

A Firm Grip on the Christian Life ■ The Way of the Cross

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of denying oneself, taking up the cross daily, and following Jesus wholeheartedly. It highlights the need to sacrifice both the bad and the good things in our lives, yielding completely to God's will. The speaker encourages living by every word from God's mouth, even in legitimate matters, to experience the fullness of joy and victory in the Christian life.

Scripture: Luke 9:23, Romans 8:13, 1 John 2:6

Topics: "Self-Denial", "Wholehearted Discipleship"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of denying oneself, taking up the cross daily, and following Jesus wholeheartedly. It highlights the need to sacrifice both the bad and the good things in our lives, yielding completely to God's will. The speaker encourages living by every word from God's mouth, even in legitimate matters, to experience the fullness of joy and victory in the Christian life.

Transcript

So, we've been considering getting a firm grip on the Christian life. God will do his part if we do our part. God could never make Adam holy unless Adam chose to be holy.

God wants everybody on earth to repent. It says in 2 Peter 3, everyone, there are nearly 7 billion people in the world. So, God wants every one of them to repent, but the fact of the matter is perhaps less than 1% have actually repented.

Why is that? Isn't God almighty? It says in 1 Timothy 2, 5, 4 and 5 that God wants everybody on earth to be saved and to come to the knowledge of all the truth there is in scripture. Not just saved, he wants all 7 billion people to know everything about the new covenant and everything about the truth of scripture, but the fact of the matter is, it's not even 1% who are born again who know the whole truth. What does that show? That God does not force a person, even for the most important thing in life, to go to heaven.

He won't force a person to go to heaven. If a person chooses to live in sin, go to hell, God allows them to go. I mean, just think of yesterday, the number of people who died on this earth.

There must have been a hundred thousands of people who died on this earth yesterday and they've all gone to hell and God didn't stop any of them. They want to go, they want to go, they can go. So God

doesn't force people to repent or to be saved, which is the most important thing of all, and he's not going to force you and me to be filled with the Holy Spirit if you don't want to be.

And he's not going to force you to remain filled with the Holy Spirit once you are filled and you can lose that fullness. He's not going to force you to come back. He's not going to force you to seek for the mighty anointing of God upon your life in ministry.

No. He gives you complete freedom and that's the reason why so many believers are so shallow. That's the reason why so many born again believers are half-hearted and carnal, because God doesn't force anybody to be spiritual.

He waits for man to seek him, Jeremiah, I mean, he's, he really, the Holy Spirit's pleading with everybody all over the earth. He pleads with believers, I mean, he's been pleading with all of you throughout these last three, four days of this conference. But he won't force you because once he forces you, you become a robot and God is not going to have one robot in heaven.

God could have programmed Adam in such a way that he looked just like a human being with flesh and blood and bones, but programmed inwardly to be like the planets, automatically obeying God. We would have obeyed God automatically like the planets that have obeyed God for thousands of years without even a split-second disobedience. But the planets, you know that the planets can never become sinners, and the planets can never be holy, even though they've obeyed God.

Imagine obeying God for 10,000 years and not being holy. The planets are an example of that. God wants people who choose to be holy, and that's why he didn't send Adam into the garden saying, you can eat anything you like, do anything you like, no.

He said, I've got to test you at least with one thing. There are 10,000 trees there, you can eat all of them, but just don't eat of this tree. That wasn't a very difficult command, but it was a test of choice.

And without that choice, Adam could never be holy. It's very important to understand that God could not make Adam holy. God could have programmed Adam to be obedient like he did with the planets, or you know the seed that falls into the ground, it's programmed to die and bring forth fruit.

It's automatic. There's no choice in that seed. You plant a mango tree, it'll never produce oranges.

It's programmed to produce mangoes. So God could have programmed man like that, and he could have programmed you and me when we were born again, that he took away our power of choice, and we were just programmed to do automatically. That's what some people believe, that once you accept Christ, you'll never be lost.

To me, it's just a lot of rubbish. It means that God makes you into a robot that time. Even when he fills you with the Holy Spirit, you're not a robot.

You still have the power of choice. For example, the gifts of the Holy Spirit. I've heard people testify like this.

I was praying, and I got filled with the Spirit, and I got thrown from one end of the room to the other, and I continued speaking in tongues, and I couldn't control myself. I said, brother, that was certainly a demon. That was without a doubt a demon.

God doesn't throw people from one end of the room to the other, and God doesn't, the fruit of the Spirit is self-control. And if you couldn't control yourself, brother, that was a demon. I've seen demon-possessed people who can't control themselves.

They can't. That's a demon. The fruit of the Spirit is self-control.

I got more control over myself after I got filled with the Holy Spirit. More control over my tongue. More control over my thoughts.

More control over my emotions. More control over everything. The fruit of the Spirit is self-control.

But he doesn't force us. Even the gifts of the Holy Spirit, every gift he gives, if, for example, he gives me the gift to teach the Word of God, it's not sort of uncontrollable. I mean, I can't tell you, I don't know when I'm going to stop, it may be four o'clock this afternoon that I finish speaking.

No. It's completely under my control, but the gift is not my own. The gift is from God, but he gives me the choice to use it, and that's how people abuse the gifts of the Spirit too, to, you know, get benefits for themselves.

So what I want to say is the power of choice is very, very important in the pathway of holiness, and God will never take it away, no matter how much you have progressed. Think of Jesus, the perfect Son of God who lived on earth at the end of his life. He could choose in Gethsemane whether he wanted to drink the cup or not drink the cup.

In fact, his choice was, I don't want to drink this cup. But, he said, Father, not my will but thine. There was a choice there.

He could have said, Father, I'm not going to drink this cup. I'm not going to be forsaken by you on the cross for three hours, sorry. I'm willing to go through physical death a thousand times.

I mean, if that's all that's required to save people from sin, I'm ready to go through it ten thousand times. But physical death is not the punishment for sin, and if Jesus had died only physically for us on the cross, our sins would never have been forgiven. It's one of those truths which I find even many Christians haven't understood, that Jesus' physical death was not enough to pay a price for my sin.

