

God Can Make You Increase In Love

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding that God is light and that there is no darkness in Him at all. It highlights the need to acknowledge and repent of even the smallest sins in our lives to truly have fellowship with God and one another. The message stresses the significance of increasing and abounding in love, as true holiness is rooted in love. It challenges believers to aim for 100% in living blamelessly before God by allowing Him to work in them to both desire and do His will, ultimately following the example of Jesus in love and obedience.

Scripture: 1 John 1:5, 1 John 1:6, 1 John 1:7, 1 Thessalonians 3:13, Philippians 2:13, Psalms 40:8, Hebrews 10:7, Hebrews 3:12

Topics: "God as Light", "Holiness through Love"

Description

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Transcript

Phrase in 1 John 1 which says, God is light and in fact it says this is the main message, 1 John 1 verse 5, 1 John 1 verse 5, this is the message we have heard from him. Now first of all he says that the reason we are proclaiming this to you in verse 3 is that you might have fellowship with the Father and with us. You know, fellowship with God and fellowship with one another in the church.

That is the purpose of all Christian teaching. Fellowship with the Father and fellowship with one another. And this, in order to get there, he says this is the first message you need to understand.

God is light, verse 5, and in him there is no darkness at all. That means he cannot tolerate the smallest sin. If you don't understand that, you will never come into fellowship with God and within the church.

The number one message you need to understand is that God cannot tolerate the smallest little sin. In thought or word or deed or attitude towards others or motive with which you do something. The smallest little sin, there is no darkness in him at all.

And so, verse 6, if you say you have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, that means, what is the meaning of walking in darkness? It is not that you are murdering people or committing adultery everyday. It just means some small little thing in your life which you know is sin. You ignore it.

You ignore it by saying, oh, that's not serious. That means you haven't understood that there is no darkness in God at all. And so, if you say you have fellowship with God and you walk in darkness, you are telling a lie.

You know what the Holy Spirit says? You are telling a lie. If you allow some sin to exist in your life, I don't mean that you have to have perfect victory over sin. My point is, when you slip up, do you feel sorry for it? Do you repent of it? Do you immediately say, oh Lord, that's terrible that I did that thing.

Then at least you are sensitive. You know, it's like leprosy. When people have leprosy, you poke them with a pin, they don't feel it.

That's serious. When your conscience comes to that place where you can do something wrong, walk in darkness and not even be disturbed. You don't have to have victory, that takes time, but you are not even disturbed by the fact that there is darkness there.

Then it says you are a liar. You are not really practicing the truth. So this is the number one message.

But in contrast, if we walk in the light, in the light that God gives us, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with one another. And the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. So, we need to understand what this light is.

Because light is an illustration of something else. What does it mean when God is light? We would think it is holiness. But in the same letter, where it says God is light, he explains in chapter 4 and verse 8, God is love.

So the light is love. And true holiness is love. So we need to understand that.

He doesn't say God is holy, which is true. But John says God is love. So I want to point you to a verse that has come to my mind many, many times.

It's in 1 Thessalonians chapter 3. In 1 Thessalonians 3, it says here that in order for God, verse 13, I want you to look at 1 Thessalonians in chapter 3, in verse 13. God wants to establish your heart without blame in holiness before God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all the saints. This is our goal.

Our goal is at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all the saints, our hearts should be established without any blame in holiness. And since the verse begins with so that, it means it tells us in the previous verse how that can be done. And here is how it's done.

May the Lord, verse 12, cause you to increase and abound in love for one another and for all people just as we do for you. Then you'll be able to establish your heart without blame in holiness. We think of holiness and love as two different things.

But this verse teaches us, if you don't love, you're not holy. If you're holy, you'll love. You'll love God, you'll love Jesus with all your heart, and you'll love others.

And it's not something that will be stagnant. It's not just one level. It says, we pray the Lord will cause you to increase and abound in love so that He can establish your heart without blame in holiness.

I want you to meditate on these two verses even after this meeting is over. Because in my life, it's helped me tremendously that I don't fool myself what holiness is. Because, you know, the world's understanding of holiness, just like the world's understanding of humility, could be completely wrong.

In the scriptures, holiness is love. And not just love, but like verse 12 says, increasing and abounding in love. Then we are established in holiness.

So if I'm not increasing and abounding in love, according to these verses, I'm not really ready for the coming of the Lord. Now, increasing and abounding in love means I'm discovering areas in my life where I don't love as I should. Where I don't love Jesus as I should.

And I don't love one another as I should. Maybe you don't love your husband or wife as you should. You don't love those who hate you as you should.

