

Judging Ourselves in God's Presence

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of living a Christ-like life rather than just speaking about Christianity. It highlights the need for believers to manifest the life of Christ through their actions and attitudes, focusing on being an aroma of Christ to others. The message encourages constant self-examination, seeking to purify oneself and discover hidden areas that need transformation to reflect the likeness of Christ.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 2:14, 1 Corinthians 4:4, Psalms 36:9, Luke 18:1, 1 John 3:2

Topics: "Living a Christ-like Life", "Self-Examination and Transformation"

Description

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Transcript

One of the great dangers we all face is of thinking of our Christian witness more in terms of what we speak and share and testify or perhaps understand, but that's not the main thing. When you look at the life of Jesus, who's our example always, you're told to look unto Jesus and run the race. You see that 90% of his life, we don't know that he preached or spoke anything.

It was the life that he lived. We read that life was the light of man. And so we must concentrate more on seeing whether that life of Christ is being manifested in us more than how much we speak.

Most Christians speak a lot. Their life is very often about 10% of what they speak. That proportion is completely wrong.

Our life should be 90% and speak 10%. So I want to turn to verse in 2nd Corinthians in chapter 2 and verse 14 and 15. Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ.

Now, since Paul was inspired by the spirit, I believe that's the truth, that in his life, he was always led in triumph in Christ. But he gives glory to God for it. He thanks be to God who leads us like that and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of him.

Not an aroma of how spiritual a man Paul is, but of the knowledge of Jesus. If you examine your heart, we all examine our hearts, we may see within us a desire to present ourselves as spiritual people who know the Lord and to be respected and appreciated by others. But that wasn't Paul's desire.

His desire was that the knowledge of Christ would be manifested through him. He says in verse 15, we are a fragrance of Christ. Among those who are being saved are those who are perished.

To the one we are an aroma of death, to the other an aroma of life. And that is a challenge, to be an aroma of death to some people. Those who are interested in popularity with everybody will never want that.

They will only want to be accepted. And the fact is, when Jesus came into the world, he was an aroma of life to some, but an aroma of death to most people. That's why they killed him.

And if it is really the life of Christ that we are manifesting, we'd be an aroma of life, a fragrance of life to those who really want to be saved from sin. But to all the others, it may be an offense. They'll be offended with us.

And if ungodly people are not offended with us, there's something wrong. So it's this fragrance of Christ that has to be manifested in us. It is God's will and we cannot produce it.

It says it is of God. Thanks be to God who leads us in triumph. And he's the one who produces that fragrance and that's through the Holy Spirit.

But we have a part to play in that. And that primarily is to make sure that we keep our conscience always clean every single moment. That we don't have anything on our conscience at any time that's not said right.

Paul said in his first letter to the Corinthians, these words in 1 Corinthians 4, chapter 4, he says, I'm, chapter 4, verse 4, I'm conscious of nothing against myself. That's the way he lived. That there was not a single thing that he was ever aware of that he felt guilty about.

Not that he was perfect or had become like Christ, but according to his conscience, it was clear. I'm not aware of anything in my life against myself. And I believe that we should aim for that.

We should come to that place where every single day of our life, we can live saying, I'm conscious of nothing against myself. But he says, I'm not by this, I quit it. Because the Lord still sees in me a whole lot of things that are unlike Christ.

So in the first part of that verse, he's speaking about his conscious life. I am conscious. And then the second part, he's talking about the unconscious part of us, which is about 90% of us, where there's a whole lot of un-Christ-likeness.

He says, well, that the Lord examines me and I'm not acquitted, which means I'm not perfect. But consciously, we must always live every single moment of every day, aware of nothing in our life that has to be set right. Nothing we have wronged anybody or done wrong, which we are not set right with God and man.

Every single day. That's our part. And if we do that, then God will manifest the fragrance of Christ in us.

But like we've often said, we must seek to discover, and the Holy Spirit will show us those areas of our life that are unconscious. And the illustration I've always used is of an ice cube in a glass of, say, some deeply colored juice where you can't see the bottom part of that ice cube. 90% is below the surface and you can't see it.

It's only 10% of that ice cube that you can see. And that's a picture of conscious and unconscious part of us. And God doesn't ask us to deal with that 90% we don't see.

A lot of people with a false humility say, well, I'm not like Christ. Nobody's like Christ. That's true.

Nobody's like Christ. But you should still be able to say that consciously, I don't know, I'm not aware of anything in my life that's contrary to the spirit of Christ. And if that is not true, we have to work on it.