Because if physical death is the price for sin, then when I physically die, I paid the price for my sin. And every believer, every atheist in the world, when he dies, he's paid the price for his sin. He should go to heaven.

But what is the price for our sin? It is being forsaken by the Father for all eternity. And that's what Jesus experienced for three hours on the cross, being forsaken. That's the cup he didn't want to drink, but he drank it for you and me.

When I understood that, I saw the love of Jesus for me, personally, I make these things personal, but then it becomes real, at Gethsemane, long before Calvary. The decision was taken in Gethsemane, it was executed on Calvary, but it is in Gethsemane I see the choice he made. For the sake of Zach Funen, I will drink that cup.

I make it personal. Make it personal. It will make a tremendous difference in your life when you understand that Jesus was willing to face the agony of an eternal hell for three hours on the cross for you.

Put your name there. It made all the difference in my life. I said, Lord, there's nothing I will not do for you from now on.

Anything you ask of me, I'm willing to sacrifice anything because I saw what you did for me in Gethsemane. I'm surprised that Christians are so reluctant to have this minimum attitude to the Christian life. What is the minimum I must do to go to heaven? I'm not interested.

What is the maximum I can do in this one earthly life for one who gave his life for me? That's what I'm interested to find out. The reason for carnality is because people always say, what's the minimum I have to do to be accepted in a church? What's the minimum I have to do in order to be church members? Look at all the church members who never go to church regularly, who float around, drift from one church to another church, treat churches like restaurants. Oh, I like the food here today.

I'll go for Thai food tomorrow, Japanese food the other day. That's restaurants. The church is not a restaurant.

It's a family. You've got to be committed. My children grew up and they ate, whether the food was good or bad, they ate there.

It was a home. It was not a restaurant. But where do you find churches like that today? Where do you find Christians like that who are committed? Very rare, because people are playing the fool with God.

What is the minimum I must do to be accepted in this church? What is the minimum I must do to go to heaven? I tell you people who have that attitude, the chances are they'll finally end up in hell. It's an absolute insult. It's like a wife saying, what's the minimum I have to do in order to be your wife? Am I allowed to fool around with other men once in a while? What's the minimum I have to do? What type of marriage will that be if a woman's attitude is, what's the minimum I have to do to please my husband? It's not going to be a healthy marriage.

I can say that from day one. That's the reason why many Christians don't have a satisfying relationship with Jesus Christ. Most Christians, if you were to ask them honestly, tell me honestly, do you have a satisfying relationship with Jesus Christ? The answer would be no, from more than 90% of born again believers.

And I'll tell you the reason is because they have this attitude of, what is the minimum I have to do? What is the minimum I have to give? What is the minimum I have to read the Bible? Is half an hour reading the Bible enough? It's always, what is the minimum? What is the minimum? What's the minimum? But when they go out into the world, their attitude is, what is the maximum amount of money I can make? What is the maximum amount of pleasure I can get? Well no wonder such people are worldly. Now if someone were to take that same attitude into Christianity, he would be a radical whole hearted Christian. I've seen businessmen who work so hard to make money.

They go to their stores early in the morning, go late at night, they're working, working. Even Christians, they skip meetings, they skip everything to make money, money, money is their God. And I've looked at them and I said, Lord, those guys, mammon is their God and they serve mammon so wholeheartedly, what a shame it is if I can't serve Christ more wholeheartedly than those guys serve mammon.

Look at the things they're willing to give up. They're willing to give up church meetings, they're willing to give up God in order to make money. Shame on me if I can't serve Christ who died for me better than

them.

See, such people will never be disciples of Jesus Christ. They'll never have a satisfying experience with Christ. They'll just be members of the church.

But if you want a satisfying experience in church with Jesus Christ, be one of those maximum Christians. And there's another thing I want to say. Today there's a lot of teaching about getting things from God.

Brother, you must have faith. You must have faith if you want to get healing, if you want to get a car, you want to get a house, you want to get this, get things from God, and you must have faith. And people are trying to look inside their heart to see if I can have more faith, more faith, more faith.

What is the maximum I can get from God in this one earthly life? I'll tell you what my attitude has been for many, many years. What is the maximum God can get from me in my one earthly life before I pass on? Just change that attitude and you'll see what a difference it makes in your Christian life. God sees that you've taken the Christian life seriously.

It will change you completely and you will be a blessing. Mark my word. You may be ungifted, you'll be a blessing to thousands.

And you'll fulfill God's will on earth and you'll come to the end of your life and say, Father, I have finished the work you gave me to do. You know that most Christians, when they come to the end of their life, not only they cannot say, Father, I have finished the work you gave me to do, they have to say, Lord, I come to the end of my life, I don't even have a clue what your work for me on earth was. What a tragedy.

We're not supposed to live like that. And they'll have such, even if they make it to heaven, they'll have such regret when they get there for all eternity. I believe I will.

If I fooled around on the earth and played the fool with things of God and always had this, what is the minimum I have to give to God and what's the maximum I can get from God of earthly things, if I lived like that for 50, 60 years on earth after I was born again and I go to heaven, you think I'm going to enjoy heaven? I'm going to have such tremendous regret for all eternity that in the one lifetime God gave me on earth, I lived for myself instead of living for Christ. I thought of what I could do, what I could gain, what I could gain of earthly things instead of thinking of what Christ could get out of my life. So I want to say to all of you young people, don't make the mistake that some of the older generation have made.

You look around you and you see a lot of older people. You don't see radical Christianity in them. You don't see the passion for living for Jesus or some of them may have had it when they were young, but they've lost it.

Somewhere along the line, they lost it. I never want to lose it. I had a passion to live for Christ when I gave myself to him.

When I was 19, when I was 21, I got baptized and I had a tremendous passion to live for God. I have that passion even more today and I hope it will increase as the years go by. Let's say, Lord, nothing is too big a sacrifice for me to make for you.

When I think of what you went through in Gethsemane, I want you to meditate on Gethsemane. He made a choice there. I don't want to drink this cup, but Father, if you want me to do it, I'll do it.

