

(The Full Gospel) 2. the Balance of Truth

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen's sermon emphasizes the necessity of balance in understanding the full gospel and the roles of the Holy Spirit and prophetic ministry in the church.

Scripture: Isaiah 30:20-21, Jeremiah 20:8-9, Galatians 1:8-9, Ephesians 1:3-4, Ephesians 2:1-8, Ephesians 3:16, Ephesians 4:1, Ephesians 5:1, Ephesians 6:11-13

Topics: "Prophetic Ministry", "Balance in the Gospel"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the necessity of balance in understanding the full gospel, warning against the extremes of over-emphasizing either the gifts or the fruit of the Spirit. He highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding believers back to the straight path of truth, as seen in Isaiah 30:20-21. Poonen draws parallels between the ministries of Old Testament prophets like Jeremiah and Hosea, illustrating that true prophetic ministry addresses the current needs of the church without seeking popularity. He stresses the importance of grounding our faith in the foundational truths of Ephesians 1-3 before moving to the practical applications in Ephesians 4-6, ensuring that believers understand their acceptance in Christ. Ultimately, he calls for a prophetic voice in the church that challenges believers to build upon the foundation of God's grace and truth.

Transcript

"If you leave God's paths and go astray (to the right or to the left), you will hear a Voice behind you say, 'No, this is the way; walk here'" (Isaiah 30:20, 21 - TLB).

The Voice referred to here is the voice of the Holy Spirit Who alerts us when we go even slightly astray (to the right or to the left) from the straight and narrow path that leads to the throne of God.

When we look at even the churches of believers today, we find that most of them have got into a rut - either to the right or to the left of the straight line of truth.

Consider just one example: Some groups over-emphasise the gifts of the Spirit and are imbalanced in one direction. Others over-emphasise the fruit of the Spirit and neglect the gifts altogether and are thus imbalanced the other way. Neither of these groups seems to be listening to the Voice that is trying to tell them to move to the left/right in order to get back to the centre. Each group has its own favourite verses from the Bible that they keep going back to again and again. They never seem to see other portions of Scripture that could make them balanced, because they are prejudiced against those verses.

Very often their refusal to see those other verses is due to the fact that those other verses have been misused by the groups that have gone astray in the opposite direction. So their understanding of truth has come from a reaction to the extremes that other groups have gone to, and not from a careful study of all of God's Word.

The ministry of the prophets in the Old Testament was always to point out where Israel was going astray. They spoke forth the corrective word of the Holy Spirit. They did not seek for a "balanced ministry". They always stressed what was missing. They never wasted time speaking of the matters in Israel that were already according to God's order. In that sense the Old Testament prophets were all imbalanced in their ministry.

Consider Jeremiah, for example. At one stage, Jeremiah said to God, "You have NEVER ONCE let me speak a word of kindness to these people. Always it is disaster, horror and destruction" (Jeremiah 20:8 - TLB). His was certainly not a balanced message full of grace and truth!! It was just judgment, judgment and more judgment! This message became such a burden to Jeremiah himself at one stage. But he still could not quit preaching it, because every time he thought of changing the message, God's Word of judgment would burn within his heart like a fire and he could not hold it in any longer (Jeremiah 20:9 - TLB). And so he continued preaching judgment to the nation of Judah for 46 years.

If Jeremiah had listened to the voice of his own reason or to the advice of other preachers who did not know the mind of God, he would have modified his message. He would then have been more balanced. But he would not have been God's prophet any longer!

Now consider the ministry of an earlier prophet, Hosea. His message was totally different from Jeremiah's. God's message through Hosea to Israel was, "O how I love you, even though you have disobeyed me and gone astray." But Jeremiah, who lived 180 years after Hosea, never sought to imitate Hosea's ministry. These prophets were not imitators of each other. Each of them knew the burden that God had given them.

A new-covenant prophet too will always speak of what is lacking in a church, and point out where it is imbalanced. He will have discernment from God about the current need of the people to whom he ministers.

The greatest need in every church today is for prophetic ministry - through which the Spirit speaks saying, "No. Not that way. This way."

Most preachers prepare their sermons by reading books and magazines (like HIDDEN TREASURES) and by listening to tapes - in order to impress their hearers. They are careful however, to leave out whatever might offend their hearers, because they seek for honour and for gifts.

Prophets however, are not like that. They listen to God, and tell the people exactly what God wants them to hear. And so a prophet may preach on one theme repeatedly, until the imbalance in a church is corrected. Professional preachers however are afraid of preaching the same message even twice to the same congregation. Travelling preachers even have to make a note (in their minds or in their diaries) as to what message they preached in a particular church, so that they don't make the mistake of preaching the same message again when they visit that church a second time - lest they lose their honour as preachers!!

What a desperate need there is for prophets in our day!

