

Being Perfect In Mercy

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the dangers of hypocrisy and the importance of being merciful towards others, focusing on the Pharisees' pursuit of righteousness and the need for genuine internal transformation. It highlights the significance of understanding and living out the new covenant, while cautioning against pride and wrong attitudes towards money, people, and motives. The call to pursue perfection in mercy, humility, and genuine inner transformation is central to this message.

Scripture: Matthew 5:48, Luke 6:36, Hebrews 6:1, Matthew 23:25, 1 Corinthians 10:31

Topics: "Hypocrisy", "Genuine Transformation"

Description

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Transcript

For those of us who are pursuing after holiness and have understood and seek to live according to the new covenant, what do you feel is the greatest danger? Well, one we can say is hypocrisy, because when we have built the reputation of just by belonging to this church, first of all, and also by our testimony, we like to maintain that impression that we have given to others, even if we find in our private life that we are slipping up. That is one of the greatest dangers of continuing to give an impression which is not actually true. And you know, the Pharisees were people who were trying to pursue righteousness.

And as far as I know, from what I've read, they started as a group a couple of hundred years before Christ, because they felt that the Jews who had come back from Babylon were not really serious about obeying God's laws. And that first group of Pharisees who started that group, I believe they were sincere people who wanted to be really righteous and probably very humble as well. But like every other movement, decline sets in over a period of time, because maybe the leaders slacken off and don't challenge people like they did in the beginning, or because the early leaders died and some other leaders took over and they did not have the same vision.

Because very often, if you read the history of Christian movements, the first founders know God, and those who follow usually know the founder, not God. That's the danger. So it's very dangerous to be

known as associated with a church.

The Jews boasted to John the Baptist saying, we are from Abraham. John the Baptist said, God doesn't care for them. God can make children from the stones for Abraham.

So we had to be very careful that our glory is not that we belong to NCCF or any church that has a reputation or to any particular doctrine. It is our life that is the light. The life is the light, not the doctrine we profess or the church we belong to.

Now all these things are very evident when I say, you say, yeah, yeah, I know that, but we have to be careful that we live according to that. So think of a verse like this, what Jesus told his disciples in Matthew chapter five and verse 48, therefore you ought to be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect. Now I'm sure all of you have read this.

Anybody who's read the New Testament must have come to chapter five at least. And those of us who value the Sermon on the Mount, you must have read Matthew five many times. What did you do with Matthew five verse 48? Now, if it was a saying that I will make you perfect one day, like your father is perfect.

Okay. That's a promise. This is not a promise.

This is a command, not you will be perfect. You are to be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect. I believe, and I've seen this in my own life, that when you come across a word in scripture, a word that Jesus spoke, and you don't take it seriously, to try and understand what that means, how can I obey it? We have already missed the straight and narrow path just by that one action that I don't take that word seriously.

I just let it slip by. Yeah, yeah. It must mean something.

Okay. I don't understand it. And then we've already missed it.

Maybe one degree, five degrees, and then we are moving in the wrong direction. And someone with discernment will be able to see that we have missed the path. You may not see it yourself, but one who is a serious Christian will stick at that verse.

I remember the years when I read that many times, and I was not serious about discipleship, and I just went past it and went to the next chapter. But once I became serious about my Christian life about 46 years ago, I began to take these things very seriously. And I said, Lord, that's not a command.

That is not a promise. I mean, that's not a promise. And it's not something you said you will do for us.

But it's a command given to me to be perfect. And this is a standard given as your heavenly father is perfect. Imagine Jesus telling me I've got to be perfect like God is perfect.

I want to ask all of you, my brothers and sisters, please be honest and ask yourself, have you ever once in your life taken that word seriously? Or did you skip past it? Or do you say, well, I don't know. It doesn't really matter. Or did you assume that it was a promise? One day you'll be perfect.

Then you're not reading scripture carefully. So what I did, I said, Lord, I can't understand it. But as I've studied the Bible, I've discovered that very often, you know, that verse in Proverbs, which says we

discover truth as we dig more into it.

So I said, Lord, I want to find out what exactly this means. And perhaps the answer is in somewhere else in scripture. God sees, you know, the Lord told Adam by the sweat of your brow, you will get your bread.

That's one of the things he told him in Genesis three. And I've discovered that it's by the sweat of my brow that I discover what is in scripture, that I get spiritual bread as well. If I'm not willing to perspire, spiritually speaking, that means seriously study the scripture, I will not get the real bread.

