

Reverence for God and Forgiveness

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of reverencing God, examining our motives, and forgiving others. It highlights the need to seek God's approval rather than human recognition, focusing on the quality of our actions and the purity of our motives. The message stresses the significance of working towards a nature that naturally seeks to glorify God and please Him, rather than seeking personal reputation or validation from others.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:13, 1 Corinthians 4:5, Psalms 130:3, Philippians 2:12, Genesis 22:12

Topics: "Reverence for God", "Purity of Motives"

Description

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Transcript

So continuing on what we were hearing in the memory verse, it says here that we seek to be pleasing to the Lord. So what is the Lord? It says we'll be rewarded according to what we did in our body, whether good or bad. There are other passages in scripture that tell us how that evaluation will take place.

For example, 1 Corinthians 3, it says, and be like the fire testing the quality of a man's work. The mark of a company that produces a good product that's sold in the market is that it has good quality. It's not it's yearly turnover as to how many products they produce that matter.

What is the quality of that product? So that's gonna be tested. And then in the next chapter, it tells us what exactly that means. What is it that's gonna be pleasing to the Lord in the final day? 1 Corinthians 4 and verse five, that when don't pass judgment now, because when the Lord comes, he's gonna bring to light what is hidden in the darkness, which is the motives of men's hearts.

1 Corinthians 4 and five. And we discover in the final day, the reason why Jesus said, many that are last will be first and first will be last is because the motives are gonna be tested. And then a lot of people who did so many good things and acted so well, and even became a little kinder and a little blinder, et cetera, like the song is a very good song.

The motive in those things was not for the glory of God. The motive was to get a reputation for themselves that they were a little kinder, a little more loving. So all these qualities are good, but we must constantly examine our motives.

Otherwise we are not becoming purer. We're just doing things in a proper way and maybe getting a reputation. And if our reputation before the church and people is in our mind, my dear brother, sister, you're gonna get a tremendous surprise when Christ comes again.

You must work on it till that becomes zero, your reputation before the church. It's such a big thing. I mean, we have to fight it.

I know I had to fight it from my youth. When you're young, spiritually, it's such a tendency and particularly you're in a church where like NCCF with a high standard and you don't want to appear as though you don't have that standard. And it can be a tremendous temptation to do the right thing and to say the right thing.

And, oh, we had to battle it. Dear brother, sister, if you're faithful in that battle and say, Lord, I wanna live before your face. I want my motive to be right, which is the glory of God, which is to be pleasing to him.

And sometimes you may find when we seek the glory of God and seek to please him, that people around may misunderstand your motives. Doesn't matter. We don't go around justifying ourselves.

In fact, one of the characteristics of the Pharisees, not just they were hypocrites, Jesus told them in Luke 16, 15, you are those who justify yourself before men. They're always trying to convince people that, no, no, no, but I did this with the right motive and I did this for this purpose and it was a good thing. And I, yeah, as long as we've got that type of attitude, we're in the line with the Pharisees.

You are those who justify yourselves before men. Jesus never did that. And the more we grow spiritually, we don't do that.

Now, nobody should feel condemned if they're doing it now. All I say is let's grow spiritually. That's what I'm saying.

You don't tell a child, oh, you're stumbling. You're not walking properly. No, we encourage the child to grow.

We all were like that. We don't tease a child who's pronouncing a word wrong or spelling a word wrong when they write it. No, we encourage them.

Yeah, it's good. You're doing better. But what I say is don't remain there.

We must work out our salvation with fear and trembling, it says in Philippians 2. So how do we do that? By examining our motives. Lord, am I pleasing to you? Is this, did I do this for your glory? Did I say this for your glory? Did I, what did I do it for? There are so many religious activities that we can engage in, which we can do with various different motives. And that's where we got to ask ourselves what is the motive with which we did that because that's what will finally matter.

So I was also thinking this morning when I was looking at scripture, a verse in Psalm 130. In Psalm 130, it says, if you, Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who can stand? And Psalm 130, verse three, 130, verse three. If the Lord should mark iniquities, none of us can stand because there's so much of unconscious sin in the best of us, on Christ likeness.

And that's why we cannot be arrogant. We cannot say, well, I'm absolutely sure I'm right. Well, it's a person who doesn't know himself who says that.

Paul said, I know in my flesh that there was nothing good. And that's why the Bible says in Philippians 2, to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. It's not just work out your salvation.

Many people read it like that in Philippians 2.12, work out your salvation. No, work it out with fear and trembling because there's such a temptation in us to justify what we did. Yeah, but this is, I wasn't wrong there.

