

(Secret of Paul's Authority) 3. Paul Accepted the Cross

by Zac Poonen

The key to spiritual authority is accepting the cross in our lives, which means saying no to our own will and yes to God's will.

Duration: 36:05

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 6:4-11, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 2:20, Colossians 3:3

Topics: "Authority"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the conflict between the flesh and the spirit that occurs when the Holy Spirit comes into our lives. He emphasizes that our natural inclination is to focus on ourselves and satisfy our own desires, but as believers, we are called to prioritize God and others. The preacher highlights the importance of experiencing life in Christ and allowing God to transform us from within. He also emphasizes the significance of hungering for obedience to God's word rather than simply accumulating information, as true transformation comes from a heart that desires to obey. The sermon concludes with a reminder of the opportunity we have in this life to bear the cross for Jesus and the eternal regret we may face if we neglect this opportunity.

Transcript

Let us bow our heads in prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the word which you have given us, this word in our own language. We thank thee that its instruction is so clear and simple to those who are willing to understand.

Pray you give us willing heart. Pray, Lord, that your Holy Spirit will find freedom to speak to us and lead us along the path of obedience. Pray that there might be a sense of your presence in our midst this evening, that when we go away from here, the lasting consciousness in our hearts and minds may be one not merely of having heard some man, but of having met with thee.

Save us from the tragedy of meeting with men and not meeting with thee this evening. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

We have been considering the reason why Paul had authority in his life. Very obvious as we look through the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul that he was one who manifested the authority that Jesus Christ

gave to his servants in his own life. And we have been considering how important it is, particularly in these days, for the churches of Jesus Christ to manifest spiritual authority.

We need from the pulpits of our churches words of authority. We need our churches to have a testimony in the totality of having spiritual authority. Even if the churches comprise of people who are poor and not so high up in society, and even if there are no rich people and no influential people, these things make no difference.

If only we could have spiritual authority in our churches. We shouldn't make the mistake that so many churches make of thinking that what we need to spread God's word and to influence people with the Christian message is more money and more qualified people. No.

What we need is a little more of divine authority. Many of our problems would be solved. Now, another secret of Paul's authority we find in this passage that we read in Romans chapter 6. There's a great mystery that Paul reveals in that section.

And Paul was one who never preached something that he had not experienced in his own life. He never preached theory. He hadn't gone to some college and accumulated a lot of information and then gone and dished it out.

That wasn't the way he ministered God's word. He experienced life in Christ. And then God gave him the ability to express that life, that experience in words that are understandable and clear.

Now, we shall come to this subject on another occasion. But when we go to the word of God, we must remember that we can understand it fully and clearly in a way that changes our lives only if we have a great hunger to obey what God is speaking to us. Those who go to study God's word merely to accumulate information or merely because they want to know their Bibles better may know their Bibles better, but they're not going to get their lives changed.

They're not going to have divine revelation on the meaning of these passages. Particularly when we come to this truth described in Romans 6, 1-14 of our, if we are born again Christians, of our being crucified with Christ. It's a great mystery.

We can't understand it. The natural mind is of no value. We cannot understand it merely with human reasoning.

How can you be crucified with Christ? Christ died more than 1900 years ago when you were not even born. How could you be crucified with him? That's how the natural mind reasons. This is a spiritual mystery, and no one can know victory over sin if he does not understand this truth.

Now Paul tells us about his own experience. Galatians 2-20, he says, I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live.

Yet not I, but Christ lives in me. In the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. These are days when many people are very confused about the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

To my own mind, in the whole Bible, there is no clearer description of the Spirit-filled life than this statement of Paul's, It is no longer I, but Christ who lives in me. When a man can say that, not merely

memorizing Galatians 2-20 and quoting it from his mind, but when a man can say that, like Paul said from his experience, he knows something of the Spirit-filled life. Now, this is the purpose with which the Holy Spirit was given, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in us.

Paul says in another passage, notice here before we go to the other one, how Christ lives in me. I am crucified. This I, which is so important, this self-life, is crucified.

Then, Christ lives and rules in me. If the I in your life is not crucified, then Christ cannot live and rule in you. As someone has said, in all of our hearts, there is a throne and there is a cross.

If I put Christ on the cross, then I am on the throne. If I am willing to put myself on the cross, then Christ will be on the throne. Now, this was another secret of Paul's life.

He accepted the cross in his life. So, we want to look this evening as to what that means, to accept the cross in our lives. In 2 Corinthians 4, he says the same thing in other words.

2 Corinthians 4, verses 10 and 11. Paul says, always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, so that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. Notice what he says there.

