

(Secret of Paul's Authority) 6. Paul Loved All Men

by Zac Poonen

The secret to Paul's authority is his love for all men and his willingness to serve others, demonstrating the heart of God and the love that He has for the world.

Duration: 35:42

Scripture: Romans 1:14, 1 Corinthians 9:19

Topics: "Authority", "Love for Others", "Servanthood in Ministry"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes that Paul's authority stemmed from his profound love for all people, which was essential for God to commit His authority to him. Paul, despite being an earthen vessel, allowed the treasure of Christ within him to shine through his love and service to others, both believers and unbelievers. He demonstrated that true authority in ministry comes from a heart of servanthood, recognizing the worth of every individual, regardless of their status. Poonen challenges listeners to reflect on their own attitudes towards others, urging them to embody the love of Christ and serve selflessly, as Paul did. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a deeper understanding of love as a fundamental aspect of Christian life and ministry.

Transcript

And I trust that what we have looked into in these past days has been something that has something that's been practical, something that I trust we've been able to apply in some way to our own life. For it is God's desire that all of us share His authority. It's God's desire that all of us manifest the power of His Holy Spirit in our life and in our ministry.

God has not sent out the Church just to try its best to serve God. No. God sent out the Church in weakness, with infirmity, so that it will depend upon God, so that its ministry will be in the power of the Holy Spirit, with the authority of Jesus Christ, and so that God's Word that goes out of such a Church will not return to Him once.

Now, let's look at another secret of Paul's authority this evening. We have already seen a number of them, and each of these, we find, are intensely practical. And each of these are not impossible things.

No. We've already seen that Paul was an earthen vessel, just like you and me. He was a man of like passion.

He had the same lusts, the same fears, the same anxieties, the same discouragement, the same temptations that come to all of us. He was an earthen vessel that could easily be broken and cracked. But yet, within that earthen vessel was a treasure.

And he allowed that earthen vessel to be broken day by day, as he took the cross in his life, so that the treasure within, the glory, began to shine out. And if you're born again, my brother and sister, you've got a treasure within you, Christ in you, the hope of glory. This is a mystery that the Bible teaches us in the New Testament, revealed to us in this age, Christ in us.

And if he would only sit down a few moments and think of this. What a wonderful thing, the almighty God coming and dwelling within us. And yet, God is limited.

The omnipotent God becomes innocent, impotent, because he cannot work through many believers. He's limited. Is this possible? Yes, it is possible.

We read in the Old Testament in Psalm 78 about the children of Israel, how they limited the Holy One of Israel. They limited him. We read in the last verse of Matthew 13, that Jesus in a certain place could not do great things there because of their unbelief.

He was limited. And I believe this is true. There is the life of God in so many children of God all over the world.

But that life of God is shut in. It's hindered. It's not breaking forth.

It's not shining out, because of our self-light, which covers it up, which locks it up. And we don't want this self-light to be broken. That's why the light doesn't shine out.

I believe this is a great mystery. We need the Lord to teach us the meaning of the cross in the life of the believer. It was only about six years after I was converted that I began to understand what the cross meant in the life of a believer.

Then I discovered it was a secret of all of Christianity. Well, we've already seen some aspects of the cross. We shall look into some other aspects as well.

But let's look this evening at another secret of false authority. He was a man who loved all men. And I believe this is something that God looks for in a man before he can commit his authority to him.

I believe it would be a dangerous thing for God to commit his authority to us if we did not love other men. It would be a very, very dangerous thing. It would make us use that authority and power to exalt ourselves, and to show off.

You know, if we don't love other people, we'll definitely be showing off to them. When we really love them, we have no desire to show off. When a man wants to show off in the Christian ministry, in any realm, whether it's praying, preaching, singing, administration, or anything, it's a clear indication that he doesn't love others.

Because he wants to show himself as better than others. And so it would be a dangerous thing for God to commit his authority to a man who does not love all men. Paul was one who loved all men.