You don't love your enemies as you should. It's a failure in love that prevents us from being established in holiness. And that means we are not ready for the coming of the Lord.

See, most believers think, I'm ready for the coming of the Lord. Even though they have so many things in their life which they haven't said right. But here in our church, we keep emphasizing, be ready for Christ's coming.

He's going to examine everything we said, did, spoke, attitudes, etc. And everything is going to be tested by the standard of love. You know, when people grow older, they realize that many others younger than them have died.

And then, of course, we are thankful that God has allowed us to live to such an age. In the world, many people want to outlive others. That means they find a certain credit, a certain satisfaction that I've lived longer than them.

I've outlived. People say, I've outlived my father or I've outlived others around me. But in the Christian life, what's come home to my heart is it's not to outlive others.

Jesus outlived very few people. He died at 33. He's our example.

So living a long life to 70, 80, 90 or 100 is not the goal in the Christian life. In the Old Testament, that was a great thing. But what did Jesus do? He did not outlive others.

He outloved others. And so our goal as Christians must not be to outlive others, but to outlove them. That means not that we live longer than them, but we love more than they do.

Whatever the level of love people around us have, our love is more. That is outloving people. And I want to encourage you, my brothers and sisters, in this year, in this new year, to pursue that.

It doesn't matter if your health is not so great and you may not live too long. Okay. But outlove people.

Jesus lived only till 33. So there's no greater... He accomplished all of God's will. By the time he was 33 and a half, he'd finished.

He said, Father, I've finished the work you gave me to do. You don't need to live long to finish God's work. And Jesus is the classic example of that.

Stephen, who died before he was 30. James, the apostle, died. He was 30 years old.

They completed their work. Otherwise God would not... Stephen and James were among the most wholehearted people in the early church. And God would never have allowed them to die if they had not completed their task.

The task that God had planned for them, they completed by the time they were 30 years old. But other people, even if they are 78 years old, they haven't completed what God wanted them to do. So if you make this your goal in life, Lord, I want to outlove.

That means I want to be in a competition of love, not in a competition of age. There are many competitions in the world. People want to look more handsome and get more marks in school.

Right from school days, we are taught to compete with others, to come first in the class and do well in athletics or come first in athletics or something like that. Here is a pursuit that very few people are engaged in, to outlove others, to love more than others do. I don't know how many of you will take up this challenge.

And always begin in your family and then in the church. You cannot love the world before you first love your own family and love people in the church. You know, it is in relation to His disciples that Jesus said, I give you a new commandment.

Turn with me to John chapter 13. I know these are elementary things. Looks like kindergarten lessons.

But sometimes we have forgotten our kindergarten lessons. And we need to be reminded. Have you ever thought of this verse? Whenever you read a scripture, meditate on it and you'll find something interesting.

John chapter 13 and verse 34. John 13, 34. A new commandment I give to you.

That you love one another as I have loved you. That you love one another. By this all men will know you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

Not because you meet in a church, not because you carry a Bible, not because you hang a cross around your neck. No. People will know you are my disciples by the fact that you love one another.

Now the question I want you to ask is, when you read a new commandment, you ask, is this really a new commandment? Isn't it there in the Old Testament as well? In fact, when somebody asked Jesus in Matthew chapter 22, Matthew 22, somebody asked Him in verse 36, Teacher, what is the great commandment in the law? And Jesus gives the answer from the Old Testament. Matthew 22. It is, love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind.

This is the great and foremost commandment. And He says, I can't stop there. You asked me only for one but I cannot tell you about only one because it's like a coin which is something is printed on the other side too.

And if nothing is printed on the other side of a coin, it's a fake. So it says, I have to tell you the second side of it also. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

So, love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself is one commandment. And that is the answer to what is the great commandment in the law. So, God already gave that commandment in the Old Testament to Moses.

You must love your neighbor as yourself. That includes everybody. Then, how is this a new commandment you read in Matthew, in John 13, 34.

A new commandment I give to you. This is a new covenant. That was an old covenant commandment.

In the old covenant, they don't have to love their enemies. They only have to love their neighbors. But Jesus taught us to love our enemies as well.

But here He says a new commandment at the end of His earthly life. He tells them at the Last Supper that you love one another. So He is talking about a love among the people, among the disciples.

Which is to be greater than love for others outside the church. And also, it's a new commandment in the sense in the Old Testament the commandment was love your neighbor as yourself. The new commandment is not love one another like you love yourself, but love one another like I loved you.

That's how it is new. So what does that mean? To love one another in the church. Let's start with our family and the church.

