

Fervent Devotion to Christ and the Way of the Cross

by Zac Poonen

Fervent devotion to Christ is the main thing we need to preserve, and it can only be achieved through daily taking up the cross and allowing the sword of God to fall on our self-life.

Duration: 26:16

Scripture: Matthew 22:36, 2 Corinthians 11:3

Topics: "The Cross", "Sanctification"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of maintaining a fervent devotion to Jesus Christ, highlighting the danger of being led astray by Satan from simple, pure devotion. It stresses the need to daily take up the cross, symbolizing the death of self-life, as the only way to access the Tree of Life, which represents devotion to Christ. The speaker warns against being deceived by emotional experiences or external actions without genuine love for Christ, emphasizing that true devotion is proven by dying to self in daily life.

Transcript

Well, it's good to be able to speak to you like this, and I want to share something from Second Corinthians and chapter 11. Second Corinthians 11, Paul says to the Corinthians, I am afraid, verse 3, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your mind should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. When we look back over the past years, the many years in which God has blessed us as a church, and in many churches in our land, it's very easy to sit back and be satisfied with what we have seen, and the various ways in which God has blessed us spiritually, materially.

And what can happen is that as a result of that type of, you know, looking back with relaxation and satisfaction, is that very subtly Satan can lead us astray without our knowing it, not into sin. I think most of us have understood how to stay away from sin and even the sins that most other churches don't even talk about. God's given us a lot of light.

But what is it that the devil can lead us astray from? Paul writes to the Corinthians that you can be led astray from simple, pure devotion to Jesus Christ. So when we go back to Genesis chapter 3 and see what it was that Satan led Eve astray from. He took her to the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

But what did he take her away from? He took her away from the tree of life. The tree of knowledge of good and evil is to me a picture of living under the law. And those who seek to be accepted by God by living under the law, it says it brings death.

Nobody in the Old Testament and under the Old Covenant could come to life, the life that God wanted man to have. And that's why he told Adam that if you eat of that tree of knowledge of good and evil, you will die. Because you will seek to live by certain rules.

This is good and that is evil and according to your own understanding. And that leads to death. The whole world lives by that principle.

Even people who steal feel that they're doing something right according to their conscience. There are people who murder who feel that they're doing right according to their conscience. And there are many other people in the world who don't commit adultery or don't steal.

And they live by certain principles of right and wrong. They don't cheat. And they feel quite happy.

And you know how people who live very upright lives, they find it very difficult to come to God. Because they say, I don't need salvation in Christ. I'm good enough as I am.

That their knowledge of good and evil and doing what's good has led them to death. In the sense that they never come to the life of God. Now that can happen to us not in the sense that we are not born again.

But I find with many people who are born again and who have come to a certain measure of uprightness in their life. There's a sense of sitting back in satisfaction. I've seen that in our CFC churches.

And that's what makes them careless in reading the Bible. Careless in seeking to commune with God in prayer. And gradually they begin to become a little loose in their private life.

To begin to watch movies that they would never have watched when they first came to CFC. They were very strict in those days. But now they've sort of relaxed.

They can do a lot of things which they would not have done in the earlier days. Because they've become familiar with God. It's unfortunate.

It's a wrong familiarity. Like the saying goes, familiarity breeds contempt. And it's not that we have contempt for God, but we feel that, well, God understands.

It's okay. And this is where I feel a lot of people in our CFC churches have, I believe, it's my conviction, have begun to love money. And that's taken them away from God.

So, the tree of life is simple, pure devotion to Jesus Christ. And anything that takes me away from simple, pure devotion to Christ, we can say, is a snare of Satan. Now, I don't know what it is in your life, but you can be led astray from devotion to Christ by even your ministry.

There are lots of people for whom their ministry, their eldership in a church and their preaching regularly has become their idol. You know, I've been preaching for at least 55 years now. Or at least 53.

And I can say today honestly, I'm burdened to share God's word with people, but it's not my idol. I'd be quite happy to completely stop preaching and never preach for a whole year. To me, devotion to Jesus

Christ is primary.

And I've always felt that if my service for the Lord does not come out of that devotion to Christ, I have gone away from the tree of life. And that's what Paul is saying here. And the craftiness of Satan.

Remember that Satan is more crafty than all of us put together. And he's very subtle in the way he leads us astray. Very often he can lead us astray by just making us busy.

Busy with good things that we do, not bad things. Maybe busy in the ministry and busy in doing things that prevent us from being devoted to Jesus Christ. From spending time with Jesus and telling him how much he means to us and worshipping him and praising him.

So remember this, my dear brothers and sisters, that devotion to Christ is the main thing that we need to preserve. More than anything else. And we have to watch it all the time.

This is why when the Pharisees came to Jesus once and asked him, what is the great commandment in the law? Matthew 22, they expected him, you know, for them, the great commandment was the Sabbath. And they were really tempting him to say something which would give them an opportunity to accuse him before others. And so they asked him, what is the great commandment in the law? Matthew 22 and verse 36.

And he said, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. And the second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

On these two commandments depend the whole law and the prophets. So Jesus said, it's not one particular action I'm talking about as a commandment, which is the greatest thing that God's looking for. It's like asking to ask which is the greatest commandment in the Lord.