A teaching ministry is different from a prophetic ministry. The teacher is able to explain the doctrines of Scripture clearly. His teaching need not however, be related to the current need among the people he is ministering to. A teaching ministry on justification, or on the baptism in the Holy Spirit, or on sanctification, or on the second coming of Christ will always be profitable in any church! But the people there may still be defeated by sin and discouragement in spite of all this wonderful teaching. What such a church needs then is a prophetic ministry!

Let us consider one area where we need to be balanced: In our understanding of the gospel message.

In Ephesians, we see clearly the good news that Paul preached. Paul said to the elders of the church in Ephesus, after spending three years in their midst, "I declared to you the WHOLE purpose of God" (Acts 20:27).

Paul received the gospel-message directly from the mouth of the Lord Himself - and not second-hand from the mouths of other men, as all of us have received it (Galatians 1:11, 12). He said that if anyone preached any other gospel than the one he had received from the Lord, such a man would be cursed of God (Galatians 1:8, 9). It is that serious to preach any other gospel - or to dilute the gospel in any way or to leave out any part of it.

The letter to the Ephesians is divided into two parts - the first three chapters form the first part of the gospel, and the next three chapters form the second part. The first part deals with what God has done for us. The second part deals with what we must do for God.

Ephesians 4:1 begins with, "Therefore, I entreat you to walk..... The word "Therefore.... indicates that all that follows in chapters 4 to 6 is based on the foundation that the Holy Spirit has laid in the first three chapters. Paul was a good master-builder and he wrote Ephesians carefully, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 4 to 6 we could say is the superstructure - built on the foundation of Ephesians 1 to 3.

The imbalance that one sees in many groups in Christendom today is that some have built the foundation of the first 3 chapters, but have no superstructure on it. Others are building the superstructure (of the last 3 chapters), but without the foundation. Both groups are equally foolish.

Something to notice about the first three chapters in Ephesians is that there is not even one command or exhortation in all those chapters, as to what WE are to do in order to please God! On the other hand, they are full of a description of what GOD has done for us.

But notice that the next three chapters of Ephesians are full of exhortations as to how we are to please God!

That is a difference that must be carefully noted, if we are to distinguish between foundational truths and superstructural truths. We don't place doors and windows in the foundation! No! They are meant to be in the superstructure. But the superstructure itself must be built on the foundation. In other words, every commandment that we preach must be based firmly on what God has done FOR us and IN us in the first place.

If we are not sure first of all, of what God has done FOR us and IN us, then we will find ourselves incapable of keeping His commandments. We will then get into the same bondage that the old covenant

saints got into, when they tried to keep God's laws and failed constantly. This is why many Christians too live a life of constant failure and discouragement, and feel that a life of victory is impossible for them.

It is true that a life of constant victory is impossible, if we do not have the foundation of Ephesians 1 to 3 underneath us at all times. The foundation is not something that we lay once somewhere, and then go on and build the building itself somewhere itself.

Every building is not only built on its foundation, it continues to remain on the same foundation at all times. If new floors are added later on to the building, those floors too are built to rest on the same foundation that was initially laid for the building.

It is when believers lay a foundation in one place and then begin to build the superstructure somewhere else, that the Voice of the Holy Spirit will say to them (if they have ears to hear, and are not prejudiced), "No, not there. Build over here, where the foundation has been laid".

On the other hand, to those who have laid the foundation, and then do nothing else but admire the foundation (at every Sunday meeting!!), the Voice of the Holy Spirit will say (again if they have ears to hear, and are not prejudiced),

"What are you going to do now? Are you happy with just the foundation? Don't you want to build the house?"

For those of us who have heard nothing but exhortation after exhortation from the pulpit for many years (based on the commands in Ephesians 4 to 6), what we now need to hear is a little more of the truth found in Ephesians 1 to 3, so as to be balanced.

Those who rush past Ephesians 1 to 3, will find later on in their lives, that they face the problems of insecurity, depression, fear, uncertainty of God's acceptance, jealousy, a competitive spirit, and many other evils.

Let us ask ourselves three questions and thereby have a check-up:

Have we ever felt when faced with a particular problem one day, that God would not help us with that problem, because we did not take time to pray or to read the Bible that particular morning?

Have we ever felt when we had an accident or when we faced some financial loss, that that happened because we did not spend time alone with God that morning?

Have we ever felt that because we did have a good lengthy time of Bible-reading and prayer one morning, that God had accepted us a little more that day than He did on other days?

If any of the above are true in your case, it would indicate that you have not yet been properly founded on Ephesians 1 to 3. You have not yet understood the basis on which God accepts you.

It is impossible to lead an overcoming life, if we are not firmly and securely founded on the fact of God's accepting us in Christ, on the basis of what Christ has done for us - and not on the basis of what we have done.

