

Make It Your Ambition to Please the Lord

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen emphasizes the importance of seeking God's approval over mere blessings by living a God-centered life.

Scripture: Luke 11:1, Romans 15:3

Topics: "Pleasing God", "Selflessness in Faith"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the importance of seeking God's approval over His blessings, highlighting that true spirituality involves living a life centered on God rather than oneself. He points out that many Christians remain self-centered, even in their religious practices, and often approach God with selfish motives. Poonen encourages believers to renew their minds to focus on what God desires from them, rather than what they can gain. He illustrates that true maturity in faith is demonstrated by a sacrificial, God-centered life, as exemplified by Jesus and the apostles. Ultimately, the goal is to have the testimony of pleasing God, akin to that of Enoch, rather than merely being blessed by Him.

Transcript

God's approval rested on Jesus when He was thirty years old, because of one reason: Jesus had faithfully overcome temptation during all those years. He had lived a life centered in His Father and not in Himself. He never did what pleased Himself (Rom. 15:3). At His baptism, the Father testified, "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased" and not "This is My well-beloved Son Whom I have blessed". The latter testimony would have meant nothing. It was the former, indicating God's approval, that meant everything for Jesus. To follow Jesus is to seek for the same testimony ourselves.

As children of Adam, we are all born self-centered. We grow up expecting everything to revolve around us and to serve us. When we get converted, we expect God also to serve us and bless us in various ways. We come to Him initially to be blessed with His forgiveness and then go on to seek the blessing of healing, answer to prayer, material prosperity, employment, housing, marriage partner, etc. But it is possible for our lives to be self-centered still, even when we are deeply 'religious' in our own and other people's eyes. God becomes just one more person in our 'orbit', and we seek to get what we can out of Him. The prodigal son came back in order to get food from his father; but the father still received him. God receives us even when our motives are utterly selfish. He loves us so much that He longs to receive us even when we come to Him with an obviously self-centered motive. His hope, however, is that we will mature quickly to realise that true spirituality is to partake of His own nature, which is to give rather than to receive. With the vast

majority of His children, however, God is never able to realise that purpose. They live and die in their self-centeredness thinking only of 'I', 'Me' and 'Mine' and of material and physical blessings.

To be mature is to have our mind renewed so that it is no longer centered on what we can get out of God, but rather on what God can get out of us in our one earthly life. This renewing of our mind is what brings transformation (Rom. 12:2). This is what qualified the 144000 (in Rev. 14) to stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion. True spirituality is not just getting victory over anger, irritability, lustful thoughts, love of money, etc. It is to cease living for oneself. It is to cease seeking our own - our own gain, our own comfort, our own convenience, our own will, our own rights, our own honour and even our own 'spirituality'.

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, He taught them a prayer that does not contain the words 'I', 'Me' or 'Mine' in it even once (Lk. 11:1-4). He taught us there to be concerned first about the Father's name, kingdom and will, and then to be concerned as much about our fellow believers (their material and spiritual welfare) as about ourselves ('us', 'us', 'us' and not 'me', 'me', 'me'). It is easy to learn that prayer 'by heart' and to repeat it like a parrot. But to learn that lesson in our heart requires that we truly forsake all and put God in the centre of our heart. The law that we will find most frequently in our members (Rom. 7:22), if we are honest in judging ourselves, will be the law of selfishness, the lust to seek our own convenience and our own rights all through life.

Jesus taught us to seek the kingdom of God first - that is to dethrone 'self' and to put God and His interests in the center of our life. Jesus gave up the comfort of heaven in order to do His Father's will on earth. Paul gave up the comfort of being a Christian businessman living luxuriously in Tarsus in order to be an apostle, facing hardships for the Lord. Every one of the apostles lived that sacrificial God-centred life. They gave their all for the promotion of God's kingdom on earth, unlike many of today's 'tourist preachers'.

A holiness that still leaves us seeking our own comfort and convenience is a false holiness - even if we have overcome anger and dirty thoughts. This is what many have not realised; and hence, Satan has been able to deceive them. Many Christians travel or migrate to different countries seeking conveniences and comfort and wealth. They can still have God's blessings upon their lives, but not God's approval - for no one can serve both God and mammon (that is wealth, pleasure, comfort, etc). If we think that God's blessing on our lives and on our children is an indication that He is also happy with us, then Satan has truly deceived us. God's blessing and God's approval are two totally different things. At the end of our earthly lives, the testimony that we have should be the testimony that Enoch had before he left the earth: "He pleased God" (Heb. 11:5). Only three words - but no one can have a more powerful testimony to his earthly life. This is the testimony that Jesus and Paul had. To merely have a testimony that 'He was blessed by God' is worth nothing, for millions of unbelievers too can have that testimony. God looks for those who will seek His approval, and not just His blessing.

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