And this is why I said this or this is why I did this. Self-justification, this characteristic of the Pharisees and one of the clear characteristics of the Pharisees justifying themselves is found in everyone in the flesh unless the person has ruthlessly murdered that aspect of the flesh. I will not justify myself.

No, I won't do it. I don't wanna be a Pharisee. We all want to avoid Pharisees.

Please look up Luke 16, 15 sometime and see what Jesus said. That is one of the characteristics of the Pharisee. You are those who justify yourself in the sight of men.

But God, that is detestable in the sight of God. It's filthy and rotten in God's sight. I don't know whether and how many believers believe that justifying yourself before others is what God, not just God doesn't like it.

He detests it. No, we must live before God's face. So God marks iniquities.

Psalms 133, nobody can stand. We're on the floor. The best of us to fall on the face, the dust like John did on the Isle of Patmos and say, Lord, I can't stand here.

I'm on the floor. But there is forgiveness with you that you may be feared. This is the word that came to me.

There are two things here, forgiveness and reverence. The word fear is, it really means reverence. And it says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

It's reverence for God, which is the beginning of wisdom. It's not the fear that I'm afraid of God. Like I've often said, there's a type of fear of God is where I'm afraid that God will hurt me.

We never need to have that type of fear. But there's another fear, which is the fear that I may hurt God. That's the type of fear I wanna have.

The fear I may hurt God. Me hurting God, how's that? Well, God is so loving. That's why you can hurt him.

Because he loves you so much. Because he's a father. A father won't hurt his child.

But the child can hurt his father terribly. And all of you who have children know that you will never hurt your children. How often your children hurt you.

That's how it is. So the fear of God is a reverence for God, a tremendous reverence that I never want to do anything with a motive to impress people. Because I've discovered one thing through the years.

As I said, we all start like children, stumbling and falling, not knowing how to walk. Crawling, crawling, and then finally walking. And even then, not steady.

And one day comes, you're running. Our growth in this is also something like that. In the beginning, we do things to impress people and we say things to impress people and all that.

But gradually we come over that crawling stage and begin to walk. And one day you can run where you're not seeking to please anybody. You're only seeking to please God.

Dear brothers and sisters, work towards that. Work towards the day where you will run and you're not bothered one bit what anybody thinks about you. Because your life has become so clear before God.

Your motive is 100% to glorify God and to seek nothing for yourself. Only that your passion is that Christ might increase in your life and it's not something you have to work on and to think about. It's sort of spontaneous.

You know, what we work on gradually can become our nature. When we sing, let me be a little kinder, let me be a blinder. I believe in that 100%.

But it must come to the place where it gradually becomes my nature. That I want to be blind to the faults of others and to be kind to other people. It becomes nature.

And to help a brother who's a loser is not something I have to remind myself. Oh, that's a brother who's a loser. Let me go and help him because I said I want to help one of those.

No, it becomes spontaneous. That's where we got to work towards. We are crawling now, but we must be running one day.

That's what I mean. That our longing is that nature has taken over where we are struggling initially, where it's become our own nature now. Not something we have to constantly remind ourselves.

I've got to do this now, I've got to do that. Or I remember one thing, I heard that, so I must do that. No, it's nature.

Very important. They couldn't have that in the Old Testament. That's one of the differences between Old Covenant and New Covenant.

In the Old Covenant, they were told to do this and some of them sincerely tried to do this, but there was no question of it becoming nature in the Old Covenant. No, it was impossible because the Holy Spirit could not come and dwell in man because man's heart was filthy. That's why Christ had to die and shed his blood on the cross and clean up man's heart completely before the Holy Spirit could come and dwell there and then make what the Old Testament people did with the struggle, nature.

And I pictured it like this. Our flesh is like, I've used this example before, our flesh is like a big black circle and Christ comes in, it's like a little white dot almost, right in the middle of that circle, Christ has come in. And his purpose is that we walk faithfully, taking up the cross every day.

Why every day? Why every day? Because our time on earth is limited. There's a Psalm of Moses in Psalm 90, which says, teach us Lord to number our days. I think it's the 12th verse of Psalm 90, that we may apply our heart to wisdom.

Let me recognize that I don't have a million years to live on the earth, I've only got a limited time. From the time I'm converted to the time my time on earth is over and I'm called home. During that limited time, Lord,

let me apply my heart to wisdom.

And wisdom is to crucify the flesh, to walk the way of the cross every single day. And if I miss one day, gone, one day is gone. I'll never get it back again.

None of us can get back yesterday. For example, if you had a opportunity, 10 opportunities to deny yourself yesterday and you didn't take it, sorry, you missed it. You could have been a little further along today in nature taking over in you, but you didn't.