He says here in 1 Corinthians 9, verse 19. Let's look at two aspects of this. Paul's attitude to unbelievers and his attitude to believers.

First of all, to unbelievers, he says in 1 Corinthians 9, 19. Though I be free from all men. He says, I'm not a servant to any man.

I'm not obliged to obey any man. I'm free from everybody. Nobody controls me, because nobody controls my first string.

Nobody controls my ministry. Nobody tells me, you better not speak all that, otherwise I'll reduce your allowance. He says, I'm not bothered by all that.

I'm free from all men. No one can dictate to me when I preach God's word. I'm absolutely free.

No one can bind me in any way. I go where the Lord leads me, and there's nobody sitting on top of me to say, no, you shouldn't go there. I'm free from all men.

You know, there are very few servants of God who can say that today. Bought by Christ, they have become the servants of men in the wrong sense. 1 Corinthians 7, verse 22 and 23.

Paul says, ye are bought with a price. Be not ye the servants of men. You should be free to be the servant of God alone.

But there's another sense in which Paul himself was a servant of all men. He says, though I be free, yet I have made myself a servant to others, so that I might gain them for Christ. You know, he was a servant of others in the right sense.

He served other people. And I believe a man forfeits the right to be a servant of God, when he ceases to be a servant of the people. Jesus was the ideal servant of Jehovah, because he was so completely a servant of all men.

And no man can be a servant of God if he is not willing to be a servant of all men. This is very, very important. Paul's attitude to the unbeliever was not one of standing on a pedestal and looking down at this poor unconverted man down there, but one of being a servant.

That's one of the secrets of his ministry, one of the reasons why God has given this authority to this man, because he was not trying to be the master. He was willing to be the servant. And you know, I believe God finds that attitude very little in Christian circles today.

So many who claim to be followers of the one who was a servant of all men are today sitting on thrones. There are thrones in evangelical Christianity, on which many Christians sit, and they claim to be followers of the one who was a servant of all men. What a contrast.

He says, unto the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might gain the Jews. He was willing to be all things to all men, if he could save them. His one passion was to save them and bring them to Christ, to give them the gospel.

To the weak, verse 22, I became as a weak, so that I might gain them. I've become, I've made myself all things to all men, so that by all means I may save some. He loved all men, so he was willing to become all things, anything, without compromising the truth of the gospel, without compromising Christian standards, without becoming worldly, he was willing to be all things to all men, so that he might save them, because he loved them.

Now I believe we need to define love a little more. We have heard much about it already, but you know, if the Bible had merely said, there are two things required of man, love God with all your heart, all your strength, all your mind, and all your soul, love your neighbor as yourself, that would sum up all that God requires of man. But the Bible tells us more than that.

The Bible is not just those two statements. And in the epistle, all that is written is an elaboration of this twofold, this relationship in two directions, in the vertical and the horizontal. Paul was, we saw on the first day, a servant of Jesus Christ, a slave of Jesus Christ, in the vertical direction, he was a slave and he loved the Lord with all his heart.

And in the horizontal direction too, towards other men, he was equally a slave of others, a servant of others in the right sense, and he loved all men. You can't have one without the other. And these epistles define to us what it means to serve the Lord as a slave out of love, and what it means to serve other men as their servants out of love.

And I believe that if we really want to be the servant of all men, not just some men, it's sometimes very easy for us to love some men. All of us love some people. Our difficulty comes when the Bible tells us to love all people.

All of us love some people, definitely. Some people have a wider circle, some a smaller circle. But the Bible tells us to love all.

God so loved the world, not a few select people here and there in the world, but all the world. And the one who is a Christian, who is seeking to come back into the image of God in which man was originally created, the image of God will involve loving the world like God loved the world. That's part of the image of God.

That's part of what was lost when Adam sinned. And that's part of what must be regained if Christ really rules within. I believe this is one of the marks of a man filled with the Holy Spirit.