It's like a lazy person who doesn't want to work hard and expects to get a bread. And many, many Christians study the Bible like that, carelessly. Now, if you ask yourself one question, if you did your earthly job, whatever it is, in the same careless way that you read the Bible, how much would you be earning today? Would you still be in the present job you have if you did that earthly job with the same carelessness with which you study the scriptures? And I'm convinced that most Christians, if they did their earthly job with the same carelessness that they studied the scriptures, they would be losing their jobs.

And most women who work at home, cook their meals with the same carelessness with which they study the scriptures, their meals would taste pretty tasteless, sure. But so many women take such care to make sure the meals are tasty by studying, reading, catering books, and all types of things. I wish they would study the scriptures like that.

And people who study in order to advance in their profession, I want to learn something more. The science of my profession is changing all the time, so I have to keep in touch with the profession. I wish they would study the scriptures like that.

It would make a world of difference in your life. Now, I began to study the scriptures when I was still working in the Navy. It's not something I did after I quit my job.

In fact, I got a pretty good grounding of scripture while I was still in my naval service. Anyway, what I discovered about this verse was, compare scripture with scripture. It's a little guideline I'd give you.

There is an answer to everything that you can't understand somewhere else in scripture. And God's hidden it, and he'll reveal it to those who are willing to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow. Yeah, that answer is in, I discovered, you know, this is the Sermon on the Mount, by the way, you know that.

Matthew chapter 5, verse 48 is part of the Sermon on the Mount. And the Sermon on the Mount is also found in another gospel. Do you all know where it is? You should know it.

If you've studied scripture, you should know that Sermon on the Mount, most of it anyway, is found in another gospel, you know, which chapter it is. It's in Luke chapter 6, you know, and there it begins what Matthew 5, 1 begins in Luke 6, 20. Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God.

So, as I go through this, I come to this verse, just as your heavenly father is, Matthew 5, 48. But here it is explained a little more in verse 36, Luke 6, 36, be merciful just as your heavenly father is merciful. There I got the answer.

There is one area only where Jesus expects me to be perfect on this earth. It's not perfectly free from sin, that will never happen. It's not even perfectly in love, I mean, 1 John 3 speaks about being perfect in love, and I believe that just means that there's no empty place in my heart, complete, perfect, and mean

complete.

But perfect in love like God, not on this earth. Like Christ, one day I'll be like him, but not today. But perfect in many other areas, answer is no.

We will not be perfect in many, many, many areas, but there's one area and only one where God expects every one of us to be perfect here on this earth. And if you never understood it till now, I hope you'll understand it today, in mercy. Mercy being means making an allowance for other people.

The first person you should be merciful towards is your marriage partner, because that's the one you live with every day. And I tell you, most Christian husbands, I hope y'all are not like that, but I have seen and I've been watching Christians for more than 60 years, in many, many denominations, even among those who preach holiness and all that type of stuff. But I've seen that most Christian husbands are not merciful to their wives, and most Christian wives are not merciful to their husbands.

They're pretty strict. I mean, the first day they got married, they may be okay, but give it a little time, and a few years later, they've lost it. They're being merciful and making allowance for their limitations.

Maybe they didn't understand exactly what you wanted, or maybe they have some limitations in their personality. Maybe they have some limitations in their understanding. Maybe they're not as sharp and clever as you are, either way, husband or wife, wife or husband.

Do you make allowance for that? Mercy is always making allowance for the fact that that person may not be gifted with the wonderful gifts God has given you. So never, never look down, even if you don't say anything. You know, looking down on someone is not necessarily with words.

You can be very careful with your words, but inwardly you can look down and devalue your partner because he or she is not like you, not as smart as you, not as clever as you, not as quick to grasp something as you are. That is being an unmerciful attitude, and what will happen is with an unmerciful attitude like that, it'll be very difficult for God to make you one. God's purpose is that the two shall become one in marriage.

That's God's purpose, and that's also God's purpose in the church, that we who are many will become more and more one. It doesn't happen overnight, but I've discovered that it is impossible for that progress to happen in that area of becoming one if we lack mercy. So one area where we must all pursue perfection here on this earth is mercy.

Like it says in Hebrews 6, let us press on to perfection, and if this has not been an area where you have taken, which you have taken seriously in your life till now, I want to encourage every single one of you to start on that path today. Get to the starting line and run this race. Even those who are not married, you've got to be merciful with so many other people you deal with.

