

Romans 15:17

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A Right to Boast - Part 1

by Dr. Wayne A. Barber

Some people mention the exchanged life, and they're not teaching it like I heard it years ago. It's not the fact that I have a responsibility. They're saying that God does everything. We don't even have to confess sin. I want you to know that is just not so. We have a responsibility under grace. Romans 12:1 through 15:14 talks about our responsibility. It's a two hundred percent relationship. One hundred percent is my choosing to bow and serve the Lord Jesus Christ, letting Him use me as a vessel. And then it's one hundred percent His power and His presence in my life. The two things work in tandem. That's what we've been talking about through Romans 15:14.

In Romans 15:14-16, Paul explains why he has spoken in such a daring way to Christians who he's never seen or met before. You see, he is an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. He explains the fact that the Gentile world will be his offering that one day he wants to offer back to God. So in the likeness of an Old Testament high priest he's willing to pay whatever price that is necessary so that

what God wants done through him can be done and that would be his offering one day to the Lord. So he wrote very daringly and boldly to people he's never seen before, reminding them to be sensitive to the Lord Jesus so that love of the Holy Spirit can make them sensitive to others around them.

Now in verse 17 they were going to talk about a right to boast. Paul has some boasting to do. There is a right that we have at certain times to boast. To understand what I'm talking about, look at Romans 15:17. The Apostle Paul is closing his letter and says, "Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God." Now the word "boasting" there comes from the root word *kauchaomai*, which has as its root the word "neck". It refers to the attitude of boasting, but it comes from the word that means neck. That's interesting to me.

Have you ever seen somebody just stick his or her neck out and just boast and be arrogant? When I was growing up I had a duck named "Dippy." It would chase me around the house. This duck was very territorial and very proud. As a matter of fact, I can remember that duck strutting around that yard as if to say, "This is mine. Don't touch it." Now, that picture you get in your mind of that duck with his neck stuck out arrogantly and proudly walking around is exactly the root of the understanding of the word *kauchaomai*, the word "to boast."

Most of the time we know that boasting is sinful, and it's talked against by the Word of God. Jeremiah the prophet tells us the things we are not to boast in. This is a tremendous verse that shows us what we're not to boast about. He nails the three areas in which we do most of our boasting. When this verse was translated into the Greek translation of the Old Testament it used the word *kauchaomai*, so we're using the exact same word here. Jeremiah 9:23 says, "Thus says the Lord, 'Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches.'"

Now look at what he says here. First of all, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom," or his intellect. Man is not to boast in what he knows. Secondly, "and let not the mighty man boast of his might," or his strength. Man is not to boast in what he can do. Thirdly, "let not a rich man boast of his riches." Man is not to boast in what he has.

If you'll think about it those are the three areas, whether in the religious arena or the pagan arena, that men love to boast the most: what they know, in what they can do, and in what they have. Put that in a spiritual context. What we know is by revelation of the Holy Spirit of God. What we can do is by the energy of the Holy Spirit of God. And what we have is by the grace of God. We're just stewards of what really is His property. So therefore, you begin to see the foundation. Man is not to boast in himself. Man is only to boast in the Lord.

Look at Jeremiah 9:24: "'but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,' declares the Lord."

So there's a wrong kind of boasting. James picks up on that. He says in James 4:16, "But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil." The word for arrogance is the word *alazoneia*. It comes from the word *alazon*. It's a person who is an arrogant individual. Have you ever been around people like that? What they're doing is, they're boasting about what they really are pretending to have. Now you put that in a spiritual context and it makes sense immediately. Here's a person who God has given strength to do something, but boasts of his own strength. Here's a person who has something, but thinks he's gotten it himself. He's a person who goes around trying to boast of something that he should never be boasting about. So there is a wrong kind of boasting. We're never to boast at what we can do, what we know, or what we have. God's Word very clearly tells us that.

As a matter of fact, that's a clear picture of how God hates anything that has to do with the flesh. That's where most of our boasting is found. Look over in 1 Corinthians 1:26. We find the word *kauchaomai* again. We see God does not want anything of what man can do or what man has or what man knows. God is the source of all knowledge and wisdom. God is the source of all strength and God is the source of all riches. 1 Corinthians 1:26-28 says, "For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast [kauchamomai] before God."

