

(Knowing God's Way) 1. Knowing God's Ways

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of knowing God's ways and living by the principle of sacrifice in order to build the church and serve God.

Topics: "Sacrificial Love", "Knowing God"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the importance of knowing God's ways rather than merely observing His actions, as true eternal life is found in a deep relationship with God and Jesus Christ. He critiques the tendency of many Christians to focus on external miracles and material blessings, which reflects spiritual immaturity. Poonen argues that understanding God's nature involves recognizing the principle of sacrifice, as demonstrated in the lives of biblical figures like Abraham and Jesus. He challenges believers to examine their hearts for self-righteousness and to cultivate a sacrificial love that mirrors God's love for humanity. Ultimately, he calls for a commitment to knowing God deeply, which transforms our lives and relationships.

Transcript

"God made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the sons of Israel" (Psa.103:7).

"This is eternal life that they may know Thee the only true God and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent" (Jn.17:3).

There is a lot of difference between observing God's actions (even His miracles) and understanding His ways.

Most Christians observe only God's actions. They are impressed by external miracles. They eagerly seek for healing and for material blessings. Most of their prayers too are related to such earthly matters, in which they want to see God act on their behalf and bless them in the physical realm. This is because they are in a state of spiritual babyhood.

The Bible says that eternal life is "to know God and Jesus Christ" (Jn.17:3).

Eternal life does not refer to eternal existence. Eternal life is but another phrase for God's life and nature.

Eternal existence will be experienced by all human beings - even by those who go to hell. But very few enjoy eternal life. The more we know God and the Lord Jesus the more we will have of eternal life.

In the days of Moses, only Moses could understand God's ways. Today, under the new covenant, that privilege is offered to all of us.

Yet very, very few know God and His ways, because most believers are taken up only with God's external actions. And when they experience an external miracle like getting a job, or earning more money, or getting a new house, or finding a wife or a husband, or experiencing healing, they are excited and are quick to testify about these matters, because these are the greatest things in life for them.

If these are the things that still excite us, then we have not seen the glory of the new covenant.

One mark of those who are mature is that they are NOT taken up with God's external acts as much as with knowing God and understanding His ways.

It is only when we understand God and His ways that we will be able, for example, to understand what "worldliness" really is.

Many believers think of worldliness as something external, such as wearing lipstick and ornaments and fancy clothes or having expensive electronic gadgets in the home etc.,

But Romans 12:2 makes it clear that conformity to the world is found in a person's mind. It is in a person's mind that he has to resist conformity to the world and to be renewed so as to understand the perfect will of God.

A person may get rid of all the external marks of worldliness and have a good testimony before men, and yet be thoroughly worldly in his way of thinking.

Most believers' definition of "worldliness" depends on their own standard of living!! They feel that whatever they themselves possess of this world's goods does not make them worldly. But if anyone possesses more than them then such a person IS worldly! And when their own standard of living goes up, their gauge of what is worldly is adjusted upwards accordingly!

But no believer is the perfect standard. Jesus alone is our Standard. To recognise worldliness, we must know Jesus Christ. Only in the light of His life can we see what is worldly and what is not.

The Pharisees became self-righteous in their pursuit of righteousness because they did not know God. They pursued righteousness without hungering and thirsting after God Himself.

We cannot get rid of Phariseeism merely by avoiding the acts of the Pharisees. We can, for example, hear of some of the marks of a Pharisee and perhaps get rid of those marks from our lives. But that would be only snipping off the fruit from a bad tree. The bad fruit will again appear on another branch.

A believer can spend his entire life merely snipping off various fruits of Phariseeism from his life and end up as a greater Pharisee at the end than he was at the beginning of his Christian life!

When we know God however, we will realise that the only way to be saved from self-righteousness is by chopping the tree down from the roots itself.

Consider the matter of the "healing crusades" that are conducted everywhere these days. Millions of rupees are collected for such crusades from gullible believers. It is rare to find a believer who can discern that there is nothing of the spirit of Christ in such commercialised "Christianity". When you know Jesus

Christ however, you will compare everyone who claims to be a servant of God with Jesus Himself.

In the light of Jesus' life it will become evident that there is no similarity at all between the Lord Jesus and these so-called "healers". But if you don't know Jesus Christ, many things that are done in such crusades can look very impressive to you, and you can be deceived.

The Holy Spirit has emphatically stated that in the last days there will be a flood of deceitful spirits invading the world, who will lead many astray (1 Tim.4:1). Jesus often warned His disciples to be careful that they were not deceived. He mentioned deception as the first sign of the end of the age (Matt.24:3,4). The only way to escape such deception is by knowing the Lord. Then we will be able to discern between what glorifies God and what does not.

Christian parents are often confused these days concerning what they should permit their children to do and what they shouldn't, what school programs are proper for their children to participate in and what are not, what type of clothes they should permit their daughters to wear, etc., etc.

