

(The Full Gospel) 3. Having a Firm Grip on the Christian Life

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen emphasizes the five essential gifts from God that help believers maintain a firm grip on their Christian life and avoid backsliding.

Scripture: Matthew 4:1, Luke 9:23, Romans 5:9, 2 Corinthians 4:10, Ephesians 2:13, Colossians 1:20, Hebrews 4:12, Hebrews 9:22, 1 Peter 1:18, 1 John 1:7, Revelation 12:11

Topics: "Christian Living", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

Zac Poonen preaches on the importance of utilizing the five gifts God has given us to have a firm grip on the Christian life. These gifts include the Blood of Christ for forgiveness, justification, redemption, and cleansing; the Holy Spirit for empowerment, fruitfulness, and spiritual effectiveness; the Word of God for guidance, renewal, and spiritual warfare; the Way of the Cross for self-denial, spiritual progress, and overcoming sin; and the Body of Christ for unity, support, and manifestation of God's glory.

Transcript

God has given us five fingers on each hand. With these, we can hold on to things firmly. You could hold a glass with two fingers, but the grip won't be as firm as when you hold it with all five fingers.

In the same way, God has given us five gifts through which we can have firm grip on the Christian life. Where backsliding occurs, it is because believers relax their grip on one or more of these five areas

As we begin a new year, let us determine that we shall not backslide any more, but progress - to know God, to walk in fellowship with Him and with our fellow-believers, and to be more available to Him for His service in the coming year, than we have ever been before.

1. The Blood of Christ

Forgiveness of our past sins is our very first and our constant need. The guilt of our sins could not be removed by God by any other way than by the payment of the full penalty for our sins. "Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22).

When Christ shed His blood on the cross of Calvary, it purchased the pardon of every sin ever committed by anyone. But that pardon becomes ours only when we receive it. Through Christ's blood we now have

the forgiveness of all our sins, if we sincerely turn from our sins (repent), trust in Him, and receive the forgiveness that he offers.

The blood of Christ also justifies us (Romans 5:9). This is more than just being forgiven. It is being declared righteous, just as though we had never sinned in our entire lives. God's promise is that "He will not remember our sins any more" (Hebrews 8:12). That means that He looks at us just as if we had never sinned. That is the meaning of being justified. Such is the power of Christ's blood. Many believers live in perpetual condemnation concerning their past lives, because Satan has hid from them the fact that God has justified them through Christ's blood.

Through the blood of Christ we are redeemed (1 Peter 1:18). That means that we have been purchased from the slave-market of sin. The blood that Christ shed on Calvary was the ransom price that He paid to meet the demands of God's holy Law, so that we might be free, and not slaves any longer. We are born to be free. We need not be slaves any longer to Satan or men or to condemnation or guilt or fear or sin.

Through the blood of Christ, we are also brought into God's presence (Ephesians 2:13). God dwells in light that no man can approach. The only way to come into His presence is through the blood - till the end of our lives. However saintly we may become, our access to God's presence will always be through the blood of Christ. Many believers tend to forget this, once they get victory over conscious sin, and end up as Pharisees.

Through the blood shed on Calvary's cross, Christ has made peace with God (Colossians 1:20). God is not an Enemy to us now. This is a fact that needs to be established in our minds firmly. Many believers live with the feeling that God is constantly unhappy with them and is always frowning at them. This is Satan's lie, designed to bring believers into condemnation and to hinder their spiritual growth. Through the blood of Christ, we have become friends of God. Unless we believe this, we will never make any spiritual progress.

The blood of Christ also cleanses us continually from all sin, when we walk in the light (1 John 1:7). To walk in the light is to walk in victory over all conscious sin. But even when we live in victory over conscious sin, there is still plenty of unconscious sin in all of us. That is why John goes on to say, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves" (verse 8).

It is not because we have a flesh, that we sin unconsciously, but because we have lived in conscious selfishness for many years, both prior to, and subsequent to our conversion. Jesus had the same flesh as we have. But because He never lived in selfishness at any time, He never sinned unconsciously even once. There was no sin at all in Him (1 John 3:5).

