’ in its noun, verb, and adjective forms, can be good or bad.

In Romans 3:27 after Paul taught how we all are sinners & don’t have righteousness of our own but that God gives Christ’s righteousness and redemption by grace through faith, he used this word.

After he made it clear that the application of Jesus’ work came to us only as a gift with no trust in self but all trust in Jesus, then he asked where boasting could fit in?

And his answer was that it is excluded.

So Romans 3:27 says boasting is excluded for Christians.

In other words, Christians should not boast.

But then we come here to Romans 15:17 and we find Paul having a boast, having a reason for boasting.

What’s up with that?

Which is it—should Christians boast or should we not boast?

Is boasting excluded or is boasting important?

The answer is “YES”—**BOTH**—there is a kind of boasting that is absolutely excluded and never acceptable.

And there is also a kind of boasting that is not only allowed, but important.

It depends on the object and the origin of your boast.

Read verse 17 again to get into our 1st point. [READ]

Point #1—Boasting is important because it shows what we treasure.

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Here's a definition—boasting is verbal venting of what we value.

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And that's what I mean in point #1, that boasting is important because it shows what we treasure.

Boasting is verbal venting of what we value.

It is speaking of what we love and live for and rejoice over and delight in and pursue and want and worship.

And note two phrases that frame up Paul's boasting in verse 17 that make it not only acceptable but desirable.

The first phrase is "in Christ Jesus" and the second phrase is "in things pertaining to God."

Paul had boasting in Christ Jesus because in Christ Jesus Paul did not get what his efforts deserved.

And in Christ Jesus, Paul's life was not defined by what he could do because he realized that living a perfect life was impossible for him.

That's us too—we are sinners & we should feel like what we face is impossible to do with complete love for God and others.

But if we are in Christ Jesus, then we CAN TRY and we CAN have some measures of success and progress and fruitfulness.

I think we wrongly assume that Paul was just good at writing bold theological letters to churches he had never visited.

Or we wrongly assume that pastors or Sunday School teachers are just naturally good at teaching or leading or that nursery workers or shut-in ministers are just naturally great at caring and serving.

But that's simply not true because we are all tempted to be selfish and not want to love others or step out in faith to risk trying to do something that seems hard.

Writing this letter to the Romans was an act of faith by Paul and the Spirit of God met him with both the power and wisdom to do it.

And since that's what he's defending in this section, this is about God's grace in Christ Jesus to make Paul an apostle.

This is about Paul being made a minister in Christ Jesus to the Gentiles to offer them up to God as we studied in verse 16 last week.

So don't miss that word "Therefore" that begins verse 17 and grounds Paul's boasting in God's grace to him in Christ Jesus.

Literally verse 17 says, "I have therefore a boast in Christ Jesus."

It's not that Paul went searching and found a reason to boast.

It's that in the purpose Christ gave him for his life, Paul had something to talk about and share.

He had something to say.

And that's one hugely important thing about boasting—we typically boast about things that we have something to say about.

So ask yourself—what do you love to talk about?

What does your heart overflow with and what drives your passions?

It is framed by God's grace to you in Christ like Paul's was?

For example, do you see your job, your family, your ministry at church, your outreach and all of life as a gift by God's grace that gives you purpose in it and moves you to praise Him for it?

God cares about your faithful work in your job & your devoted love in your marriage and your committed investment in your kids and your sacrificial giving & serving in His church.

And in Christ Jesus, His Spirit can empower you to do what seems impossible or difficult so that you can praise Him as He works.

The Spirit meets us with grace for what we face.

And that grace is only in Christ Jesus—only in trusting in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because Jesus has lived perfectly to count His righteousness as mine and because Jesus has died to pay for my sins and because Jesus has risen, then I can see God at work in my life.

If we are in Christ, we can see God at work in every part of our lives.

In the most mundane, daily tasks and in clearly spiritual things.

We should think ahead and pray ahead and consider each minute how to frame up what God's Word tells us He wants to produce.

Then we can seek and enjoy not what we deserve but what God has for us in Christ Jesus by grace through faith.

And then we can boast in things pertaining to God as Paul's second phrase clarifies.

Paul had a boast in Christ Jesus in things pertaining to God, which is literally just "things toward the God".

So again I don't like the ESV or NIV making it 'my work for God' because it's not that specific.

It's not like this is 1 portion of Paul's life where he could boast.

It was more like the kind of things in the whole scope of his life that were directed toward God.

As the next verse shows, this was about what God had accomplished through him in ministry to the Gentiles.

But in applying this I don't want us to minimize the application as if we can only boast in Christ Jesus in what God does in saving souls.

We can boast—or glory, which is another word for boast—in God's grace in Christ Jesus to bear ANY good fruit through us.

When my attitude at home or my diligence at work are framed as spiritual issues in which I depend on God for grace in Christ Jesus to glorify Him, then those are things pertaining to God.

And then I can glory in God when He helps me to be faithful.

Especially when I see fruit in how He's using me to bless others, I can marvel and share how good He is to do so.

Here's the catch though—if I'm the focus & being loved by others is the focus & my successes are the focus, I'm off track.