Then he goes on in verses 30 and 31 and says, "But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, that, just as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.'" So you see that there's a boasting that can be right but most boasting is wrong. Most of the times we boast of the flesh—what we know, what we have, what we can do—and that's not right. We're only to boast in God, in who He is, what He's done, and what He's doing and what He's going to do. That becomes a right context for boasting. That's what Paul is saying in Romans 15:17. I have found a

reason to boast in things pertaining to the Lord.

I think it's important for us to understand when there is a right to boast. When can we boast? What qualifies that? I want us to, first of all, look at the character of the man who's writing this. Now of course the Holy Spirit of God authored the scriptures through Paul. I've told you over and over again how awed I am with this man. I don't praise him, but I do appreciate him. He's a man who did not get anything more than I got when I got saved, nor did he get anything less. But it just thrills me to see his life and how God used him, to watch his humility. He never points to himself. He always points to the Lord. I want you to see his character because the first point is "Who has the right to boast?" I want us to look at the character of the man writing this in Romans 15:17.

There are seven things about his character that helped me to understand what I must be in order for my boasting in the Lord to truly be pure and right and not somehow secretly calling attention to myself. You see, there's a lot of right things being said these days but in the wrong context. A lot of people say, "Oh, we give God the glory." But while they're using the right terms, they're using them to draw attention back to themselves. It's like they're at the Olympics and they say, "Oh God! You're here. We give you the silver medal, but we get the gold medal." They'll give token appreciation to God, but really what they're overwhelmed with is what they have done for God, not what God has done through them.

God says, "Don't you ever boast in what you know. Don't boast in what you can do. And don't boast in what you have. You boast in Me, what I have given you as far as understanding, what I can do through you, and what I have personally been gracious enough to entrust you with."

Well, Paul, to me, shows the character of a man you can trust when he says he's giving glory to God. What makes the difference? You know, the thing you've got to remember is the Apostle Paul was so religious when the Damascus Road experience came. Then three days afterwards God sent him out radically changed. Now listen to me. He had nothing left to brag about. In all of his religious things that he did for God he had a lot to brag about. He talks about them Philippians 3. He counts all of that as loss. The only thing he has now to brag about is Christ—what Christ has done in his life, what Christ has given to him to do in his life, what Christ has empowered him to do. That's all he has. His salvation has so radically changed him, but I want to tell you, it also has radically changed us. But some of us have not become aware of that yet. We still like to give God the glory with one hand and on the other hand take all of the credit we can possibly take. We haven't come to realize we wouldn't be saved had it not been for the grace of God. And anything that gets done, He will do it whether I'm with Him or I'm not with Him. He gives me the grace to participate in what He's doing on this earth.

Let's look at the seven things that marked the Apostle Paul. We've learned it from Romans; let's go back and review it, just for the sake of understanding. Who has the right to boast? First of all, turn back to 1:1. The Apostle Paul was a man who wanted only what God wanted. That's why I can trust him when he says, "I've found things I can boast about pertaining to God." I believe him. The Apostle Paul did not have an agenda of his own. He did not have some ministry he wanted to deify. He only wanted what God wanted in his life. He started the book with this and set the pattern for everything we've studied. "Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus." Nothing can be more revealing of his love for Christ. Nothing can be more revealing of his willingness to submit to Christ than the word "bond-servant." He pulls it out of the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 15:12-17, particularly. It talks about the slavery of that day. Slavery to us today and slavery to them is so far contrasting.

In those days, you treated a slave like you would treat your own son. You had a responsibility towards those who were working for you. And on the seventh year, the sabbatical year, they would set that slave free. Well, that slave had a choice to make. Nobody made him make the choice. He had a choice to make. That choice was, was he going to go free or stay and be a lifetime slave to that master. Of course, he would evaluate how this master had treated him, etc. When he chose to stay they would have a public ceremony and put a hole in the ear of that individual. Wherever he went from that point on, he would be marked as an individual who truly had chosen to serve his master.

