

# Balanced Christianity 5. Holiness and Fellowship

by Zac Poonen

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*A balanced Christian life requires a deep love for God and a genuine concern for others, demonstrated through the cross and the power of forgiveness.*

**Duration:** 1:12:52

**Scripture:** Genesis 6:14, Malachi 1:11, Matthew 18:20, John 15:5, 1 Corinthians 12:27, Ephesians 4:16, Hebrews 10:24-25, 1 Peter 2:5

**Topics:** "Church Fellowship", "Christian Discipleship"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of living a balanced Christian life, focusing on the need for fellowship within a local church. It highlights the significance of falling into the ground and dying to self to bear much fruit, the necessity of being part of a body of believers to reflect the image of Christ, and the safety found in being cemented into the church as opposed to being a loose brick. The speaker encourages listeners to seek fellowship, manifest grace and truth, and engage in evangelism and discipleship within the context of a local church.

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## Transcript

So this is going to be our final session and thinking of a balanced Christian life. When people asked Jesus in Matthew chapter 22, what is the great commandment in the law? Verse 36. What they had in mind was the Sabbath.

They felt the greatest commandment in the law was you don't light a fire on Saturday, you don't do any work on Saturday, and you go to the synagogue and don't do any of your work. And they thought that's the greatest thing if you're keeping the Sabbath. Very often we also, it may not be the Sabbath, but it may be that for us the greatest thing is read the Bible every morning or go to church every Sunday, put a little money in the offering box.

These are the things we have to do and then we are okay. But Jesus said, I can't give you one commandment as the greatest. I have to give you two.

He always spoke about the two sides of the coin. You know, like we were speaking yesterday about evangelism and making disciples or the foundation and the superstructure, grace and truth. The Bible

says in Romans 11 22, look carefully at the kindness and the strictness of God.

A good father is kind and strict. So there's always a balance. A father who's only kind is not a good father.

A father who's only strict is not a good father. Kind and strict. There's a balance that God wants in our Christian life and Jesus said two things.

One side of the coin was you shall love the Lord your God, verse 37, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. And the second is just like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Can you have one without the other? No. In fact, the Bible says in 1 John and chapter 4 that if a man says I love God, verse 20, 1 John 4 20, I love God. Now this is a very important verse for believers and possibly for some of you sitting here and if you have ears to hear.

I love Jesus Christ and there's some brother whom you hate. The Holy Spirit says you're not a believer, you're a liar. Do you hear that? He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Is there some child of God you don't like? Some people you say, I can love him but I don't like him. Sounds very spiritual, right? How would you feel if God said to you, I love you but I don't like you? Or if you told your wife, I love you but I don't like you? Or you told your husband that? But sometimes we say that, I don't like that person but I love him. You don't really love him.

If you say you love Jesus and you don't love your brother, you are not a believer, you're a liar. L-I-A-R, you're a liar. If you face up to what the Bible says, it will change your life.

Now to love a brother doesn't mean I have to go and do 101 things for him. No. Love is an attitude of the heart.

It's not a question of serving him or giving him money when he's in need. No, no, no, no, no, no, no. Love is an attitude of the heart and God knows how much opportunity we have to serve.

For example, you can never love other people's children as much as you love your own children. That is impossible and anybody who says they love other people's children as much as they own love their own children, I will tell them to their face they are liars. It is impossible.

No human being can do it. God can love the whole world in the sense that he can do so many things for them because he's got such capacity. But I can't love the whole world in that way.

My attitude is I have got no enemies in the world. I don't ever hate anyone to the best of my knowledge. I don't hate a single soul in the whole wide world.

But I can't do all the things for them that God does for them. I can't even do all the things for all the Christians in India that God can do. So that's why God puts us all in little fellowships.

It's not that we are exclusive and we think we are the only children of God in the world. No, no, no, no. But God puts us in little fellowships just like he puts us in little families.

And he says in your little fellowship, can you love one another? When Jesus said, all men will know you're my disciples. Not when you love them, but when you love one another. Very often people say, let people see your love and show them that you're Christians.

That's not the way Jesus said. Jesus said, you love one another and people will see you're Christians. Like the song we sing, and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love for one another.

As we love one another, all men will know you're my disciples. That's what Jesus said. So that's why God places us in little fellowships, where we are to love one another in that fellowship.

And then as our capacity increases, we can love more and more people. But it must begin in our home and in our local church. So there must be a balance, you know.

It's not just I love God. But like the two arms of the cross, you know, there's a vertical arm and a horizontal arm. And in every cross, the vertical arm is always bigger.

The horizontal arm is smaller. It's true that my love for God must be supreme, more than anything else. But there must be this horizontal arm.

Without that horizontal arm, there's no cross. And there's no Christianity. So I need to check my love for God by my love for the believers in my local church.

And then, if you have the capacity, of course, for others. But not by how much you love the poor saints in Argentina or, you know, countries where there's a lot of poverty in Congo or some of that. It's very easy to love the believers in Congo and Argentina, right? Have any of you had a problem with the believers in Argentina and Congo? Not at all.

You never see them. You can love them for years. The problem is that brother whom you see every Sunday, right? And that's the one with the problems with him.

Or that sister. But that's where your love is tested. So often we can have a love for the world and all that.

It's a lot of nonsense. The place where God has put you, that's where we got to love one another. And there, the only way to do it, Jesus said, you must love one another as I have loved you.

And I see this, that in Jesus' love for me, there was a cross on which he died. And if I am to love other people the way Jesus loved me, there must be a cross on which I die. That's the way he loved me.

And the problem, the reason why we can't love others is because I don't, I want to love them without the cross. He said, love one another as I have loved you. He did not love me because I was perfect.

He did not love me when there was nothing wrong with me. There's everything wrong with me when he loved me. And he still loved me.

But he didn't leave me where I am. And I don't love people in a way that I want to leave them where they are. He corrects me.

You know, in Revelation 3, it says, verse 19, Jesus says, those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, I rebuke. I thank God for the times Jesus has rebuked me from the scriptures or through the Holy Spirit. That proves his love for me.

