

Mark 9:38-42 We Are One in the Lord

Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem to be crucified and was using the limited time left to teach His disciples who would be responsible for carrying on after He left. An important dimension to those lessons was the reality that Jesus was calling on His followers to live radically different lives than those in the world around them. Jesus declared that in His kingdom the first shall be last and the last first. His standard of greatness was being a servant even to the least of those in the eyes of the world. That is a hard lesson for any of us to learn, especially in a culture that places special value on being the best or the greatest. Perhaps because the disciples got it but more likely because they wanted to shift attention away from that issue, read Mark 9:38.

John was saying. *“OK, we get it, we are all equal to each other, but as a group we are the elite ones you have called to be your disciples. We caught someone thinking he was one of us and casting out demons in your name, so we told him to cease and desist immediately.”*

Read the response of Jesus in Mark 9:39-40.

Don't miss the irony of this situation. Earlier in this chapter Mark recorded that when Jesus came down off the Mount of Transfiguration He found the rest of the disciples trying, without success, to drive a demon out of young boy (9:14-18). Now John was saying he stopped a man who was successful where they had failed.

Jesus took that opportunity to teach His disciples an important lesson. There is no such thing as elitism among the followers of Jesus. Anyone or any church that is preaching Jesus is to be viewed as legitimate in God's eye. There are, of course, churches and individuals who claim to be Christian while denying the basic teachings of the New Testament. They are wrong and should be condemned but as long as they are preaching the basic truths of Scripture they are to be accepted as belonging to Him. We may not agree on every detail but if we are preaching Jesus as God's Son, crucified, dead and buried, and raised again to offer salvation to all who put their trust in Him, then we are to assume we are one in the Lord.

It is important to note that Jesus was not giving wholesale approval to this individual simply because he was seeking to cast out demons in His name but emphasizing that we are not to view ourselves as elitists who alone have all the answers. Matthew 7 is a part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and we find Jesus warning his followers against judging others improperly. Read Matthew 7:3. As the chapter goes on Jesus issued a warning. Read Matthew 7:15. Jesus never suggested we should automatically accept the message of anyone who happens to use His name. Rather we are called upon to evaluate the message in light of God's Word. Discretion is expected.

Read in Matthew 7:21-23 what Jesus went on to say.

The point that Jesus was making for His followers in Mark was not that everyone who uses His name is a true believer, but we are not to assume that we have a special relationship to Jesus that excludes others, nor do we have a corner on the ministry that Jesus has given to the His church. We must not reject other believers because they worship differently or emphasize a different aspect of the gospel. We are on the same team. God will be the judge of one's ministry.

Read what Jesus went on to say in Mark 9:42. The point Jesus was making is, *"If in discouraging others in the kingdom from doing the work of the kingdom because you feel that right belongs to you alone, you may cause them to leave the Lord all together. That is extremely serious, and you must never do it."*

Just before this Jesus took a child into His arms and spoke to His disciples about that child. We are prone to assume that Jesus was talking about the same child. He probably was not. Jesus was specifically speaking of **"those who believe in me"** or young Christians.

Jesus was talking about Christians who were relatively new to the faith, so they could be described as children in Jesus. That metaphor is commonly used in the Bible to speak of those who were either new in their faith or still significantly weak in it so they could stumble if someone put something in their way to trip over. For an example read I Peter 2:2.

Here Jesus was talking about tripping those who were still children in their faith. Jesus said that if someone causes one of these new converts **"to stumble"** that individual would be better off if **"a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea."** The idea of causing one to stumble carries the idea of tripping them up and is a warning against putting obstacles in the way of young Christians that will cause them to fall away from the faith.

There is often a special enthusiasm among new believers that we should keep forever but unfortunately seems to wane in time. New Christians want to talk about their faith and share it with others. Too often older Christians, instead of encouraging them, put them down because of their excitement and desire to talk about Jesus.

Jesus was talking here specifically about allowing young Christians to serve Him, but elsewhere in Scripture we find that idea related to other areas. For example, in Galatians Paul relates this to leading believers away via corrupting the gospel. That would apply to many of the cults who approach young Christians with their lies and lure them away from the true, biblical faith with false doctrines.

And the concept of tripping up new Christians can be seen if we cause or encourage other Christians to sin via our attitude or actions. Paul went into significant detail about this in I Corinthians 8. Paul's point was that as Christians we need be careful that we do not engage in activities that we can handle but young Christians may not be able to. There may be places I can go to that will not tempt me to sin but may be a problem for a new Christian who sees me there

or that I take there. We have the right to do it but are urged to avoid it lest it be a problem to others.

Here Jesus was specifically talking about causing other Christians to fall away from the faith in what is called “Christian Snobbery.” Christian snobbery is when we make another Christian feel inadequate in some way. It can happen when we make them feel inadequate because they do not yet know the Bible the way we do. It can show up when they ask a question and we come off as saying *“How dumb can you be, everyone knows that.”* It can also come when one assumes that his position in the church is more important than that of another Christian or when he lets it be known that because of his experience he can do it better than a novice. Read Mark 9:41 Jesus was saying to His disciples, you may be one of the 12 and responsible for teaching and leading the church, but I also honor equally the one who simply gives a cup of water to someone who needs it.

Jesus said it would be better to die via a **“large millstone being hung around our neck and being thrown into the sea.”** The word Jesus used for **“millstone”** is literally “donkey stone” and referred to the large stone used in milling that was so heavy that men could not turn it, with the exception of Samson in the Old Testament. This was a very real punishment in the minds of Galileans. Earlier in their history the Romans reportedly had done just that to some leaders who rebelled against them. They had stones tied around them and were tossed into the sea to drown. It was a horrible way to die but it would be better than to cause a new Christian to fall away from the faith because of our activities or attitude.

Jesus said we do not have some special knowledge or commitments that makes us better than others. We are all equal in the kingdom because we are all saved by grace and have received our spiritual gift from God so have no reason to brag. Jesus cautioned His disciples not to allow their attitude of superiority or spiritual maturity to hinder other Christians from growing in their faith. We are challenged to help all other believers to grow in their faith, being careful not to discourage those who are newer in their faith. We are also encouraged to pray for others who may differ from us in one way or another but are, none-the-less, part of God’s kingdom.