

(Knowing God's Way) 16. a Clean Heart and a Pure Life

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen emphasizes the importance of manifesting God's life through integrity, submission, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit for a clean heart and pure life.

Scripture: Proverbs 24:3, Matthew 5:16, Luke 15:11, John 9:5, Romans 12:17, 1 John 4:12

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Christian Integrity"

Description

Zac Poonen preaches about manifesting the life of God by being the light of the world as ordained by Jesus, emphasizing the need to reflect the divine nature through our actions and relationships. He highlights the importance of integrity of heart, showcasing King Abimelech's example of integrity and the significance of maintaining a pure heart before God. Poonen also discusses the concept of repeated testings, drawing from Abraham's faithfulness in various trials and the need for believers to endure in love till the end. Additionally, he addresses the importance of listening to the voice of the Spirit for personal guidance and the significance of submitting to and exercising spiritual authority in a godly manner.

Transcript

Manifesting The Life Of God

Our Lord said that while He was in the world He was the light of the world (Jn.9:5). After Jesus left the world, he has ordained us to be the light of the world (Matt.5:16).

The light that Jesus brought was not some doctrine or teaching. It was not even the truth of the new covenant. It was His life that was the light - a life that manifested the divine nature.

We often use the expression "We got light on". We can glory in the fact that we have got light on the baptism in the Holy Spirit, victory over sin, etc., But the light that we need to manifest is the life of Jesus.

It is written twice in the New Testament that "no man has seen God at any time". First Jesus came and explained God to us (Jn.1:18). When Jesus put his arms around a leper, He was manifesting what God was like. When He chased the money changers out of the temple, again He manifested what God was like. He told His disciples that those who had seen Him had seen the Father. But Jesus has now gone to heaven.

Now if we love one another, God dwells in us and people will be able to see God in the church, as they saw Him in Jesus (1 Jn.4:12).

Those who observe us in the church should be able to know what Christ is like. If we have failed to reflect this light - the life of Jesus - through our lives, then we must acknowledge that we have failed in our primary calling.

None of us can reflect the light (life) of God in all its aspects and in all its fulness individually. But together as a church we can show forth to others the manifold wisdom of God. It is only as we bear the dying of Jesus in our bodies that we can manifest the life of Jesus too. In a home, if both husband or wife are willing to die to their Adamic life, what peace will reign in that home! No matter how heavily we are distressed, afflicted, persecuted or tempted, we should be able to say, "Death works in us, and life in you". That is our calling.

Integrity Of Heart

In Genesis 20, we read that King Abimelech took Abraham's wife Sarah to be part of his harem. However, in an unusual way that heathen king went off to sleep that night, without even touching her. Then God spoke to him in a dream and told him that he was a dead man because he had taken another man's wife. Abimelech told God boldly that it was "in the integrity of his heart" that he had taken her, for Abraham himself had said that she was his sister. God acknowledged that there was "integrity in Abimelech's heart", and told him that that was why He had kept him from sinning that night. When God can put a heathen king to sleep and thus keep him from sinning just because He saw integrity in his heart, how much more He will be able to keep us under the new covenant. But what He looks for is integrity of heart. If a heathen king can have integrity of heart to such an extent that even God could acknowledge it to be so, it shouldn't be difficult for us to have the same.

Let us pursue integrity of heart then. It is because God does not see this in many believers that He does not keep them from falling.

Repeated Testings

God tested Abraham again and again and he was found faithful each time. After many trials in which Abraham was faithful, God tested him again, fifty years after first calling him in Ur, and asked him to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. Again he obeyed God wholeheartedly, just as he had done 50 years earlier.

God does not stop testing us just because we've been faithful for many years. Only one who endures to the end in love who will be saved.

God may test us through our being rejected by our fellow-believers. It is written about Jesus that "He came to His own and those who were His own did not receive Him" (Jn.1:11). If we are to receive the same education that Jesus received on earth, then we have to experience the rejection that He experienced, and we must respond in love as He did.