Our unconscious sins (which constitute perhaps about 90% of our total sins initially) are continually cleansed by Christ's blood, so that we can have constant, and unbroken fellowship with the Father.

Through the blood of Christ, we also overcome Satan and his accusations (Revelation 12:11). Satan accuses us to God, to other men and to ourselves constantly. But we can overcome his accusations by confessing ("the word of our testimony") that we have been forgiven, justified, redeemed, brought near to God, brought to peace with God and cleansed by the blood of Christ. Satan can have no power over us any longer.

We need the blood of Christ to cleanse us DAILY, for all of us sin unconsciously daily, and many believers sin consciously too.

2. The Holy Spirit

It is impossible to live a victorious Christian life or to serve God effectively, if we are not filled with the Holy Spirit.

Forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit are the two gifts that God offers to all repentant sinners AS SOON AS they turn to Him.

There is no need for anyone who turns to the Lord and receives forgiveness of sins to wait for even a single day before he receives the Holy Spirit. That is how it was in the early days of Christianity. In those days, as soon as people repented and believed, they were baptized in water and then received the Holy Spirit at once. That was part of their initial experience. But nowadays, we find believers waiting for years before being baptized in water and then waiting for many more years before receiving the Holy Spirit.

What every believer needs to know is that there is no need for any extra qualification in order to receive the Holy Spirit, other than what is required for the forgiveness of sins - namely, repentance from sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is due to ignorance of this fact that many, many believers are not baptized in the Holy Spirit. If only they knew the truth, they would not be deceived by Satan any longer.

To try to be worthy enough to receive the Holy Spirit is as foolish as trying to be worthy enough to receive the forgiveness of sins.

The fullness of the Holy Spirit will primarily bring the fullness of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives - fullness of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:23).

Secondly, it will equip us to be powerful witnesses for Christ and effective members of His earthly Body.

The anointing of the Holy Spirit is the prime requisite for being an effective member of Christ's Body. Without this, however holy our lives may be, we will be limited in our usefulness to God for His work on earth.

Although Jesus lived a pure and holy life for 30 years, He still needed to be anointed with the Holy Spirit, before He could have the supernatural gifts necessary for Him to fulfil His ministry.

God wants to equip us in the same way today, so that we can carry on that ministry, as the Body of Christ on earth. Those who either despise or don't believe in these supernatural gifts will of course not have them. Thus their service for the Lord will also be limited.

We need to be filled with the Holy Spirit DAILY, for this is not a once-for-all experience that takes care of our need forever.

3. The Word of God

Right from the first paragraph of Scripture, we see the Holy Spirit operating along with God's Word. The spoken Word of God and the brooding of the Holy Spirit (Genesis 1:3), brought beauty and order out of chaos. That is how God can bring beauty and order into our lives too.

The power of the Holy Spirit known experientially, without the guidance of the written Word would leave a man like a steam engine, full of steam but without any rails to run on. Conversely, knowledge of the written Word without the anointing and the power of the Holy Spirit would make a man like an engine standing on

neatly laid-out rails, but lacking the steam to move forward.

God's Word is the means by which we understand the mind of God. Through submitting to it, we can have our minds renewed to think the way God thinks and "to look at things from God's point of view" (Colossians 1:9 - paraphrase). It is impossible to grow spiritually without allowing God's Word to renew our minds. Many do not know the will of God in the different situations of life, only because they do not know the Word of God. There is an answer in God's Word for every single problem that we can ever face in life - if only we know where to find it.

How poor those believers are who do not know the Word of God.

The Word of God is also a revealer of our inner spiritual condition (Hebrews 4:12). It is like an scanning machine that reveals everything inside our hearts. One who does not regularly meditate on God's Word will remain perpetually ignorant and self-deceived about his true state.

When it comes to spiritual battle, the Word of God is our weapon against Satan. Jesus overcame Satan only by quoting the Word of God to him (Matthew 4:1-10). This is the sword by which the Enemy is driven away. When the Word of God dwells within a person, he becomes strong to overcome all of Satan's schemes (1 John 2:14).

We need to hear God's Word speaking to us DAILY, if we are to get light on ourselves, be overcomers, and make spiritual progress.