Law is another way to put that question would be, what is the thing that God is looking for most of all in human beings he has created? What is the thing that God is looking most of all in believers who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ? And the answer is that they will love him supremely. That's the main purpose with which God created man. It's the main purpose with which God redeemed man, that I can love him with all my heart.

He wants our love more than all our service and anything else. And especially those who have got any responsibility of leadership in a church is very, very important. That they themselves live in a fervent love for Jesus Christ and are seeking to lead others into a fervent devotion to Christ.

How do we know whether a church is spiritual or not? How do we know whether our church is spiritual or not? It's not by how active we are or how many people come for our conferences. These things come for nothing before God. There are mega churches that have many more people than us and who satisfy themselves in their numbers.

There is only one test as far as I can see. And that is the people in our church have got a fervent devotion to Jesus Christ. If that is not there, we're not a church that God approves of.

Where Jesus Christ means more to us than anything on this earth. And that's the thing which I want to say to all of you. We've got to keep on checking ourselves.

I would say every day, is there anything that means more to me than Jesus Christ? Is my heart devoted to him as it was the first day when I was gripped by the truth that he loved me and gave himself for me? The son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. That truth, if it ever becomes cheap and familiar to us, we have gone astray. So, here is the test by which I test myself.

And I would encourage all of you to test yourself in the days that lie ahead. Never to evaluate ourselves by any other standard except this. Because as I see in this verse in 2 Corinthians 11:3, anything other than this means I've gone astray.

There is only one way I know I have not gone astray from the truth. And that is my devotion to Christ is fervent. And Jesus said, if you love me, you'll keep my commandments.

You know the big difference between the law, the way the law commanded and the way Christ commanded is this. The law gave commandments and Jesus gave commandments, but there is a big difference in the way it was given. In the law it was thou shalt and thou shalt not.

It's like a master telling his slave, go and do this, don't do that. Whereas Jesus, you never see him saying thou shalt, thou shalt not. That's the language of the law.

And when preachers speak like that, they are old covenant preachers. Jesus always gave freedom. He said, if you love me, keep my commandments.

Otherwise don't keep them. I'm not interested. I'm not interested, the Lord is saying, in a person keeping my commandments, if he doesn't love me.

It's back under the law. It's going to the tree of knowledge of good and evil. You know, doing the right thing, but not out of love for Christ.

In other words, the motive with which we do something is much more important to God than what we actually do. We can find a satisfaction in what we have done. The Lord does not find satisfaction in that if it doesn't arise from a right motive.

And the motive must be that I love Christ more than anything else on earth, or anyone else on earth, where I can lose everything. And if I don't lose Jesus Christ, I'm happy. So each one of us, it's good for us to evaluate ourselves like this.

Not whether we are doing certain things and congratulating ourselves that we have kept New Testament commandments or are accepted in the church as good brothers and sisters. It counts for nothing. In the day the Lord comes, the Bible says he's going to bring to light the things that are hidden.

And what's the primary thing he's going to bring to light is the motives of men's hearts. That's what we read in 1 Corinthians in chapter 4. That don't judge anything it says until the Lord comes, verse 5. Don't judge anyone or anything till the Lord comes. 1 Corinthians 4:5. Because when the Lord comes, he will bring to light the things hidden in the darkness.

And that is he'll disclose the motives of men's hearts and then each man's praise will come to him from God. Do you know that verse? It's what the Bible said. This is how God's going to judge in the final day.

In other words, when I stand before him, the Lord is not just going to see what I did and what I said. Of course, he's going to evaluate that. But behind that, what is the motive? Did it come from a fervent love for

Jesus Christ? Is it because I love the Lord that I came to the meetings? Is it because I love the Lord that I read his word? Is it because I love the Lord that I did anything for him? Is it because I love the Lord that I wanted to stay away from the love of money? Is it because I love the Lord that I stayed away from lusting after women or losing my temper? Or is it because I love the Lord that I took up the cross? Otherwise, it's worthless.

So when you think of our access to the Tree of Life today, which we've seen, Tree of Life is this fervent devotion to Christ. Before Adam sinned, he could access the Tree of Life easily. He could just walk up to it.

But we know in Genesis chapter 3, after he sinned, God put a flaming sword, Genesis 3, 24, that went in every direction around the Tree of Life. Teaching us that now, you can't come to the Tree of Life without that sword falling on us before we reach the Tree of Life. So ever since Adam sinned, there's a thing which we have called our self-life.

And what I learned from that picture is, it is impossible to have a fervent devotion to Christ without the sword of God falling and slaying, killing my self-life. Here is where we can deceive ourselves. I can deceive myself saying, Yeah, yeah, I love Jesus.

I really believe. I love Jesus with all my heart. And if your self-life is not slain and killed, you're deceiving yourself.

That's not the Tree of Life you came to. You came to an emotional experience. The Tree of Life you can come to only if the sword has fallen on your self-life.