And when I was a young Christian, if you ask me, how do you know Jesus loves you? I'd say, he died for me on the cross. Today, if you ask me, how do you know Jesus loves you? I say, boy, he rebukes me. That's how I know he loves me.

He doesn't leave me alone when I do something wrong. Times I've lain in bed with a fever or some sickness and I say, Lord, what's this for? What is this discipline for? What's this little spanking for? What did I do wrong? And the Lord says, points out something that happened the previous week. Maybe some careless word I spoke or something like that.

Some unloving attitude I had towards someone. Thank you, Lord, for showing that to me. Thank you for keeping such a jealous watch over me that you don't let even a small thing slip up, let go.

You quickly bring that to my attention by a little discipline or rebuke. And that has meant so much to me that I have wept in gratitude. Have you ever wept in gratitude to God for spanking you, for rebuking you? I've done it many times.

And I've said, Lord, please, don't ever let me go. Treat me like this till the end of my life for rebuking me for the smallest slip up. I don't want you to wait till I've hit rock bottom before you correct me.

I slipped up one tenth of an inch from the direction I'm supposed to go. Pull me up. I tell you, if you pray to God like that and ask God to pull you up, rebuke you, and do anything you like but keep me on the straight and narrow path, he'll really do it.

See, I support myself with some investments I've made. And once I lost a very large amount of money by Indian standards. And I said, Lord, why was that? Why did you allow that? I could have used that money for many good things.

It was quite a large amount of money. And the Lord said to me, didn't you pray a few days ago that you should be freed from the love of money? Aha! It was that, was it? Thank you, Lord. So, all of you who are praying for the love of money, just be careful.

It's good. And I tell you, I really thank God for it. I said, Lord, you are really answering my prayer.

Not the way I didn't expect it to be answered this way. But if that's it, it's fine. I want to be free from the love of money.

You can have money and still not love it, you know. I have a bank account. I take care of my needs.

And if that bank account increases, it doesn't mean I love money. It doesn't affect me. If it's much or less, I say, Lord, it's yours.

I use it for my needs, for my family's needs, etc. to live on earth. But I don't love it.

Don't think that if you have, only those who have very little money are the ones who are free from the love of money. I've never seen a homeless man who doesn't love money. Have you? Have you ever seen a beggar who doesn't love money? Rich people love money.

Beggars love money. It's not your salary, or your income, or your bank account, or the size of your car or your house that determines whether you love money. Other people will judge you like that.

But that's because they don't know God. You can have a lot of money and not love it. And you can have very little money and be a real lover of money.

So the Lord doesn't tell us not to have money. He tells us to be free from the love of it. And if you let him do it whichever way he likes.

But the Lord rebukes us. So in our love for one another, it's not that I will not correct a person. If I love, really love a person, I'd correct the person.

If you love your children, you'll correct them. The Bible says that a person who does not correct his children is probably not his own child. If God does not correct you, he's treating you like an illegitimate child.

That's what it says in Hebrews chapter 12. Very clear. If you're really a child of God, he will treat you like a father treats his own children.

I've never spanked anybody else's children in my life. I've never disciplined anybody as a child. That is not mine.

God doesn't discipline people who are not his children. He says, you go your way. So if you are without discipline, the Bible says in Hebrews 12, God's not your father, really.

Or he doesn't treat you like his son. It's a very strong word, you know, in Hebrews chapter 12. I don't know whether you know that verse.

Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 8. If you're without discipline, you're like illegitimate children. You're not really a child of God. You mean you do something seriously wrong and God doesn't discipline you? You do something seriously wrong and God doesn't discipline you? Boy, I'm scared for you.

You better check up your salvation. Check up your relationship with God. That you could do something seriously wrong and God didn't discipline you for it? Maybe you were saved once upon a time and you lost your salvation.

I remember, I told you this how once I was speaking to a brother and he was a bit offended. He said, nobody talks to me like that. I said, oh, don't worry.

I will never talk to you like that again. I never spoke to him like that again and he just drifted away from the church and fell away. So, perhaps the last time God corrected you, you got so offended with him.

It's okay. I won't trouble you again. Go your way.

That would be terrible if God says that to you. I never want him to say that to me. Hug him closer, tighter when he corrects you and rebukes you.

That's a mark of his love. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and in those times of rebuke, you love him even more. Thank you Lord.

How much you love me. It's that which makes me respond to God in love. The way I love Jesus, my love for Jesus comes through knowing how much he loved me and knowing how much he has forgiven me.

Two things. We love him, 1 John 4, because he first loved me. That's the way.

The more you understand how much God loves you, the more you will love him. When you see his rebukes are mark of his love, you'll love him more. When you see how much he suffered for you to be cut

off from his father for three hours on the cross, what he never had for all eternity.

The greatest suffering that Jesus went through on the cross was not the nails. The nails were nothing. The physical agony was nothing.

The spiritual agony for three hours being cut off from his father so that for the one time in his life, he could never call him father. He said, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Do you know what an agony it was for Jesus not to be able to call him father? It was as if he was a heathen. He who had always called him father, father, suddenly he had become God.

Have you noticed that? My God, my God, because now he was not standing there as a son. He was standing there as a criminal who was full of sin. He had never sinned.

He became sin. My sin, my evil, my lust, my bitterness, my anger, my wrong attitudes, it was on him. Boy, when I saw that, I really began to hate sin.

You need to see it. He was standing there before the judge of the universe now. That's how much he loved me.

He said, father, don't let Zach get it and give it to me. I'll take it. Have you heard that? Don't let him go.

Don't punish him. Punish me. That's what happened on the cross.

And you meditate more on that. I spent years and years meditating on that. I still do.

And as I've understood the love of God there, it's made me love him more. I believe to the best of my knowledge, I love Jesus more than anything and anyone on this earth. I believe I can love my wife best if I love Jesus more than her.

And she can love me best if she loves Jesus more than me. I can love my children best if I love Jesus more than I love them. That's the way.

If any of you love a human being more than you love Jesus Christ, you will not be able to love that human being the way God wants you to love them. All these people who say they love one another and one year later, they are divorced. Why is that? Because they didn't love Jesus more.

If they love Jesus more than their wives and husbands, they would never divorce. Impossible. So, love for Jesus comes out of recognizing how much he loved me.

