

# Spiritual Dangers When We Are Blessed

by Zac Poonen

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*When God blesses us, we face many dangers, including spiritual pride, unwillingness to receive correction, and exalting ourselves over others, but we can avoid these dangers by being humble, dependent on God, and willing to be corrected.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 13:10, 2 Samuel 15:16, Zephaniah 3:12, John 6:37, John 12:32, John 13:17, Romans 8:29, 1 Corinthians 9:27, 1 Corinthians 11:31, Revelation 12:4

**Topics:** "Spiritual Pride", "Humility In Ministry"

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## Description

Zac Poonen preaches about the dangers that come when the blessing of the Lord is upon our lives and labors. He highlights the risks of spiritual pride, unwillingness to receive correction, and exalting ourselves over others. Poonen emphasizes the importance of becoming increasingly Christlike as the infallible mark of God's blessing, rather than seeking personal glory or admiration. He warns against divisions and splits that can arise in ministry due to uncrucified pride and selfish ambitions, using biblical examples to illustrate the consequences of such behaviors.

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## Transcript

When the blessing of the Lord comes upon our life and labours, we face many dangers.

### Spiritual Pride

The first of all dangers is spiritual pride. Whenever God blesses us, Satan will tempt us to compare our spiritual growth and ministry with that of others. God opposes every proud person - believer or unbeliever. So we are safe only if we keep our face in the dust before God always.

Pride will make us lose the grace of God, even if we do not lose our gifts. We may still have a ministry, but the grace and anointing of God will be absent from our lives. When Lucifer sinned, he lost his anointing, but he did not lose his supernatural gifts. He has those gifts even today. This should be a warning to anyone who glories in his gifts or ministry. Immature believers (who cannot distinguish between grace and gifts) may flatter us and tell us that the "anointing of God" is still upon us, even when "Ichabod" ("the glory has departed") is written all over our life and ministry (1 Sam.4:21). The danger is that gradually the voice of those flatterers can replace the convicting voice of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

There is actually only one infallible mark of God's blessing on our lives - that we become increasingly Christlike - for that is what He predestined us for (Rom.8:29). God did not predestine us to go to heaven or

to have a great ministry. He predestined us to be like Jesus.

We must not confuse oratory with the anointing. An anointed ministry will always draw people to a deeper devotion to Jesus, to a greater brokenness, and to a greater hatred for sin. Oratory, on the other hand, will only draw people to admire us and to be more attached to us. Many politicians are great orators and they can hold audiences spellbound for hours and stir them emotionally. But they draw people to themselves. Orators are proud, whereas anointed preachers are humble.

#### Unwillingness to Receive Correction

A second danger is an unwillingness to be corrected. When God blesses our ministry, it is easy to begin to think that we can never be wrong. We cannot then be corrected even by older brothers. We will justify ourselves in the face of every correction.

When Judas Iscariot was corrected by the Lord, he was offended and went out and betrayed the Lord immediately (Compare John 12:4-8 with Matt.26:10 and14). Thus he destroyed himself. Peter however humbled himself, even when Jesus called him "Satan". Thus he saved himself.

The Holy Spirit always shows us the glory of Jesus. And when we see that glory, we will see our own need and our lack immediately. If we are godly, we will then judge ourselves. The promise of Scripture is that "if we judge ourselves rightly, we will not be judged by God" (1 Cor.11:31). The following verse goes on to say that if we do not judge ourselves rightly, then God Himself will be compelled to judge us - by disciplining us. But He disciplines us only in order to save us from being "condemned along with the world" (1 Cor.11:32).

#### Exalting Ourselves

When God blesses us, it is easy for us to exalt ourselves over others. We can gradually build up a "fan-club" of those who admire us - especially among the youth - just like the filmstars do.

Solomon's son, King Rehoboam sought popularity with the young people in his land and did not listen to the counsel of his elders. This was what led to the division of Israel.

This is how many divisions come in to Christendom too. Divisions and splits are produced by strong, uncrucified people who exalt themselves, at times when God is blessing His work.

Consider two examples from the book of Acts.

Ephesus saw one of the greatest revivals and some of the most amazing miracles mentioned in Acts (Acts 19:11-20). But three years later, Paul warned the elders there that a split was looming ahead of them (Acts 20:30). Paul warned those elders that after he left Ephesus, some of them would "draw away disciples after them". They would seek their own name and ministry, and split the church, without being concerned about how their actions would dishonour the Lord's Name and would "give occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme"

(2 Samuel 12:14).