How did Jesus love us? In the love that Jesus had for me. There was a cross on which He died to show His love for me. That's how He demonstrated that love.

It's not in words. It is not by helping us financially and healing our sicknesses. In fact, many of God's children struggle financially.

They don't have enough sometimes. And many of God's children get sick and die of sicknesses. So it's not by giving us money and healing.

That's the way we show love to people. But Jesus' love for us was not shown in giving us a lot of earthly gifts. Or you say we love people by visiting them, praying for them.

That's not how Jesus showed His love for us. He showed His love for us by the most costly way possible. He died in order to save us.

He died entire life. He died to Himself so that He might never sin and thereby offer a perfect sacrifice. So when it says about loving one another as I have loved you, the command is that in your love for others, you must be willing to die to yourself.

And I want to say to you that it's a very high standard. Your love for others in your family must be one where you don't think of yourself and your needs first. You die to yourself and love your wife.

You die to yourself and love your husband. That's the ideal family. Not where they smile at each other and give gifts, etc.

Jesus' standard is you have to die to yourself. In His love for me, there was a cross on which He died. In my love for my wife, there must be a cross on which I die.

In your love for your husband, there must be a cross on which you die. And in your love for one another also, there must be a cross on which you are willing to die. And if you are willing to die, you won't get offended.

Why is it so many people get offended? Even in the church I've seen. I've seen people who are I'm thinking of a number of people who were in this church and who have left. They the moment they leave, they forget all the good we did to them through many years.

And they only remember the one word of rebuke or correction. Isn't that amazing? That all the good that was done to them for years and years and years in the church, they completely forget in a moment and all they can remember is one rebuke they got. That shows the utter selfishness there is and it's a good thing I say it's a good thing that such people leave the church.

Such selfish people who can only think of they want to get and get and get and get, it's better they leave. Because Jesus said love is something that gives not keeps on getting. So that's a good question to ask yourself who are still sitting here and who haven't left.

Have you forgotten all the good things you have received in the church? I can only think of certain corrections you got or certain rebukes you got are those the uppermost things in your mind? It's not a question if you were if somebody asks you, of course you would say yeah I got this, I got this. But what's in your mind? Are you disturbed when you are corrected? Like I said earlier, if you have never heard a word of correction from the Lord, you have not heard God at all. You are fooling yourself that you are listening to God if you have never heard a word of correction.

So in the love of Jesus for me there was a cross on which he died to show his love for me. That's one part of it. And the other we read in Revelation chapter 3 and verse 19.

How does Jesus show his love for me? Love one another as I have loved you. How did he love me? He laid down his life for me. He died on the cross.

I must be willing to lay down my self life. That means if somebody speaks to me harshly I just die to myself and say okay. Maybe he was under a moment of pressure, that's why he said it.

I make some excuse for him so I don't blame him for speaking in that rude and crude way to me. I say maybe he was under some pressure, maybe he's had a bad day and therefore he was under some tension and that's why he spoke in such a sharp way to me. I'm surprised but I'm not going to say that he's always like that.

He's not always like that. This particular moment he slipped up. I die to myself at that moment.

If you don't die to yourself you say ah he's always like that. He's not always like that. But the other way Jesus proves his love for us in Revelation 3.19 is by rebuking us.

Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So in my younger days if you ask me how do you know Jesus loves you I'd say he died for me on the cross. He suffered.

But today if you ask me as a mature Christian, how do you know Jesus loves you? I say boy he reprovess me and disciplines me. You say really brother Zach he reprovess you also? He's sure. Many times I hear his rebuke.

Correction. Because I seek to listen. I never want to stop listening to what the Lord has to say to me.

And it's not always encouragement and you're doing great and you're a great guy. He does say that sometimes but as reproof that was wrong what you did. That word that you spoke was unnecessary.

It was wrong. And your attitude to that person is wrong. I thank God for that.

It's a proof of his love for me. And if some brother is kind enough to tell me the same thing I think that's a proof of his love for me too. Those whom the Lord loves he rebukes and not only rebukes but disciplines.

I've experienced discipline from the Lord. When I ask the Lord I never question discipline because I know that's a mark of his love. My younger days probably I didn't understand it but I know it clearly that one proof of Jesus' love for me love one another as I've loved you.

He disciplines me. Because I love my children I discipline them. And if I have a responsibility in a church as an elder I have to show my love by reproofing and disciplining.

Otherwise I'm not a good elder. Otherwise I hate people. That means I see them going astray and I won't correct them.

I say, let them go to hell. No. I love them.

I have to reprove them and discipline them. They may get offended and leave the church. Well, that's up to them.

