

When we cease exalting ourselves and exalt the only one truly worthy, God, then we begin to care about the things that God cares about. Jesus gives us two areas where self-exaltation will endanger your soul and your relationships with others. Then, he warns us to remember that God is to be exalted because He never owes us gratitude for our faithfulness, and we are to be humble because we owe God everything.

1. Esteeming God Means That We Repudiate Self-Esteem

- a. What are the “*skandala*” (stumbling blocks) referring to in this verse?
 - i. **“Stumbling blocks” are the stones of teaching or truth-claims** that cause someone to fall down, to stumble, to not walk uprightly in consistency with God
 - ii. Therefore, they can refer to false-teaching that proclaims falsities about God’s character or His works, or they can refer to the sins themselves that are the result of esteeming or exalting ourselves rather than God and His Word
 1. Doctrinal stumbling blocks
 2. Practical stumbling blocks
 3. Both are the result of self-esteem superseding God-esteem
 - a. We trust our own wisdom/intellect/experience to define God
 - b. We trust our own wisdom/intellect/experience to live rightly
- b. “Woe to the one who makes crooked the straight path!”
 - i. Acts 13:6-11
 - ii. 2 Pet 2:10-22
 - iii. Jude 1:8-13ff
 - iv. Rev 2:12-17
- c. It is a terrifying thing to knowingly, and even unknowingly, lead others away from Christ-esteem to self-justification
 - i. God is opposed to false-teaching with terrifying ferocity
 1. The millstone was the upper stone wheel that crushed the grains of the mill against a base stone
 - a. Weighed between 55lbs for the domestic hand mills to several thousand pounds for large livestock-pulled mills
 - b. Jesus is most likely speaking of the smallest domestic stones, which are clearly enough to drown a person
 2. The judgment of the millstone was reserved for the most heinous crimes, for even the body of the condemned was thrown away as the supreme sign of disrespect
 - ii. God is opposed to encouragements to sin or delight in sin with terrifying ferocity
 1. Temptations to self-trust and self-exaltation can also hidden in temptations to serve oneself through sinful means
 2. God considers it abominable when anyone encourages another to sin, to pursue sin, to delight in sin, etc. because sinful behavior (sexual immorality, theft, etc) is always the result of self-esteem or self-trust
 - a. We always justify our behavior by appealing to our own wisdom, morality, determination rather than the revealed word of God
 - b. This self-justifying of sinful behavior and sinful desires is self-esteem and God detests it
- d. Jesus is declaring that it would be better if the deceiver picked up that millstone that he is using to trip others up and tie it around his neck and jump into the deep sea than to face the God who delights in the little ones that one is deceiving
 - i. **“little ones” refers to the weak, like Lazarus and the poor in this context**

2. Esteeming God Means That We Must Forgive Others

- a. Jesus immediately goes from the horrific condemnation of those who teach others to sin to the necessity of forgiveness. Why?
- b. We must not think too highly of ourselves!
 - i. Thus the command to "Pay attention to yourselves!"
 - ii. Guard your own heart and consider what you are teaching or presenting to others.
 1. It is a dreadful thing that it may be your instruction or encouragement that leads others to sin.
 2. God takes it very seriously, so guard yourself and be wise.
- c. Yet it is also necessary to rebuke a brother when he sins
 - i. The necessity of speaking love and truth, never one without the other
 - ii. Love speaks truth for the sake of the one loved and the ones affected by the other
 1. Love of the brother as motive
 2. Love of the little ones as motive
 3. These are not incompatible, but may come into conflict
- d. Interestingly, it is the profession of repentance that is to be acted upon, not the proof of repentance.
 - i. How often have we questioned such a profession, skeptical and self-justifying in the light of mere words.
 - ii. Jesus' command is harder here because it is only based upon the profession of repentance that forgiveness is to be granted, even when the "evidence" of such profession is weakened by multiple repetitions of the sin against you.
- e. Forgiveness is evidence that one is truly not self-justifying or exalting of himself/herself!
 - i. If we cannot forgive another, for any reason, then we think that our righteousness is what leads God to justify us!
 - ii. Matthew 18:21-35
 - iii. When we have been shown such great mercy by God, and thus esteem Him for such great mercy, we extend mercy to others who have wronged us
- f. This word is so difficult that the disciples cry out for increased faith!
 - i. There is a recognition in the command itself and in our distrust of our own hearts that we need greater faith!
 - ii. It is hard to forgive because forgiveness means bearing up the cost of what has been taken from you
 1. See Jesus
 - iii. "I believe! Help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24)

3. Esteeming God Makes Us Completely Dependent Upon His Grace

- a. We have social pressure to live in two worlds: faith (immaterial world) and "fact"(material 'provable' world)
 - i. This leads us to emphasize "faith" as a powerful end in itself rather than as a dependence upon another one outside of ourselves
 - ii. Thus, it is honorable to have "faith" as long as it is not exclusive of other "faiths"
 1. All "faiths" are equally "faith" and thus equated in society as ends to themselves
 2. As long as these "faiths" don't conflict with our social values of "facts" there is room for community
 3. But when a "faith" conflicts with the social norm (regarded as 'fact') or social virtue (of tolerance) there is intolerance of such faith
 - iii. This is how our culture speaks of "faith"
 1. "my faith" "your faith" "faith initiatives" "inter-faith prayer", etc.

