

# Built Together in Christ's Body

by Zac Poonen

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*The New Covenant emphasizes the importance of fellowship, humility, and the church's authority to bind satanic spirits.*

**Duration:** 1:07:21

**Scripture:** 1 Kings 6:7, Isaiah 2:22, Acts 20:28, Philippians 2:19, 1 Peter 4:17

**Topics:** "Church Unity", "Spiritual Growth"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of building fellowship and unity in the body of Christ, drawing parallels to the construction of Solomon's temple where stones were shaped in the quarry before being brought together seamlessly. It highlights the need for believers to judge themselves privately, allowing God to shape and cleanse them, so they can fit perfectly with others in the church without the sound of clash or division. The message encourages individuals to seek Christ's interests above their own, to work towards a harmonious and united church.

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## Transcript

In the Old Covenant, two people could never become one. There are many differences in the New Covenant. We speak about grace, in the Old Covenant it was law.

And one mark of being under the law is you can never become one with another person. Grace makes us one. Now I said grace forgives our sins.

So we can say that we've begun to experience grace when our sins are forgiven. But grace is a huge thing. Turn with me to John's Gospel, Chapter 1. In John's Gospel, Chapter 1, we read like this.

Of the fullness there is in Christ, John 1 and verse 16, we have all received grace upon grace. And we can say it's grace upon grace upon grace upon grace upon grace upon grace. There's a progression.

It never stops till you become like Jesus Christ completely. But you can choose to stop after a while and say, well, I've received enough. You won't get any more.

And there's a law of receiving grace. God doesn't give grace to everybody. In 1 Peter 5, it says that God, verse 5, the last part, God is opposed to the proud, but He gives grace to the humble.

This has been a very precious verse for me for 40 years. I have longed to experience the grace of God more and more in my life. I need the grace of God to overcome all the sins I was a slave to, particularly inward sins of thought, attitude, motive, love of money, bitterness, murmuring, inward, without coming out.

I need grace. I need grace in my family to bring up my children in God's ways. I need grace for my ministry to be able to know exactly what to share whenever I get up to speak.

You know, just to take a Bible study, you can take a Bible study in anyone, but to have a prophetic word according to the need of the people in front of me, it's impossible without grace. So, I need grace all the time, and this verse tells me that if I am humble, I will receive grace. So, if any situation, I don't receive grace, it clearly proves to me anyway that I was not humble.

And I look at it like this, when I'm humble, God gets behind me and pushes me forward. And if God is pushing me forward, all the powers of hell cannot stop me. I will keep on making progress, not just every year, but every day.

I believe that if I really live, walk in humility every day, I will be somewhat, a little more like Christ inwardly every day. That's for you too. We're not supposed to be in the same place.

The moment I become proud, proud of anything, proud of my accomplishments, proud of Bible knowledge, proud of my victory, proud that I'm better than others, or my church is better than others, or proud of some particular accomplishment, or some ability, playing music, or anything. The moment I become proud, God comes in front and pushes me back. This is the way I see it.

As long as I remain in humility before God, He'll keep pushing me forward. The moment I become proud, He comes in front and pushes me back. And I want to tell you, my dear brothers and sisters, this is the number one reason for backsliding.

People say I'm a backslider. How can you be a backslider if God is pushing you forward? All the powers of hell cannot make you a backslider. Face up to the fact that God has come in front and is pushing you back.

That's why you're a backslider. Or if you're not making progress in the Christian life, if you find yourself in the same place, if you find your marriage in the same place as it was, it's not God's will. Every day, God wants us to move a little more forward, a little more forward.

You know, to me, it is like the first chapter of Genesis. In the beginning, the earth was beautiful. You read in verse 1, that's how God created man.

And then the devil came and the earth became corrupt and spoiled, Genesis 1, verse 2. But as soon as the earth became corrupt, the Holy Spirit came. It's in Genesis 1, verse 2. The Word of God went forth, God said, God said. And every day of those six days in Genesis 1 became a little better.

The next day, it was a little better. And the next day, it was a little better. And finally, on the sixth day, it was perfect.

That is the first chapter of Genesis. It's a little, the Bible in a nutshell, the message of the Gospel in a nutshell. God created man perfect.

The devil came and man became corrupt. And every day, God began to work through His Holy Spirit, through His Word, to make us a little better, a little better, a little better. But, the difference is that in that place, the objects on which God was speaking had no choice.

If God said, let the sun appear, it would appear. If God said, let the trees come out of the earth, they would come out. Because the earth had no choice to say, no, I don't respond to that.

It was automatic, automatic. But, when God speaks to us, we have a choice. Every day, God wants to say something to us, to make us a little better.

That's what I read from Genesis chapter 1. I don't know whether you believe it, that God wants to make you a little better every day. The Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians, in chapter 4, he's speaking about the original creation. And he interprets that creation for us, the meaning of Genesis chapter 1, in 2 Corinthians chapter 4. It's very wonderful, you know, when you study the Bible, and you see that the things in the Old Testament are interpreted in the New Testament.

If you look carefully and you study hard, you can find it. 2 Corinthians 1, chapter 4, 2 Corinthians 4. Here's the first thing, verse 6. That's what happened on the first day, by the way. God said, let there be light.

And God, here in chapter 4, verse 6, that is referring to Christ coming into our heart. Being born again. Way back there in the first day in Genesis 1, when God said, let there be light.