He has love for all people. And he therefore recognizes the work of each individual in God's sight. Now I believe this is something that Christians in our day need particularly to know and recognize.

We need to recognize the work of man in God's eyes. You know that verse in Proverbs 17, 5, it says, he who despises the poor man is actually reproaching his maker. Because that man, he may be poor, he may be just on the street, but he's made in the image of God.

That means if you show respect to the rich and the influential, but you despise the people who are lower down in society, you're actually, whether you know it or not, reproaching their maker. You're actually reproaching God. Because we don't see the work of men.

How does the world estimate men? The world estimates men according to their position, according to the way they dress, according to the type of house they live in, according to their culture and their manners

and their income. But a Christian, a true Christian, he doesn't care for any of these things. Because God doesn't care for any of these things.

He is going to be in the image of God. A Christian is pressing towards the mark to fulfill the high calling of God, to be recreated in the image of God which Adam lost. And in his pursuit of this high calling, to be like God, he stops looking at other people like worldly people look at them.

You know, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5, he says, verse 16, henceforth, we don't know any man after the flesh. In other words, as another translation has it, 2 Corinthians 5, 16, we do not look at men merely from a human point of view. We don't look at other people merely from a human point of view.

And I want to ask you this. Do you look at other people from a human point of view? Well, in that measure we've still got something of Adam in us. Something that needs to get, we need to get rid of.

Paul said, we no longer look at other people from a human standpoint. We are seeking to look at them from God's standpoint. And what is God's standpoint? Jesus said, a man's soul is worth more than the whole world.

He said, what shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and he loses his soul? Meaning that one soul, if you put it on one side of the balance, and you put all the wealth and the honor and the riches and the glory of the world on the other side, this side of the balance will go down. This one human soul, he may be poor, he may be uncultured, manners may not be good, he may not be a big shot, but that one human soul is worth more than all the wealth of the world. That's why God loved these men of the world.

Paul, as he sought to be a servant of God, he knew that if he was to reflect the image of God in his life, he was to reflect something of God's love for the whole world. God so loved the world, John 3 16, must be reflected in our lives, more and more. It's one of the tests of whether we are increasing in likeness to Jesus Christ or not.

And it's one of the things God looks for in us before he can commit his authority to us. No despising of others. I don't believe Paul despised others.

I don't believe Paul looked down upon anyone, anyone who was too great a sinner. I don't believe Paul looked down upon the prostitute. I don't believe he looked down upon the murderer or the covetous man or the thief, because Paul, till his dying day, he never forgot what God had forgiven him.

Sometimes we forget. Paul recognized always, as he said in 1 Corinthians 15 10, by the grace of God, I am what I am. And if it were not for the grace of God, I would be like that prostitute.

I would be worse than her. I would be like that criminal. I would be like that thief.

I'd be worse than them. Do you recognize that? You know, once we recognize that, that the only thing that makes any difference between me and another person morally is the grace of God. Remove that from my life and I'll be just the same as the worst person in the whole world.

Once we recognize that, we never despise any sinner. Oh no. And yet I tell you there are Christians who have a holier-than-thou attitude towards other sinners.

This is what prevents them, these others, from coming to Christ. Paul loved all men. He never forgot what he was.

And so he could love the worst. He could identify himself with the worst. He could become all things to all men.

He could put his arm around the laborer on the street without being bothered about what everybody would think if he was putting his arm around the laborer on the street and talking to him and giving him the gospel. He didn't have any false dignity about him. Oh, I can't be seen with these lower levels of society sitting and talking to them on the sidewalk.

These false ideas of dignity and self-respect that so many Christians have today with Jesus in there, Paul didn't have. Because, you know, Jesus and Paul, they never looked at the outside. They didn't care what dress the man was wearing.

They looked at the soul within, and they knew they were eternal souls. That's how Paul looked at them. And this is one of the fundamental principles of Christian service.