That white circle could have become a wee bit bigger today, but it didn't, it didn't become bigger. That white circle remains the same today because all the 10 opportunities you've got to deny yourself yesterday, you didn't take it. Missed it.

Oh, you're not gonna get that again. You'll get some opportunities today, but that's different. But if you had taken those opportunities yesterday to take up the cross and die to yourself, that white circle would have been a little bigger today.

And then you've had today's opportunity will be still bigger tomorrow. So much of our time has been wasted. The message of the cross is completely ignored, not taught in Christendom.

It's a great work of the devil. The God of the world has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they don't see the cross on which Jesus died. And he's blinded the minds of believers so that they don't see that they died on that same cross.

It's the same devil doing one work over there and one work here among us and God's people. And I say, Lord, I'm not gonna let the devil blind my eyes anymore. I've seen clearly that I died with Christ on the cross and that's why I'm supposed to be on the cross every day if I wanna follow Jesus.

For the unbeliever, it's, oh, well, I'm gonna have an, yeah, I accepted Christ now, the person's newly converted, but I'm not gonna live there. No, my ambition is to please God and I see there's only one way to please him, that this filthy, wretched, black flesh that I've inherited from Adam, that I'm determined to put as much of it to death as possible before I leave this earth, that that white circle of the nature of Christ becomes more and more and more and more and more. So in all of us, we can say there's a huge black circle, flesh in which dwells nothing good, many, many areas which we know, which even your wife doesn't know, your husband doesn't know, areas in your thoughts and attitudes and motives, which nobody knows.

The ones closest to you can live with your partner for 25 years and he or she doesn't know what's going on in your mind, your attitudes and motives. You can conceal it so well, but you haven't fooled the devil and you haven't fooled God. See, there's this black circle.

It's a lot of filth in all of us, but we've decided to accept Christ and he's coming and some of us here in NCCF and have heard, those who've heard the message in CFC of denying yourself, that white circle has become bigger. There are areas where you've definitely made progress compared to the old days when you were in some dead denomination, when you never heard these truths. But so we have an area where I hope nature has taken over, where you spontaneously want to help rather than remember an exhortation, which says, I got to help now, where you spontaneously want to be kind, where you spontaneously want to forgive and be merciful and be reverent towards God.

So the two things mentioned here in Psalm 130, one is reverence for God and the other is his forgiveness. Now, when you think about God's forgiveness, it's, see God's got no authority above him, absolutely no authority. I mean, when a judge passes a judgment in a court, he's got an authority above him.

Even in the Supreme Court, there are other judges who can evaluate him and the whole world looks to see if Supreme Court judges are corrupt. So, but with God, there's nobody above him. He doesn't have to prove anything to anyone.

He doesn't even have to prove anything to the devil. So when Adam sinned and the race of man sinned, God could have decided, well, I'm the judge. I make the laws.

Nobody would want me to make laws. God is the law giver, it says in James four. I decide to be merciful and forgive.

I just, anyone who repents, he doesn't have to do anything more. I forgive, but God is righteous and righteousness demands punishment. But you say, who is going to question him? Nobody, but it doesn't matter that nobody's going to question him.

That sin must be punished, God's nature. That's why Christ had to die. That's why he had to send his own son at such tremendous cost and pain to the father because he's righteous.

There's a, that's the reverence we need to have for God that forgiveness was not easy. There is forgiveness with God. It says here that we might reverence his righteousness, that we might reverence how he is so righteous that even though there was nobody to question what he was doing, he still would do the right thing.

Well, you may say, well, if he didn't do that, the devil would have pointed out to him, hey God, you're not being righteous. He could have destroyed the devil with one word and every demon and devil would have been destroyed and we would never have heard that story. We would have never known of the existence of Satan at all and God could have just forgiven.

Nobody would have questioned him, but he was righteous. It doesn't matter that there's nobody to question him. Righteousness demands punishment.

Well, then somebody has to go to hell, okay? And send my son, he'll take that punishment. It's a tremendous price when you think of it in order to forgive us. That's righteousness.

That's why it says here there's forgiveness with him so that we learn to fear and reverence this God who was so upright and righteous in the way he dealt with us that he was even willing to let his son die to answer to nobody else, only to himself. I wanna do what's right. Nobody's gonna question me, but I will do what's right.

And a true child of God comes to that place. Nobody's here watching me. Nobody knows what I'm doing, but I'm righteous for my own sake.

That is nature. God's nature has taken over in such a person. And my dear brothers and sisters, it's not there fully in you or in me yet, but work towards it till it becomes more and more in you.