One young man who was gifted with the Word, found that one of the elders in his local assembly (who was 20 years older than him) was jealous of his ministry and would not permit him to preach, and made him sit quietly in the meeting. This was the test of rejection. The young man submitted to the elder's authority without any rebellion, and maintained a good relationship with him. Thirty years later, when he was a much older man, God tested him again in the same area. God arranged a situation, where again he was

not allowed to speak in an assembly. Again he sat quietly in the meeting, submitting to the elders without any rebellion, and maintaining a good relationship with them - even though this time the elders were 20 years younger than him!

God will test all of us in many ways until the end of our lives.

Listening To The Voice Of The Spirit

There are many times in our lives when we have to take decisions but are not sure exactly what we should do. There are many matters on which the Scriptures are silent. At the same time, we cannot always find a godly brother whom we can go to, for advice.

Whenever we have to justify our actions by saying that some godly brother had done things like that or that he had said that it was all right for us to do something, that by itself would prove that what we are doing is being done with a bad conscience.

God has given us the Holy Spirit to guide each of us personally.

For example, a sister may hear an exhortation in the meeting not to love the world. That is a very general exhortation, that does not deal with anything specific. The New Testament gives us only such general exhortations. What should she do then if she has to decide whether or not to wear a gaudy, expensive saree to a wedding-reception. Her mind may give her many reasons why she should wear that saree. But the Holy Spirit will examine her motive and may tell her that she is dressing like that only to seek honour from her worldly friends and relatives. The Spirit will be faithful to tell her the truth. But He will not force her to obey. The final decision will be hers.

The anointing of the Spirit will teach us about many things that no brother or sister in the church can ever teach us about. But we must be careful to listen to the Spirit. If we keep on rejecting that voice, He may stop speaking to us after a while. Then we will backslide and become worldly and carnal.

Submitting To Spiritual Authority

The church is not built by knowledge (doctrine) but by wisdom (Prov.24:3).

Wisdom will make a brother submit to all the authorities whom God has placed over him - whether at home, in the church or in society.

Jesus submitted to imperfect foster-parents (Joseph and Mary) throughout the years He was in Nazareth - just because that was what His heavenly Father wanted Him to do. The question there was not whether Joseph and Mary were perfect, but rather what the Father had appointed for Jesus. Joseph and Mary were no doubt God-fearing people. But we must not forget that they were under the old covenant and so were not under grace and therefore could not possibly have had victory over sin. They must have had fights with each other in their home and also had tensions between them - just like all couples have even today who have not entered into the new covenant. Yet the perfect Son of God submitted to those two imperfect people. His first steps were steps of submission to imperfect authorities.

Now if we are to walk along the same way, we too must be willing to submit to any authority whom God places over us - however imperfect they may be. That is why we teach children to submit to their parents. That is the first commandment for children; and God's promise to all who obey it is that "it will go well with

them". God places so much importance on submission to authority. So if we want it to go well with our children in life, we must teach them obedience.

In the same way, if we want it to go well with us, we too must submit to the imperfect spiritual authorities whom God places over us in the church. The elders who are over us in the Lord are certainly not perfect. But if we are certain that we are in the right local church, then we must submit to the elders appointed by God there. If however you are not sure that the local church you are in at present, is the right one, then you must seek God about leaving it.

But God will never approve of rebellion against authority.

We must not forget that the elders in our churches are battling to maintain a pure testimony for the Lord. That is certainly NOT an easy task. It is an easy task however for brothers and sisters in the church to see faults in their elders and to criticize them and rebel against them.

It is easy for those who have no children to find fault with the way others bring up their children! Those who are wise however will keep quiet, knowing how difficult it is to bring up children in godly ways.

It is also good for you to consider this first of all: Has God ever selected you to lead a church anywhere?

If God Himself has never considered you fit enough to exercise spiritual authority anywhere, why do you judge others to whom God has entrusted such spiritual responsibility? You are rebelling against God's appointment. Those elders may be imperfect in many ways. Yet God found them to be better than you! That is why He made them elders. They were the ones whom God selected first in that locality, long before you arrived on the scene. You may be just an immature rebel, full of bright ideas that have never been put into practice. If God has not given you grace to build even one local church for Him, then the wisest thing for you to do is to humble yourself under your elders and to be quiet.