This is another place where he uses the word always. We saw that yesterday in relation to how he kept his conscience clean. Herein do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offense toward God and toward men.

This is true of these other two secrets of his authority that we have considered in the past two days. He was always a bond slave of Jesus Christ. He always kept his conscience clean.

And here he tells us in this verse, he always accepted the cross. There was never a moment in his life when he didn't accept the cross in his life. He had dedicated himself to follow one principle.

That was the principle of the cross. He had determined that he was going to walk only one pathway on earth. That was the way of the cross.

That's what he says in this verse. Always bearing about the dying of the Lord Jesus, accepting death to myself perpetually, so that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in this mortal body. There is nothing more glorious that a man can experience than to have the life of Jesus manifested in his mortal body.

In verse 11 he says, we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. Now, the measure in which I can exercise spiritual authority is the measure in which the life of Jesus is manifested in me. Have you got that? The only measure in which spiritual authority will be manifested in our lives is the measure in which the beauty of the life of Jesus is seen in our lives.

When Jesus Christ walked on earth, I believe God was showing the world what he wanted man to be like. When God created Adam, if you want to know what God wanted Adam to be like, look at the life of Jesus Christ. That was God's purpose for Adam, which Adam frustrated.

Look at the authority that there was in the life of Jesus Christ. He was never afraid of anything. All of nature was subject to him.

Devils feared and trembled before him. Nothing could disturb him. Going to the cross, knowing that he was going to be crucified, hanged like a criminal in a few hours, he could tell his disciples, my peace I give unto you.

As if to say, I know I'm going to be crucified tomorrow morning, but I've got such an abundance of peace with me, I'd like to share it with you. That was his life. Never disturbed.

Such perfect communion with the Father and tremendous authority. That's what God wanted Adam to have. What Adam didn't have because he disobeyed God.

If you turn to Genesis 1, verse 26, you see there when God created man, what his purpose was for him. God said, Genesis 1, verse 26, let us make man in our image. As far as we know from the Bible, man alone, among all created beings, was created in the image of God.

We don't read that said about anyone else. As far as I know, we don't even see that said about the angels being created in the image of God. Man alone.

And when man is made, God said, in our image and after our likeness, then let them have dominion over many things. Let them have dominion or authority. There you find it, right in the beginning.

When God created man, his desire was that man should have authority. Man should not be under everything else but on top of everything else. Like that wonderful promise God gave to Israel through Moses in Deuteronomy 28, verse 13, a verse that's lifted up my own spirit many a time.

God will make you the head and not the tail. You will always be on top. You will never be underneath.

What a tremendous promise. God will ensure that you're always on top and never underneath. In any circumstance, in any situation, God will see that you're always on top provided you listen to him.

That's what that verse says. Provided you obey. And Israel did not obey and so they always were underneath.

God's promise was not fulfilled. None of God's promises are fulfilled automatically. No.

If we don't respond in the way God expects us to, then of course the promise is not fulfilled. But this, let us remember, was God's intention for man. Let us make man in our image.

Let them have authority. God's desire for man was to have authority but he could have that authority only as long as he reflected the image of God. You see, one follows from the other.

Let us make man in our image. Therefore, he will have dominion. If he loses that image, he will lose the authority as well.

That's what happened to Adam. He disobeyed God and the image of God in him was defaced and immediately he lost his authority. What has Jesus Christ come for? To restore to man what Adam lost.

God's purpose for man did not change when Adam fell. God's purpose for man is still the same. That man might once again be in the image of God.

And in the measure in which we allow the Lord Jesus Christ to fulfill his work of salvation in us and bring us back into the image of God. In that measure, we shall also regain spiritual authority. The two are

connected.

We can't have one without the other. And that's why in the Bible we read that the flesh lusts against the spirit. When Adam fell into sin, he became a self-centered individual.

He became a person who was no longer centered in God, but centered in himself. His spirit, that part of his being which God created to be supreme and on top, was dethroned. And his body and his mind became the most important things to him.

That's how man is throughout the world today. Man's body and man's mind is what he cares for more than for his spirit. Man is centered in himself.

He is bound by what the Bible calls his flesh. Meaning a life controlled by the desires of the body and the desires of the mind apart from God. That's man's condition today.

And when we are born again, that flesh within us does not disappear. It does not disappear. It's still there.

But something else has been introduced into us. A new nature. The Holy Spirit comes into us and immediately he comes in, begins this conflict between the flesh and the spirit.

The flesh, my old nature, which I've inherited from Adam, constantly saying, look after yourself. Yield to the desires of your body. Satisfy the desires of your mind.