Maybe you're with your mom and dad, because they may be old-fashioned and they're different from you, and even many, many good believers who are supposed to be new covenant believers, they are pretty unmerciful to their unconverted parents, or to their parents who don't understand their ways. Our mercy is tested by people who are different from us. Blessed are those who seek to be merciful just as your father is merciful.

It's a tremendous standard. It means 100 percent. It means there is no human being towards whom I should not be merciful.

I don't have to agree with them. No. God doesn't agree with, I think, more than 99 percent of people on the earth, but he's merciful.

He's tremendously merciful. You know, if you read the Old Testament, I'm amazed at God's mercy to some people. I'll give you one example.

We read of, have you read of King Ahab in the Old Testament? He had a wicked wife called Jezebel, and this Ahab coveted a vineyard that was just next to his palace, which belonged to a godly man called Naboth, and Naboth refused to sell, saying, God's word does not permit me to sell my family inheritance, and Ahab sat at home crying, and his wife said, why are you king of Israel crying like that? I'll get it for you, and she got a lot of false witnesses to say that Naboth was cursing God or something, and they got him stoned to death, because those who curse God are supposed to be stoned to death, and a couple of false witnesses said that, and Jezebel told him, go and take that vineyard now, and he took it, and God sent Elijah. Boy, I tell you, we need more people like Elijah in our day, fearless, speak the truth even to kings, not afraid of their lives, and told him, the dogs are going to eat, lick your blood where you killed Naboth, and Ahab got scared, and it says he went to his palace and put sackcloth upon himself. Now, even I could see that's just plain hypocrisy.

The guy was not repenting, he was just scared, but the amazing thing is, God said, okay, I won't do it, I won't let the dogs lick your blood. I tell you, I would not have done it. I would have told Ahab, you're just being a hypocrite, I see through all that empty sackcloth you put on your head.

It's amazing how God is merciful even to a man like that, and there are other instances like that where you see God's mercy. When you read the Old Testament, you don't just see God as a very strict God, but you see here and there little acts of God's mercy. It's tremendous mercy.

The fact that he allows hypocrites to live for so long is an act of mercy. I mean, I find that my natural tendency is to wipe off that fellow from the face of the earth, especially someone who's a hypocritical preacher or a hypocritical Christian. When you think of the number of hypocrites there are among Christian preachers alive today, swindling poor people of their money.

I mean, if I were my natural self, I'd just finish them off. They're swindling all of those poor people's money and fooling people that God has called them and all that, but I find God's mercy. I'm tremendously blessed when I meditate on God's mercy as I look around and I say, Lord, it's a very high standard, but I want to be, you have commanded me to be merciful as you are.

I don't have to agree with people, but I have to be merciful. I want to encourage you to pursue that path. In Luke chapter 18, Jesus spoke about the Pharisee.

You know the story of the Pharisee and the publican who were praying. Pharisee and a tax collector rather, who went to pray and here's the Pharisee. It's very interesting if you read scripture carefully, Matthew 18 verse 11.

If you read Matthew 18 verse 11, did you see something? Did you see that the Pharisee unconsciously considered himself to be his own God? It says there he prayed to himself and what does he say? God, I thank you. I'm not like other people. He was praying to himself and he calls himself God.

He thought he was praying to God in heaven, but he was only praying to himself and Jesus was saying his God was himself, nobody else and he said, I thank you that I'm not like other people, swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector standing there. There were many areas where the Pharisee was probably better than the tax collector. He probably never cheated like the tax collector did, but Jesus said at the end of that story that that tax collector, verse 14, went to his house justified by God rather than this Pharisee.

Whenever we have an inward attitude, you see, remember he's not praying aloud. He was not raising his voice. Nobody could hear it.

It says he was praying to himself. He was praying in his thoughts and when you begin to think in your thoughts, I thank God that I'm not like that other person in the church or your sisters can think I'm not like that sister. I'm a little better.

I thank God that other sisters in the church respect me or other brothers in the church respect me. I'm not like that person. Yeah, you don't say a word to anybody.

The Pharisee didn't say a word to anybody. He was just praying to himself. I thank you that I'm not like other people or leave alone the church could be even someone outside.

Lord, I thank you I'm not like those people there. Well, if God has made you different, give him the glory and be humble about it. It's like, you know, if you earn, if you have a lot of money which you inherited from your parents, you can't boast about it as if you worked and earned yourself.

No. I've supported myself through these years, 46 years, never taking any money from CFC because I received an inheritance from my parents. I'll be honest about it.

