

## Overcoming (Part 9): Self-Exaltation

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An eagle cannot devour an oyster unless he breaks it open by carrying it into the air and dropping it from a great height onto rocks below. Satan uses a similar method to break our resistance to pride: He tries to get us to desire high stature and wealth. Then, once we are exalted in our own minds, he can spiritually dash us to pieces.

Satan used this method on Jesus Christ in Matthew 4 when he attempted to elevate Jesus' view of Himself through enticements of vanity and power. He placed Jesus on the highest pinnacle of the Temple, and then told Him to cast Himself down if He were truly God. Jesus, though, was not deceived, being content with His temporary stature during His physical life.

Contentment is indeed great gain (I Timothy 6:6) if we are satisfied with our current status. The world views stature as overwhelmingly important, when, in reality, those who seek great heights receive the depths of this very dangerous pitfall. In this Bible study, we will analyze yet another sin of vanity that impedes overcoming and growth: self-exaltation.

1. What is self-exaltation? Exodus 20:3-7; Psalm 83:18; 86:10; Isaiah 43:9-13; I Corinthians 10:12.

**Comment:** The self-exalted person is he "who thinks he stands" on his own merits. Self-exaltation is an excessively intensified sense of well-being, power, or importance. At its worst, it is self-tribute, self-praise, self-honoring, self-glorifying, and self-worshipping. It overtly breaks the first three commandments by placing oneself as more important than God, setting oneself up as an idol, and making the name of one's god, "I" or "me."

2. In whom is self-exaltation manifested most dramatically? Isaiah 14:12-15; Daniel 4:28-37; II Thessalonians 2:3-4; Psalm 73:3-9.

**Comment:** Satan is the archetype of the self-exalted being, beginning with his attempt to usurp God's throne. Nebuchadnezzar follows his example by his self-praise: "Is not this great Babylon, that *I* have built for a royal dwelling by *my* mighty power and for the honor of *my* majesty?" The man of sin, the Antichrist, will be the most self-exalted human being on earth, and this same spirit of pride will drive him.

3. How is self-exaltation produced? Proverbs 8:13; 11:2; Mark 7:21-23; Romans 12:3; Galatians 6:3; I John 2:16.

**Comment:** Self-exaltation naturally follows self-deception. We deceive ourselves into thinking we are greater than we really are. The father of pride, Satan, encourages this self-deception that produces pride, and once pride is introduced, human nature takes over. Ironically, in our quest for self-exaltation, in the end we receive the opposite of our intended goal of personal glory; our quest ultimately results in shame.

4. What penalties do we pay for the sin of self-exaltation? Obadiah 3-4; Proverbs 17:19; 25:6-7, 27; Ezekiel 31:10-14.

**Comment:** God eventually removes all the physical accomplishments of the self-exalted person. Anyone who glories in himself will receive his true reward in the form of condemnation, debasement, degradation, and humiliation. Glory is praise, honor, or distinction extended by common consent. If we glory in ourselves, it is because no one else is glorifying us for our perceived accomplishments—probably because we have done no real, glorious deeds in the first place.

Ezekiel speaks figuratively of trees exalting themselves because of their strength. These trees represent mighty princes of Egypt to whom power and prosperity flowed, who believed they could never be toppled. Yet, a succession of invasions and civil wars reduced Egypt to subservience. The Egyptians' pride in the Nile as the source of their prosperity and power availed little in the end. No physical source can compare to the true source of living water that brings eternal life and true glory (John 4:10-14).

5. What is the opposite of self-exaltation? Whom does God commend? Proverbs 15:33; 16:18-19; Luke 14:7-11; II Corinthians 10:3-6; Philippians 2:5-11.

**Comment:** God commends the humble, not those who consort with the rich and famous, and He promises to exalt the humble at the appointed time. Jesus Christ's example of humility helps us to realize the meek stature of true Christians. In Him we see the zenith of virtue from which the apostles drew illustrations and admonitions for us. He gave up inexpressible glory to take upon Himself the humble form of humanity and perform the lowliest of services to us. He consented to be without distinction or honor and was willing to be despised and disregarded. When He laid aside his former rank and dignity, He became as nothing, yet now He is exalted above everything and everyone. He set this example for us that we might overcome self-exaltation and develop the true and ultimately exalting trait of humility.