That is the meaning of the cross, the cross in the life of the believer. That's the fourth thing I want to speak about. I spoke about the blood of Christ, the word of God, the importance of these to get a solid grip on the Christian life, the power of the Holy Spirit, and I want to speak today about the way of the cross.

The way of the cross is very little preached about and even less understood. When Jesus said in Luke 9.23, it's so clear, if anyone wants to come after me, anyone, any person in the world wants to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. Let's read that slowly, anyone, anyone means brother, sister, man, child, anyone, wants to come after me.

Not anyone who wants to go to heaven. You never find Jesus saying, how many of you want to go to heaven? Is there any stupid fellow who will say, I don't want to go to heaven? Is there any person who will raise their hands and say, I want to go to hell? No. That's not the question Jesus asked.

He never asked anybody how many people want to go to heaven. That's all foolish preachers ask such questions. Jesus asked this question, how many of you want to follow me? How many of you want to love me more than your own life? How many of you want to love me more than your money, more than your business, and more than your father, and mother, and brother, and sister, and wife, and children? How many of you want to do that? Then there are not so many hands raised up.

If anyone wants to come after me, he has to do certain things. He can't say, God, do this for me. No.

Let him. Whose responsibility is that? His. Let him deny himself.

That means say no to self. You want to follow Jesus, the first thing you've got to say is no to yourself. I remember once a brother and I were speaking to a Hindu man who seemed to want to receive Christ as his savior.

We don't believe in forcing anyone to change their religion because it's worth nothing. There's a lot of accusation by people in India who say that Christians are forcing others to change their religion. It's a lot of rubbish.

No. Any forced change of religion means nothing. I said, we're not interested in getting a person to change religion.

We're interested in a person being connected to God through Jesus Christ. We were speaking to this man because he seemed to show some interest in Christ. I asked him, do you want to receive Christ as God, as your savior? He said yes.

We were about to pray, and this brother who was with me said, no, I want to ask him another question before we proceed. Because the Holy Spirit keeps telling me the word Saraswati, I don't know what that means, but does that mean anything to you? It was like a word of knowledge that the Spirit gave at that time. He said, yes, of course, it's one of the gods I worship.

I said, so I presume you're going to give up that and now receive Christ? He said, oh no, not at all. I want to receive Christ in addition to all the other gods I have. I said, sorry, you can't receive Christ.

It's like a man who's married 10 wives and says, I want to marry another one now. Would you give your daughter to that man? Well, God's not going to give Christ to someone who already wants him in addition to other gods. And if money is your God, you can't have Christ.

It's not just to the non-Christian we say that. This is the fundamental problem with many Christians. They want to marry Christ, but they have not given up their old marriages to something on earth, which means a lot to them, pleasure, comfort.

They have to say no to self. Self is the God that all the children of Adam worship. It's their idol.

And you have to make a choice now. You're forsaking that and marrying Christ. And many people, the problem with their Christian life is they've been asked to receive Christ without having given up that other God they're worshipping.

I mean, if that man, for example, if at that time the Spirit had not revealed that and we had asked him to receive Christ and we patted him on the back, wonderful brother, now you're born again, now you're saved, you're going to heaven, like many creatures would say who don't believe in the ministry of the Holy Spirit revealing things like that, we would have fooled him and fooled ourselves. And that person would have joined some church and considered himself a Christian when all along he was worshipping some other God as well, in private. Of course, he wouldn't bring that God to his church.

In the church he'd be worshipping Christ, but in private he's worshipping another God. This is exactly the problem with a lot of people who are born again. They come to church and they sing all the praises of Christ, but in private life during the week they're worshipping themselves, they're worshipping money, they're worshipping another God which is just as much an idol as any idol that any person in another religion worships.

No difference. And they're wondering why their Christian life is not satisfactory. It won't be satisfactory, brother, I'll tell you that, in a hundred years it won't be satisfactory.

Ten years from now you'll be more miserable than you are today. But you may be a good member and good standing in some church that does not tell you the truth. So I want to say to you young people especially, from day one, determine to be a radical Christian and not like the half-hearted older generation you see around you in your church.

Don't follow their example. I say that in my own home church. I say if you see a worldly young sister suddenly changing her dress fashions to the worldly fashions of people around her in the world, don't follow her.

She may be a member of this church, but she's a worldly member of this church. You don't have to follow her. There will be, God allows such worldly people to exist around us to see whether you'll follow them or follow Him.

So say no to yourself. Say no to seeking your own honor. Say no to seeking your own comfort.

Say no to seeking your own reputation. That's the meaning of taking up the cross. And then say no to yourself and take up your cross daily.

The cross means death. You say no to yourself and then you crucify your flesh every single day. It's not a once for all thing.

It's something you've got to do every day. Let me just explain the difference between what the Bible calls the old man and the flesh. Many people don't understand that.

The Bible says in Romans 6, your old man was crucified with Christ on the cross. And that's something people don't understand. How could that happen? Well, I'll tell you.

Do you believe God knows the end from the beginning? Yes, He does. I mean, God's mind knows everything that's going to happen in the next million years and way back before anything existed on this earth. And there was before there was any angels or Adam or heaven or earth or stars or anything when there was only Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

That's all. At that time, God knew the whole history of the human race. He knew all about you, where you'd be born, what your name would be.

And He knew that at some time in your life, you would open your heart to receive Jesus Christ as your Savior. You'd really repent and you'd be born again. Now, when did God know that? Before He created, before Genesis 1 verse 1. You know there's a verse in the Bible about something that happened before Genesis 1 verse 1? Let me read it to you.

Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 4. Ephesians 1 verse 4 says, before the foundation of the world. That means before Genesis 1 verse 1. This is a verse that took place before Genesis 1 verse 1. Before the foundation of the world, God the Father chose you and me in Christ to be holy and blameless before Him. He didn't choose you to go to heaven.

He chose you to be holy and blameless before Him. So Ephesians 1 verse 4 is something that happened before Genesis 1 verse 1. So before Genesis 1 verse 1, when God looked into way into the future of millions of years, He saw me. Let's make it personal.