And I believe you must meditate on that. I mean, I've been meditating on that for 57 years. Believe me, that's the truth.

And I also, Jesus also said in another place in Luke chapter 7, he who is forgiven much, loves more. And he who is forgiven less, loves less. So, that's the other thing I try to meditate on, how much I've been forgiven.

All of us have been forgiven much. There's nobody who can say I've been forgiven little. It's because you don't see the gravity of sin that you think you've been forgiven little.

Some of you may have been brought up in God-fearing homes. And therefore, you didn't commit gross sins like other people who were brought up in godless homes. Think of a father who was a drunkard or a

mother who was a drug addict.

And if you were born in such a home where they didn't care for you and they just didn't feed you properly and you were on the streets and with no proper instruction, you'd have got into all types of bad habits. But fortunately, you were brought up in a God-fearing home. You didn't go into all those terrible evils that other people went into.

That's the only thing that protected you. Otherwise, you're just as evil as that wreck of a man. I look at the worst terrorist or suicide bomber in the world and I say, Lord, I've got the same flesh as him.

He's a child of Adam. I'm a child of Adam. How is it he ended up as a suicide bomber and I'm here preaching the gospel? He's got nothing to do with me.

My flesh is just as corrupt as his. But like Paul said, I am what I am by the grace of God, period. Not the grace of God plus something I did.

I am what I am by the grace of God, period. Never forget that. But I've been forgiven so much that these are the two things.

If you really want to love Jesus with all your heart like Jesus said is the greatest commandment. Meditate on how much he loved you regularly and meditate on how much you've been forgiven. Never forget your purification from your former sins.

1 Peter, sorry, 2 Peter chapter 1 says, I want to paraphrase that verse in 2 Peter 1 and verse 9. This is what it's saying. If you forget all your past sins from which you have been cleansed, you will become blind. Or you'll become short-sighted.

You know the meaning of short-sighted? Short-sighted means you don't see heaven's values. You see only your earth's values. You get occupied with money.

That's being short-sighted because money is only for a short period of time. You get occupied with earthly accomplishments. That's a short-sighted man who can only see for 20-30 years.

He can't see for eternity. Have you become like that? There are many believers like that. Extremely short-sighted.

They think they've got a lot of money. They're blessed. Crazy.

Because they've got, even among Christians, they've got some ability to preach or sing or play some instrument and it goes to their head. Boy, they can see about six inches. Absolutely short-sighted.

When I look at them, when I look at people who are very gifted and are proud of it, I don't envy them. Do you envy a man who has to hold a Bible, hold a book this close to read it? Because his eyes are so dim and blind. He can read it only if it's three inches from him.

You feel sorry for that person. And I feel exactly like that for a lot of Christians who are so short-sighted that they glory in their earthly abilities. They glory in their earthly money or accomplishments or talents or gifts or they're exactly like the man who's reading a book this close.

Think of a man who's got good vision. He can see a long distance. He says, you forget how much God has forgiven you.

Or you think you've been forgiven very little because you don't see the gravity of sin, you will be short-sighted. Or you'll become totally blind one day. And I don't want to be blind.

I don't want to be short-sighted. I don't want to think this world is everything. And the way is to never forget what God has forgiven me.

To see the seriousness of the sins God's forgiven me. Not to feel condemned about it. I mean, if you're not sure the blood of Jesus has cleansed you, then please don't think of your past sins.

You need to come to step one. Step one is to know that God has completely cleansed away your past. Like I said yesterday, He's declared you righteous in Christ, accepted in Christ and also says, I will not remember your past again.

You're a righteous person. If you're sure of that, then you can think of your previous sins and be grateful. Otherwise, don't think of it because you'll get into condemnation.

There's a lot of people who think of their past sins and get into condemnation. Oh, I did such a terrible thing so many years ago. And the devil keeps on reminding them every day, don't ever forget what you did 25 years ago.

Or don't ever forget what you did last year. Well, the devil reminds me too, but I don't listen to him. But I do recognize it and I'm grateful that I've been forgiven.

Never lose that sense of gratitude because that's the way we love Jesus more. I want to tell you, I've discovered these are the two ways we can increase our love for God, love for Jesus with all our heart. Meditate on how much He loved you on the cross.

Ask God to show you the price that He paid when He was cut off from the Father for three hours. I've meditated a lot on that. I don't meditate much on the nails going in, how much pain He felt.

And that's okay for children. When I was a child, I thought like a child. I spoke like a child.

When I become a man, I put away childish things, Paul says. So today I don't meditate on, oh boy, how much it must have been painful for the nails to go through His hands. That did help me once to love Jesus.

But as I've grown more in the Lord, I meditate more on how much He suffered when He was cut off from the Father for three hours. You know, where He completely cut off. It's like having your head wrenched off.

The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 11, the head of Christ is God. And that was wrenched off for three hours, which He'd never experienced for all eternity. That's the price He was willing to pay in Garden of Gethsemane.

He said, oh Father, don't take this cup. I don't want to drink this cup. I don't want to drink this cup of being cut off.

And He struggled for one hour. But finally, He said, okay, for my sake, He would do it. For your sake, He did it.

Meditate on that. It really changed my life when I saw, He who knew no sin, 2 Corinthians 5.21, God made Him to be sin. God made Him to be sin, that I might be the righteousness of God in Him.

I tried to, every imaginable, filthy picture I can think of being thrown into a sewer, where all the toilets of a thousand homes are flushed down that sewer and thrown into it. He came down there to save me. Just to save me.

There was no need for it. I loved that filth. I lived in that sewer for so many years, loving it.

Idiot that I was. And He jumped into that pit, went through all of that to save me. And Lord, I never want to forget it.

I don't want to take for granted. And I don't want to keep on enjoying the stuff in the sewer. I always say, committing a sin is like licking the toilet bowl.

Do you ever go lick the toilet bowl in your house? Every sin that you commit, every dirty thought is like, I'm going to lick my toilet bowl again. I enjoy it so much. When you yell at your wife and you yell at your husband, you're licking the toilet bowl again.