You'd see that person on the road and say, "You know that man was set free last year, but in the freedom to make his own choice—not being made to—he chose to become a lifelong servant to that man. Oh, how he loves his master." That's exactly what Paul is saying. "Nobody made me make this choice. I made it myself. I made a choice to become a lifetime slave to my Lord, Jesus Christ." You know, it says over in Matthew that nobody can serve two masters. You'll love one and hate the other. Paul says, "I know what the other master will do to me. I lived under its power for so long. But now I've been set free from it. I made a choice. I'm going to be a slave to the Lord Jesus Christ."

He was a man who wanted only what God wanted in his life. Now, you can trust somebody's giving glory to God when you find out that's what their life is made up of. They don't come before God with their agenda. They come before God to surrender to His. All they want to do is to please Him. All they want is to spend their life causing Him to have great joy in their willingness to obey. That

person truly can boast in the Lord.

Secondly, to follow up and build on that, he was a man who, as a slave to Christ, was pure in his devotion to Christ. Look in Romans 1:9: "For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son." Now that little phrase, "in my spirit," distinguishes Paul from someone who does what looks good on the outside but has an ulterior motive behind it. "The inner man," "from the heart," and "in the spirit" were all similar terms to describe the inner motivation of why a person does what they do.

There are two different thoughts on this. Some people equate the soul and the spirit and you can do that. This would be fair with scripture. There are many passages that equate the soul with the spirit. But I think overwhelmingly, to me anyway, in the scripture the overwhelming context is that man is body, soul, and spirit. Now I say that for a reason. In Hebrews 4:12 it says, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of the soul [psuche] and spirit [pneuma], of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." This seems to be a division there in this particular context.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:23 Paul says, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." There are contexts in scripture that seem to indicate that the soulish part of man is the fleshly part of man. It's the pagan mindset apart from the influencing of the Spirit of God. So when a person does something soulishly, he's doing it out of the energy of the flesh. When he does something in his spirit, he's doing it with a motivation to serve the one true God with a pure motive.

Over in 2 Timothy 1:3 Paul helps clarify this. He says, "I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience." The word "clear" was surprising to me. It's the word *katharos*, which means that which has been cleansed, that which is unspoiled, that which does not have any defilement to it at all. What is he saying? To me, if you put the two together, he says, "I serve God in my spirit unspoiled by any of the pagan interests of my soul. I serve Him truly in the innermost part of my being. I have no ulterior motive, no fleshly desire whatsoever."

It's like the Psalmist said in Psalm 9:1, "I will give thanks to the Lord with all my heart." All of me is committed to Him. There's nothing that I'm holding back. There's no other side interest here. You know, there was an Old Testament example of someone just like Paul, and that was the man named Caleb. In Numbers 14:24, He says, "But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully." I love that. He also says this about Joshua later on: "The two have followed Me fully." It's repeated in Deuteronomy 1:36: "because he [Caleb] has followed the LORD fully." In Joshua 14:14 it reads, "because he [Caleb] followed the LORD God of Israel fully."

In other words, there was no ulterior motive. There was no agenda other than "God I want to serve you. I want to obey you. Your agenda is my agenda and I push mine aside to do what you want in my life day by day." That's a man who's qualified to give all the glory to God. He has not got one ounce of flesh in which he can brag about. He doesn't want it. He's decided against it. He only wants God to be God in his life.

Paul had that absolute pure devotion. He was a man who had only one agenda as a slave of the Lord Jesus Christ. How many times in ministry do you see people with soulish motives? They use emotion to stir results. They use oratory to stir the elect. Paul said, "I do not come with eloquent words of wisdom but in demonstration of the power of the Spirit of God." They use gimmicks to stir the flesh of others and turn around and have the audacity to give God the glory. There is no glory in that. It's what man can do and they've asked God to bless it rather than what God alone has initiated and what God has anointed.

Paul is a man you can trust when he gives glory to God. He doesn't have anything in it for himself. He is overwhelmed at what God can do. He is not in any way infatuated with his own self.