It is equally impossible to be an overcomer, if we only have the foundation, and never pay heed to the commandments and exhortations found in the New Testament.

We should not make either mistake.

The Foundation in Ephesians 1 to 3

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, WHO HAS BLESSED US with every spiritual blessing (every blessing of the Holy Spirit) in the heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3).

The Bible begins with the words, "In the beginning God...." (Genesis 1:1).

That is how the true gospel begins too - with God and what He has done for us. A humanistic gospel however would begin with, "In the beginning man..... It would begin with what WE have to do, and not with what GOD has already done for us.

In fact this is one way to distinguish the true gospel from every false one. All cults proclaim a humanistic gospel that exalts human effort, where men can glory in what they have achieved.

Many such false gospels sound very good and appear to lead people towards holiness, and therefore many sincere believers are deceived. But all such gospels and those who proclaim them come under the curse that Paul proclaimed in Galatians 1.

Remember that the true gospel always begins with God, and with what He has done for us - and not with what man has to do for God.

So Ephesians begins with, "Blessed be GOD WHO HAS BLESSED US....". That is the right way to begin.

With how many blessings of the Holy Spirit has God blessed you?

Every single one of them. Not even one blessing has been left out.

You are an heir to EVERY single blessing of the Holy Spirit, the moment you are born again. It may take time before you appropriate all of those blessings to yourself. But don't forget that you are an heir to all of them from the very beginning.

"He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4).

Long before the universe was created, God knew each of us by name. Did you know that God knew you by name, millions of years ago? This assurance by itself can bring tremendous security into our lives.

"....that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened that you may know what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." (Ephesians 1:18)

We must be rooted in this assurance that God got a treasure when He got you and me. That is the meaning of the above verse. Zephaniah 3:17 states that God rejoices over us with shouts of joy.

Most believers live with the understanding that God is always looking at them with a frown and with an attitude that seems to say, "That's not good enough. You can do better". They can never imagine God rejoicing over them with shouts of joy! Yet that is what the Bible says clearly that God does.

"....that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened that you may know what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe....which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead" (Ephesians 1:18-20).

The greatest manifestation of God's power was not in creation, but in the resurrection of Christ.

This resurrection-power (greater than the power that created an universe from nothing) is what is now available to all of us who believe.

Everything is dependent on faith - and faith comes from hearing God speaking to us through His Word. So it is important to meditate on passages like the one above - and not rush through them.

Either what we read in verses 18 to 20 (above) is a total lie or it is absolutely true. If it is a lie, then everything else that the New Testament teaches about forgiveness and justification etc., must also be false. On the other hand if we have seen that those other teachings were true, when we believed, then the reason why we don't experience this supernatural power of God in our lives, is because we do not believe!.

This power is available to all "who BELIEVE".

Jesus taught us to begin our prayers by saying, "Our Father Who art in heaven". We must be clear in our minds first of all, that we are talking, not to the Managing Director of the universe, but to our Father - a Father Who loves us, Who is intensely interested in every aspect of our lives, and Who is perfectly wise and almighty in power.

It is easy to rush past this part of addressing God as Father thinking it is unimportant. But the way we address God is the foundation for all prayer - faith in a loving Father Who knows our every need.

Jesus sought to lead his disciples to a firm faith in God as their Father. The first three chapters of Ephesians also seek to lead us to that same faith. Only such faith can bring perfect security into our lives. Otherwise our lives will be like a storm-tossed vessel - tossed by the winds and the waves of circumstances and the attacks of demonic forces.

Many believers are so insecure - perpetually unsure as to whether God will carry them but halfway across their earthly journey, and then cast them away, saying, "I have had enough of you". And so they are always trying to do something or the other to please God - giving a little extra money for Christian work perhaps, or fasting and praying etc., - in order to find acceptance with their Father.

An illustration will perhaps describe this condition more clearly.

Suppose you had three children of your own (aged between 10 and 6) and then you adopted a 8 year old boy from an orphanage. Your three children will feel perfectly free in your home and will sleep soundly at night and will be perfectly secure in your love at all times. But this boy who has come newly into your home, will always feel insecure. He will always wonder whether he is accepted in the same way as the others. He won't sleep soundly at night. No matter how much you reassure him, he will still have doubts about his being accepted as an equal with your other three children. One day when he spills his milk accidentally, he may wonder whether he will be thrown out of the house for that. He will feel that his acceptance with you will be dependent on his conduct. And so he will spend all his life trying to gain your acceptance.

This is a picture of the condition of most believers, in their attitude towards God. They are constantly striving to be accepted - and never seem to be sure that **THEY HAVE ALREADY BEEN ACCEPTED IN CHRIST!**

Ephesians 1 goes on to tell us that when God raised Christ from the dead, He put all things under His feet - and since Christ has been given to us as the Head of the church, all things are under our feet too! (Ephesians 1:21, 22).