You know, if you see sin as the serious way it is, and I try to use every type of picture to show myself the horribleness of sin so that I hate it. That's what I'm trying to do, to hate sin. And I know that, you know, the Bible says that Jesus loved righteousness and hated sin.

And that's why the Father gave him the oil of gladness. That's in Hebrews 1.9. And a very interesting part of that verse is, the Father gave him more gladness than he gave me. It's written there.

Hebrews 1.9. The Father gave him more gladness than he gave me because he loved righteousness more than me. He hated sin more than me. It says there, more than his companions.

I'm one of his companions. I'm one of his brothers. So I learned something there.

The reason why many Christians don't have joy and gladness, that's only one reason. It's not because they don't have enough money. It's not because they don't have enough health.

It's because they don't hate sin. They don't love righteousness. Even Jesus, he doesn't say, Father, you anointed him with the oil of gladness because he was your son.

That's the foolishness. A lot of people today say, I'm your son, Lord. Give me happiness.

No. It doesn't even say about Jesus that God gave him the oil of gladness because he was his son. Why should he love you more? He gave Jesus the oil of gladness continuously 24-7 because he loved righteousness and hated sin more than all his brothers, more than me.

I say, Lord, get me closer to you in that area that I shall love righteousness and hate sin and my life will be filled with gladness too because there's no partiality with God. He will anoint me with the oil of gladness. And if you're not having the oil of gladness all the time in your life, my brother, sister, it's because you don't love righteousness.

You don't hate iniquity more. You don't see what Jesus suffered for you on the cross. And of course, you don't love him as you should.

So that's this vertical arm of the cross. But there is, this must also lead to horizontal. And that sometimes is a more difficult one.

Holiness without fellowship is a deception. It's an absolute deception. You can think you're holy but your holiness is tested when you fellowship with other people who are not like you.

And that's why many people don't like to become an integrated part of a local church. A balanced Christian life is one where we love God with all your heart and love others in my local church. And I get into fellowship with them, not only fellowship with God, but fellowship with my fellow believers.

So if you are living this lonely Christian life, only fellowship with God and you think you're very holy, I want to tell you right now, you are deceiving yourself. Test that holiness by becoming a part of a local church and being integrated with other people who are not like you. And that's why you have churches nowadays based on community.

You have churches of Indian people only, Romanian people only, Ukrainians only, Germans only, Chinese only. It's very easy to love people who are of the same community, right? You know what Jesus did on the cross? He brought Jews and Gentiles together when he stretched out his arms. He was bringing the two greatest opposites in the world.

Whatever community you belong to, no community in the world is more opposite than yours, as Jew and Gentile. I've heard the Jews would get up in the morning and say, I thank you God that I'm not a slave and I'm not a Gentile. Can you think of anything more racist than that? I've heard people say that.

But God, Jesus brought them together. On the cross he made the two into one. It says in Ephesians chapter 2. The early Jews liked to meet among themselves.

God had to break down that. Even the apostle Peter would not even go to the house of a Gentile to preach the gospel. And God had to show him a vision of a sheep coming down with all types of animal, pigs in there, which the Jews were not supposed to eat.

The Lord said, eat. And he said, Lord, I've never touched pork in my life. I'm not going to eat that.

And the Lord said, don't call unclean what God has cleansed. Go to the house of Cornelius. And he went.

And it was so difficult because he had to explain to people, hey fellas, you know the Holy Spirit told me to go, that's why I really went. And years later, he was still so scared that we read in Galatians chapter 2 when he was eating with some other Gentiles in a meeting. He saw some of the people coming from Bishop James's church.

And that was the really strict Jewish guy. And he got up from the table, excuse me friends, and he went and sat with the Jews again. But Paul was watching that.

Paul was a bold guy. I like Paul. He got up while everybody said, hey Peter, where do you get up from that table and go there? Are you scared of James and the report these people are going to give him? Is this the gospel we are preaching? See how Paul fought for this gospel that people of different communities must become one and there must be a demonstration of it in a church, that there is no difference between educated, uneducated, rich, poor, Jew, Gentile.

So I personally don't believe in community church. I remember when my sons came, my four sons came to the US. One of the things I told them was never, never join an Indian church, please.

Never go to an Indian church because that is not a local church. Follow scripture. And they never did.

In all the years they are here, they never joined an Indian church. I'll tell you why. I told them, I gave an example.

I said, supposing, you know, we have missionaries coming from America to India. I thank God for all of them. Supposing a bunch of Americans came to Bangalore, India and started an American church there.

No Indians are allowed there, only Americans. What would you think of them? What would the other Indians think of them? What a bunch of arrogant people. I said, what's the difference between that and you Indians getting together all by yourself and saying we are Indians? That's not a local church.

Local church is people who are in that locality. Your church must be representative of your locality. Otherwise, it's not a local church.

It's your club. I call it a club. Indian club, Romanian club, Ukrainian club, Russian club, call it what American club.

That's not where the Lord is. I remember hearing the story years ago in the days of segregation when there was a black Afro-American brother, years ago, this is 60, 70 years ago, who got converted and he went into a church not knowing that this was not meant for blacks. And he walked in and a deacon very graciously requested him to leave.

He was surprised. He never wondered, hey, these are supposed to be people who love Jesus. And he walked out on the street and said, Lord, why was that? And the Lord said, don't worry.

I've been trying to get into that church for the last so many years and they've not let, they haven't let me in. So don't worry if they don't let you in. Do you welcome people of some other community in your church? Are they equally accepted? Are you building the body of Christ or some private club? Balanced Christian life is not just loving Jesus and loving God and saying, He's everything to me.

But see what it says in Colossians in chapter 3. If you have been really renewed, we say when we are born again, we are renewed. He is speaking about that renewal here. He said, don't tell a lie.

Verse 9. I like that verse. When the Holy Spirit tells believers, don't tell a lie. It's not with our mouth.

We can tell a lie by our actions. Don't lie to one another. You laid aside the old self.

You're born again now. Verse 10. You put on the new self.

You're born again in Christ. You've been renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the one who created him. Remember, we are to be in the image of God.