Look at another instance: Just after Paul and Barnabas had an immensely successful ministry, they broke up (Acts 15:39). They separated from each other over the issue of John Mark. But this time God produced something good out of the split. He used it to produce two teams of workers (one led by Paul and the other

led by Barnabas) instead of just one - and thus the work of evangelism was furthered even more!! John Mark also became a useful servant of the Lord later, writing the gospel of Mark.

Why was God able to produce something good out of this latter split? There was a reason. It was because, unlike the Ephesian elders, Barnabas conducted himself in a spiritual way. Barnabas did not split any church. Neither did he drag away any believers after himself. He did not interfere in Paul's sphere of work but went away to a totally new area and worked with John Mark there (Acts 15:39b). Barnabas was a godly man who was more concerned about the Lord's Name than his own ministry, and so he conducted himself as a true disciple of Jesus. Thus God could bless this latter split. But men like Barnabas are rare to find in Christendom.

1 Corinthians 11:19 tells us that "there must be factions (divisions) among you, in order that those who are approved may become evident among you." God uses divisions to expose the ungodly and to remove the weeds (the proud and the haughty) from His garden, the church.

Many milleniums ago, a "split" took place in heaven itself. That was how God cleansed heaven. He allowed the chief angel Lucifer to drag away with him, all the other angels who were even slightly proud and rebellious (Rev.12:4 with Isa.14:12-15). Thus heaven was cleansed. That work of cleansing continues even today in the church, wherever God is at work.

The Lord says, "I will remove from your midst your proud exulting ones, and I will leave among you a humble, lowly people and they will take refuge in the name of the Lord." (Zeph.3:12). The remnant left in the church will have one characteristic: "They will do no wrong and tell no lies" (verse 13). Only then will the Lord will find delight in the church and "exult over it with joy" (verse 17)

Note one characteristic of those who leave the presence of the Lord: They begin to tell lies. They start by telling small lies but gradually become "liars who have seared their own conscience" (1 Tim.4:2). In contrast, one mark of those who follow the Lord will be this: They will cleanse themselves of all lying (Rev.14:4,5).

### Good And Bad Examples

God has given us many good and bad examples in the Scriptures, in this connection. A wise man will learn from all of them.

Abraham never grabbed the good land, when there was a conflict between his servants and Lot's servants. He allowed Lot to choose first. Lot immediately grabbed the better land (Gen.13:10), but suffered greatly as a result. Abraham gave up his rights. So God gave Abraham all the land. "The meek will inherit the earth".

Jacob unfortunately, never followed his grandfather's example. He kept on grabbing things - the birthright from his brother Esau, the blessing from his father Isaac, the daughters and flock of his uncle Laban etc., It was only when he stopped grabbing those earthly things and grabbed on to God, that he finally became Israel (Gen.32:26)..

David followed Abraham's example and never grabbed the kingdom from Saul, even though God had anointed David as king. God tested David for many years, on this very point. But not once would David grab the kingdom. He waited for God to give it to Him. And God gave it to him, at the right time.

Absalom however was different. He was jealous of his father David's popularity and worked shrewdly and cleverly behind his back and "stole away the hearts of the men of Israel" from his father (2 Sam.15:16). Then he drove his father out and became king. But God brought his kingdom to a quick end.

Our ministry must be God-given - not something that we have grabbed for ourselves. "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven" (John 3:27). What we grab for ourselves can never be from God.

It is very easy to understand all this. It is also easy to preach it to others. But if we don't live by these principles, then we will be disqualified, even if we do understand it and preach it

(1 Cor.9:27). Jesus said, "If you know these things, you will still be blessed, only if you do them" (John 13:17).

Jesus never schemed or grabbed. He never flattered people to earn their support. He never compelled people to join His group. His attitude at all times was, "All that the Father gives me SHALL come to Me" (John 6:37). He did not have a lust to disciple large numbers, or to have many people in his "church". He was satisfied with the few whom the Father had given him. All of us too should be satisfied with "those whom the Father gives us".

Jesus drew people. He never dragged them or grabbed them. He said, "If I am lifted up, I will draw men to Myself" (Jn.12:32). We too are called to lift up the crucified Christ and thus to draw people to Him. But only a crucified man can lift up a crucified Christ properly. A man whose hands are nailed to the cross cannot grab or drag anyone!! He can only draw!! The problem in Christendom today is that uncrucified people are trying to lift up a crucified Christ.

May the Lord help us to keep our faces in the dust and to learn His ways.

He who has ears to hear let him hear

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