Thirdly, he was a man who realized that he was a debtor to Christ and the gospel. Look in Romans 1:14: "I am under obligation [or, "I owe a debt"] both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish." Now what he means by barbarians are not the cannibals. It means those who do not have the Greek language. That's what he's talking about. He's talking about those who do not have the Greek culture. Paul said, "I'm under obligation." I wonder how many of us who say, "Oh God, we give you the glory" really live as if we owe a debt that we're going to spend our lifetime paying. Most of us are spiritual on Mondays. On Wednesdays, forget it. On Thursdays, maybe. On Fridays, who knows. Then on Sundays, "Oh God, we give you all the glory!" There's no sense of the fact that we didn't deserve what we have and we are under a debt. We owe our fellow man to take the good news of God's Word to the uttermost parts of the world.

Paul understood what few Christians in America understand. They live as if somebody else owes them. Paul lived knowing he owed others. He owed his fellow man to let them know the good news had changed him. He lived that way. There was no other agenda. All of this ties together. There was no other agenda in his life. He lived as a man possessed to pay the debt of taking the good news of the Gospel to others in the will of God.

In Romans 1:16 he says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel." The word "ashamed" is the word *epaischunomai*, which comes from *epi*, upon, and *aischunomai*, shame. He has not brought shame upon himself. There's no humiliation to him that he's out preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. There were some places in Acts when he went into a city, and they threw him out, beat him up, and left him as dead. You're thinking, "Paul, go home." Paul gets up, wipes the blood off, shakes the dust off, and goes right back in the city. And you're thinking, "No, Paul, don't go there." Every time he'd go into a city he'd go to the synagogue, and a riot would break out. And you think, "What's this guy doing?" He was not ashamed, folks. He was not ashamed. It didn't matter where he was or what circumstance was there, he was in no way humiliated by the message that had radically changed his life. When a man has that kind of vision and that kind of devotion, then, when he praises God, I can accept what he's saying. He truly is giving glory to God. He doesn't have an ulterior agenda of somehow calling attention to himself.

Well fourth, he was a man who was conscious of the wickedness of his own flesh. Oh folks, it is the man who understands how wicked his own flesh is that I believe God uses. He knew the wickedness of his own flesh. I used to think in Romans 7:14-25 that Paul was lost during that time. It sounded right to me with the tenses and everything he's saying. But going back now and studying Romans I've changed my mind completely. Of course, that's not the issue of chapter 7. It's the law, being under the law. To me, I think he's just being flat out honest. He says in verse 14, "For we know that the Law is spiritual (*[pneumatikos]*, that which pertains only to the spirit); but I am of flesh (*[sarkikos]*), sold into bondage to sin." Paul says, "There's something that happened back here. I wish I were just purely spiritual. But I'm not. I've got something about me that's called the body of sin, my flesh, and it is lured to sin. It still wants to sin. I'm living daily understanding the wickedness of my flesh."

He says in verse 18, "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh." Then he says in verse 21, "I find then the principle that evil [*kakos*—inherent evil] is present in me, the one who wishes to do good."

I think somehow over the years God has over and over again tried to show me, "If you don't understand how wicked your flesh is, how are you ever going to learn to depend only and purely upon Me?" Several years ago a speaker at a Gideon Conference got up to speak. When he walked over to the platform there was a beautifully decorated box with a big bow on it. He thought, "Man, this is nice!" He had spoken at a lot of places, and he said, "These people are appreciative of what I've done and somehow they're going to honor me with this gift." He took the wrapping and the bow off and then he took the top of the box off and looked inside, looking for something really nice so he could thank the people for it. When he opened it up, there was nothing there but filthy, soured, smelly rags and a little note that said, "We did not come to hear you. We came to hear from the Lord." He said that for the first time in his life it dawned on him, "It's not by might and the power, not in what a man can do, but it's by my spirit," says the Lord.

That's the key. A man that understands the wicked and deception of his flesh is a man who God can use. That's a man, when he gives glory to God, there's nothing in himself he's bragging about. He knows the wickedness of his own flesh. He understands that, and he's so appreciative of what God has done.

Fifth, he was a man who was conscious, not only in the wickedness of his flesh, but also that suffering played a role in the light of eternal reward. He was willing to pay whatever price that came. Look at Romans 8:18: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." He's a man who was willing to endure the pain. Here's a guy who the Jews did not trust at all. They even brought the accusation when he went over to Jerusalem that he brought a Gentile behind the wall of petition, which caused five years of imprisonment on a false charge. They hated him. They said he was preaching against their law. He wasn't. He was just trying to help them understand it. He was preaching against the temple. He wasn't. He was just trying to show them the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. He was taking what they had always seen as the shadow and was trying to show them the substance that was pointing to. But they all accused him.