He saw you. And He saw me when I was 19 and a half years old giving my life to Christ and saying, Lord I receive you as my Lord and my Savior and I want to live for you. Thank you for dying for my sins.

I'm a sinner. I want to turn from my sin. God saw that millions of years ago.

And therefore He put my name in the book of life way back there. And He put me, even though I didn't exist, I was not going to exist for another millions of years. He already in God's mind, I existed.

And in God's mind, He put me in Christ. When? Before Genesis 1 verse 1. This is me and this is Christ. He put me in Christ millions of years ago.

And when Christ came to earth and died on the cross, I was there in Christ. And I died with Him. And when He was buried, I was buried with Him.

When He rose again, I was there. I rose up with Him. And when He ascended up to heaven in my spirit, it says I'm seated with Christ in the heavenly places.

Very simple. The Bible is a very simple book. If you don't listen to preachers, it will make it complicated.

Really very simple. It's written for children. I thank you Father, you've hidden these things from the clever intellectual people.

Revealed to babes. Come to it like a little baby, you'll understand everything. This is what it means to be in Christ.

What some of you probably never understood until now. You understood it now? How you could have been crucified with Christ 2,000 years ago? How Jesus could take the sins you commit today and pay for it 2,000 years ago when you were not even born? You believed, without seeing it, that He took your sins on the cross 2,000 years ago. Otherwise you wouldn't be here today.

But you find it difficult to believe that your old man was crucified with Him? It's the same Bible that says both those things. You say, that's difficult to believe. You understood it today because He placed you in Christ long, long ago.

See, most Christians think of Christ in them. Which is important. That's the emphasis in Colossians 1.25. Christ in you, the hope of glory.

In Ephesians, the emphasis is, you are in Christ. There are two sides of truth. Christ in you, you in Christ.

And most Christians think a million times more about Christ in me. He lives, He lives, He lives. You know, ask me how I know He lives.

He lives within my heart. It's absolutely true. But it's only one side of truth.

And one side of truth will give you an imbalanced Christian life. It's like a person who's got only one leg. He's limping along.

And that's how many Christians are. The other side of truth is that we are in Christ. And Ephesians emphasizes that.

We are placed in Christ. And Jesus is our example. In Christ our old man was crucified.

But the flesh is different. So let me explain the difference. The old man is the, let's look at it like your heart is a home.

And the lusts of the flesh are like the burglars, the robbers, who want to come inside your heart and take away everything precious. They want to take away your joy and make you depressed. They want to take away your purity and leave you impure.

They want to take away your love for God and replace it with the love of money. They want to take away everything good. That's what burglars come for.

And those are the lusts of the flesh. A whole gang of robbers just trying to get inside your heart. And inside your heart was this guy called an old man who was a servant.

Your servant who was in league with these robbers. And every time the robbers came, he'd open the door and say, Come right in. What do you want? I want everything precious.

Take it. You want purity? Take it. You want to take away my joy? Take it.

This is the old man that opened the heart for sin to come in. That old man was crucified with Christ on the cross. In a moment, God did it.

You didn't have to do anything about it. And when you received Christ, it became real in your life. Of course, if you didn't know the truth, it wouldn't make you free.

But once you know the truth, it makes you free. To know that my old man was crucified, it's finished. That means the desire to sin is gone.

And now God has put within me a new man, a new servant. Now the gang of robbers are still hale and hearty. That's the lust in the flesh.

The lust in the flesh of the gang of robbers. The old man, the old servant has been killed and got rid of. But the lust in the flesh still come knocking.

The very next day after you're converted. Because they're hale and hearty. But there's a new man inside.

Who says, no, I'm not going to let you in. You see how after you're really born again, you find a changed attitude to sin? You don't want to? You're still tempted to go to that pornographic site on the computer. You're still tempted to lose your temper.

But something within says, hey, hang on. Don't do that. But, sometimes the robbers are strong.

They push their way in and come through the door. Even though the new man doesn't want them to come in. And the reason is, because this new man hasn't eaten properly.

Or he ate such a lot and became fat and didn't do any exercise. So he had no strength. What do I mean by that? He didn't feed on the word of God.

And he didn't seek for the power of the Holy Spirit. To be able to resist these robbers. Then though he wants to stop them, he can't stop them and the robbers come in.

That's how a believer sins. In both cases, the robbers have taken away purity or joy or whatever it is. Just like in the unbeliever.

But there was a difference. The believer wanted to stop it because he had a new man. Now, taking up the cross means, I have to put these lusts of the flesh that come to death.

We can compare it in the Old Testament. The Old Testament is a very beautiful picture. Egypt is a picture of the world.

Pharaoh is a picture of Satan. We were enslaved there. By the blood of the Lamb, which is a picture of Christ, we got delivered.

We escaped death. They went through the Red Sea, in and out. They didn't get sprinkled with the waters of the Red Sea.

They went in and out. That's a picture of baptism. You go in and out.

It's very exact, these pictures. And then, what did God do? He took that entire Egyptian army, which is a picture of the old man, buried them in a moment. The Israelites did nothing.

God put the old man to death, and the Bible says, buried them in the Red Sea. And the Bible says, when you get into the waters of baptism, you are testifying that your old man was buried. And you come out.

It's so exact. The Word of God is exact. More accurate than 2 plus 2 is 4. And then, the children of Israel, that was not the end of their journey.

The Lord said, now, you come out of Egypt. But that's not the end. You don't just go to heaven now.

You've got to enter a land called the land of Canaan. The land of victory. The land that's ruled by giants.

A land that should belong to me, but is ruled by giants. I want you to go there and possess it. But, there is a difference now between the way these giants are to be killed and the Egyptian soldiers were to be killed.

You have to kill the giants. I killed the Egyptian army, the Lord says. But you've got to kill the giants in Canaan.

But I'll give you the power. That's the difference between the old man and the flesh. The lusts of the flesh are pictured by the giants of Canaan.

God's not going to kill them. He killed the old man. Galatians 5.24 says, those who belong to Christ, they crucify their flesh with the affections and lusts.

But Romans 6 says, your old man was crucified with Christ. That God did. That's the Egyptian army.