Are we to just imitate the standards adopted by other godly brothers? The Bible seems to imply that imitating the actions of others can lead to our being drowned (See Heb.11:29). We are to imitate the faith of others not their actions (See Heb.13:7). We are to understand the principles by which a brother arrived at a decision, and not just imitate his actions.

Let me illustrate this with an example. I was told of a brother who, knowing that frugality was an essential part of godliness, used to put tooth-paste across only half of his tooth-brush, so that his tooth-paste tube would last twice as long. But you can imitate that practice every day and yet never become godly!! It is the principle of frugality that that brother lived by that we can imitate and not the measure of tooth-paste he used on his tooth-brush!! If your teeth are bad, you may need to use a full length of tooth-paste on your brush, even if you are a godly man!!

Our passion should be to know God better and better, because this is eternal life. We are going to spend all eternity getting to know God more and more. This is why eternity will not be boring for anyone whose passion is to know God. Our earthly life too will then not be boring any more.

Let us learn something of God's life and of His ways from Genesis 2, in the way He dealt with Adam. There we see that it was God Who saw Adam's need for a wife and Who met that need and made a wife for him. There we see what God's nature is like. God is always alert to the needs of people and does all that He can to meet those needs.

When we partake of this Divine nature, we too will become like that - always alert to the needs and problems of those around us and doing everything we can in order to meet those needs!

This will involve a great deal of sacrifice on our part often. We need therefore to ask ourselves whether we are willing to pay this price for partaking of the Divine nature.

Our Adamic nature is the exact opposite of this Divine nature. The life of Adam is thoroughly selfish and makes us alert only to our own needs and to the needs of our own family members. In fact it is so full of selfishness and jealousy that it does not want the needs of others to be met even by another. On the contrary. it enjoys seeing people suffer.

When man sinned, God placed cherubs in front of the tree of life with a sword that turned in every direction to guard the way to that tree. The tree of life symbolises eternal life - knowing God.

Through this sword placed in front of the tree of life, God was symbolically showing Adam that if anyone now wanted to partake of the tree of life, he had to first experience the sword falling on his own selfish life.

We read in Genesis 3:21 that as soon as Adam and Eve sinned, God killed an animal in Eden and clothed them with coats of the skin of that animal. There too God was teaching them the same lesson - that the only way for them to be clothed now was through the way of sacrifice and death. Adam and Eve had tried to clothe themselves at first without any "death" - with just fig leaves. But God threw those leaves away and showed them the right way to be clothed.

So we see right from the beginning God emphasising sacrifice as the way for man to fellowship with Him and to be clothed with His nature.

God told Cain that his fundamental problem was that he "did not intend well" towards his brother Abel (Gen.4:7 margin).

Jude speaks of those who walk in "the way of Cain" (Jude 11). Who are they? They are those who do not intend well towards their brothers.

It is good for all of us to have a spiritual check-up in this matter.

Can you honestly say that you desire the very best for all the brothers and sisters in your local church and for their families? Can you also say that you desire the very best for other believers whom you know in other denominations? Then widen the circle still further and ask yourself if you desire the very best for all the people whom you know, including your relatives, your enemies and those who have harmed you in any way.

If you find a disturbance in your heart (instead of a rejoicing) when something good happens to another person or to his children, or if you sense a rejoicing in your heart (instead of a grief) when something evil happens to him or his family, what do such attitudes indicate? Just this that the life of Adam is alive and active in you.

If you are honest with yourself, you will soon discover whether you are walking the way of Cain or not. You must be quick when you see that evil Adamic life within you to put it to death, if you want the fire and the anointing of God to rest upon you constantly.

It is when the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies TOTALLY, that there will be much fruit. One who dies totally to himself will never get offended, no matter what others do or don't do. He will always intend well towards all. He will never get angry in any matter that concerns himself and he will never quarrel with anyone. He will never shed a single tear for himself in self-pity - for, surely, dead people don't weep in their graves!!

Cain's face was sullen and dark when he did not intend well towards his brother (Gen.4:6). We may not realise it, but the attitude we have in our hearts is often reflected on our faces. If you intend well towards all, your face will always beam with the joy of the Lord.

Many believers are walking in the way of Cain. Beneath their weak smiles and the "Praise the Lord"s that come from their lips, are found wrong attitudes towards their fellow-believers.

When people turn against you and do evil to you, God uses them to give you a scan of your real heart condition. If you cannot love them, your heart- scan will show that you have NOT partaken of God's nature, for God's nature is one that loves even His enemies. Jesus intended well even towards Judas Iscariot.

God desires the very best for all people. The gospel message is that we too can partake of this nature. Those who haven't understood the gospel thus haven't understood the gospel at all.

When Adam and Eve sinned, God did not curse them. He cursed the serpent. But to Adam and Eve, He gave that wonderful promise of the coming of Christ as "the seed of the woman" (Gen.3:15) to crush the serpent's head. In the process, Christ's heel itself would be bruised. That would be the price He paid in order to save Adam's race from their sins.