There could however be serious problems with the elders in a church. In that case, you should speak about it with a mature older brother elsewhere who can help the situation, and not go around backbiting to others in the church. God can never bless those who sow discord or create confusion in a church. We must learn to remain under submission to the authorities appointed by God.

Exercising Spiritual Authority

Just as it is important to submit to spiritual authority in a godly way, in the same way it is equally important to exercise spiritual authority in a godly way. Many elders unfortunately exercise religious authority over their flock, not spiritual authority.

In the parable of the two sons (in Luke 15:11-32), we see this contrast in a clear way in the attitudes of the father and of the elder brother toward the prodigal son.

When the younger son repented of his wayward life and returned home, the father ran out to welcome him. This is a picture of the heart of God and of godly elder brothers, toward repentant sinners.

When the elder son saw the way in which his father welcomed his younger brother, he was so angry (an anger that grew out of jealousy) that he would not even go inside the house. His self-righteousness became evident in his actions and in his words. He would not even refer to his younger brother as his own brother. He told his father, "This son of yours". He despised his brother and imagined the worst about him

saying that he had lived with harlots (without verifying whether he had actually done so). That elder brother may have kept all his father's commandments and stayed faithfully in the father's house ("the church"). But his heart was so hard and ungodly. He was religious, not spiritual. He was so self-righteous and Pharisaical. And one proof of this was that he could not share the joy of his father.

Pharisees have a gloomy, stern righteousness - without any of the joy of the Holy Spirit. The Bible clearly says that the righteousness of God's kingdom is "a righteousness with peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom.14:17).

But we see that the father went out to plead with his Pharisaical elder son too. Godly elders (like the father in this story) are good towards both repentant sinners and Pharisees. All elders need to have a large heart like that. Only then can they exercise spiritual authority.

Just as it takes a long time to build a skyscraper, it takes much time, labour, sweat and tears to build a local church as the Body of Christ. And just as that skyscraper can be destroyed by a bomb in a few moments, it is easy to criticise the work that others have done, especially if we ourselves have not invested any sweat or tears to build that work.

Hidden Attitudes Will Be Exposed

If we do not do a thorough work of cleansing ourselves of all sin in our inner beings - especially of wrong attitudes towards those whom we have something against - such attitudes will one day destroy us like an inward cancer.

In the Old Testament, we read of a man called Shimei who was a relative of King Saul. When Saul died and David became king of Israel, this man kept a grudge against David deep down in his heart. He was not happy that David was ruling God's people, even though God Himself had anointed David as king. Shimei's envy and discontentment remained hidden in his heart for a long time, until the day that Absalom rebelled against his father, and David had to flee from Jerusalem (2 Sam.16:5-14). Then what was hidden in Shimei's heart came out. When David was fleeing for his life, Shimei came to David and not only accused him but also cursed him, called him a man of bloodshed who was now being judged by God and threw stones at him. It is only when others are in distress, that all that is hidden in our hearts comes out.

But David was gracious and overlooked Shimei's cursing. Later on when Absalom was killed and David returned as king, Shimei was afraid and ran to ask David for forgiveness. Again David was gracious and forgave him and promised that he would not kill him.

But it is obvious that David had not cleansed himself of his inner bitterness against Shimei. For just before he died, he told his son Solomon, "I forgave Shimei and promised not to kill him. But that promise doesn't bind you. You are a wise man and you can surely find some clever way of ensuring that Shimei is killed." As far as we know those were David's last words, just before he breathed his last (See 1 Kings 2:8-10). Thus he took vengeance on Shimei and died. What a sad way to die, after having been a man of God for so many years.

We cannot judge David by our standards, for he lived under the old covenant. Our calling is higher in the new covenant. Now we are exhorted not to repay evil for evil, for vengeance belongs to God (Rom.12:17-21).

It is important therefore that we search our hearts before God to see if there is the slightest desire for vengeance against anyone in our hearts.

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