2. Since all faiths are equally valid on the basis that they are faiths, then there is commonality
 - a. **Question on FoxNews: "Can faith fix society's problems?"**
 - i. No, but *God can fix society's problems*.
3. But when one starts talking about the objects of each of these faiths, there is immediately division because there is immediately distinction.
 - a. My faith is in Jesus who is divine, vicariously died for the sins of the world, was raised from the dead on the third day, ascending to the Father to reign over all things, and is returning to judge the living and the dead
 - b. This is not acceptable because the objects of our faith are differentiated and mutually exclusive
4. **Jesus' answer is simply that faith doesn't do jack and faith has no power, but GOD does great things because GOD has power**
 - b. How does Jesus respond to the request for *increased* faith?
 - i. Jesus rejects this idea of faith and deflects the power away from faith and onto the object of faith, i.e. the self-revealing God
 - ii. He takes the focus off of the quantity of our faith (increase) and places it upon the object of our faith, God, and His power
 1. God moves mulberry trees and plants them in the sea
 - a. Faith is not the power, God is powerful and faith is dependence upon Him, the particular and specific personal God who has revealed Himself through His Word and more handily in Jesus Christ
 - b. **Thus, having "faith" is not the point, but rather what you have faith in is the point**
 2. This is not based upon the size of your faith (hence, mustard seed), but on the power of God
 - a. Even the smallest dependence upon the Lord will see God do tremendous things according to his own power, wisdom, delight
 - b. Thus, an increase of faith is not the issue, but rather the object of faith is the issue
 - c. **"With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt 19:26)**
 - c. He doesn't base it upon my experience of power but upon his Word.
 - i. If we are to have greater faith, we must learn from Him, root ourselves in Him, entrust our understanding of God, ourselves, and the world to Jesus' words.
 1. This shows that faith is always rooted in what we know, and thus knowledge is important and the word of God necessary for our instruction and thus our increase in faith
 - ii. It is also true that though all things are possible with God, we must entrust ourselves to His Word and to His wisdom and to His will
 1. **See Jesus' example of both of these things: faith in God's absolute power and faith in God's wisdom and will**
 2. **Garden of Gethsemane:** "And he said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.'" (Mar 14:36)
 - d. He focuses on grace
 - i. The teaching on the servants is showing that God never owes us gratitude for we are always indebted to him and never Him to us

- ii. Even when we've done our work, God doesn't owe us gratitude, for gratitude is the response to mercy or grace, being given something of which one is unworthy, and we never show grace to God
 - 1. God is never unworthy of our work, our praise, our service, etc. and thus is never ingratiated to us
 - 2. What we give to Him he is absolutely deserving of, so it can never be that God would give us thanks
 - 3. **God never owes us a "Thank you" and He never says such to us in Scripture**
 - a. If this bothers us, we think too highly of ourselves and too lowly of God
 - b. **It bothers me...ugh.**
- iii. This also means that what blessings and goodness that God gives to us is always by His grace towards us, no matter if it's before we go into the field, are working in the field, or have finished our work for the day - it's all of grace from God to us.
 - 1. We never move beyond the need for grace
 - 2. **His grace is how he always deals with us before and after we've done what we ought to do**
- iv. This also means that God gives *freely* to us in all these ways. He never gives to us because he owes us anything, but because He is *freely* gracious, *unbound* by our performance and completely acting according to his kind intentions of his free will
 - 1. His free grace is decisive in how we are treated before and after we have done all that we ought to do. We never move beyond the need for grace.
 - 2. **This is encouraging because since we are 'unworthy' slaves before His mercy and 'unworthy' slaves after His mercies, then the only reason that God deals kindly with us comes from solely from the kind intention of His will.**
- e. **This means that God is more amazing than we usually comprehend, for he doesn't owe us love or mercy or help in *any* way at *any* time, but He has freely and willingly chosen to abundantly grace us accordingly only to the kind intention of His will**
 - i. All by the lavish and extravagant kindness of the God who owes me nothing but righteous indignation, just wrath, holy condemnation, and eternal destruction.
 - ii. **WONDER** at the wonderful news of what God has done by His own free choice!