This is Divine love - a love that is willing to lay down its life in order to save the one it loves.

When we see the depth of the love of God, we see how far short of it we come ourselves. We can never produce this life of God ourselves, even if we strive after it for a million years. It has to be given to us by God. The Holy Spirit has come down to flood our hearts with this love (Rom.5:5).

Only one who is willing to live by this principle of sacrificial love can be used by God to build His church on earth.

In 2 Chronicles 3:1, we read that "Solomon began to build the house of the Lord on Mount Moriah". Mount Moriah was the place where Abraham had offered his son Isaac to God (Gen22). There on that mountain Abraham understood God's way as the way of sacrifice and submitted to it. God sanctified that spot and determined that His house would be built on that very spot 1000 years later. And this is where God builds His house (the church) even today - wherever he finds those who have the spirit and the faith of Abraham.

On Mount Moriah, Abraham was symbolically saying exactly the opposite of what Adam and Eve had told God in Eden.

In Eden, Adam and Eve as it were, told God by their action of eating the forbidden fruit that created things that brought them pleasure were more precious to them than the Creator Himself. And that is exactly what billions of human beings are saying to God even today. "They worship and serve created things more than the Creator" (Rom.1:25).

But on Mount Moriah, Abraham said the opposite: that his God and his Creator was more precious to him than his dearest possession on earth (Isaac). And he was willing to sacrifice Isaac in order to prove it. God will honour all who live by this principle of sacrifice. It is by those who have been gripped by this way that the true house of God is going to be built even today.

On Calvary's hill, it was not only true that Jesus died for the sins of the world. There, Jesus demonstrated the principle of sacrifice by which God does all His work. No-one can serve the Lord in any other way.

Those who seek for a comfortable life in this world and at the same time want to build the church also, will only deceive themselves. Those who seek the best of both worlds have been deceived by Satan

thoroughly. Many have attempted to serve God without sacrifice. Their labours however have been crowned with failure after failure!!

"Christ loved the church and gave HIMSELF for her" (Eph.5:25).

To build the church, we have to love the church in the same way. It is not enough to give our money or our time. We have to give OURSELVES - our Self- life.

When God wanted to describe His love to man, He could compare His love with only one earthly example - the love of a mother for her newly-born child (See Isaiah 49:15).

If you observe a mother, you will see that her love for her baby is full of the spirit of sacrifice. From early morning to late at night and right through the night, a mother sacrifices and sacrifices and sacrifices for her baby. And she gets nothing in return. She endures pain and inconvenience, year after year for her child, joyfully, expecting nothing in return. That is how God loves us too. And that is the nature He wants to impart to us.

But it is impossible to find a fellowship anywhere in the world about which it can be honestly said that they all love one another like that.

Most believers know only how to love those who agree with them and who join their group. Their love is human and is far removed from the sacrificial love of mothers!!

Yet Divine love is the goal towards which we should be striving. So each time we sing the above lines, we should not only honestly admit that our love is not yet like that, but also confess our hope and longing that our love will become like that one day.

A mother does not care whether others around her are sacrificing anything for her child or not. She joyfully sacrifices everything herself. In the same way, one who has seen the church as his own baby will not be bothered whether others around him are sacrificing anything for the church or not. He will sacrifice himself joyfully, and he will have NO complaint or demand against anyone else.

Those who complain that others are not sacrificing for the sake of the church are not mothers but hired nurses. Such nurses have fixed working hours and will complain when the nurse for the next 8-hour shift does not come on time.

But a mother does not work 8-hour shifts each day. She works a 24-hour shift daily - year after year - and she does not even get paid for it. Even when her child is 20 years old, the mother's work is not over!!

Only mothers can have milk for their babies every day. Nurses cannot produce milk for the babies they care for. In the same way, those who are like mothers in the church will always have a word for their spiritual children - in every meeting. Many elders have no word for the church because they are nurses, not mothers.

A mother does not expect any payment from her children. No child ever pays its mother for her service. In fact, if you were to calculate the wages a mother should be paid, at the rate of Rs.20 per hour (as paid to nurses), you will find that every child owes its mother more than 3 million rupees, by the time it is 20 years old!! Which child can ever repay such an amount to its mother?

Now the question that comes to us is: Who is willing to work like that for the Lord and for His church - without receiving any payment, but giving oneself, day after day, year after year, until Jesus comes?

If God can find just one person with that spirit anywhere, He will use him to build the church, much more than He can use 10,000 half-hearted believers who try to serve Him without the spirit of sacrifice.

When Jesus returns to earth and you stand before Him, will you have any regrets over the way you lived, or will you will be able to look back over a life spent usefully for the kingdom of God?

Many are drifting along and wasting their lives on earth.

Wake up before it is too late, and ask God to show you that His way is the way of sacrifice.

He who has ears to hear let him hear.

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