But if serving others is the focus, then I'm on track.

If bringing blessing to others in ways that point them to Christ is my goal, then I can have something to say when God works.

The treasure is not in how good we are, but in God's grace working to glorify Himself and to bring attention to Himself.

The right treasure in good boasting is loving God in Christ and leading others to see HIM as glorious and good.

The right treasure is the spiritual lesson through the mundane task.

Our boasts should be in what God has done and in how great God is when He uses someone as bad and needy and flawed as me to bless other people somehow.

It is a statement of His power and grace that allows us to proclaim that God is not distant or dead, that He is indeed at work in our world.

And that's what we want—we want to treasure God and things pertaining to God in ways that move us to seek Him and be aware of His work and be eager to share about it.

Really this is about being people who love to praise God—that's what right boasting is—it's praising God, it's speaking of God and His work because we are amazed and thrilled and thankful in Him.

What He has done and is doing is so glorious that we should love to tell the stories and testimonies of His grace and power.

In fact, we want to give more attention to testimonies in our Sunday evening services—so let me know if you'd like to share some time.

Boasting is important because it shows what we treasure, what we love to talk about and share in joy with others.

And families, this is important in our parenting because our kids pick up what we really love by what we boast about.

My kids and I enjoy sports, for example, but I want them to value what God was doing as much as what their stats were.

Part of what God was doing can include good stats—just like a successful day at work for adults or a breakthrough on a problem or many other things can be God's gracious answers to our prayers.

But in all of that, we relate it to God and boast in Him.

As we do so, we can remember as well to treasure Him as greater than all the gifts that He gives.

We can recall that all His blessings down here are arrows pointing up to Him as far better.

And we need to share the stories from our lives that pointed us to God.

We need to pass along testimonies of God's grace that encourage our kids and youth to put their confidence in God.

That's what Psalm 78:4 means when it says to “tell to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, And His strength and His wondrous works that He has done.”

Then in verses 6-7, Psalm 78 explains further the goal that the future generations “should put their confidence in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments.”

If we don't talk about how great God is and how wondrous His works are in our lives, why would our kids want to follow God anyway?

If we aren't speaking of God as a treasure and His works as supremely valued, what are we teaching?

Part of glorifying God is speaking of His glory, talking about Him and telling of all His wondrous deeds—that's biblical boasting!

And that biblical boasting is also effective evangelism.

Sharing how God moves in ministry helps us trust Him to move again.

And that leads us into our 2nd point for today.

1st was that boasting is important because it shows what we treasure.

Now 2ndly, boasting is important because it shows whom we trust and thank.

#2—boasting is important because it shows WHOM we trust & thank.

Read Romans 15:18 where we'll find this point. [READ]

Think again about that word boast—in English we picture a self-exalting, proud, blabbering that's all about me, me, me.

And we detest that and find it annoying.

The reason that kind of self-focused, self-congratulating, “I'm so great and did this or that so great” boasting is disgusting is because it makes scrawny, sinful creatures the object of lofty praise.

The object of such bragging is a finite human who depends on God for life and breath and all things.

That's like bragging on how great a dessert tastes with no praise for the chef who cooked it or the ingredients in it or anything else.

That's like praising a plant that grows when you put it under ideal conditions for its health and growth.

It just doesn't add up because there is so much that is out of our control that contributes to what happens in our lives.

That's why it's at least nice to hear leaders and heroes and MVPs in every realm give credit to their coworkers or teammates or fellow soldiers or parents or mentors or others.

But ultimately God is the sovereign Ruler over all of life and so ultimately every pleasure and measure of goodness is a gift from Him.

So the final and full credit and glory goes to God alone.

And speaking to HIS praise like that is biblical boasting.

By the way, I had to make a note to myself here to appreciate it when I hear any praise to God from athletes or politicians or others even if I'm tempted to doubt it or roll my eyes.

I can't judge hearts, but at least some recognition of greater glory and credit and honor to God is nice to hear in contrast to boasting that totally leaves God out of the picture.

In verse 17 Paul clarified what he did not dare to speak of his own works with no reference to God.

He clarified that he would certainly not extend himself in boldness in any way that did not give credit to Christ.

And his emphasis on daring to speak highlights that boasting is verbal, that boasting is verbal venting of what we value.

Our hearts may be high on our God, but that's only known to others when we actually say something about Him.

So biblical boasting must include speaking.

Just think—God created this universe to share His glory, not because He needed us, but because He LOVED us and wanted to share.

So biblical boasting is a way to love others by sharing God's glory with them when we speak of His works.

But Paul's clarification to begin this verse highlights that he did not trust himself or what he had done.

He was not looking to his own merits or what he had generated in his efforts for ministry in the world.

In that way his boast showed that he trusted in Christ and not himself.

Similarly, when our boasts point to our dependence on God and how God answers, we highlight whom we trust.

We glorify God by showing that we approach each day and each task with dependence on our God in Christ.

We trust God to work in and through us in every situation.

And when we see Him answer, we can BOAST in Him.

So our boasting is important because it shows whom we trust.

And our boasting is also important because it shows whom we thank.

Verse 18 says Paul would only speak of what Christ had accomplished through him.