But I can stand before the Lord in the final day and say, Lord, I did my part. I loved them by reproofing them and disciplining them. Maybe they didn't listen to me.

Maybe they got offended. They accepted all the words of encouragement and nice words I said about them. But when the moment a little correction came, they got offended.

That's between them and the Lord. But I did my duty. Please remember this.

That God's love is not a wishy-washy soft type of love that just gives us gifts and tells us nice words. He lays down his life. I tell you this.

Sometimes I had to lay down my life when I have had to rebuke somebody. It's not easy. If you're a good father, you don't find it easy to discipline your child.

You have to lay down your soft feelings and die to that and punish your child. And it's like that. Many times I've had to reprove people and it's been very, very difficult.

I had to think about it, pray about it, long to God before it. And I say, Oh, I've got to do it. See, it's that type of love that will build this church.

Love one another as I have loved you. So, dear brothers and sisters, don't get offended when the elders in the church seek to love you as Jesus loved them. By reproof and discipline.

Because they're doing it for your good just like Jesus does it to us for our good. And what did we see in 1 Thessalonians 3? Turn back there for a moment. This is how we get established in holiness and we are unblameable when the Lord comes.

I want to be unblameable. I want to be without blame when Christ comes again. You've heard me say many times that when I stand before the Lord, I want the Lord to say about me, I have nothing against you, nothing to tell you because everything in your life you set right.

As soon as you heard my voice, you set it right. That's the meaning of without blame. It's like saying I've got 100%.

Is it possible to get 100% in mathematics? Yes. There are people who get 100% in even these public examinations. Is it possible to get 100% when you stand before the Lord? Yes.

In 1 Corinthians 11, I think it's verse 30 which says if we judge ourselves, we will not be judged. That means if I judge myself every day, I'll get 100% at the judgment seat of Christ. Don't you want that? That's the only way to get 100% at the judgment seat of Christ.

You judge yourself every day when the Lord approves you and disciplines you. You say, Lord, why was that? Why did you do that to me? And the Lord will show you why he disciplined you. The Lord will show you when you read scripture and a word comes to you like a reproof.

See, don't just take the words of encouragement in scripture. Sometimes there's a word of reproof there. Don't say, oh, that's for somebody else.

That's also for me. Take it and say, Lord, what are you trying to tell me? That's the way you'll grow. So then you'll be without blame in the final day.

You'll get 100%. That's the meaning of without blame in holiness, verse 13. Before God at the coming of the Lord.

100%. My dear brothers and sisters, aim for that. Aim for 100% at the judgment seat of Christ.

That is my aim. I want to get to 100% at the judgment seat of Christ. I don't care, meanwhile, what people think.

Whether people think I'm getting 30% or 40% is absolutely unimportant. When Christ comes, if he tells me, well done, good and faithful servant, you are my beloved son in whom I am well pleased, that will be worth all the misunderstanding and rebuke that people gave. Live for that.

In order to get there, let's look at verse 12 again. Increase and abound in love for one another and for all people. That means begin with one another, then go to the outer circle of others as well.

Increase and abound in love. The part I wanted to show you is that first part. May the Lord cause you.

In other words, this is where I want to conclude. I have to come to God and say, Lord, I can't manage this. It's too much.

There are some people I just can't love. I say, Lord, if you can cause me to do it, I'll do it. Isn't that encouraging? May the Lord cause you to increase in love.

It's not just increase in love. I say, Lord, I can't. Oh, the Lord caused you to increase.

Oh, sure, Lord, if you want to do it in me, do it. And it's amazing if you come to the Lord like that and say, Lord, I find it difficult to increase in love for that person. There are wives who say, I find it difficult to love

my husband, difficult to love my wife because they are so selfish and they don't care about me.

I tell you, go to this verse. And Lord, you cause me to increase in love for my husband and increase in love for my wife. Maybe you find a very rebellious child and you feel like hitting him and turning him out of the house.

May the Lord cause you to increase in love for your rebellious child, for your wayward son or daughter. Ask God to cause you, that means do a work in you where he makes you love supernaturally what you cannot do yourself. To me, that's the wonderful thing about the New Covenant.

In the Old Covenant, it would be abound in love. Just go ahead. Abound in love for another and for all people.

But in the New Covenant, it is different. May the Lord cause you to abound in love. This is the fundamental difference between Old Covenant and New Covenant.

Old Covenant is a commandment and the New Covenant is I will write my law in your heart, in your mind. In other words, I will make you do it. Turn to Philippians 2 verse 13.

Very, very important verse. You'll never find this verse in the Old Testament. God is at work inside you.