That it becomes spontaneous. That forgiveness is not something you say, oh, that verse says I must forgive. Or if I don't forgive him, God won't forgive me.

Nonsense. That's good in the beginning, sure. The word of God, it says, if you don't forgive others, God will not forgive you.

That's where you got to start. You got to start with writing the ABA and you see a little crooked. You don't know sometimes you put the E the other way and all that, okay.

But don't stop there. Work towards till your handwriting becomes perfect. When you forgive others, not because, oh, if I don't forgive others, God won't forgive me.

Rubbish. I forgive others because it's become my nature. I cannot live without forgiving others.

It's just automatic. Just like once upon a time, maybe you could say, I can't ever forgive that person. Imagine such a person coming to the place where, I can't imagine not forgiving that person.

Nature has taken over and that's just one area. It all comes with a reverence for God. I believe that we don't have enough reverence for God, my brothers and sisters.

Let me tell you plainly, I don't believe all of you in NCCF have enough reverence for God. And I've seen that in many CFC churches. You've got the right doctrine.

We can explain the new covenant backwards and forwards. Wonderful. But reverence for God will make you progress and progress.

Reverence for God, it says in the Old Testament too, is the beginning of wisdom. It's the ABC of wisdom. That's how I paraphrase it.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The reverence for God is the beginning, the ABC of wisdom. You wanna study science, learn the ABC first.

You wanna study history, learn ABC first. You wanna study geography, study ABC first. You wanna study any subject in the world, start with ABC.

You want to progress in any area of the Christian life, start with the reverence for God. That's the ABC of the Christian life. Reverence for God.

And it's something which God himself must certify that I reverence him. And it's, for example, in Genesis chapter 22, is the first place where this fear of God and reverence for God is mentioned in the Bible. First place.

Of course, in history, in terms of history, the first time it is mentioned is in the life of Job. Job is the first book of the Bible written and it's very interesting that the very first verse of scripture that God wrote, Job 1.1, what is it about? It's about a man who revered God. He wasn't poor, he was the wealthiest man on earth, but he revered God and he reads some of those things about his life in Job 31, saying, I'll make a covenant with my eyes that I will never lust after a woman.

You'd think that guy had read Matthew chapter five. No, Matthew chapter five is gonna be written 2,000 years later. But he knew Matthew chapter five, that I shouldn't lust after a woman with my eyes, 2,000 years before Jesus said it, because he revered God.

Job 1.1, God writes, that was a man who revered me. There are a lot of things we can learn without even reading the Bible, if you reverence God. Job learned it, he didn't have a Bible.

But you see his compassion towards the poor and all you read in chapter 29, 30, 31 onwards. Amazing things, it's all came out of reverence for God. But in the Bible, as we know in the book of Genesis, the first place where the word reverence for God comes is when Abraham offered up his son.

He didn't even tell, as far as I know, he didn't even tell Sarah where he was going, because I think they would have had a big fight there. Sarah would never have allowed him to go. Yeah, there are things we have to do in the secret before God, which others don't know.

It looked as if he was just going for a walk. He was going to do the most difficult thing that any human being is ever called to do. In Genesis 22, he even told his servants who walked with him, they would have asked him, sir, where are you going? What are you gonna do up on top of that mountain? And he didn't say, well, you know, God has called me to make a big sacrifice and I love God so much, I'm gonna do it.

None of all that. He said in Genesis 22, five, very simply, we're just gonna worship God. My son and I are gonna worship God there.

And when we worship God, we'll come back. They thought, you know, bow down, take an animal, kill it there, that's how they understood worship those days. But it was a lot more painful than that.

And it says here, till the last minute, God tested Abraham, he made the altar, laid his son on the altar, and listen to this Genesis 22, he stretched out his hand with a knife in his hand and God stopped him there. He didn't stop him earlier. He wanted to see to the last moment, is this guy really gonna offer a son up to me? And God stopped him and said to him, lovely words, verse 12, middle.

Now I know, as the margin of my Bible says, you are a fearer of God. You got a degree there, fearer of God. Covet to get that degree.

In secret, nobody's seen, no servant, no Sarah, nobody's there on the mountain, it's just you and God. And you're offering up in secret to God that which is most precious in your life. What is the most precious thing in your life? Whatever it is, some ambition, some possession.

Offer it up to God, otherwise you will not get a certificate from God that you're a fearer of him. You can get a certificate in your church that everybody thinks you're a wonderful Christian. That counts for nothing.

Throw it in the trash can, that certificate you got from all your fellow believers in your church. Get this one from God, brother, sister, and you'll get it only in the secret place. You get alone with God, search your heart and offer to him.