These are the giants of Canaan. But you can look at the giants of Canaan. And what are the giants of Canaan in our life? Anger, lust, bitterness, love of money.

You know the love of money is a giant? Many Christians never kill it. They allow that giant to occupy some territory in Canaan forever and ever and ever. And they become like a thorn in the flesh, harming them.

They know that sexual lust is dirty. Internet pornography is dirty. But this giant love of money doesn't look such an ugly man.

Yeah, some of the giants are pretty pretty. But they occupy areas that should belong to God. You know, God opens our eyes to see these things.

And they're all revealed in Scripture. If you read the Sermon on the Mount, you'll see all of them there. Anger, lust, seeking the honor of men, judging others, love of money, anxiety.

The thing that makes you anxious is a giant. You've got to get rid of it. So these are the giants that rule Canaan.

And what did the Israelites say when they saw these huge giants? You know, it says that the spies went to check out on the land and they came back with grapes that were so heavy that two people had to carry a branch of grapes. And they said, this is a wonderful land. We've never seen anything like it.

It's a land flowing with milk and honey. Water comes from heaven and we don't have to keep on pedaling the wheels like we did when we pumped the water of the River Nile in Egypt. This just receives rain from heaven.

But these giants rule the land. They're too tough. They're nine feet high.

We're the tallest of us. We're six feet and these guys are nine feet high. They're so huge.

We'll never be able to conquer them. That's exactly what Christians say today. This anger of mine, I've been enslaved to it for 30 years.

I'll never be able to conquer it. This lust of mine, I'm enslaved to it. I'll never be able to conquer it.

This habit of drinking alcohol or smoking or drugs or whatever it is, I can never conquer it. That's exactly what the devil wants you to say. Keep on confessing that this filthy habit of yours is more powerful than Almighty God who created this universe.

And you keep on confessing that lie. Which lie? That your filthy habit is more powerful than Almighty God who created it. You know what God told the Israelites? Okay, it'll be like that for you.

For the next 40 years, you'll never enter the land. Because you insulted me by saying that those nine foot giants were more powerful than me who created the universe. You know what an insult it is? To say that your sin is more powerful than the Holy Spirit? Your sin is more powerful than the Holy Spirit? And you keep saying that to God every day? And glorify the devil by living to prove it? God says, that's the reason why many people never enter in.

They wander, wander, wander in the wilderness, glorying in the fact, I'm redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. I've been baptized in the Red Sea. And the pillar of cloud is leading us, wonderful.

But that's not where you're supposed to be. You're supposed to be in the promised land. You've got to put the flesh to death.

That's taking up the cross. Take up the cross every day. It's not something that happens once for all like the old man.

Here is something you've got to do every day. If anyone will come after me, let him deny himself and take up the cross. Die to himself and to the lust of his flesh every day.

It's not a once for all decision. The old man is gone once for all, but even that can come back. If you don't take that position continuously.

But putting the flesh to death is every day. Let me read you a verse in Romans 8 and verse 13. Romans 8 verse 13 says this.

If you live according to the flesh, you must die. Now you would think he's speaking to unbelievers. I don't know how the Calvinists explain this verse.

Is it telling unbelievers that you must die? He's not talking about physical death. That happens to everybody whether you live according to the flesh or not. He's talking about spiritual death.

If you live according to the flesh, you must die spiritually. If you live according to the lust of the flesh, you will certainly die. What does the devil say to believers? Who is he writing to? Let's see verse 12.

Brethren. Brethren. Born-again brethren.

My dear born-again brethren. Verse 12. If you born-again brethren live according to the flesh, whatever you may call yourself, spirit-filled, speaking in tongues, whatever it is, you will die.

And what does the devil say? What does the devil tell Eve? You will? Oh, you will not die. The first lie spoken in scripture was when God said you will die, the devil said you will not die. That is the lie with which he's been fooling born-again believers around the world.

The born-again believers, God says, you brethren, if you live according to the flesh, you will die. And the devil says through many preachers, you will not die. You have your choice.

You can believe the devil and his agents, those preachers who tell you you'll not die, or you can believe God's word which says, brethren, if you live according to the flesh, you will die. It's true. Say what you like.

Your logic doesn't work here. You know logic. Once a child of God, always a child of God.

You know the Luke chapter 3, the last part where the genealogy of Mary is given, Adam is called. You know who? The son of God. He's called the son of God in Luke chapter 3. The devil could have told him, you're a son of God.

You'll never be anything else. You're a son of God. How can you not be a son of God after some time? You know logic.

Even if you go away from me, you're a son. If your son leaves your home and rebels against you and goes off, you're his son. All this logic doesn't work in God's kingdom.

I'll tell you that. Adam is called the son of God, but he's in hell today. Where did the son of God end up? So, you brethren, if you live according to the flesh, you must die, and I don't believe the devil, whatever he may say, but there's an alternative.

If you brethren, and here's where the cross comes up, by the spirit put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. We've got to read the Bible slowly. Now, from verse 13, question.

And even a 10-year-old can answer this. Who has to put to death the deeds of the body? The Holy Spirit or you? Most people who read the Bible carelessly will say the spirit will put to death the deeds of the body. Read it again.

If you, by the power of the spirit, put to death the deeds of the body, you'll live. This bulb receives electricity. With the power of that electricity, drives out the darkness.

But by itself, it can't do it. This bulb, by the power of the spirit, drives out the darkness. I, by the power of the Holy Spirit, put to death the deeds of the body, I will live.

Now imagine if you were to call the Holy Spirit a liar. You know how Christians call the Holy Spirit a liar? Well, even if you don't put the deeds of the body to death, you will still live. Uh-huh.

Is that so? Well, the Holy Spirit must be a terrific liar then. He must be the biggest liar in the world. To say that if you put to this, the deeds of the body to death by the spirit, only then you'll live.

When the real truth is, even if you don't put the deeds of the body to death, you'll still live. Because remember, 25 years ago, you all said those magic words, Lord Jesus, come into my heart. It's one of the greatest deceptions going on in Christendom today.

Whereby people are made two-fold a child of hell. I believe God's word. And I want to tell you this.

