

BEING EXALTED BY GOD

By Glenn Smith

God and God alone truly exalts leaders! Psalm 75:6-7 says,

No one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt a man. But it is God who judges; He brings one down, He exalts another.

Inside all of us Type-A leaders (and maybe everyone) is this secret ambition to be great, and well known, and successful in the eyes of the world! When I am not bridling this ambition (and it can only be bridled by the Holy Spirit), it drives and governs everything that I do. It is the secret motivator, although it is usually disguised in “spirituality.” Privately I am working to gain approval, recognition, and prestige. It is all too easy for us to maneuver in such a way as to “get what we want” out of our ministry and service.

The Psalmist tells us that it is really God who exalts. However, we can “pseudo” exalt ourselves to get some of the kudos that we desire! If I am good enough, I can be successful and recognized, but it may not mean anything for me personally in eternity. That doesn’t mean that good things won’t happen here on earth! Even if my motive is impure, God can still use me to draw people to Himself and meet needs in others. If He can speak through Balaam’s donkey, He can probably bring glory to Himself no matter how wretched my heart is. But to be truly exalted, something needs to be radically different inside me!

Second Corinthians 5:10 says,

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

My understanding of this verse is that, although we are saved by grace through faith, we will still be rewarded in heaven for the things we do on earth. However, the word “bad” gives us an important insight. It might be better translated as “worthless” or “good for nothing.” Trench says, “The word indicates the impossibility of any true gain ever coming forth from it, and the notion of worthlessness is the central notion.”¹ In other words, while God will glorify Himself no matter what, we cannot truly exalt ourselves with self-serving ambition and impure motives!

On the other hand, if I humble myself according to 1 Peter 5:6-10, God will exalt me, and even greater things will happen! Plus, this passage suggests that it will be exaltation without anxiety, without great risk of falling to the tricks of the evil one, and as a result, He will make me strong, firm, and steadfast! But it will be in His time!

Humility must be intentional. It is not our default posture. To make sure that our heart is humble before the Lord we can ask ourselves these diagnostic questions:

¹ Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers. *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, p. 468.

- Am I experiencing anxiety right now?
- Am I experiencing strong temptation from the enemy, or am I in a position where I could be blind-sided easily by the enemy?
- Do I feel spiritually empty or weak?
- Am I content if I do not receive any recognition, affirmation, or credit for the good things that happen?

Of course these questions will mean nothing unless we are brutally honest with ourselves!

Jesus said “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”² It is far better to be pure in heart than to be successful in the eyes of the world (even the Christian world!) It is the pure in heart that God invites into His presence. They are the ones who will see and experience God.

If good things happen and you gain some measure of recognition, beware! Don’t trust recognized success! Ask yourself the honest question, “Have I exalted myself in some way, or has God in His grace exalted me before others?” Exaltation that matters in eternity only comes from God and it should never be something we spend any appreciable time or energy pursuing or basking in. God calls us to be faithful, not successful! There is a difference! And to help us see the difference, I close with a great statement from Dr. Robert Moorehead entitled “The Fellowship of the Unashamed.”

I’m a part of the fellowship of the unashamed. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I’m a disciple of His. I won’t look back, let up, slow down, back away or be still.

My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, my future is secure. I’m finished and done with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tamed visions, mundane talking, cheap living and dwarfed goals.

I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotion, plaudits, or popularity. I don’t have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded. I now live by faith, lean on His presence, walk by patience, lift by prayer, and labor by power.

My face is set, my gait is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way is rough, my companions few, my Guide reliable, my mission clear. I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded, or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of adversity, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

I won’t give up, shut up, or let up until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up and preached up for the cause of Christ. I am a disciple of Jesus. I must go till He comes, give till I drop, preach till all know, and work till He stops me. And when He comes for His own, He will have not problem recognizing me... my banner will be clear!

² Matthew 5:8.