The Gentiles were afraid of him because he was the one persecuting the Church. So all of a sudden, he's a believer. The Jews won't have him. The Gentiles won't have him. He's a man without a country. He's a man who's suffered greatly, tremendous persecution. I Corinthians 11 talks about all the marks that he bore on his body. But he's a man who says, "I'm not even willing to talk about it. Because it's not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to come."

In Philippians 3 he was sick of all that religious stuff that he used to be in. Folks, I wish some times we could just get sick, sick, sick of religious stuff and understand that Christianity is a relationship. I don't know what it's going to take. I wonder what it's going to take to get us so sick of religious garbage, baggage, that we start walking in a love relationship with Christ, just seeing what He and

He alone can do in and through us, becoming a part of what He's up to in our lives. I guarantee the persecution that comes will be well worth it because you're living in the promise of what's to come in the future. You know the earnest of your inheritance is now but the down payment. The full payment is coming later on. Paul was willing to make that kind of choice. He was willing to be laughed at and embarrassed because he so loved Christ. He accepted that as part of the turf. He knew it was coming. He was willing to be light in the midst of a dark world because he knew the hope of the calling that God had given to him. So therefore, when he said, "I have things to boast about pertaining to the Lord," I perk up. He doesn't have any flesh. He doesn't have any agenda other than what God wants in his life.

Sixth, he was a man who had learned the secret of surrender. That's why he could say in Romans 12:1, "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." Why could he say that to them? That's what he had done. That's his whole life. He says in Galatians 6:14, "But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." The world has been crucified to me. I've been saved. I'm not of it anymore. But I crucified myself to the world. I have chosen not to be a part of it. I'm in it, but I'm not of it. Paul had learned the secret of surrender. He was a man who knew that Christ was the only one worthy to bow to.

The seventh thing is, he was a man who knew that only by God's grace would he be involved in the wonderful ministry to the Gentiles. I've said it over and over again; I'm going to keep saying it: Paul did not get there by his personal striving. He got there because of the grace of God. It was not something he planned. It was something God planned and allowed him to be part of. He says in Romans 12:3, "For through the grace given to me...." He's the apostle to the Gentiles but only by the grace of God.

Listen to Galatians 1:1: "Paul, an apostle (not sent from men, nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father)." Ephesians 1:1 says, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God." Colossians 1:1, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." 1 Timothy 1:1 reads, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior, and of Christ Jesus, who is our hope." 2 Timothy 1:1 repeats, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God."

He was the man who knew that the ministry that God had assigned him to the Gentile world was something he had received. It was not something he had achieved. When you understand that, that's when you can give all of the glory back to God. That's when you can boast in God. Paul said, "I didn't come up with this. God came up with this. My ministry is received. It's not something I personally have achieved. I give all glory unto Him."

You know, it just doesn't make any sense to me to get up and praise God with one side of my mouth but wanting the personal credit in the other side. It doesn't make any sense. But yet that's what I've done many times in my life. You have. All of us have. Pure praise, boasting only in the Lord comes from integrity of a character that has been broken just to know that if he doesn't do it it's not going to get done. Yes, I'm willing to obey. Yes, I'm willing to surrender. But God, it's you and when you do it, I'm going to give you the glory for what you've done. You're the one that's doing it in my life. Paul had no agenda but Christ. He wanted only what Christ wanted. He realized he owed a debt to his fellow man. He was conscious of the wickedness of his flesh. He was willing to pay whatever price of suffering he must for the sake of Christ. He knew that the only way to be free from himself was to surrender to Christ daily. He knew he was involved in the ministry because of the grace of God, therefore, he had found reason to boast in things pertaining to God.

Who is it that really boasts in the Lord? The person who just comes to understand that if it gets done, God alone is going to have to do it. It's a person you could trust his giving glory unto God. Look at his life and his character. That'll tell you something about whether or not he truly is boasting in the Lord