I could show you a hundred verses in the New Testament that teach exactly the same thing. And yet the devil has succeeded in blinding people around the world. Because he knows that man loves a comfortable sinful life.

And so he wants to present them a version of Christianity which will allow them to live in their sin. Allow them to fight and yell with their husbands and wives and still go to heaven when you die. Allow them to love money on earth and still go to heaven when they die.

It's a deception. It reminds me of that Sunday school children's Bible class story where the teacher was teaching them the story of the rich man and Lazarus. How the rich man went to hell and Lazarus went to paradise.

And at the end of the story the teacher said, well children, who would you want to be like? And one smart boy got up and said, I'd like to be like the rich man on earth and like Lazarus after I die. That's exactly what most Christians are living like. And the devil says, you can be like that.

You can be like the rich man on earth and like Lazarus after you die. Don't believe all these verses which says, don't believe all these preachers who say, if by the spirit you're putting to death the deeds of the body, only then you'll live. Oh no, no, no.

You're okay. Dear brother, sister, do you realize that you may be believing the devil's lie and living in a world of delusion, self-deception? Let me tell you in Jesus' name, if you do not put the deeds of the body to death and the power of the Holy Spirit, you will not live. Take it from me.

And I have the authority of the word of God to back it. Does that mean I live in constant uncertainty? No. If you open yourself to the Holy Spirit, He will give you the power to hate sin.

When we are babies, we don't hate sin spiritually. It's like, you know little children, they'll pick up all the rubbish from the floor and eat it. Don't we have to teach them, give that up? But now you're grown up, you don't go licking the floor.

No, because you've got discernment. There's no, you don't delight to lick the floor. It's the same way.

I mean, it's difficult for a child to understand. How is it that these grown up people don't love to play in the mud and dirty themselves? How is it they're always wanting to be clean and have a shower and all that? And I hate taking a shower, that two year old says. How is it these grown up people love to take a shower? That's how two year old baby Christians say, how is it these some Christians want to be holy all the time? How is it they want to hate money? I love it.

It's like a two year old saying, I love this dirt. You've got to grow up. And the Holy Spirit will make you grow up.

It won't be a struggle to take a shower. You'll be delighted to take a shower. You'll feel fresh at the end of it.

It's exactly like that. The devil's fooling people left, right and center. To take up the cross and say, Lord, I am going to put the deeds of the body to death.

The cross is an instrument of death. If you were living in Israel in those days where the Romans were crucifying people here and there and one day you looked out of the window and you saw a man carrying the cross, you knew he was not going for a picnic. You know he had closed his bank account and he had said goodbye to his friends and he was on his way to die.

It's the equivalent of the electric chair or the lethal injection today. There was no turning back. It was death.

And Jesus, when he used that expression, take up the cross. You see, people don't understand it today, unfortunately, because the cross has been so glorified. You have these golden crosses and people hang a cross around their neck and all.

But, you know, you've got to see it as like the electric chair. Imagine if a person had a model of an electric chair hanging on his neck or a noose hanging around his neck. To get the picture of what the cross is, you've got to see it as an instrument of death.

Because the cross has been so glorified, people don't understand what it is. It was an ugly thing. Nobody would hang it around their neck in the days of the Romans.

Nobody thought that an electric chair was a beautiful thing to have a model of or a lethal injection or a noose. But the cross has been glorified. And the devil has been in this business of glorifying the cross in the wrong way so that people don't understand it's an instrument of death.

Because it's a shameful thing to be taken, to be carried on the cross. I mean, if you were paraded naked down the street, would that be something you'd be proud of? In some places, they do shame people like that. They shame people by stripping their clothes and making them go down the streets naked.

The cross is something like that. Shameful. You wouldn't want to be associated with it at all.

That's what Jesus said. You've got to treat sin like that. You've got to treat the flesh like that.

You've got to die. Take up the cross every day. Die to the opinions of this world and die to your flesh and the lust of it.

Crucify it. When those gang of robbers come to your door, you say, I'm going to kill every one of you. I'm not just going to tell you to go away.

I'm going to kill you. In Jesus' name, all of your lusts, I'm going to whack you on the head and you'll run away. You'll come back next time and you're going to get another whack.

You're not going to enter my heart. That's what it means to take up the cross. I'm going to say no to my choice.

Now, I want to say this. The difference between temptation and sin. See, many people confuse that.

When bad thoughts come into their minds, Oh, God, that bad thought. It could only be a temptation. If you relish it in your mind, then it becomes a sin.

Let me show you, James. Many people, many young people are confused. They're actually looking for a life free from temptation.

That will never come. Even Jesus was tempted in all points as we are. Now, turn to James chapter 1. Look at the expressions the Holy Spirit uses here.

Verse 14. Everyone, everyone is tempted in the same way. When he's enticed, carried away or pulled.

Enticed by his own lust. Those are these robbers. These robbers are very attractive.

They entice you. But sin is not born until this lust has conceived. You see, this is the language of birth.

You know that a birth takes place when an egg and a sperm unite. And no matter how many eggs a woman may have, she cannot give birth. It's impossible.

Eggs alone cannot produce a baby. And that's temptation. Temptation alone cannot produce sin.

It has to conceive. Now, let's take a picture. Here's a girl.

Here's a picture of the bride of Christ. She's walking down the road. And there's this very handsome, attractive, rich young man inviting her.

And she's attracted. She is attracted because the guy is so handsome, so kind, so generous, so lovable. And she's attracted.

And she knows it's wrong. And she says no. There's no conception.

Was she attracted? Yes. Did she conceive the baby? No. She walks down the street the next day.

There are a number of handsome people like that. She knows that none of them are Godly. And she says no.

Is she attracted to them? Yes. To every one of them. But she says no, no, no, no.

This is temptation. Being attracted, being attracted, being attracted. You say no.

You haven't sinned. Would you say that such a girl was impure because she was attracted? Hey, you were attracted by that good-looking man. She is pure because she said no.