4. The Way of the Cross

Jesus, as our Forerunner (One Who has run the same race ahead of us), has opened a way for us to enter the Father's presence and dwell there all the time. This way is called "the new and living way" (Hebrews 10:20).

Paul speaks of it as "always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus" (2 Corinthians 4:10). He once said, as his personal testimony, that he was crucified with Christ and lived himself no longer. It was Christ that now lived in him, because he himself had died on Calvary. This was the secret of his amazing life and usefulness to God.

Jesus always walked the way of the cross - the way of death to Self. He NEVER pleased Himself even once (Romans 15:4). To please oneself is the essence of all sin. To deny oneself is the essence of holiness.

Jesus once said that no-one would be able to follow Him, unless he decided to deny himself DAILY and to die to himself DAILY (Luke 9:23). That is clear. It is impossible to follow Jesus if we don't deny ourselves daily. We may be cleansed in Christ's blood, have received the Holy Spirit and have a deep knowledge of the Word. But if we don't die to ourselves daily, we cannot follow the Lord Jesus. That is certain.

Jesus once spoke of those who seek to patch up an old garment with a new patch. This He said would tear the garment. What was needed was to get rid of the old garment and get a brand new one. In another parable, He spoke of making the tree itself good, if we wanted the fruit to be good. It was no use just cutting off the bad fruit.

All these parables have basically one lesson: The old man cannot be improved. He has been crucified by God (Romans 6:6). Now we must agree with God's judgment on him, and put him off, and put on the new man.

The way of the cross is the way of spiritual progress. If you are not overcoming sins like anger, irritation, impatience, lustful thinking, dishonesty, jealousy, malice, bitterness, and the love of money etc., the answer lies here: You have avoided the way of the cross.

A dead man does not stand up for his rights. He does not fight back. He does not care about his reputation. He will not take revenge. He cannot hate anyone or have a bitterness against anyone.

This is what it means to die to Self.

This way of the cross, like all the other provisions that God has made for our spiritual growth (that we considered above), is also something that we need DAILY, if we are to make spiritual progress.

5. The Body of Christ

Under the new covenant, God has not intended that we should be lone Christians living by ourselves - even if we are living in victory over sin. God's will is that there should be a Body of disciples of Jesus manifesting His glory together.

There is a difference between a Body and a congregation. A congregation is no better than a secular club. The club may be a good club, where people care for one another and help one another. But a Body is more than that. In the Body of Christ, each member is first of all inwardly connected to the Head and then inwardly and inseparably connected to the other members. These members must grow in oneness until their unity is like the unity of the Father and the Son (John 17:21-23).

Satan opposes the building of such a Body anywhere on earth, for he knows that such a Body can rout him, put him to flight, and destroy his kingdom. Jesus said that it is against the church that the gates of Hell would not prevail (Matthew 16:18). The gates of Hell may prevail against a lone individual Christian. But they cannot prevail against the church. That is why Satan's attacks on spiritual unity among believers are far stronger than his attacks on purity.

Where any two disciples of Jesus are firmly united in oneness of mind and spirit, whatever they ask for will be granted, for in two such disciples is found an expression of the Body of Christ (Matthew 18:18-20).

In fellowship with other believers, we will discover the selfishness and utter corruption of our flesh much more quickly and more deeply than if we lived all by ourselves. It is only through fellowship with others who have a flesh that our rough edges can be smoothed out.

Many believers merely spin theories about the church and the Body of Christ. But we must be among those who seek reality. There are enough theories about the church in Christendom. We don't have to add to that number with one more theory or doctrine about the Body of Christ. Let us demonstrate the reality of the Body in our mutual relationships in our local church, and thus demonstrate to the world and to Satan that the Body of Christ is a reality on earth.

Receiving all of God's Gifts

We can do many things with one finger, more with two fingers, still more with three fingers, and very much more with four fingers. But God in His wisdom has created us with five fingers, with a purpose. When we think of the fingers on our hands, we would never be satisfied with the bare minimum of two fingers.

Why then should we be satisfied with the bare minimum in the Christian life? Let us avail of ALL the gifts that God has given us to have a strong grip on the Christian life.

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