I didn't work to support myself. Having learned how to fire torpedoes and guns, I couldn't get a job where I was living, but God provided for me in other ways. I can't boast about it.

So we cannot boast about in any area. We have to be thankful for whatever God has provided for us and say, Lord, if you made me different from others for something, I'm thankful for it. Maybe you have a sharp mind.

I find God's given me a sharp mind and good memory. I must not despise someone else who does not have a sharp mind or a good memory because I didn't create it. I was born with it.

Many of the qualities you have and your abilities you have, my dear brother, sister, remember you were born with them. You did not create them. Don't think it's because of your hard work you got all that.

You were born with certain capabilities with a lot of ungodly people also have. So it's good to be humble about it and never, never even imagine in your mind, I'm smarter and I'm clever. That's in the spirit of the Pharisee.

I'm not like that guy over there, that dumb guy who just follows all that. I'm not easily fooled. But even discernment, I find through the years, God's given me a lot of discernment about who is spiritually minded and who's not, but even that is a mercy of God.

Any ability that you have, my brother, which makes you a little better even spiritually than somebody else, I hope you will give the credit to God. Even if you happen to find your place in this church, I hope you will

give the credit to God and not because you were searching and you were wholehearted. Give the glory to God.

That's all I say. And otherwise we can end up like this tax collector who God didn't think much of. He thought God thought highly of him.

And I've seen a lot of Christians who think that God thinks very highly of them. I don't think God thinks very highly of them at all. And some of the other people whom we despise may be the ones whom God thinks more highly of.

The other passage of scripture that I want to turn to is Matthew chapter 23. The greatest need, I was asking, what is the greatest need of people pursuing holiness? I told you hypocrisy is one danger. The other is the danger of not being merciful to other people.

I've seen that through the years. I mentioned this once before, when we were constructing the first CFC building in Bangalore in 1981, we never thought we would own a building because we were just a bunch of poor people, but somehow God provided our need. And we put up this building and somebody asked me, Brother Zach, what verse shall we put behind the pulpit that people can see when they come into the church and sit down and see the whole time they are there? And I said, I feel that the greatest danger, we who are pursuing holiness, preaching the new covenant, overcoming sin, the greatest danger is of being unmerciful to other people who don't believe what we believe, who don't preach what we preach, who don't agree with us doctrinally or spiritually.

So I said, let's put this verse, even though you don't find an exact verse like that in scripture, be merciful to others just as God has been merciful to you. It was based on this verse I read in Luke 6, be merciful to others just as God has been merciful to you. And we kept it there.

We still have it there in our new building as well. And I've often looked at it and said, I'm absolutely convinced that's the thing we need to pursue. And I would say that to all of you brothers, please keep that in mind all your life till the day you meet Jesus face to face, be merciful to others in the church, in your home, be merciful to your children who are not, maybe take a long time to learn something, or who are not as smart as somebody else or, and don't spoil your children by making them into Pharisees.

And also I've seen some parents spoil their children, even in our CFC churches by giving them the feeling that they are better. And they grow up and they're too young to handle that temptation. I mean, you're grown up and you can't handle that temptation.

Can you imagine putting that temptation in the mind of a little child? That'll ruin that child or ever comparing one with the other evil, or even comparing your children with somebody else's children in the church or outside the church or in the school or anywhere. It's you, you will develop a Pharisee in your own home and you've ruined that child with all the teaching. You think they do the memory verse correctly and they know this and they know the answers, any Bible quiz, they come first and all that.

That's good, but keep them humble. They are not going to grow by Bible knowledge. They are going to grow if they get the grace of God and they'll never get the grace of God if they're not humble.

And if you've got a particularly smart child who knows the scriptures well, please help them to remain in humility and to acknowledge all that I have is of grace, not that I deserve, not by my smartness. I was born with certain gifts. Teach them that, teach them that.

In your home, they were born with certain gifts. And if that other person is not so smart, maybe their parents didn't have the, their genes did not have the intelligence that your child's genes had. What does that prove? Proves nothing.

There are a lot of other people in the world who are 10 times better than all of our children and all of us. It's got nothing to do with God. It's got to do with genes.

Ungodly people, the smartest people in the world are not wholehearted Christians. No. This, the Pharisees called Peter and the other elders, these uneducated people, even they said about Jesus, how does this man preach like this? It was the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

And there's a lot of difference between an anointed message and a clever message. And we need to discern between that. And those of you who get the opportunity to share the word, please, please, please don't try to show your cleverness when you preach.