Do you think the other girl who sits as a nun in a convent, never goes outside, never sees any attractive men, do you think she is pure or this one who walked past all those attractive men and said no to them? You know who's purer. The one who was attracted and said no, rather than the other one who sat inside a convent and just never saw any men and was not tempted at all. You don't know whether you're holy until you're tempted.

So the fact of attraction does not mean you're sinning. I mean, if you as a young man, you look at a pretty girl and you say that's pretty, that's not a sin. The Bible says, but God says that's not yours.

So don't keep looking at her. She's not yours. That's somebody else's daughter, somebody else's wife.

It's not for you. You shouldn't be. You're attracted.

You don't have to pretend when you look at a pretty girl. Oh, she's ugly. She's horrible.

That would be telling a lie. God doesn't ask you to tell a lie. And yet some people think that's what God's expecting me to say.

You see a pretty girl and you say, oh, Lord, she's horrible. No. You say, all right, she's attractive, but she's not given to me by God.

And I say no. I'm not interested in her. That is temptation.

And I haven't sinned. A conception has to take place in my mind. I may not touch her, but in my mind I say, I want her.

You've sinned. But the fact that you find something attractive is not a sin. I think all of us have to acknowledge, all of us, that money is attractive.

Who can say money is not attractive? I mean, if you were working in an office and the boss said to you, well, from next month I'm going to double your salary, what do you say? Oh, I hate money. I don't want it. I'll just live with my old salary.

I don't think any of us would say. Money is attractive. But I don't want to get it in the wrong way.

I don't want to love it. I don't want to live for it. I don't want to make it my idol.

It's attractive. Of course it's attractive. But I'm not going to sin.

I'm not going to yield to the love of money or do something wrong to get it. No. So the fact that something is attractive does not mean that you're a sinner.

Why didn't God make? I mean, if the only purpose that God had was to prevent Adam and Eve from eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, I could have recommended many other ways. Make the tree of knowledge of good and evil ugly, repulsive, stinking, smelly, full of thorns, and then tell Adam, don't go anywhere near it. And Adam would say, I'm not interested.

I want to stay a mile away from that in any case. The thing stinks. Why did God make? I believe it was one of the most attractive trees in the garden.

Who made it attractive? God. Because otherwise there's no temptation. If the thing repelled you in any case, there's no choice to say, Lord, I choose you over this stinking, repulsive tree.

It's not a great thing. But when there's something that's attractive, that makes your mouth water, and that you really feel drawn towards in every way, and you say, no, I want God, then you can be holy. That's why God's made many things in this world attractive.

I mean, if every woman in the world were looking like old 95-year-old hags and say, I'm not tempted, that's not very great. You're not getting any victory there. God's made them attractive.

If money was repulsive and you say, I don't love money, there's nothing attractive there. Temptation has to be attractive for you to overcome it, for you to be holy. That's why all temptation is attractive.

Don't you find a delight in spreading a juicy story you heard about somebody? There's something attractive about it. You like to pass on that bad news about somebody. You like to believe that something bad happened.

Temptation is like that. When you say, no, I'm not going to be a gossip. I'm not going to delight in bad news that happened to my enemy.

The Bible says, rejoice not when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad. So, temptation is attractive. When I say, no, I will not accept it.

When something bad happens to your enemy, there's a delight that comes into your heart. You say, no, I'm not going to be delighted. I'm going to feel sorry for him.

I know he's my enemy, but I don't want anything bad to happen to my enemy. You have overcome that temptation. If you find a delight that something bad happened to somebody because he cursed you or did something bad to you, you've sinned.

You have sinned. So, I want you to see the difference between temptation and sin. And it's in between there.

If you want to avoid sin, you've got to take up the cross. And the cross is to die. Say, Lord, I find that attractive, but I'm going to choose you.

It need not be always something sinful. It could be something good. For example, there are good things also that God may ask us to give up.

Fasting. Why do we fast? We don't just fast when the food is bad. There's no virtue in fasting when the day the food was bad.

Say, I decided to fast today. But on the day when the food was good, say, I'm going to fast today. That's really something.

See, I'll take the example of Abraham. Abraham had two sons in the beginning. Ishmael and Isaac.

Ishmael, he got the wrong way. It wasn't the will of God. Isaac, he got the right way.

And do you know that God asked him to give up both? The good and the bad? The one he got the right way and the one he got the wrong way? Ishmael, we can say is a picture of like the bad sheep of Amalek. Which God told Saul to kill. That's easy to get rid of.

You never see Ishmael again. Okay, fine. There are things in our flesh which are really ugly.

God says, give it up. You give it up. Then there are things which are not ugly.

Isaac, this is what God gave you. And God says, don't make that your idol. Don't make your wife your idol, even if God gave her to you.

Maybe you got a house, which is definitely, I mean, you read the circumstances behind it, it was a gift of God. Don't make it your idol. I find God's given me a preaching gift.

It can become my idol. It can become more important to me than God himself. There are many Christians who have the gifts of the Holy Spirit who worship the gifts and not the giver.

And that's how they go astray. They use their gifts for personal profit. It becomes their idol.

So, we have to sacrifice the Ishmael, and we've got to sacrifice the Isaac. Both have got to go to the cross. Not only the bad things, Lord, I put that to death, but the good things.

Where I say, Lord, you mean more to me than even that house you gave me. You mean more to me than the lovely wife you gave me. You mean more to me than the lovely children you gave me.

They are all, they will never take the place you have in my heart. And God will test you on that. It may be something good, which you have to sacrifice.

And when God, when Abraham sent away Ishmael, God first told Abraham to send away Ishmael, and he said, OK. You don't find God coming down to him with a fantastic promise. OK, you sent away Ishmael, I'm going to do all that for you.

No. But notice, that was in Genesis 21. Then you see in Genesis 22, when God told him to give up Isaac, and he gave up Isaac, and then see what God told him.

Boy, Abraham, there's going to be no limit to the way I'm going to bless you. Because now you have proved to me that you really fear me. You don't prove to God that you fear him when you send away Ishmael.

When you give up the bad things in your life, when you put the cross over that and say, I'm going to die to all those bad things, and I'm not going to do those things anymore, you don't really prove that you're a fearer of God. The first time in the Bible when God said to somebody, I give you a certificate, you fear me, was when he gave up that which God had given him. So remember this.