Think, first of all, of yourself. Don't think so much about other people. That's our nature.

Centered in ourselves. Just think of your little family. Don't worry about anybody else.

Don't worry about God. First of all, look after yourself. If you have some time and energy and all left over, give it to God.

First of all, for yourself. That's our selfish, self-centered nature which we have inherited from Adam. And into this life, when we are born again, comes the Holy Spirit who has come to give us a new nature which is a nature centered in God.

And the Holy Spirit is constantly telling us the opposite. Be centered in God. God has created you to be centered in him.

To have him on top. But the flesh says, no, you must be on top. And this is the conflict.

Am I going to say yes to my will or to God's will? This is the conflict between the flesh and the spirit. It's intensely practical. When you young people fall in love with somebody and you greatly desire to marry that person, but you know, even though you may have many arguments to convince yourself that it is God's will, deep down in your heart, there's a voice which says, how can you marry that person? He's not born again.

She's not born again. And then comes the tussle. You can say you're born again.

You can sing the choruses. You can say all to Jesus, I surrender, but it's all nonsense. Because you want to do your own will.

You want to go ahead and marry whom you like. And you can talk about spiritual authority, but you'll never know it. You can come for Keswick Convention after Keswick Convention, you'll never know it.

Because you have not known what it is to say no to your own will, and yes to the will of God. This was the choice that was placed before Adam. The two trees in the Garden of Eden, the tree of knowledge and the tree of life, symbolize two principles of life.

One, a life centered in oneself. The other, a life centered in God. Adam had to make a choice.

Jesus had to make the same choice. When Jesus was tempted, every temptation that came to him was to exercise his own will against the will of God. And the perpetual attitude that Jesus took throughout his life was, not my will, but thine.

And this is the cross. This is what it means to accept the cross. This is what it means to always bear about in our body the dying of the Lord Jesus.

And this is what Paul did. It is no longer I, but Christ. No longer my will, like his master in Gethsemane.

Paul said, not my will, but thine. Right from the first day that he was converted. Lord, what will thou have me to do? I don't care what other people want me to do.

I don't care what I myself want to do. But Lord, what will thou have me to do? He accepted the cross. This choice that was before Adam and before Christ was before Paul and is before us.

It's whether I'm going to say yes to my will or yes to the will of God. The flesh lusts against the Holy Spirit and they are constantly fighting. And if I want to know the life of Christ being manifested in me all the time, I must know what it is to say no to my own will all the time.

This is why when Jesus spoke of the cross, he connected it with denying ourselves. He said, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Die to himself.

Die to his own will all the time. Then he can follow me. Say no to himself and say yes to God.

In the little things and in the big things. When you're looking for a job and you know that God wants you in a certain place because there's an opportunity there to witness for him and there's an opening for you to get a job there. But there's another job where you can get a little more salary.

There comes the choice. This is intensely practical. It's not mere theory, whether we say yes to ourselves or yes to God.

And in so many little things, the decisions we make day by day, which nobody knows but God and each one of us, we know and God knows what decision we are taking. Whether we are saying yes to our will or yes to the will of God. In the measure in which we put God first in our lives, in that measure we shall know spiritual authority because this is how God created man.

To use an illustration from the physical realm, the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 11 that the head of every man is Christ. And in other words, Christ should have the place in my life that my head has in my body. And where is my head? On top.

God has created us that way. Now if you decide that you don't like to walk on your feet, you want to walk on your head. Well, God does not compel you to walk on your feet.

If you say, well, I'd like to keep my feet on top and keep my head down or keep my head on the side. Well, that's up to you. There is no compulsion.

But you'll find it very difficult to walk, that's all. Because God never created you to walk that way. Now that's just an illustration.

God says, do you want to be balanced in your life spiritually? Well, put your head where it should be. Put Christ on top. But you say, no, I'll give Christ a place in my life but not on top.

Somewhere else. All right. Then you're going to have trouble walking the Christian life.

Just like if you decide to put the head anywhere else but on top, you'll have trouble walking in the physical life. It's exactly the same. It's a law that God has built into our physical bodies that the head must be on top.

And we recognize it. If we don't recognize it, we suffer, not somebody else. In the same way in the spiritual life, it's a law that God has built into our spiritual system, Christ must be on top.

If we don't recognize that law, if we don't follow that law, no one in the world is going to suffer but we ourselves. Seek ye first the kingdom of God, all the other things will be added unto you. And millions of people through the centuries have proved that in their experience.

But you don't seek the kingdom of God first, you seek your own will first, and you end up in misery. Go ahead and marry the person you like. Go ahead and choose the job you like.