This is the mark of reverence for God where God gives you a certificate. Now I know that you are a fearer of God. You say, well, doesn't God know everybody's heart? Sure, he does.

But when you actually do it, that God says, now I know, verse 12, now I know that you're a fearer of God because you've not withheld the very, the most darling of your heart, the most valuable thing you have in your life. You just gladly gave it up because you love me more than even your son, love me more than that. That is what we need.

There is, why did God forgive us? Psalm 130, verse four, never forget it. There is forgiveness with God so that we may fear him. Why did God forgive me? Not for me to go to heaven.

I gave up that theology many years ago. More than nearly 50 years ago, I gave it up. That's not why I'm forgiven.

I am forgiven so that I might become a fearer of God, that I may reverence him, Psalm 130, verse four. And the other thing I say here is I must reverence God and I must have this, the mark of my rejoicing in my forgiveness. That's the other thing I wanna say is from the parable in Matthew chapter 18.

You know the parable. I don't wanna read the whole thing. Matthew 18, verse 21 to 35, the king who forgave his servants some millions of dollars or billions, let's say, all our sins, forgave freely because he knew that that man could never pay it.

He said he would pay it, he couldn't pay it. We can never pay for our sins and freely forgiven. Otherwise, you know, he should have been in prison.

For us, it would have been hell, the prison of hell. But he forgave freely that I don't have to spend one day in hell. I'm forgiven completely.

And then I come to this other person, my fellow human being. It could be a brother in Christ. It could be a human being who's not even a Christian.

And he did something wrong to me. Maybe he cheated me. Maybe he hurt me with what he said.

Maybe he deprived me of my rights. It could be your mother-in-law deprived you of your rights, your dignity, or whatever it is, whatever you value so much. You know, we value our dignity so much out there.

That person talked to me like that. Don't I have a dignity as human? Yeah, yeah. You live like that, brother, sister.

You'll never make progress in your Christian life. I'll tell you that. You're gonna die to all that.

Dead men have no dignity. Dead men don't fight for their rights. You say, well, if I live like that, my mother-in-law will walk all over me.

And all people in the world will walk all over me. Agreed. If you believe that God cannot, God will not allow you to be tested beyond your ability.

You don't believe that. If your God is so helpless and powerless that he can't restrain such people, then of course it's like that. I have a God who, I believe that he can restrain anybody from doing something that will tempt me beyond my ability.

God knows my ability. When I was in the fifth standard or fifth grade, my teacher never gave me a question paper at examination time that was beyond my level. When I went to the 10th grade, it was a higher question paper because I was at a higher standard.

But at each stage, the teacher would only give me an examination paper at my level. And my God is million times more faithful than all those school teachers. I will never in my life get a test where God gives me a question paper, an examination paper beyond my level, impossible.

It's not happened in all these 61 years that I've been a believer. And I don't believe it'll happen in the future till Christ comes again. I will not be tested beyond my ability.

No mother-in-law, no father-in-law, no brother-in-law, no X, Y, Z, nobody. It is impossible. That's why we can forgive, forgive, forgive.

Will they take advantage? Okay, fine. God will give me grace. At the end of it all, all that provocation will only make me more Christ-like.

More nature of Christ will take over in me. I'm not preaching theory, my brothers and sisters. God's taken me through some hard parts in my life and I've learned to forgive and I've learned how nature has taken over where you don't even, you don't get upset.

You don't get into a bad mood a single day of your life. You're in a good mood from morning till night, no matter what happens. That's how it should be.

Jesus was in a, the thing that challenged me, I saw that Jesus was never in a bad mood a single day of my life. We all say we wanna be like Jesus. Okay, work on this.

Say, Lord Jesus, you were in a good mood every single day of your life. Let me work on that. Let me work on my moods.

That can be seen in your face. You know, you can't cover it up. Work on it.

Don't worry if you battle it in the beginning, but a day will come and nature will take over. That little white circle will become, would have conquered in one area and more and more and more and more. And the black is getting less and less and less and less.

May God help us. Forgive others. Reverence God and forgive others.

Reverence God and forgive others and let that increase more and more and more in the days to come and have low thoughts about yourself. Don't ever think that you're such a great guy and you know everything. We know very little.

We know very little, brothers. The more I have come to know the Lord, I tell you, I feel I know so little. There are times when I've stood outside and seen the skies and I said, Lord, what am I? I think I know you so much.

I'm such a speck of dust in this universe. I know you so little. Yeah, it's so important for us to keep this in mind at all times.

We know so little. We cannot boast about anything. Lord, help me to respect you, reverence you, and to be merciful and forgiving to others.

Amen.

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