And in this renewal, listen to this, there is no distinction between the Greek and the Jew, the religious circumcised person who's got some religious ritual that keeps them different from the one who doesn't have that religious ritual and the barbarian and the Scythian, the slave and free man. But Christ is all and in all. The only thing that unites me is Christ, not language, not education, not financial level, but Jesus

Christ.

This man loves Christ and I love Christ. I don't care what the color of his skin is. I don't care what community he came from.

I don't care what his income is. I don't care how educated he is. This is the only type of church I ever want to be a part of.

And this is the only type of church I have ever built and worked with in India or in any other place. You know, imagine putting a cultured Greek next to a barbarian. That'd be great.

You know, a barbarian who picks his nose and sits next to you and doesn't put his hand over his mouth when he coughs and not cultured. He's a Christian, but he hasn't been taught culture. He's not civilized.

Okay. I'm not saying you shouldn't teach him good habits, but it takes time for these good habits. You know, how long it takes to teach your own children some good habits like that.

Yeah, we've had, you know, I've worked, I'm not telling you what I have not practiced. We work in the poorest villages in India and they are not cultured. Some of those brothers come to visit me in my home from the village for some work in the city.

And they come to my house and they'll walk right into the bedroom without knocking. Because in their village homes, there are no doors. You just go from one room to the other.

You don't, there's nothing to knock at. You just walk in. And he doesn't even want to check if my wife is there.

And he says, he just walks in. It actually happened. And by the way, the little children in the villages in India, they don't have diapers.

No, it's too expensive. Diapers. I mean, you'll never have a diaper store in a village in India.

Nobody will buy it. It's too expensive. The children, they just go around without underwears.

Here's a brother who once came with one of his children to see me and that boy climbed on my coffee table and urinated all over it. I said, great. You know what I said? I said, Lord, I don't worship my coffee table.

I worship Jesus Christ. What is it? It takes a little cloth and a little soap and something's over. That child didn't commit a sin.

His father didn't commit a sin. He's my brother in Christ. I'm not saying that we shouldn't teach him.

I would definitely teach him. Hey, you know, it's a good habit to put an underwear on your children. And if you don't have diapers, put a cloth there.

You can always wash it off later. Education, we have to do. But until they're educated, what do you do? What do you do if your child still hasn't understood how to go to the toilet? You don't get upset.

It takes time. So I'm not saying that we shouldn't teach all barbarians better ways. Sure.

But until they learn, what are you going to do? Put them in some other church? Not me. And you know, it speaks about the Scythians. Have you heard of the Scythians? You know who the Scythians were? The Scythians were the ones whom the barbarians considered barbarians.

The Eucydians. Can you imagine putting a Greek with a Scythian? Wow. That would be some church.

But where Christ is all and in all. And where we grow up together, bearing with one another. And I'll tell you what I have learned through it myself.

My fellowship with these uncultured, uneducated brothers has made me a better man. Made me more Christ-like. Taught me values that I could never have learned if I had lived with all people of my own level.

Because you know, when I live with people who are always as cultured as me and as educated as me, it's very easy. I don't have to deny myself in a single thing. It's self-denial that makes me spiritual.

And there's no room for self-denial with people who are at my level in every area. And that's why we gravitate towards people who are at our level. Because I have to minimum self-denial there.

Everybody's my own community. Everybody's my own education level. I love Jesus.

Oh, I love Him so much. It's a deception. Because you can't love that other person who's different.

And Jesus died to bring them all together. Now again, let me repeat. I'm not saying that you leave them in that condition.

Jesus was the friend of sinners. But He didn't leave people in their sin. He made them repent.

And we are in the job of educating barbarians to be cultured and to be considerate. Definitely. And we've done that.

And it's a wonderful joy when I see these uncultured villagers learning some culture and Christian culture. Yeah. To learn to say thank you.

Just learn to say thank you to your wife when she brings you a cup of coffee. That's absolutely unheard of in the villages in India. What do you mean say thank you? That's what she's supposed to do.

We have some cultured people also who don't say thank you. Leave alone the uncultured. No, I'm saying that we despise people for something which is not sin.

Do you know that certain things are not sin for people because they don't have light on it. It's when you get light on it that it becomes sin. If a baby, a newborn baby spoils his diapers, that's not a sin.

I hope you know that. There's no use getting upset with that baby. It's not a sin.

So, it's a wonderful thing when God brings together people. And I'll tell you this. Bangalore where I live is a very sophisticated, civilized, it's the Silicon Valley of India.

Bangalore. It's the place where all the top software engineers work and they earn a lot of money and they've all got cars and all types. Very high standard of living compared to the rest of India.

Educated, knowledgeable computer scientists. And I tell you, my salvation has been frequently going into the villages and meeting with these village folk and sitting on the floor in their homes. They don't have chairs and benches in their homes.

Eating their simple food and living at their level for a few days when you go for a conference, getting to know them. And I can get revelation from them about Jesus which I can't get from these clever PhDs in my church. So, I've been very enriched.

I can tell you this. I feel sorry for those who don't have that experience. I've told many people in my home church in the city.

I say, you guys need to go down to these villages and meet these simple brothers. They can't teach the profound things. They don't even know English.

They can't teach the profound things that you can teach. But I thank God through the years of some of these people who can't speak English properly have grown up to such maturity that they now come and speak in our English language conferences in their own mother tongue with translation. They are just people who just finished school.

They don't know a word of English. And I like it when I see the PhDs sitting and listening and receiving God's word from these uneducated people. We had one brother who was illiterate.

Couldn't read or write. Share the word in the meeting. He had the whole Bible on his cell phone.

That's how his quiet time was putting the phone to his ear and listening to audio Bible. It's wonderful to meet with people like this as an enrichment. And I'm so thankful for one thing that my four sons grew up in a home church like this.

Which is like a home where there was no distinction between rich and poor. Between educated and uneducated. That is what molded my sons to be disciples of Jesus.

And I feel sorry for people who are bringing up their children and very sophisticated. Okay, if you want to do it, do it. That's up to you.

But I don't know how they'll turn out 20 years from now. But I'm thankful that for myself, I'm very thankful that my sons grew up in the midst of a family where some were rich, some were poor. We were not communists.

No. Communists teach, make all fingers equal. Cut it off here.