So Paul was the tool in Christ's hand to bring about blessing.

And the right response is not to praise the tool, but to praise God for shaping the tool and then using the tool beautifully.

Then Christ is rightly the One who is thanked.

Yes, we can thank each other & should encourage one another.

But we do so best when we also tell them how we thank GOD for them and for HIS work through them.

That's the best kind of encouragement anyway, isn't it?

It's thrilling to know that God reached down into time and moved in my life to bless someone else and glorify Himself!

That's biblical encouragement rooted in biblical boasting.

By it we are built up and moved to seek & serve God again.

Yet God in Christ still gets all the glory and praise.

In verse 18, Paul says that God is the One who brought the result of Gentiles coming to obedience.

God accomplished that by word & deed through Paul.

So God is the One to be trusted for the fruit of obedience in people and God is the One to be thanked for that fruit.

And by the way, note that the salvation of Gentiles here is described as the obedience of the Gentiles.

It's phrased that way in chapter 1, verse 5 also, because God commands all people to repent at Acts 17:30 puts it.

And it is a command of God to trust Christ and to follow Him.

So it is obedience to those initial commands when a person trusts Christ to become a Christian.

It's not obedience to earn or merit salvation, but it is obedience

Yet God is the One who effects it and who gives the gift of faith and the power to respond and He is the One we trust and the One we thank.

So our boasting is important to show whom we trust & thank.

And you know these things because I hear you practice them.

I praise God for how you as a body embrace this model of God-centered thanksgiving and encouragement.

And I pray that we'll abound in it all the more.

Boasting is important, #1, because it shows what we treasure.

& #2, boasting is important because it shows whom we trust & thank.

We must boast because God's work is worthy of rejoicing in.

As John Piper wrote, "the sanctification and obedience of God's people is a thrilling thing. It is a glorious thing. It is a miraculous thing. It is a deeply joyful and satisfying thing. To watch people grow in radical obedience to Jesus, and to watch them fall out of love with the world and into love with Christ, and to see them seek the kingdom first and let material things go, to see them become bold in their witness, and compassionate toward the poor, and respectful toward ethnic diversity, and devoted to sexual purity, and committed to world missions, and a wartime lifestyle that maximizes resources for the global cause of magnifying Christ—to see this happen in our ministry through Jesus Christ is the greatest thing that can happen to a pastor."

I certainly agree.

And that's not only true of a pastor—it is true for us all as we serve God by serving others and watch Him work.

And as Piper adds, "God will not be honored in our work if we are not thrilled by his glorious work in our work." [1/29/06 sermon accessed at www.desiringgod.org]

Therefore we must boast!

We dare not boast not in self—but we must have reason to boast in Christ Jesus and in all He is and has done for us.

We can agree with Galatians 6:14, "Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

And we can say with 1st Corinthians 1:31 and 2nd Corinthians 10:17, "let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord".

There is a kind of boasting that is not only acceptable, but important.

It is not only ok to boast biblically, it is worshipful and fruitful.

It is worshipful and fruitful to have a God-centered, thankful boast in offering up a people to God that He has saved or sanctified through us.

In 1st Thessalonians 2:19-20, Paul told those Christians that they were his glory and joy.

They were his delight before God that encouraged him and others of the power of the Gospel at work through him.

God was alive and moving in their times and Paul saw the evidence of God's grace in their lives and praised God for it.

And I have to do the same thing today as I close this message.

I am so blessed to serve among a people like you who love God's Word & want to know His truth & obey it & serve Him.

It is pure grace from God that He would allow me to enjoy serving with you and seeing Him work in your lives.

I hear of ways you are serving one another and reaching out to others and I am profoundly blessed again and again.

So I just want you to know again how deeply thankful I am for you all and for the grace of God on my life to witness His work in your lives and to use me in whatever small ways He does.

I want us to tell our stories even more.

I want the precious children and youth among us hear how compelling and good and faithful our God is and how powerful is His Gospel.

I pray God will help us to boast in Christ Jesus in things pertaining to God to speak of what He has accomplished.

We can pray in that way because we have Christ Jesus and that's what we want to remember now as we transition to the Lord's Table in our time of communion remembering Jesus until He comes again.

We can pray and we can see God work and we can offer our praises all because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

So we want to thank Him this morning for living perfectly, dying sacrificially and rising victoriously to be our Lord and Savior.

We worship King Jesus and there is no one like Him.

He is worthy of our boasts about Him.

Jesus is God the Son yet He became a man to show us God and to share His love.

He did it with shocking humility, absolute perfection, and with a sacrificial death that bore the wrath of God on sin.

Jesus is worthy of every boast we can proclaim in His name.

So let's bow in prayer now to prepare to remember Him in a fitting way through the bread and the cup as He commanded.

And if you are a follower of Jesus—if you live to worship Him by faith in His life and work—then we invite you to join us in this ceremony of remembrance.

There is no special magic in the wafer and juice that we'll take, but there is majesty in the body and blood of Jesus they represent.

If you don't trust and know this Jesus, we urge you to watch this ceremony and pray for your heart to bow before Him.

Now everyone please pray with me as the men prepare the table.