Seek for the anointing. You'll accomplish a lot more with a little bit of anointing. And with a lot of cleverness.

I've seen many preachers and young people growing up who are ruined by cleverness. I've seen that in my own church in Bangalore. Young people who grew up and their parents were not wise and they grew up and destroyed themselves.

Matthew 23, verse 25. You know, you've probably heard me say this as well. There are two things in Matthew 23 that Jesus appreciated in the Pharisees.

He didn't denounce everything in the Pharisees. Matthew 23 is full of denunciation. You Pharisees are like this, like this, like this, like this, like this.

But Jesus was not a person who could never see good in those who are bad in many areas. If there were one or two good spots in those bad people, he would point it out. Yeah, that's good.

That's good. But the rest, 98% is all hypocrisy and rubbish. Just like that in this chapter.

First of all, the doctrines of the Pharisees were absolutely according to the laws of Moses. And Jesus gave credit for that. He told his disciples in verse two and three, the Pharisees are seated in the chair of Moses.

Everything they tell you to do, do. Now would Jesus say that today? Everything that the Roman Catholics tell you to do, do, or everything that the Jehovah's Witnesses tell you to do, do, or everything that the Baptists tell you to do, do? No. But he did say that about the Pharisees.

Everything, not 90%, everything they tell you to do, do, which means the Lord is certifying that doctrines are all absolutely right. Jesus could see where something was good. Second, verse 25.

These are the two things, positive things. Verse 25, you scribes and Pharisees, you clean the outside of the cup and the dish. Isn't that a good thing? To have a good external testimony.

They were not living in adultery and theft and sin. He gave them credit. The external part of your life is very good.

Your external testimony before men is excellent. Your problem is that inside is full of robbery and self-indulgence. Of course, that made them hypocrites.

So here was Jesus who could appreciate what was right. And you may say that now, the way, the reason I mentioned these two things is because we could ask ourselves, is Jesus commending us for two things, being in this church? The Lord says, you are the people who have really understood the new covenant. Unlike so many other people who call themselves Christians, you have really understood the new covenant.

You understood it so well that you can explain it to others. That's the first commendation he gave to the Pharisees. It doesn't make you any different from the Pharisees.

No. Second, your external testimony is perfect. The Lord say that about you.

It doesn't make you any different from the Pharisees. And yet you may, if you're honest, you may be inwardly congratulating yourself for these two things. I know the new covenant.

My external life is so clear. Even everybody in the church appreciates it. Those are the two things Jesus appreciated in the Pharisees.

What is the thing he's looking for? What is the inside of the cup? What are your thoughts like? Even your wife does not know impurity in your thoughts, but Jesus does. You may appear to be free from the love of money. What about in your thoughts? What do you think about most of the time? You worship what you think about most of the time.

I don't mean in your secular job and things you have to do like your earthly tasks as a homemaker or my wife or husband. I'm not talking about those things, but when your spare time, where do your thoughts go? Your thoughts are important. That's the inside of the cup.

Secondly, the inside of the cup is your attitudes towards people, towards that tax collector, like we saw in Luke 18, or towards somebody else. Your attitude, which you never speak about, it never comes out of your mouth. You're very careful to hide those wrong attitudes that you have towards somebody, maybe in the church or towards other people.

Your unconverted relatives, you'll never draw them to Christ by having wrong attitudes towards them. Attitudes, attitudes towards people in the church, outside the church, that's the inside of the cup. What is my attitude towards money? Even your wife won't know that, only you know it.

What's your attitude towards money? You can convince everybody that you're a person free from the love of money, but you know in your heart what it is like. What is your attitude towards men, towards pretty women? Only you know. Attitudes, attitudes, attitudes.

And the third is motives. That's another area of the inside of the cup that nobody can see. You can do the best thing in the world and the Lord will throw it in the trash can because the motive behind it was impure, un-Christlike.

You can preach a very clever sermon and the Lord will say, reject it, because the motive was not to bless the people or to glorify God. It was something for yourself. One last verse.

1 Corinthians chapter 10 and verse 31. I think this was a memory verse for some children. I heard them speaking I think in RLCF or somewhere.

Whatever you do, and it takes the most elementary thing that we do every day, eating and drinking, whatever you do, do all for the glory of God. You can meditate on that verse for a long, long time and get a lot of light on your inner life. Brothers and sisters, I'm only telling you areas where I have sought to judge myself all these years and it's made my life a better life and a closer walk with the Lord.

God bless you all.

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