We see it in the Incarnation itself. You see, Jesus didn't sit in heaven and send messages down to earth saying, I love you very much, and oh, I care so much for you. I'm praying for you every day.

It would have been no use if he had just sat there and sent these messages down to us. He came down. He became like us.

He humbled himself. He became a servant made in the likeness of men. He dwelt with us, with the least and the lowest, so that he was called the friend of sinners.

And that's how he fulfilled the will of God. And every servant of God, when I say servant of God, please don't misunderstand me. A servant of God is not just a full-time worker.

That's a concept which is not found in the New Testament. It is one of the traditions of men that have accrued onto Christianity. In the New Testament, there is no such thing as only a full-time worker being a servant of God.

Romans 6.22 says, being made free from sin, you are servants of God. Has Jesus come and saved you? You're a servant of God then. So that's what I mean.

And I believe every servant of God, every true Christian, must follow his Master in this step of the incarnation, of coming down and being one with others, considering oneself equal with them. This is what Paul did. And this is when Paul recognized that he was a debtor to the grace of God.

For anything that had been accomplished in his life, he at the same time recognized, thereby he automatically became a debtor to the whole world as well. Every man who sings, O to grace, how great a debtor! Are you a debtor to the grace of God? Yes, we all are. Well, sometimes we don't recognize that that automatically puts us in debt to all humanity.

To give them that message. That's what Paul said in Romans 1.14-16. He says, I'm a debtor. I'm a debtor.

I have a perpetual debt that I'm trying to clear. The debt of having to give the gospel to others. God has given it to me.

I have to give it out. This is why he became all things to all men, so that he could save them. In Romans 13.8, Paul says, O no man anything except to love one another.

The way some Christians live, it would look as if that verse said exactly the opposite. Don't owe other people love, don't show them love, but keep borrowing and don't pay back. That's not what the verse says.

O no man anything, never be in debt to other people financially, but one debt you should have is the debt of love. In other words, every time you meet a man, you have to treat him as one to whom you owe some love. That's what that verse means.

You meet a brother or you meet a stranger, you owe him some love, because God's given you some love in your heart for him. You haven't yet given it to him. That's the way the Bible tells us to look at all men.

Whether it's the in your office, somebody in your school, you have to look at them as someone to whom you have a debt to clear. Something of God's love to be passed on by your behavior, by the way you've conversed with them. This is what that verse means.

This is what Paul recognized himself. If you turn to Acts 20, Paul tells us how he ministered in Ephesus. He says in verse 31, Acts chapter 20, verse 31, Paul says to the elders in Ephesus where he had spent three years, he says, therefore watch and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn you, day and night with tears.

I tell you that verse convicts me when I warn other people often, more often than not, that tears have been lacking. There's been lack of compassion. Paul says three years I was with you and I knew the seriousness of the gospel and I warned you with tears.

He loved them. He loved all men. No wonder God could commit his authority to this man.

He was not a mere professional religious man who was standing in the pulpit for some salary or some honor. Oh no! He was far removed from such carnal things. He was a man who had a fire in his heart set alight by God and he had a compassion for souls and he was willing to shed tears for them because he loved them.

Notice in verse 33 to 35 his attitude to things. We see in verse 31 his attitude to people. He loved them.

What about Paul's attitude to things? I have coveted no man's silver or gold or aphro. He says, when I came to you I was not hoping that you would give me some money or that you would buy me a new shirt. Yea, he said, you yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities to them that were with me.

He had necessities. He had needs in his life and he earned money and he used things. Notice Paul's attitude to people and to things.

He loved people and he used things. Very often with some Christians at least it's vice versa. They love things and use people.

Is it like that with us? Do you love things and use people for your own end? You know, try and get friendly with some great man because later on you may need his help, some recommendation or something that he can help you in. So get friendly with him now. That's using a man.

You don't love him. You just want to use him for your own end. There are people like that who think they are following Jesus Christ.

They're actually following the world. Jesus never used people. He didn't try and get friendly with big shots so that he could get their help later on.