Make everything equal. That's not Christianity. The fingers are unequal.

But they work together. So we don't teach communism where you say, okay, get rid of your riches and give it to the poor. No, we never taught that.

But there are rich and poor and educated, uneducated. We work together, love one another. And for my little boys to grow up and fellowship with young brothers, they were not perfect.

Which young brother is perfect? They grew up with these young brothers who, they were their friends and they are their friends today. After 40 years. Boy, I wouldn't exchange it for anything.

Not for a billion dollars. I've seen balanced Christianity. It's not just loving God and living by myself.

That's why I say to people, find a church, which is a family, which is not an exclusive club, where you feel comfortable, where you're a little uncomfortable, but your self is broken down and you fellowship with people who are different because they love Jesus and you love Jesus. And that's the thing that unites you. You can't force that.

It's not artificially going out and getting some people, you know, like these colleges, they want to show that they are open. So they invite people from different countries and even if they are not qualified, give them a seat there just to show, hey, we got people of many communities. I'm not talking about building a church like that.

No. That is just window dressing. We don't want any window dressing in our church to show other people, hey, see, we are a community of others.

I'm saying just be open and let God bring. We never deliberately try to grab people to show that we are multicultural or anything. You know, India is a land of many cultures.

I don't know whether you know that. We have 22 languages, many races, many languages, many cultures, many levels of society, etc., all. And we have all of them in one small church, in our church in Bangalore anyway.

And so in the cities especially, there are people from many, many cultures and languages and it's a wonderful opportunity, just like you have in the cities here, in places like California. It's wonderful. And so make sure your church that you go to is a local church, local in the true sense of that word, representative of your locality, that you welcome people.

Don't make yourself exclusive. If there should be an exclusiveness in our church, it should be that we exclude sin. We don't want sin in our church.

We don't want worldliness in our church. You know, people can come to our church and see the sisters all modestly dressed and they veil their heads and they sit there and say, we don't want to be a part of this church. Okay, brother, sister, don't be a part of this church.

But we are not trying to be exclusive. We are trying to obey God's word. We believe in modesty and in our sister's dressing.

And if that offends you, find another church. There are plenty of other churches where people are not modestly dressed. And we have plenty of sin as well, where the pastor falls into adultery with these immodestly dressed girls.

If you can go right ahead and be a part of that church, we won't stop you. But we are determined to be a testimony for God in the midst of a generation that does not value purity or modesty. We want to be a testimony for God and that's what a church is.

Not like the world, different from the world, in the midst of the world, but different. We don't exclude ourselves and go and live in some forest or jungle to be different. You know, the way they test a ship, whether it's watertight, I was in the Navy for years, is by putting it in the middle of the sea.

A ship is built in what's called a dry dock. That's the only place you can build a ship. It's a dry dock in which they build the ship and you can think it is watertight and it may be, but there's no way to know until you put that out ship out to sea and then you see.

But the water pressing it on all sides, you discover pretty quickly whether that ship is watertight or not. And that's why God has placed the church in the middle of the world. We don't run away from the world.

We are not followers of John the Baptist who live in the wilderness. We are followers of Jesus who lived right in the middle of the world. And in the middle of the world, with the world pressing around us all sides, we have a pure testimony.

It's a wonderful thing when our sisters go to school and college modestly dressed. And I've said to them, I said, I'm proud of you girls. The way you dress modestly so different from all the others in your friends and who are all following the latest fashions.

There you are a testimony for Jesus just by the way you dress. You don't even have to open your mouth. I remember when I was in the Navy, every naval officer would drink alcohol.

It was a regular thing. Many of them would get drunk. And I was always waiting for an opportunity to witness to people about Christ.

And sometimes all I had to do was in these parties, stand with a glass of orange juice. Cause that's all I drank. I wouldn't drink alcohol.

And they would come up, come to me and say, Hey, why aren't you drinking orange juice? And I say, okay, you asked for it. I'm going to tell you. I get an opportunity to preach the gospel.

It's amazing just because you're different. Some girl will come up to you and say, why are you dressed like this? This old fashioned 18th century dress. Okay.

You asked for it. I'm going to tell you, you know, the fact that we are different, not different in an odd way, not really 18th century dress. I mean, some of them are a bit extreme, but what I mean is modesty.

We're not fanatics, but little things like this. That's what a local church is supposed to be a light in the midst of darkness, not become like the darkness. So I'm not ashamed of the fact that we stand out as different because we stand against sin.

We stand against worldliness. We stand for obedience to God's word, which a lot of Christians also don't take seriously nowadays. That's fine.

For those areas, we're exclusive, but not exclusive in the sense of excluding somebody because of his community or education or social level or any such thing. It's very important that our Christianity is balanced, that our love for Jesus and our holiness is balanced with fellowship. So those of you who are not part of a local church that's seeking to make you like Christ, remember I told you Romans 8 28 leads to Romans 8 29, which is to become like Jesus.

We are predestined to become like Jesus. So predestination means it's like a ticket written on your air ticket to New York. Okay.

So when you go to the airport, you don't say, hey, that's a big jumbo jet. I'd like to get into that, but it may not be going to New York. You like the size of the plane and a lot of people in it, but it doesn't take you where you're supposed to go.

Your ticket says New York, and that may be a small little plane over there. That's the one going to New York. That's what you go to.

So like that, the picture of churches in these jumbo jets are like these mega churches. You say, hey, there's so many people here, but is it taking you in the right direction? By going to that church, are you going to become more like Jesus? Your goal is predestined. It's written on your ticket to become like Jesus.

So if you're in the right plane going to New York, every hour you'll get closer to New York. That's how you know you're on the right plane. And if you're in the right church that's going in the right direction, predestined to become like Jesus, every meeting you go to will challenge you to become a little more like Christ.

Not that you had a good time singing. I don't care how good the singing was. I want to know whether it may challenge you to be a little more like Christ.

That is the type of church I want to belong to. Because I've got a destination. And everything, the whole current of this world is pushing me in the other direction.

I'm swimming against the current six days of the week. In my office, in the neighborhood, on the roads, everywhere. I want to be encouraged in a church to press against this current and go on against the current to become like Christ.