Go ahead and keep yielding to the desires of your body and mind. And one day, I've met people like this. Years later they regret.

They say, Brother, what can we do now? I say there's very little you can do now. Because you have to reap what you sow. If you sow to the flesh, the Bible says you'll reap corruption.

How can you reap everlasting life when the Bible says so clearly, you will reap corruption, if all through your life you have kept on saying yes to your own will. You have only done what pleases you, not what pleases God. And in the end you say, Lord, I want abundant life.

I'll go to any number of conventions. You'll never know abundant life. We can't go and sow potatoes in our field and expect to find tomatoes growing there and harvest them.

It's not possible. We reap what we sow. We are not so foolish to think that we go into the field and sow rice and get wheat.

No. But we are so foolish to think that day by day in our life, not just at convention time, but day by day the rest of this year, we keep on saying yes to our own will, yes to the desires of our body, yes to the desires of our mind. We do our will and don't seek God's will.

And then we say, Lord, why is it I'm not experiencing abundant life? It's like a farmer who sows rotten seed in the ground and says, Lord, why is it I've got rotten fruit? It's exactly the same. Is there anything

surprising about it? You know, we don't get abundant life merely by listening to messages given in conventions. I tell you this.

We have to sow to the Spirit if we want to reap abundant life. And if we are to sow to the Spirit, we are to accept the cross in our life. We have to say no to ourselves.

We have to recognize that in ourselves dwells no good thing. Anything that comes out of ourselves is rotten. Do you recognize that? Paul recognized it.

Turn to Romans 7, verse 18. Romans 7, verse 18, Paul says, I know that in me, that is in my flesh, there dwells no good thing. Look what he said.

This great apostle, he says, I know one thing. He knew something which many great scholars in this world have still not learned. That in themselves, their self-centered life can never produce any good thing that will please God.

And so he said, I just put my self-centered life to death. And as he accepted that law, that spiritual principle, he knew deliverance. He says in Romans 8, verse 2, The law of the Holy Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death.

Wonderful. And he goes on to say in verse 13, If you live after the flesh, if you keep on saying yes to your own desires, you will die. You may say you're born again, you may say you're an evangelical and a fundamentalist, but you will die.

That's what the Bible says. I know the devil will come and whisper to you, don't believe that preacher, you shall not die. Remember, that's what he came and told Eve also.

You shall not die. And she believed the devil. And she died.

God said in the day you eat that fruit, you will surely die. The devil came and said you will not die. And the Bible says if you live after the flesh, you will surely die.

And the devil says no, no, no, no. You're born again. You're evangelical.

How can you die? He's the deceiver. He's a liar from the foundation of the world. Don't believe him.

The word of God says if you live following the desires of your self-centered life, pleasing your mind, pleasing your body, no matter what testimony you can give, you will die. But if you live, if you through the Spirit, through the Holy Spirit, you put to death, this is the cross, mortified, put to death, the deeds of the body, then you will live. And like Moses I say, behold I set before you the way of life and the way of death.

Choose. God does not compel anyone. The way of life and the way of death is so clear.

Paul knew it in his experience. From his experience he knew that if he yielded to the desires of his mind and body, he would die. And he said so.

He didn't believe the devil's lies. And he also knew that if through the power of the Holy Spirit he put to death the deeds of the body, he would live. And he goes on to say in verse 14, for as many as are led by the Holy Spirit in this way, they are the sons of God.

Some people take Romans 8, 14 to refer to guidance. Guidance in relation to whether I should go to Hong Kong or Bangkok and what I should do with my money. But that verse doesn't mean that.

Not in its context. And a text taken out of context, as someone has said, is a pretext. It's not really what it means.

What does that verse mean in its context? In its context it means that verse 14 begins with the word for, means it refers back to verse 13. For as many as are led by the Holy Spirit to put to death the deeds of their body, they are the sons of God. That's my understanding of that word in its context.

And this is what Paul did. He steadfastly set his face, like Jesus set his face to go to Calvary. And Satan said, no, no, no, don't go to Calvary.

I'll give you the kingdoms of the world through a shortcut. Just bow down to me. Jesus said no.

Peter came and said, don't go to the cross, Lord. It's such awful agony. Jesus said no.

He steadfastly set his face to go to the cross. Every other voice, whether it came from the devil himself or whether it came through Peter, was the voice of the devil. And to both of them he said, get thee behind me, Satan.

I'm going to the cross. And like his master Paul, steadfastly set his face to walk the way of the cross, always accepting the death of Jesus in him. No to self, and yes to God.

