

Can You Boast?

“Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord” (**I Corinthians 1:31**, ESV). This statement is an imperative, not a permissive. Paul is not saying we must allow those who want to boast in the Lord to do so. Rather, it is commanding those who boast in anything, to only boast in the Lord. Paul demonstrates he didn’t come up with this principle and it wasn’t given to him by direct revelation. He notes he is merely referring to what had already been written. In fact, Paul is giving a condensed restatement of **Jeremiah 9:23-24**: “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’” (ESV).

When we consider the passage Paul is quoting, we realize he is not saying to boast in the Lord’s strength instead of our own (other passages demonstrate that, e.g. **II Corinthians 12:7-10**). Rather, he is saying the only thing that provides us any benefit is knowing the Lord. Neither wisdom, might, or riches gives us real help. Why would we boast in things that are not beneficial? Boast in what is beneficial, knowing the Lord.

This central principle actually governs a good bit of this section of **I Corinthians**. The word of the cross is foolish to the wise of the world. However, the wisdom of the world doesn’t help us know God (**I Corinthians 1:21**). What’s the only thing I can boast in? Knowing God. If worldly wisdom doesn’t help me know God, why would I boast in it? On the other hand, Christ on the cross is the might of God and the wisdom of God. Thus, the foolishness and weakness of God is wiser and stronger than men not because on a scale of 1 to 10 God outstrips men in wisdom and might, but because Christ on the cross, which seems foolish and weak to men, is far greater wisdom and power than men have ever possessed.

Therefore, Paul came to the Corinthians, teaching in weakness and without “plausible words of wisdom” because what good or what benefit does the wisdom and strength of men accomplish? None. Only knowing the Lord provides benefit. Thus, he decided to “know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (**I Corinthians 2:2**, ESV). What an interesting way to phrase that. He doesn’t say, “I decided to teach nothing except...” or “say nothing” or “proclaim nothing,” but to “know nothing.” Why that odd phrasing? Because when we see the connection to **Jeremiah 9:23-24**, we understand boasting in the Lord means boasting in knowing Him. Paul decided not to know the wisdom of men, the might of men, the riches of men. He decided to know only the Lord, and the only way to know the Lord is through Christ and Him crucified. Christ and Him crucified is the love, justice, and righteousness of the Lord.

Christ crucified may be a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but it is the only way to know the Lord, to understand that He practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness. Therefore, let us not boast in our wisdom, might, and riches. They provide no benefit. The only benefit is Christ on the cross.

So, do you have a reason to boast?