You see this in scripture. The Ishmael and the Isaac. The bad sheep of Amalek and the good sheep of Amalek.

And Saul lost his kingdom because he didn't give up the good sheep of Amalek. And that's how many people don't become kings today also. They've given up the bad things, but they haven't given up the good things.

Something good in their life is still their idol. It takes the place of God in their life. And you'll never come into the life God wants you.

There has to be a cross over Ishmael. There has to be a cross over Isaac. The bad sheep of Amalek have to be put to death and the good sheep of Amalek have to be put to death.

The things which you see as bad in your flesh have to go to the cross and the things which you see as good in your flesh have also got to go to the cross. For example, my intelligence. Who can say intelligence is an evil thing? Intelligence is a very good thing.

I thank God for the intelligence God gave me when I was born, but it's got to go to the cross. Otherwise, my intelligence will lead me astray. I can worship my intelligence.

I have to crucify it. I say, Lord, that's not more to me than you. You are more precious to me.

There are things that my intelligence cannot explain. People who worship their intelligence, if they find something in the Bible that their intelligence can't explain, they say, I can't believe this is God's word. Who are the people who say that? The people who worship their intelligence more than they worship God.

I can tell you so many things in the Bible I can't explain, but I don't worship my intelligence because I see that God is beyond the level of my intelligence and there are things about God my intelligence will never be able to explain. My intelligence is like a small cup. God's wisdom is like an ocean and the fact that the ocean doesn't fit into the cup, that's not very surprising.

So there has to be a crossover, the good things and the bad things, to take up the cross every day and say, Lord, there's so... How do you get light on it? I'll tell you how you get light on it. You get light as you progress. You'll never get light on putting the good things to death before you finish with the bad things.

Think of the areas in your life which are displeasing to God, which you already know your conscience tells you is displeasing to God. Romans 8.13 By the power of the Spirit, you're going to put those things to death from now on. Every day.

Lord, I am going to walk the way of the cross every day of my life. Now think of this. When Jesus said, If anyone wants to follow me, let him take up his... Now picture this in your mind.

You've got to go slowly. If anyone wants to follow me... Now what do you picture in your mind? You see that Jesus going in front and you're following him. If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself every day.

That means Jesus must have denied himself every day. Otherwise how can he ask me to follow him? And died to himself, take up his cross every day. That means Jesus throughout his 33 years died to himself every day.

There were many things that Jesus may have wanted to do, but he never did. I've often thought about this. If Jesus was like me, don't you think he could have thought, Well, I'd like to go and visit Rome, the capital city of the world.

I hear there are some interesting sights there. I can live... Do you think Jesus would have lived a holy life if he went to Rome? Sure. He would have lived a holy life anywhere on the earth.

Why didn't he go to Rome? Why didn't he take a two-week vacation and go to Rome to see the sights? Yes. It was not in his father's will. Period.

That settled it. It was not a question of, Is it sinful or not sinful? There's nothing sinful in going to Rome to see the sights. What's wrong in sightseeing? Jesus lived at such a high level, far higher than the average Christian lives.

That's why his life was so effective. That's why he did more in three and a half years than most Christians do in 300 years, even if they live that long, because he never wanted to do anything outside his father's will. Did that make him miserable? Was he an unhappy man because he never went sightseeing in Rome? No.

He was the happiest man that ever walked on this earth. His will was completely yielded to the father's will that even legitimate things, he would say, Well, I haven't had a word from the father for that. Think of the first temptation that came to Jesus.

Let me expand on the temptation. Satan says, You're hungry. You haven't eaten anything for 40 days.

You've drunk water, yes. That's why you're not thirsty. But you're hungry.

And there's nothing wrong in satisfying your hunger, particularly if you're not stealing somebody else's food. So Jesus, I'm not asking you to steal somebody else's food. I'm asking you to use the supernatural power God gave you 40 days ago when you were baptized.

Use that power to turn these stones into bread. That's not a luxury. I'm not asking you to turn these stones into ice cream, into bread.

Just necessity to eat it. Now you'd think, Well, there's nothing wrong with that. I'm not hurting anybody else.

I'm not asking for luxury. I'm asking just for bread. And that's just to live so that I can do the will of my Father.

You know what Jesus' reply was? If I were to paraphrase his words, I live by every word that proceeds from my Father's mouth. I don't live by bread alone. I need bread, but more important than that to me is every word that proceeds from my Father's mouth.

And I have not yet heard a word from my Father's mouth telling me to turn the stones into bread, however much my intelligence says, Yeah, I've got the power and I can do it. Can you imagine the level at which Jesus lived? That which looked like a necessity. He would not go ahead and do it if he didn't have a word from the Father.

Is it possible for a Christian to live like that? I believe it is. It's the most wonderful life you can ever live. He who says he's a Christian who abides in Christ, 1 John 2, 6, must walk as Jesus.

It's the way of the cross. You say, oh boy, what a burden that'll be. Always asking the Lord about everything.

You mean I can't do my own will in one area? My life will be miserable. Was Jesus' life the most miserable, unhappy, depressed life the world has seen? On the contrary. It was the happiest life the world has ever seen.

His joy was so full that just before he went to the cross he said, my joy is so full I want to share it with you. It's the most wonderful. If you can see that the way Jesus lives, the most wonderful life anybody lived on earth, you'd want to take up the cross every day.

It's the fourth thing. It gives you a solid grip on the Christian life. You know, we slip and lose so many things because we haven't got all five fingers.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, as we bow before you, it's so easy to be taken up by these wonderful concepts. And these things remain empty concepts in our mind instead of reality in our life.

Save us from that self-deception. Father, make these things real in our daily life where they are no longer theories, where they are no longer concepts, where they are no longer nice explanations that we can now share with others. Deliver us from that self-deception and make these things real.

Show us the glory of walking the way of the cross every day. The secret of Jesus' life. Help us each one.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/F1jhUV7dqO0.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/a-firm-grip-on-the-christian-life-the-way-of-the-cross/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net