

Not Knowing One's Wretchedness

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of humility and living before God's face to avoid self-sufficiency and pride, and to build the Body of Christ.

Scripture: Revelation 3:14

Topics: "Spiritual Humility", "Self-Awareness"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the danger of self-sufficiency and ignorance of one's spiritual wretchedness, as illustrated by the elder in Laodicea who believed he was rich and in need of nothing. Unlike the apostle Paul, who recognized his own wretchedness and lived in the light of God, the Laodicean elder was blind to his true condition, leading to a lukewarm and carnal life. Poonen warns that gifted preachers can fall into arrogance, speaking from a place of self-sufficiency rather than humility, which does not build the Body of Christ. He stresses that true spiritual growth comes from recognizing our need for God and maintaining a humble spirit. Ultimately, it is the poor in spirit who can genuinely contribute to the kingdom of God.

Transcript

The elder in Laodicea (Rev.3:14-22) was rebuked strongly by the Lord for a number of reasons. He felt he was rich and increased with goods and had need of nothing. Riches are not related only to money. One can be rich in knowledge, gifts and talents too - and thus feel self-sufficient. Those who are intelligent, eloquent and gifted need to walk with fear, because they are in constant danger of being proud of these human abilities and of depending more on them than on the Lord. The elder here was satisfied with his Bible-knowledge, his gifts, his achievements, and his position as an elder. But he was not aware of the fact that in God's eyes, he was still spiritually "wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked" (Rev.3:17). It is sad indeed when we are ignorant of our true spiritual condition, as God sees us. While this elder brother was totally ignorant of the fact that he was a wretched man, we find a godly man like the apostle Paul crying out and saying, "O wretched man that I am" (Rom. 7:24).

How did Paul know his own wretchedness and the Laodicean elder not know his? Because Paul lived before God's face, while the Laodicean elder did not. In God's light, Paul constantly realised that his flesh was corrupt (Rom.7:18). Thus Paul remained constantly poor in spirit, and became a godly man. The Laodicean elder however, not seeing the wretchedness of his flesh, became carnal and lukewarm. It is very easy for self-satisfaction and self-sufficiency to come into the life of a servant of God, if he does not live before God's face - for he will not see his own need. And evidence of this will be seen in the way he

speaks and preaches. The way a needy person speaks is quite different from the way a strong self-sufficient person speaks.

There are gifted preachers who can speak well, who are eloquent, and who know the doctrine well. But if you listen to their spirit when they speak, you will be able to sense an arrogance there. They speak as experts, and not as those who are poor and needy themselves. The Body of Christ cannot be built by men who have a strong, arrogant spirit, but only by men who have a humble, gentle spirit. It is easy for an arrogant preacher to whip people in his sermons!! Then he becomes like the servant Jesus spoke of, whose master had appointed him to give others their daily ration of food. But instead of giving them food, he whipped them (Lk.12:45)! Unfortunately, there is a lot of whipping that goes on from the pulpit in Christendom today. Whipping never leads anyone to a godly life, but only to feelings of condemnation, and to subservience to the preacher who whips him. Consider how a poor, helpless beggar speaks to anyone. It is always with meekness and respect - because he knows that he is a nobody in the world. That is how the Bible tells us to speak to all human beings, for we too are nobodys in the world (1 Pet.3:15). On the other hand, how does a dictator speak? Always with arrogance.

Does our speech come from poverty of spirit or from arrogance? 1 Peter 2:17 commands us to "honour all men". Is there a single human being on earth who is excluded from that command? No. A brother who is not eloquent, and who does not know much of the Word, but who has a humble, gentle spirit, will build the Body of Christ far more than an arrogant brother who is gifted and eloquent. The gifted brother may look like a spiritual man here on earth, and others may even consider him to be a great asset to the church. But at the judgment seat of Christ it will be seen that it was the humbler brother who actually built the Body of Christ. It is essential that we realise that the Body of Christ is built, not by Bible-knowledge and spiritual gifts primarily, but by our life. Only the poor in spirit can build the kingdom of God (Matt.5:3). And there is only one way to remain poor in spirit (aware of our own spiritual need) constantly, and that is, by looking at Jesus always. When we see ourselves in His light, we will realise how unlike Him we are, even if we are better than others around us. In His light, we will lose sight of the weaknesses of others, and see only our own. And we shall spontaneously say, "Oh, wretched man that I am" (Rom.7:24). We won't have to be prompted by anyone to say it. But we must live in that state always. Otherwise we can easily backslide into the deep pit of lukewarmness, carnality and arrogant pride that the Laodicean elder was in.

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