He disciplined his body. In 1 Corinthians 9, verse 27 he says, I keep under my body, bring it into subjection, lest after I have preached to others, I myself should be disapproved. Can you think of that? Do you know Paul said that more than 20 years after his conversion, after he had established churches, after he had been taken up to the third heaven, after he had done miracles? He says, even now, I may be disapproved if I don't put to death the deeds of my body.

You know, Paul's Christianity was serious business. He was not playing around with Christianity. He really meant business with God.

Before he became a Christian, he was wholehearted in persecuting the Christians. He was all out in killing these heretics called Christians, because he really believed that he was doing the right thing. But the moment he was converted, his wholeheartedness turned in the opposite direction.

He was equally wholehearted, as wholehearted as he was in putting other Christians to death. He was now equally wholehearted in putting himself to death daily. He says, I die daily, always bearing about my body the dying of the Lord Jesus.

And therefore, the life of Jesus was manifested in Paul, despite his ugly appearance, despite the fact that he had no personality, despite the fact that people hated him and detested him, kicked him and stoned him. Yet the life of Jesus was manifested in him, and spiritual authority was manifested in his life and ministry, which has flowed down for twenty centuries now. Little did Paul think that we'd be considering his life here in Singapore in 1972.

Just think of that. The rivers of living water that flowed from that man, flowing all over the world for twenty centuries. And when a man walks that way, the way of the cross, he may be despised and rejected.

He may be considered the filth and off-scurrying of the world. But if he keeps saying no to himself so that he can do the will of God, he will abide, as the Bible says, forever. Nothing can destroy that man's life or ministry.

He who does the will of God abides forever. What a wonderful thing. Paul denied himself many rights that he had, that he could have had.

He even denied himself the right to be married, the right to have a comfortable home, many things like that. He just voluntarily accepted the way of the cross. He said, Lord, I walk this way.

He didn't keep comparing himself with other believers and say, oh well, I've sacrificed more than them, I don't need to sacrifice anymore. That's what some believers say. They compare their sacrifice to the sacrifice other people have made and they sit back, oh, we have sacrificed more than them, that's enough.

But not Paul. He had no eyes for other believers. He looked at Jesus and he knew that he hadn't sacrificed as much as Jesus.

So he kept pressing on. He kept pressing on. He said, I want more of, I want to know more of his cross.

I want to be more conformed to his death, he says in Philippians 3.10. Oh, that I might be conformed a little more to his death. Where are the Christians who cry out to God like that? You find Christians fasting and praying, oh God, fill me with the Holy Spirit. Very good.

But how many Christians have you found, have you ever done this yourself, fasting and praying, oh God, let me be a little more conformed to the death of Jesus. Give me a little more of the fellowship of the cross in my life. You know, if we had prayed that prayer a little more, we'd have known a little more of the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Because the fullness of the Holy Spirit comes via the way of the cross. Pentecost always comes after Calvary. There is no Pentecost without Calvary.

We go through Calvary to Pentecost. We go through the way of death to ourselves before the Spirit can fill us and the life of Jesus can be manifested in us. One final thing, it was on the cross that Satan was defeated.

Isn't that a wonderful thing? The Bible says in Hebrews 2.14, through death, Jesus destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil. In Colossians 2.15, the Bible says, on the cross, Jesus triumphed over Satan. Where did he triumph over Satan? Not when he preached sermons, not even when he conducted great healing campaigns, but when he died.

There's a lesson there for us. You can't overcome the devil merely by preaching, not even by healing. That's what some people think.

If only we could get a few people healed, the devil would be defeated. Jesus healed a lot of people, but the devil was still not defeated. The devil was defeated when Jesus went to the cross.

That's what the Bible says. That's why Jesus said in John 12, now is the judgment of the world, John 12.31, now shall the prince of the world be cast out, because I'm going to the cross, and there is no other pathway for the servant. Where the master is, there shall also the servant be.

And if the master overcame the devil through his dying on the cross, the servant can never overcome the devil any other way. This is why the devil keeps showing us other ways, because he knows the moment you take the way of the cross, you are going to overcome him. And so he keeps telling you, don't go that way, don't go that way, that's too difficult, don't die to yourself.

May the Lord teach us this truth. May the Lord teach us to embrace the cross. Father Sundar Singh, the great saint of God in India, one of the greatest saints that India has seen, he once said, remember one thing, when you go to heaven, you'll never have another chance to bear the cross for Jesus.

There is no cross in heaven. You can't bear the cross for Jesus if you don't take the opportunity now. We'll have to spend eternity regretting that we have not borne the cross when God gave us an opportunity.

This is the way of victory. This is the way of power. This is the way of spiritual authority.

May the Lord help us to walk it.

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