

Is It Ever Right to Boast?

Psalm 34 is a Psalm of David and is generally considered to be a Psalm of Thanksgiving. It was written by David during a time when he was fleeing for his life from King Saul and yet, in this Psalm, David makes it abundantly clear that—no matter what comes into our lives—God’s people should be a thankful people. In this article, I want to focus on one phrase from Psalm 34:2 which reads, “My soul makes its boast in the LORD....” By God’s grace, if we can better understand the proper object of our boasting it will help us to be a more thankful people. It’s interesting to look in both the Old Testament as well as the New Testament pertaining to the concept of boasting. The word itself can be either positive or negative depending on the context. It can be translated ‘praise’ with the idea of someone praising another, e.g., for their beauty (Gen. 12:15); or praising/boasting in a group of people for their service to God (2 Cor. 9:2). This type of boasting can be an encouragement to many and is not necessarily wrong as far as it goes.

But, unfortunately, boasting can be done in a very negative way. When it’s used negatively it’s often used in the sense of boasting in something or someone that we hope in or that we place our ultimate trust in other than God. Let me give you some examples: Boasting in wealth and riches (Ps. 49:6); boasting in any idol of our own making that we put in the place of God (Ps. 97:7); boasting about tomorrow (Proverbs 27:1), e.g., “I’ve got plenty of time to do what God wants. I’ll do that someday”; boasting in ourselves and our own abilities (Proverbs 27:2); boasting in our own works to make us right with God (Eph. 2:9).

Jeremiah 9:23-24 says, “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.’” In Psalm 34, David’s example of ‘boasting in the LORD,’ should remind us that any boast in our innate ability to fully care for our own lives or the lives of others is an empty boast. Apart from God all will eventually end in futility. God is our only true hope; only God can sustain us when our world comes crashing down...and it will. When times are difficult; when it seems that

you're all alone with no one to comfort you, a child of God is never alone. God is our only safe boast.

Having said that our 'boast is in God' we can no longer live primarily for ourselves. A true boast in or praise of God comes from those who seek to obey him and trust him in every area of our lives. We will only do this if we have trusted in Jesus Christ alone, by faith. Although we will surely fail, at times, in our obedience to God's Word, we can rest fully in the finished work of Jesus Christ. He is the only one who obeyed perfectly. In 2 Corinthians 10:17-18 Paul writes, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord. For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends." When our boast is in him we always have reason to be thankful.

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