No, he loved people and he used things. He never loved things and used people. One of the tests of how much Christianity we have in our own hearts.

If we want to communicate the message of Christ to other people, I believe first of all we need to be identified in our heart with God. There must be a heart identification with God. And in God's heart there's a cross.

God so loved the world that he gave his only son to die. That was the proof of his love for the world. And the one who is seeking to grow in the image of God will have that same cross in his heart.

He loved the world and he's willing to give his life, die to himself, in order to save the world. He accepts the cross in his life, in his relationships with other people. Now this is intensely practical and I'll tell you exactly what I mean.

I heard a story of a soldier, a Christian soldier who was living in an army barracks. And in that barracks, in that dormitory, he was the only Christian. All the others were heathen.

And he used to kneel down by his bed. He was not ashamed to kneel down and be seen by others praying. He was not ashamed to be carrying a bible.

Some people are ashamed to carry a bible with them when they go for a meeting. Some people are ashamed to be seen kneeling down and praying. Some people are ashamed to bow their heads in a restaurant and give thanks for the food.

He was not one like that. He was not ashamed. And people laughed at him and mocked at him and ridiculed him.

But he continued faithfully. He witnessed to them, of course they just told him to get out. And one day when he was kneeling by his bed and praying at night, a drunken soldier came in from outside and he saw this man kneeling down there and he got so angry with him he took off his boots and he flung it at this man.

And those boots went and hit him on his forehead and there was a deep gash. And this Christian soldier, he said nothing. And the other man went to bed.

The next morning when the other man got up, he saw the boots that he had thrown at this Christian soldier, cleaned and polished and kept by his bedside. That broke him. You know what this Christian soldier did? He died to himself.

He did not retaliate. He took the cross. He had something of the spirit of Jesus in him.

He died to himself to show his love. And that other man, when he saw this, he came to this Christian and said, I don't know why you did this, but if this is Christianity, tell me more about it. Do you see why the world does not believe? We preach to them so much, but they haven't seen the cross in our lives.

And no man can preach a crucified Christ adequately who has not been crucified himself. If I have not known what it is to die to myself, to take the cross in my own life, then I cannot speak of the love of God to

others. Let's see very briefly what was Paul's attitude to believers.

We have seen something of his attitude to unbelievers. 2 Corinthians 4 verse 5. Paul says we preach two things. The twofold message that we preach, first of all, with our lips, we preach Christ Jesus as Lord.

No one else. Jesus Christ is Lord. That was his message with his lips.

And he says, 2 Corinthians 4 verse 5, with our life, I'm paraphrasing the word, with our life, we preach ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. He was a servant of unbelievers and he was a servant of believers. You know, Paul was the type of man who was always looking for the lowest job, not for the highest, for the lowest job.

He was always the type of man who was always going around trying to see if there was some job of a servant that he could do somewhere. How many Christians do you find like that? Not many. This is why the world says, it's all theory what you have.

You know, in John chapter 13, when it says, Jesus loved his disciples unto the end. John 13, 1, the last part. He loved his disciples unto the end.

One proof of that love comes out in the next verses, the succeeding verses, where he took a bucket of water and washed their feet. He did that dirty job because he loved them. And I believe he did the job of a servant, because he loved them.

You know, when we love people, we are not, it's no problem for us to serve them. When we are not willing to serve others, when we have a desire to rule over others, it's a clear indication that we don't love them at all. The man who loves honor and position in Christian circles is a man who has no love for other believers.

Clear as cursive. The man who loves other believers like Jesus will take the bucket and the towel, be willing to wash their feet. He has no desire for anything.

He recognizes his need of them. He doesn't feel superior to them in any way. He may have some different gifts.

That man may have some different gifts, but he doesn't feel that because his gift is more prominent, that therefore he's superior. This is the mistake some people make. They feel that because they've got some great ability to preach or sing, therefore they are superior to other disciples, to other believers.