Are you in a church like that? If not, why not? You need to ask yourself. Are you living a lonely life saying, I'm living a holy life. I watch Brother Zack's videos at home.

Fine. That's good. That's second best.

But there's one thing you can't get in watching a video and that's fellowship. Why can't you find fellowship? I'm not trying to condemn anybody here, but I want to tell you the truth. I've always sought to speak the truth.

That's one reason I don't take a salary. I remember years ago when before we started our own churches, I was invited to be a pastor of a Baptist church in Bangalore. And I said, sorry, I won't take the title.

I don't like titles. I'll just be a brother. And secondly, I said, I won't take a salary because if I take a salary, I won't be able to preach the truth to you.

So don't give me a title. Don't give me a salary. I'll come here every Sunday and I preach.

And I lasted about one year and they threw me out after that, which was one of the greatest blessings that happened to me. That's when we started our church. I mean, they threw me out because I preached the baptism of the Holy Spirit to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

That's why they threw me out. So I say that here is the reason why many are alone, single. John 12, 24.

A grain of wheat, if it doesn't fall into the ground and die, it will remain alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit, guaranteed fruitfulness. You know, today, many companies guarantee cure for this or a cure for that and guarantee this.

A lot of it is fake. But here is a guarantee that Jesus gives. If you fall into the ground and die to yourself and live that life of death to self, there will be much fruit in your life, in your personal life, in your home life, in your children.

And also there will be others. You know, you take one grain of wheat and sow it somewhere in a field. It grows.

You come back after 10 years and you find, boy, what a lot of wheat came out of that one grain of wheat. Because it died and the one that came up was also sowed again. And it died and died, died.

It's always through death that life comes. But if you take that grain of wheat and put a nice glass case in your window and you come back after a hundred years, it's still one grain of wheat because it didn't refuse to die. And I remember years ago, somebody telling me, long before we started our church, he said, Zak, the greatest work you can do for God is to fall into the ground and die.

I took it seriously. I am going to fall into the ground and die to myself, to my own plans, to my own ambitions, wishes. And I want Christ to be glorified in my life.

And it took time. But I want to say to you, I've always said to people, choose the way of death, of following Jesus, dying to your will and your choices and your preferences. Say, Lord, I want your will.

And God will lead you maybe initially to one other person. That's how we started. I started with one other brother and his wife.

It was just two families when we started praying together. And then it grew and grew and grew. And now we are thousands, scattered all over.

But it started with two. It's just like a, you know, how is a baby born in a womb? That's how the body of Christ is also born. In a womb, two dissimilar units come together, become one.

And if those dissimilar units are just floating around the egg, there's no body. But if one of those dissimilar units unites with that egg, ah, it's the beginning of a body. It's exactly like that in the body of Christ.

God brings two opposites together. Paul and Barnabas were opposites. Paul was the fiery, no-nonsense, uncompromising person, type of person.

But he needed someone like Barnabas, who was more gentle and gracious. And because grace and truth had to be manifested. Paul was more standing for truth and Barnabas was more for grace.

You know, none of us is perfect, by the way. That's another reason why we need the body of Christ. I cannot reflect Christ by myself, no matter how spiritual I am.

I've got to be very conceited to think that I can reflect Christ all by myself. Even when God made the first man, you know, he said, you can't reflect me, Adam. You need somebody else to reflect me completely.

And that should humble every man. You cannot reflect God adequately without a woman. And so, God said to Adam, you need a helper.

A helper to reflect my image, not just to cook your food and wash your clothes, but to reflect my image. Do you know that God gives you a wife to reflect the image of God in your home? Because he made man and woman in the image of God. The same principle applies in the church that I want to reflect the image of Christ and I cannot do it on my own.

I need other brothers and I'm very thankful that I've learned it in my local church. First of all, God gave me a brother who was completely opposite from me in temperament, ministry. He wasn't as gifted as me in preaching or any such thing.

But boy, was he a balance for me? Sure. That's what preserved me. And then God brought others like that.

We would balance each other just like the human body. The left hand is the exact opposite of the right hand. That's why they work together so perfectly.

If it was exactly like the right hand, boy, that would be odd. The fingers are all unequal. God's in his great wisdom has made us different.

And the human body of Christ is also like that. So when you see a brother who's different from you, he's the one who's going to be a blessing to you. Different in culture, temperament, gift, everything.

And together we reflect the fragrance and the aroma of Christ. I cannot do it on my own. And I tell you this, even though I've been a believer 57 years, I still say, I cannot reflect Christ on my own.

It is impossible. I'll never be able to do it. The only one person who was the perfect body of Christ was Jesus himself.

He didn't need anybody else. He could reflect the entire glory of God in one human body. But ever since him, it has always been a multitude.

That's why on the day of Pentecost, it was 120 people who were baptized into one body. And that's what the Lord is doing in different places. One of the verses the Lord gave us when we started our work 41 years ago in Bangalore was Malachi chapter 1. In Malachi chapter 1, you know Malachi is the last prophet.

God was giving up on the Jewish people saying, I finished with you guys as a nation. I'm going to do something new now. For 300 years there was silence, no prophet till John the Baptist came and paved the way for Jesus to come.

And this was the last message of God to the Jewish people before Jesus came. The last book of the Old Testament, Malachi. And he says, you've all, verse 6, you've stopped honoring me and you don't respect me and you stopped offering, you've given up your spirit of sacrifice.

You give, verse 8, you give what is blind and sick as sacrifice. And you, I, you're hopeless. I've given up on you.

But you people still think that you're the only people whom I will choose. You know that's, that was like the Jews in Jesus day also. They thought we're the only people whom God will select.

God won't care for anybody else. It's like a lot of churches think today, we're the only ones whom God will select. And God said, you think so? You know what's going to happen? He told the Jewish people, verse 11, from the rising of the sun way out there in the east, all the way from Japan, way out to the setting of the sun, way down to Hawaii or where it is, all the way across, in every place it says in the middle of verse 7, 11, in every place, not just in Israel, from the one end of the earth to the other, my name will be great among all these nations whom you despise.

And in every place, there's going to be an offering that is pure. And then my name will be great among all the nations. An offering that is pure.