In other words, if I'm still disturbed and upset when somebody provokes me, and I've not put myself to death there, I'm not really devoted to Christ. I can feel very emotional in a meeting when I'm singing His praise, but I'm not really devoted to Christ. So there's a close connection between taking up the cross and devotion to Christ.

You know, when Jesus went to the cross, He said, I'm going to the cross to prove my love for my Father. That's what He said in the Gospel. That the world may know that I love the Father.

I'm going to the cross. So His devotion to His Father was proved by His going to the death on the cross. And it's exactly the same for you and me.

I cannot come to the Tree of Life without that sword falling on me. And if I think I've come to the Tree of Life without that sword falling on my self-life, that is not the Tree of Life. I say that because I find a lot of people deceive themselves that they love Jesus when they don't.

Ask yourself, my dear friends, whether you have really allowed the sword to fall on your self-life, and whether in the daily temptations and provocations of life, that sword has fallen on you. And you die in every temptation as you face it. You say, I've got to die here.

That's how you prove your love for Jesus. As you die, you reach the Tree of Life. Any tree that you access without dying is not the Tree of Life.

So I hope you got that clear. Because there's so many people I feel today are deceiving themselves about devotion to Christ. We can say the serpent has deceived them.

How does the serpent deceive them? 2 Corinthians 11.3 I fear that the serpent will, by his craftiness, will lead you astray to some other tree and make you think that is the Tree of Life, make you think that is devotion to Christ. And you're emotional and you're excited and you love Jesus and you sing some wonderful songs. And the devil's led you astray because there was no sword that fell on your self-life in that process.

So for myself, it has become very clear that I cannot say that I have a fervent devotion to Jesus Christ if I'm not daily taking up the cross. That is why you often heard me say that God listens to our praises on Sunday morning if he saw us taking up the cross right through from Monday to Saturday. He's not listening how good our music is and how well we sing.

No, those are all for worldly choirs. And it's possible that some people here in CFC also think that the Lord appreciates them because they play music well or sing well. I want to tell you, you're deceiving yourself.

You're deceiving yourself. It's very clear to me that some folks who sing are conscious that they're singing well. And imagine that the Lord accepts their singing just because they sing well.

I'm not saying we shouldn't sing well. But I want to say the Lord accepts your singing. Praise to him if he's seen you take up the cross Monday to Saturday before you come on Sunday and sing to the Lord.

Then it has come out of devotion to Christ. So I want you to be gripped by one thing. That's the main thing I'm trying to emphasize here.

Devotion to Christ comes out of taking up the cross every day. That is proved by the fact that there's a sword in front of the genuine tree of life. And any way in which Satan can lead us astray from that death of the cross, from the slaying of the cross, he will seek to do.

This is why you read in Matthew's gospel chapter 16, the strong rebuke that Jesus gave to Peter. When Jesus for the first time, Matthew 16 21, for the first time he told his disciples that he would have to suffer and go to the cross and die. And Peter said, no, Lord, that will never happen to you.

Immediately, Jesus turned around and said, get behind me, Satan. There are only two occasions where Jesus said that. Once was directly to the devil.

When the devil told him to fall down and worship him, he said, get behind me, Satan. And the other is here to the Peter, when Peter told him not to go the way of the cross. You see the connection there, the way the devil was coming through Peter to lead Jesus away from the way of the cross.

It was the voice of the devil and Jesus recognized it. He was not going to be deceived by the schemes of Satan. But very often we are.

Think back over your life in the past two, three months and ask yourself as far back as you can remember, the occasions where you had the opportunity to die to yourself and please the Lord. And you didn't take it. You spoke back in anger when somebody spoke to you in anger.

You reacted without dying. There are many situations like that. In situations where you were seeking God's will, you didn't die to the pull of self, which usually comes through money and honor and position.

You didn't say, Lord, what is your will for me? What will glorify you most? Instead, you sought the things that the world seeks after. Money, honor, position and took your decision. Did a sword fall on yourself like

there? No.

But you imagine that you love Jesus. This is the deception of Satan. So it's my duty to warn you and I believe that many, many people sitting in our CFC churches have lost their devotion to Jesus Christ.

I don't say that to scold anyone. I don't say that to rebuke anyone. But I do say, dear brothers, that I feel that we have missed out on something if we have not been gripped by the way of the cross.

How much do you hear the word of the cross being preached in CFC churches today like it was in the early days? Have we missed out on something there? There's only one thing that Jesus said I have to do every day of my life and that's to take up the cross. Because that's the only way to the tree of life. That's the only way I prove my devotion to Jesus Christ.

As we look into the future and as we seek to share God's truth with other people I need to ask myself am I going to be gripped by this? Have I been trying to get to some tree which I think is the tree of life devotion to Jesus but I missed out on the cross then that's not the tree of life. That's not real devotion to Christ. Satan has led me astray.

Not in the gross sin I may be much better than most believers around me but I missed out on God's will. So may God help us to take this one matter seriously. I don't want to talk about anything else.

One single thing is enough. Fervent devotion to Christ is the tree of life and the only way to get there is through allowing the sword to fall on myself life. Anything other than that any other tree which I think is the tree of life is not the tree of life.

There is no devotion to Christ except through daily dying to myself. May God help us. God bless you all.

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