Because I'm not going to get light on the unconscious part if I don't work on the conscious. It's like if you slice off that top 10% of the ice cube to move it, then a little part of that ice cube which is underneath will come up. Another 10% will come up.

But that will never come up if you don't deal with that top 10%. So we are aware of areas in our life right now that we are always deluded by. You spend your whole life never discovering those unconscious areas.

That's why we've got to take seriously the areas of our life where we have light and ask God to give us light. And be radical in dealing with it and cleansing ourselves. And one way to know that for myself, I ask myself, over a period of time, am I getting light on areas in my life which I never had light on before? Let's say in the last one year.

Have I got light in some area which I never realized was unchristly? I wouldn't say sin, because sometimes sin is a strong word. You think, oh, we're not sinning. But some unchristlike area in our life which we never got light on before.

We should be getting that all the time. And if a whole year goes by and I've never discovered anything unchristlike in me that I didn't know before, it's like a child who's sitting in the same class forever. He's getting 100%.

But he's forever sitting in the first grade and getting 100%. Better to go in the second grade and get 50%. But to forever sit in the first grade and say, I'm getting 100%.

And 10 years later, I'm still in the first grade, getting 100%. I've seen believers like this. Yeah, they're not doing anything wrong, but there's no development in their life.

There's no growth in the process. So how does that happen? It's what we have often spoken about in the church. 1 Peter chapter 4 and verse 17.

It's time for judgment to begin with the household of God. And it begins with us first. So where must judgment begin? Judgment must begin with the family of God.

In the family of God, there must be judgment first. So the mark of a man who's in God's family is not that he sits in RACF. It's that he judges himself first before he judges anybody else.

He's not going to judge anybody else. But he judges himself. It's the mark of those who are in the household of God.

And why do I need to judge myself constantly? Because I might become fully like Christ. The one who stopped judging himself is the one who imagined that he'd become like Christ. So we can ask ourselves, is there some area where I've never seen a judge like Christ where there would be more Christ-like? If we keep judging ourselves, it says here in 1 Corinthians 11, that the day will come, 1 Corinthians chapter 11, when God says, 1 Corinthians 11.21, we will not be judged anymore.

If we judge ourselves rightly, there'll be absolutely nothing that God has to judge about us. That should be our goal. If God has to judge something in us, then we will not judge ourselves rightly.

But having said that, I have to say this. There's a lovely verse in Psalm 36. Psalm 36.

And verse 9. The second part of that verse says, Lord, in your light, we will see that. It's only in the light of God that I can get light on myself correctly. Not otherwise.

And one of the classic examples of that in the Old Testament is Isaiah, where he was a prophet. Part of the mercy of a prophet is to expose the sins of other people. And he did that in Isaiah chapter 5. He'll say, woe unto the people who are just multiplying poverty.

Woe unto those, verse 11, who get drunk from early in the morning. And woe unto those who tell lies, verse 18, and keep on sinning. Woe unto those, verse 20, who call evil good and good evil.

Woe unto those, verse 21, who are wise in their own eyes. Woe unto those, verse 22, who get drunk. It is all correct.

Absolutely right. And it's inspired by God. It's put down in Scripture.

Spoke as a true prophet. But then one day, it says in chapter 6, verse 1, he saw the Lord. And when he looked at the Lord, he saw all the angels who had never sinned, covering themselves, hiding their face, hiding their feet.

And out of six wings, they were covering themselves with four of them. And flying with two, meaning there was more worship in their life than service. You think of flying in service, and covering themselves with worship.

There was 66% worship and 33%. 66% worship and 33% service. And then he realized how unholy he was.

But he thought the great thing is to serve God here, there, and everything, and congratulate himself that I'm serving God here, serving God there. He had absolutely no idea of how they worshiped in heaven and their holiness. And when he saw that, he said, oh, Lord, I'm ruined.

Woe is me. The guy who said, woe is everybody else, now turned around and said, woe is me. It's a very blessed day in your life when you see the Lord, and you say, woe is me.

In some area in my life, I said, Lord, I see, I'm unclean. In his case, he was convicted about the way he was speaking. And a man with unclean lips, unclean in, not that he was going around cracking filthy jokes, but he was unclean as he only saw the wholeness of God.

But his speech was not pure, because I've seen the thing. And when he did that, you know, if we judge ourselves, the serpent flew and immediately cleansed him. He said, your iniquity is taken away, your sin is forgiven.