That's the word the Lord gave us. In every place. Not an offering that's large.

People are impressed by large mega churches. I'm not. It's like getting into the jumbo plane that's going in the wrong direction.

It's huge, but it's going the wrong direction. Sorry, I don't want to go there. A pure offering.

That's what the Lord's looking for. And that's what the Lord said to us. Keep your church pure.

So what happened in the beginning, we had some influential rich people and all who came along, mostly to hear me. They like to hear me, but they realized that when you come to our church, it was not just listening to me. It was not just a performance.

They had to fellowship with others. And some were not exactly that type. They dropped out.

I said, praise the Lord. They were not supposed to be a part of us. And like that, God sifted out some people, some of the richest people are the ones who left first.

But we were not bothered because we were not interested in anybody's money. We didn't take an offering in any case. They would come and they would go.

It's fine. And little by little with a sifting that takes place, a sifting is always necessary. In India, when we go to the store or we had to go to the ration shops in the olden days to buy wheat or rice.

And in India, in those days anyway, you couldn't get cleaned rice in a packet. We'd go to the ration shops because that was cheaper to get it there. And we'd stand in the line for a long time and get a ration bit of rice.

And the rice would always have teeny bits of stones in it, deliberately added to increase the weight of the rice. So the first thing you got to do with the rice is to clean it, get rid of the stones. It's a standard job of every Indian housewife.

You get the wheat, you got to get rid of the chaff. You don't get cleaned wheat and rice. Now, of course, it's become, India has become a little wealthier.

You get all that clean stuff. But this is what we found in our church. The wheat would come with the chaff and then little by little, the wheat didn't drive out the chaff.

They themselves got offended and left. Just like with Jesus, you know, great crowds would come to him and then finally they'd go away one by one when he preached the cross. And finally, you read in John

chapter six, there were only eleven people at the end.

John chapter six is a great chapter. It begins with five, ten thousand people. Jesus preaches the cross, you must eat my flesh and drink my blood.

You come to the end of the chapter, there's only eleven. Jesus is a great master of reducing mega churches to small little groups of disciples. And he's still doing the same today.

And that's the type of church he's building everywhere. A pure offering, not a large offering or a great offering. This is balanced Christianity.

Not just my individual walk with God and loving him and thinking I'm a great, great, I'm great, my family, I and my family. There's a lot more to Christianity than that. A local church.

It's the local church that is the lampstand. Jesus didn't come here and say, I'm building holy people. He said in Matthew 16, 18, I will build my church.

The gates of hell will not prevail again. And that's why the devil hates the local church. He said the gates of hell are attacking the church, but it won't prevail.

The devil hates the church. He doesn't hate individual local, individual holy people so much. Okay, I'll close with a lovely illustration from building houses in India.

The church is also called a building in the New Testament. In India, we don't build with wood because we can't get treated with the termites and abundance in the hot climates. All your wood will be eaten up.

So we build with brick, clay and bricks. So whenever a man's building a house, a truckload of 10,000 bricks has come and dropped in front of that construction site. And then they start building.

And brick over brick and to the side and cemented together, that's a picture of the body of Christ. But all those bricks lying on the road there, they're all loose from each other. That's a picture of a congregation.

Could be a mega congregation, 10,000 bricks. But the danger in India is that if you leave it there, you'll find the number of bricks getting reduced every day. It's one of those miracles that takes place in countries like India.

Because a couple of streets down, somebody else is building his house as well, you see. So that's the danger of being a loose brick in the midst of 10,000 bricks. But none of those people can ever take a brick out from the house, which has been cemented into the house.

So it's better to be cemented into the house. It's a little uncomfortable because you have a brick sitting on top of you and a brick on this side and the brick, you don't have so much freedom. Bricks in a house don't have much elbow room.

They're stuck, but they're safe. But you want to be loose and be on your own, that's the one the devil picks off one by one. And that's the reason why the devil can pick off certain people.

I'm protected in the church. I remember a man once came to me and said, Brother Zak, I want to tell you something. A friend of mine went to a satanic church in Bangalore.

I didn't even know, I've heard of satanic churches in America, but in Bangalore? He said, yes, there's a satanic church in the north of Bangalore and one in the south of Bangalore and they're targeting the city. And he says, it was not me, a friend of mine went there just to see what it's like. And he said, they are praying for five Christian leaders in Bangalore that they'll be destroyed.

And Brother Zak, you're one of them. They're praying for you to be destroyed. Don't worry.

This is about 25 years ago. Nothing happened. But I said, that's wonderful.

It's an honor to be a target of Satan. But I said, he can't touch me because I'm part of a body. I'm not one of those loose bricks lying around on the road.

I'm cemented with Christ as my head and not just Christ as my head. I'm not a lonely holy person walking around Bangalore. I'm part of a body.

I'm safe. I've got brothers this side, that side, in front of me, behind me, above me, below me. I'm perfectly okay.

There's a safety in the body of Christ. There's a safety for your children. Let me recommend that you no longer be a loose brick.

Be built together. It may be inconvenient on culture. Don't you think it was very inconvenient living inside Noah's Ark for one year? Can you imagine all the smells from all the animals, their dung and everything else? I don't know what they did with it, but it must have been pretty uncomfortable living with all those smells.

But I tell you, it was the safest place on earth at that time. And the church is the safest place today. I recommend it wholeheartedly.

Don't live an individual life. Balanced Christianity is not an individual walk with God, but with others who are seeking to go in the same direction. I pray that all of you will have that blessing.

It's been mine for 41 years. I wouldn't exchange it for a billion dollars. I wouldn't exchange it for anything in the whole wide world.

And there are many others sitting, some sitting here who have experienced that. They'll tell you the same thing. And one day their children will rise up and call their parents blessed for keeping them in such a church.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we pray that you will help us to live that balanced Christian life full of grace and truth, loving God and loving one another. Evangelizing, reaching out to the lost and making disciples as well.

Seeking fellowship, manifesting grace and truth in our lives along with other members of the body of Christ. Help us, Lord, we pray, each one. Show us where we lack and help us to correct these lacks that the word we have heard in these days will not be taken away by the birds of the air, but will produce lasting fruit, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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