That is why we can live in this world without any fear - either of men or of Satan. There is no demon anywhere in the universe that was not conquered by Jesus on the cross at Calvary.

When encountering demon-possessed people, I have conquered my own temptations to doubt and fear by asking myself this simple question, "Was this demon conquered by Jesus on Calvary or not?"

The answer to that is "Yes, he has been conquered" - every single time, without exception. Then I know that I have authority over that demon in Jesus' Name.

This has nothing to do with our abilities or gifts. It has only to do with what Christ did on Calvary, and with the fact that Christ is now our Head. Satan cannot touch us, when we are under Christ's headship.

Ephesians chapters 2 & 3 amplify further what has been mentioned in chapter 1. We can look briefly at some verses there. But you can meditate on the chapters themselves leisurely.

In Ephesians 2:1-8, we are told that when we were dead in our sins, God raised us up together with Christ and saved us.

A dead man can do absolutely nothing. So that means that when we could do absolutely nothing for ourselves, God raised us up and saved us. Do you believe that? Or do you feel that you did a little bit yourself too in order to help God to raise you from the dead?? That may sound funny. But there are multitudes of believers who feel that they did help God a little bit with their salvation!! It is obvious that such believers do not feel that they were dead in sin, but only perhaps sick with sin. A sick man may be able to do something. But a dead man can do nothing!!

What were you - sick or dead?

Read Ephesians 2 carefully, and you will get the answer. You were dead - absolutely lifeless and dead! That is when God raised you up.

Our salvation was:

"not of ourselves"

"not of our works"

"that no-one should boast" (verse 8).

If our salvation was even a little bit because of our own works, we would have something to boast of. But because it was all of God, we give Him ALL the glory. And so none of us can boast over each other either. All who are proud have not understood the teaching of Ephesians 2.

Do you know that there is not a single verse in the Bible that says that Christ raised Himself from the dead? Everywhere it says that it was God Who raised Him. It was God Who raised us too.

Even if we were to live a blameless life on earth, one in which we pressed on to perfection for many years, yet at the end of it, when we stand before the Lord, we will still only be able to say, "Lord, I am a sinner

deserving eternal hell. But You died for me. So I am saved by Your free grace. I have nothing at all to boast of."

Only one who realises this fact has understood the doctrine of salvation properly.

In Ephesians 1:17, 18, Paul had prayed that the Christians at Ephesus might receive revelation from the Holy Spirit.

At the end of this first half of Ephesians, in chapter 3:16, Paul prays that they might receive power from the Holy Spirit.

These are our two greatest needs - revelation and power.

The Holy Spirit alone can give us both.

The entire Christian life is dependent on the Holy Spirit. First of all the Spirit gives us revelation on what God has done for us in Christ.

Then He gives us power to walk in a manner worthy of our calling, obeying all that the Lord has taught us.

Let us now look at one last thing from Ephesians 3. In verses 18 & 19 we see that we can experience the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ (there are four dimensions there and that itself goes beyond human knowledge!!) - only along with ALL the saints.

We can never grasp the love of Christ all by ourselves. We need the other members of Christ's Body. And further, we need ALL the members of Christ's Body, not just those in our own little group.

That is why our hearts should always be open to ALL believers, even to those who don't agree with us, and even to those whom we would consider a bit extreme. We may not be able to work with all of them and we certainly will not be able to meet all of them on this earth. But our hearts should be open to all of God's children. Our hearts must have room for as many brothers and sisters, as God has children - both barbarian and cultured.

That is why we need to be open to read the writings of ALL godly people - and not just to the writings of our favourite authors.

Let me warn you in advance, that in my lifetime, I have found very, very few believers who have such an open heart. But those are the few who are truly spiritually wealthy. The remainder carry on with their poverty-stricken, sectarian attitudes and live and die as Pharisees, missing out on the wealth that could have been theirs, if they had been humble enough to accept all whom God had accepted.

Let us meditate carefully then on the first three chapters of Ephesians, and ask the Holy Spirit to give us revelation on these glorious truths that we have just been considering.

Once you have got revelation, you will be ready to seek the Spirit for His power to live an overcoming life, full of purity, humility and love.

Then we will be able to put away ALL unwholesome words from our speech, and ALL anger and ALL bitterness from our hearts (Ephesians 4:29, 31).

Then wives will be able to submit to their husbands as the church is to Christ, and husbands will be able to love their wives as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:22, 25).

Then we will be able to overcome Satan at all times (Ephesians 6:11-13).

And then we will have the power to "become imitators of God" (Ephesians 5:1).

God is able to do far more in us and through us than we can ask or think. To Him alone be all the glory (Ephesians 3:20, 21).

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