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, verse 9, go and tell these people. So the only one who is qualified to go and tell others is the one who is living in a constant cleansing of himself in the presence of the Lord. And the others may speak, but they're not commissioned by the Lord to speak, they speak on their own.

There's a world of difference when the Lord commissioned you to speak. You go out and speak on your own. A lot of people don't understand the Bible, they can go and speak out on their own.

But it's a very different thing when the Lord says to you, you have cleansed yourself. The fire from the altar is coming now go and speak on my behalf. So as I said, to come to that place, we have to live in the presence of the Lord and allow the Lord to show us things in our life that we must have a passion for being cleansed from so that we can speak the word of the Lord from a pure heart.

And in this connection, I would like to point you to the parable that Jesus spoke in Luke 15. Because any area of impurity or uncleanness in our life is an area where the devil's got a foothold. The devil couldn't have any foothold in Jesus' life.

But he has a foothold in the lives of many believers. And in that connection, we think of this parable that Jesus spoke in Luke 18, a widow who came to a judge who wanted to see if the judge didn't fear God or respect man. And what the widow was asking was, give me legal protection for my opponent.

And I picture in my mind a widow who doesn't have a husband to defend her. She doesn't have a son to go and represent her before the judge or a daughter. She has to go herself.

It's a picture of utter helplessness. And that's the picture that Jesus knew of us believers. Utter helplessness against the devil.

And we can see how all the areas in our life that the devil made inroads in our life. We've been careless. And it looks as if we don't have power against him.

There's only one way we can solve the problem. I think of this widow like someone who's been inherited some land, house from her husband and all that property. But next door to her is this enemy who says, well, this is a helpless widow.

I can just keep on pushing my boundary more and more and more and occupy her land. And it looks as if nobody's coming to the defense of this widow. And so she has to go to the judge herself.

And remember, this is a picture of Jesus, a picture of a Christian. A Christian is like a helpless widow. Because that's the picture of going to God and saying, God, here's my enemy occupying areas of my life that he shouldn't be occupying.

It's legally mine, because the purchase on the cross is legally mine, this land. Every part of my life is legally belonging to God, because he purchased me to be totally pure, my eyes to be totally pure, my thoughts to be totally pure, my speech to be totally pure. It's purchased.

It's not a favor we are doing to God when we give that to him. It's purchased on the cross. That's the meaning of redeem.

Redeem is purchased from the slave market. Now, Lord, give me my legal rights, because the enemy is occupying areas of my life that belong to you. And here in the parable, the judge doesn't do anything.

He doesn't bother. So she keeps on testing him. I can picture her going to the judge's house at 2 o'clock in the morning.

And at different times, she'll find that the judge got fed up and said, okay, she's continually coming to me, and wearing me out. So I'll give her that legal protection. And the picture here is of a believer who feels exactly helpless like a widow, but determined to possess, not to let any part of that possession, not even one square inch of her rightful property to go to the enemy.

I wonder if you are like that. I said, Lord, I don't want even one square inch of my life to go into the enemy's hand. Nothing, nothing, nothing, all of Christ.

And the encouragement here is, he was saying that parable to teach us in verse 1, that we are always to pray at all times, and never lose heart if you have not conquered in some area, in some area in your life that's still defeated. He says, keep praying, keep going to God like a widow, and never lose heart, never give up, never get disturbed. Because he says here, and finally the judge did something for the widow, and he says in verse 7, if that unrighteous judge who couldn't care less for man or God could do that, don't you think God, your loving father, will bring about justice for his elect? Not just the supreme to the elect, but he cried to him day and night.

It's always challenging. Is there a cry in me day and night, that no part of me that has been purchased by Christ on the cross, should be occupied by the devil? No part of me. And that's where we judge ourselves and say, hey, there's some part of me which is not glorifying Christ.

Some part of my speech, or the type of books and magazines I read, or the type of things you watch on television, or anything in your life which is not glorifying Christ, maybe some financial transaction which is not 100% upright. And it's an area the devil's got possession, the devil's got a grip on many, many, many believers. And those believers are happy that they go to meet him, and they got the right doctrine, and they understand everything, and they think everything is okay.

But in their daily life, the devil's got a grip in different areas. And they say I'm weak. A very common expression I've heard from many believers, they would write emails to us, and they would say personally, I'm so weak, I can't come to it.

This widow is weak. Jesus always pictured believers as weak. Sheep.

Sheep are among the weakest of animals. And he said, you're like sheep. You're like a widow.

You're supposed to be weak. So that we ask God for help, and don't depend on ourselves. Those who don't ask God for help constantly are the people who think they're pretty strong.