Far from it. They feel that because they've got some gift which brings them into the limelight, therefore they are superior. You know, these hands and the eyes and the mouth and the face are always in the limelight.

But there are some parts of my body which you never see, like the heart, the kidney, the liver. But which is more important? You can cut off my hand, I'll still live. If you take out my heart, I can't live.

So in the Christian church, many of the people who stand in the limelight are not the most important members of Christ's body. There are others who never stand in the pulpit. Some poor widow who is faithful to Jesus Christ, wherever she is, perhaps will get the greatest reward at the judgment seat of Christ, because she's been faithfully prayed.

Unseen by men, no reward from earth. Nobody publicizes her name, a photograph appears nowhere. But like the heart pumping the blood, even though it doesn't get praise, nobody appreciates it.

People say, what beautiful hands you have, what a beautiful face you have, what beautiful ears. But no one appreciates the heart. But it carries on.

It carries on pumping, even though nobody appreciates it, nobody even thinks about it, until it starts giving some trouble. You see, it faithfully keeps on pumping. And there are people like that in the church.

And I tell you, the church of Jesus Christ carries on, not because of these great, well-famous preachers, but because of the heart. Well, when we recognize that, it keeps us a little low. It just helps us to realize that we are not the people on whom God is depending.

Paul was like that. He was a servant of others. He didn't feel he was indispensable in the body of Christ.

He didn't feel superior to anybody. He was willing to be servant of all. He says, I preach with my lips, Jesus Christ is Lord, with my life I am your servant.

That's why right at the beginning of his life, God sent Ananias, that poor, unknown believer, to lay his hands on this man who was to be the great apostle. And Paul had to recognize right there in the beginning of his Christian life that he needed even a poor, humble disciple like Ananias if he was to get along in the Christian life. You know, the authority of Jesus Christ is not committed to an individual.

It's committed to his body. And the man who does not recognize his place in the body of Christ, who feels himself superior, who feels he's indispensable, who feels his gift is so valuable, it's much better than everybody else's, and who therefore elevates himself in any way before other men, will never know the authority of Jesus Christ, because that authority is in the body. Have you noticed one thing in Ephesians 1, verse 22 and 23, it says, God has put all things under the feet of Jesus Christ, and given him to be the head over the church, which is his body.

The church is the body of Christ, and under the feet of Christ is all authority. That means under the church, because the church is his body. And the feet of the church refer to the least and the lowest members in the body.

You know, the people who are always unseen, like your feet, always hidden under socks and shoes, nobody sees them, right down at the foot of the body. Some people in the body of Christ like that, but they've got authority, there are things under them. If they live, of course the authority is in all parts of the body, provided they live in the body under the headship of Jesus Christ, and in cooperation with other members in the body, then they can have that authority, they can share the authority of Jesus Christ.

Paul recognized that. He knew he could not do it alone, that's why he asked other people to pray for him. He knew he could not carry on alone.

He did not consider himself superior to anybody. I believe this is so essential, it's one of the fruits of our love, whether I love to serve or to rule. If I want to elevate myself above other believers, it's a clear indication that I don't love them.

I can talk as much as I like about loving them, but I don't really love them, and I shall not know the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. You see, there are some Christians, very gifted Christians, but the only

trouble is nobody can work with them. They are so gifted, you see, they are individualists, they can only work on their own.

I tell you, they really don't know what the authority of the body of Christ is. Unless we know what it is to die to ourselves, and fellowship with one another, and recognize our need of the least and the lowest member in Christ's body, we shall not know the full authority. We may have a little measure, but God wanted to give us more, but he couldn't give it to us because we didn't recognize our position.

As just one member, one humble member in the body, and God's got plenty other members. If we don't recognize our need of them, if we don't love them, if we are not willing to be servants, we shall not know the authority of Jesus Christ. Jesus was a servant of all men.

That's why he has such authority. May the Lord teach us to be servants like him.

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