Whenever you read in the New Testament that God is at work inside you, it's the work of the Holy Spirit. Outside God the Father works all things for our good. That's His work.

Inside us the Holy Spirit works to do what? First of all to choose God's will and second to do God's will. Let me paraphrase that. To will and to work is good pleasure means God works in you through the Holy Spirit to choose His will and to do His will.

Both. First of all, let me ask you. I'm sure many of you sitting here you really have a desire to do the will of God.

Isn't that right? I believe so. I really believe you want to obey the scriptures. I really believe you want to do the will of God.

Do you humbly acknowledge? Let me ask you. This is a difficult question. Do you humbly acknowledge that it is not you but God who put that desire in you? You've got to be very arrogant and proud to think that you desire to do God's will.

Absolute nonsense. Why is it people in your family don't have a passion to do God's will like you have? Why is it some of your relatives have no interest like you have to do the will of God completely? Don't be proud and think that you are so special that you had that desire. No! It's God who worked in you to choose His good pleasure to will His will.

If you don't humbly acknowledge that, you will not get grace for the next step. And maybe that is the reason why you never got grace to do His will because you assume that you are the one who desire to do His will. At least today acknowledge that even that desire to do God's will was planted by God.

I say, Lord, I can't take any credit for it. I can't take any credit over my family members or anybody else that I have a desire to do God's will. You put that desire in me.

Acknowledge that every day of your life. And secondly, if God put that desire in you, He says in the same verse He will give you the power to do it. He works in you to will and then to actually do it.

So if He did the first part, how is He going to leave out the second part? Impossible! It's like two legs you stand on. God didn't make you born with one leg. He makes you desire His will and do His will.

That is new covenant. In the old covenant it was only, I desire to do your will. Let me show you that.

Psalm 40. This is the Psalm of David, the man after God's own heart. You see what he said.

Psalm 40 and verse 8. This is 1,000 years before Christ a man could say I delight to do your will oh my God, your law is within my heart. Do you say that? Good! You've come as far as the old covenant. You've come as far as Psalm 40.

You've come as far as 1,000 BC. I delight to do your will. Why don't you actually do it? You say, oh I want to do it, but I don't do it.

Well, you're an old covenant Christian. That's all. You're living in 1,000 years before Christ.

That's here. I delight to do your will. Your law is within my heart.

Lord, your commandments are in my heart. And I delight to do them. But David said, the only thing is I can't do them.

When I see Bathsheba, I forget all about your commandments. Even though your law is in my heart, I just can't do it. That is old covenant Christianity.

When I sit in front of my computer, I forget about how pure I'm supposed to keep myself. Uh-huh. But in the new covenant, the same verse, exactly the same verse, is quoted in Hebrews in chapter 10.

See how it's quoted here. Psalm 40, verse 8, is quoted here. Like this.

Psalm 40 is quoted in Hebrews 10, verse 7, as Behold, I've come. This is referring to Jesus. Behold, I've come.

In the role of the book it is written to me, to do your will, O God, not to delight in your will. To do your will. And again it's repeated in verse 9. Behold, I've come to do your will.

That, Psalm 40 in Hebrews 10, you see the difference between old covenant and new covenant. Old covenant was, I delight to do your will. Your law is within my heart.

But Lord, when I actually come to time of temptation, I don't do it. Get out of that old covenant and say, Lord, work in me. May the Lord cause you to abound in love.

Trust the Lord to do it. The Lord who gave you that desire, if you are humble enough to acknowledge that even the desire came from God, then God will give you grace to actually do it. Lord, I've come to do your will.

Behold, I've come to do your will. It's repeated twice. And we are to walk as Jesus walked.

Because it says there verse 5, when he comes into the world, that is the beginning of the new covenant, he opened a new and living way where he not only delighted to do the will of God like David, but actually did it. When you delight to do the will of God, you're following David. When you actually do it, you're following Jesus.

And I think most Christians in the world are only following David without even knowing it. And they think they're very spiritual when they follow David. They're ignorant.

I don't despise them. They haven't heard about the new covenant. But we have heard.

So I say, Hebrews 3.12 says, may the Lord cause you to abound in love towards him and towards one another. And increase and abound so that when he comes again, you'll get 100%. That is our goal.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we pray that these things will never remain just theory. Lord, but become real in the coming days in our life to believe that you who planted a desire in our heart to please you and do your will, will also complete that work and give us that other leg to stand on to do your will.

Because both are your work. We open ourselves to the Holy Spirit. We want to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

We want to die to our own choices and give us grace even for that so that we can do your will. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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