They're not widows. They're strong people. They say, I can handle myself.

And they're defeated day after day after day. And all they do is increase in knowledge. Increasing knowledge is like blowing up a balloon, hollow, empty balloon that rises higher and higher and higher.

There's nothing there. But solid Christianity is where I don't allow any part of my life to be swayed or controlled. And that is connected to what I said earlier about judging ourselves.

We judge ourselves, say, Lord, show me, show me something that I haven't seen yet. Show me part of the hidden part of that ice cube, an unconscious life, that I can discover it constantly, constantly. And the Lord says in verse 7, don't you think God will bring justice for his elect? Justice means to give us what we deserve, because Christ has purchased it.

But his elect are not just those who glory in the fact that Christ chose me, but who cry day and night. We delay long over them, I tell you, he will bring about justice or victory for them quickly. So I believe it's God's will that he should give us quickly in any area.

But it's only for those who cry to him day and night. We have such a desperate longing. In a way, we would cry out if my wife is dying of cancer and the doctor is giving her one week to live.

Well, we really cry out then for a child seriously sick. And to cry to him day and night like that, you know, everybody in our family is healthy, but we are defeated by sin in some area, in our thoughts, our attitude. We're not getting any light on the hidden areas, men are always afraid.

And if we do cry to him day and night, he will bring about justice for them quickly. There won't be a delay. God wants to help us very quickly.

If there's any delay, it's not on God's part, it's on our part. And then he concludes by saying, but when Christ comes back, when you find people with such faith, a matter of faith, to believe that it's not God's will that I should be defeated in any area. I must be an overcomer by conquering the giants of Canaan.

It's not all in one moment, one by one by one by one. But it is never God's will that any giant should be defeated. I can't kill the giants I've not seen.

You know, when the children of Israel went into Canaan, they could only kill the giants they could see. There's a whole lot of giants occupying other parts of Canaan, they haven't even seen them, they're not responsible for that. But the giants that you see, the ones in Jericho, the first area, deal with that.

Make sure that you finish with that and move on to new territory. Then you discover another giant. That's how you change the illustration of discovering unconscious things.

Another new giant that I never knew existed, and I deal with that. And that is how God leads us from glory to glory. The Bible speaks about our development from glory to glory.

And the aroma of Christ that we've looked at, first of all, becomes more and more, without any sound even, when it manifests in our life. So I believe that should be the passion of our hearts, that we pursue that, and we seek with all of our hearts in the days to come, that light in areas of our life that we haven't seen. To the extent of the areas where, the extent of the fact that we're not zealous to pursue that.

And then one more verse, 1 John chapter 2. In fact, the whole of the New Testament really speaks about this, and if you look for it, there's so many places where it speaks about this. This is what it means to follow Jesus, really. 1 John chapter 2, verse 2. Beloved, we are the children of God, and that's here.

But it does not yet appear what we will be, what God wants to transform us, which is into the total likeness of Christ. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him. We will see Him just as He is.

And if you have this hope, you will purify yourself until you reach the standard of purity. And the only person who is not purifying himself is the one who imagines he's already fully like Christ. He's arrogant and conceited.

We all readily admit that we have not become like Christ. And I said, then what are you doing about it? That's the question I have. You admit you're not like Christ, then what are you doing about it? Are you doing something to discover areas in your life that you don't see yet? Or are you satisfied with the area that we see? Okay.

I'm getting 100% in first grade. 10 years later, I'm getting 100% in first grade. I've not learned one new thing in mathematics or science or any area, just the same old area.

That's not God's will. That's not God's will in education of a child. And that's not God's will in spiritual education of ourselves.

There must be a progress in discovery. It says here, everyone who has the soul, verse three, purifies himself until he reaches the standard of Jesus purity. And this is the primary thing that distinguishes the pre-church from Babylon.

It's not a doctrine of how zealous we are in different activities, but whether we are purifying ourselves is a passion until we become like Christ. And that's not going to happen until we come together. So that means we do that every day.

I've heard of people, you know, when we emphasize this in our church, back in India, people say, well, you're a bunch of people purifying yourselves all the time. Now, is that a crime? According to John 3.3, anyone who believes that Christ is coming again, who has this hope, purifies himself. In fact, for those who don't purify themselves, they're acting as if they don't have any hope that Christ is coming again to make them like him.

There's only one proof that you believe that Christ is coming again. It's not just what you confess. Everyone who has this hope purifies himself.

That's the proof that you have this hope. If Christ is coming and we're going to be like him, may the Lord help us in that.

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