That is a picture of Christ coming into our heart, the glory of God coming into our heart. That's the first day. After that, the progression every day is mentioned in verse 16, the last part.

Our inner man is being renewed every day. Not once a year. It's not that I make progress once a year.

It's every day. Until that final day when I become perfect. Supposing, for example, in the first six days of Genesis, one day nothing happened.

God said something and the earth said, no, I don't feel like doing that. Something would be missing, right? But the earth didn't have that choice. But we have that choice.

So if God says something to you one day and you are too lazy to listen to Him, nothing happens. Well, you can't recreate that day. That day is gone.

It's finished. You can never get back a day that you have lost. You can never get back a year that you have lost.

It's gone forever. We can do nothing about the past. We can do a lot about the future.

And that's why I believe that every single day is important. And God was teaching the Israelites in the wilderness in Deuteronomy chapter 8. You know, we all know the story that the Israelites received manna every day from heaven. But what was the message in that? Everything in the Old Testament had a picture, has a meaning.

The Lamb's blood put on the door. It's a picture of Jesus, the Lamb of God. His blood protects us from the angel of death.

Going into the waters of the Red Sea and coming out, a picture of water baptism. A cloud coming down from above for the Israelites. A picture of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The giants of Canaan, a picture of the giants of sin in our life that can be conquered. What about the manna? What is the meaning of that? Every day, manna coming down, coming down, coming down. Verse 3, Deuteronomy 8 verse 3. He humbled you and let you be hungry and fed you with manna, which you or your fathers did not know.

And through that, he was trying to make you understand, if you have a heart to understand, that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. And how often did the manna come? Not once a month, not once a week, every day. To teach me, according to this verse, that my eating food every day is not enough.

I need to receive the word from God every day. Just like Genesis 1, every day God spoke something, something happened. The manna coming every day was also the same lesson.

Every day God wants to say something and you've got to live by that word. What about if one day you didn't bother to receive that word? The day is lost. Can you get it back? You can't get it back.

You can't get yesterday back now, no matter how much you repent. You can ask God to forgive you, he'll forgive you, but you can't get the day back. The year that you've lost in backsliding in pride, you can't get it back.

These things should stir us to say, Lord, help me to make the best of my life in future. And as I said, not just to live a holy life, but to build fellowship with other God-fearing people. In the Old Testament, as I said, two people could never become one.

That is why throughout the Old Testament, you always find God using single people. One Enoch, one Noah. He didn't have any co-workers, just Noah.

Other people worked to help him, but he was one prophet. And then you find Abraham, one man. Moses, no co-worker, one man.

Joshua, it was always one person. All the judges in Israel, one person. David, one man.

Elijah, one prophet. No co-workers. Elisha, one prophet.

Jeremiah, one prophet. It was always like that throughout the Old Testament. And finally, the last of the prophets, John the Baptist, one prophet.

Do you know why God never put two people together? Because they wouldn't be able to get along with each other. Do you know that in Jeremiah's time, there were other prophets and prophetesses in Israel around the same period? People like Habakkuk and Zephaniah, all around the same time. Huldah, the prophetess, around the same time.

But they were never in the same place. Jeremiah would be one place, those other people would be somewhere else, because they couldn't get along with each other. Whenever two people can't get along with each other, they're under the Old Covenant.

But as soon as Jesus started His ministry, you know what He did? He read that He sent His disciples out two by two. That's a very interesting thing. You read that in Luke's Gospel in Chapter 10.

This is something unusual. Luke's Chapter 10, Verse 1, Why the sudden change? Because Jesus was introducing a new covenant. And in the new covenant, you don't operate alone.

Those of you who want to serve the Lord alone, you are under the Old Covenant, whether you know it or not. You say, I can't get along with that person. Well, that's because you're under the Old Covenant.

And when you begin after the Day of Pentecost, you read in Acts Chapter 13, they want to reach out to other places. The Holy Spirit says, Verse 2, Acts 13, To separate me Barnabas and Saul, that is Paul. It's not the Old Testament.

If it was the Old Testament, it would say only Paul. He's a mighty man of God. He can do it.

No? You can be the most powerful anointed man like Paul, but you need a Barnabas. That is new covenant. It's something like right at the beginning, God made Adam and he said, It's not good for man to be alone.

Even in marriage, even in a family, God's put two people together. That is God's plan. That's why I don't believe in a one-man pastor of a church.

You never find that in the New Testament. There's no such thing as a one-man pastor anywhere in the New Testament. It's always two elders.

Always two, minimum. The Apostles appointed elders in every city. Acts Chapter 14.

But many people haven't understood that. Most people don't even bother about whether this is Old Covenant Church or New Covenant Church. Because they haven't studied the Scriptures.

And I say, if you don't study the Scriptures, which is the only book God has given to man, then you deserve to be deceived. And if you're deceived, it's your own responsibility because you have the Scriptures. So remember, this business of building fellowship is not a sort of an optional extra that if you want, you can have it.

If you don't want, it doesn't matter. Just live an individual holy life. No, it's fundamental to being part of the New Covenant.

And I'll show it to you again and again in the New Testament. Let me show you another verse. Matthew Chapter 18.

In Matthew 18, Jesus said, you know, in this battle against Satan, He says, You see, in the Old Testament, just let me explain another thing. In the Old Covenant, they never battled Satan. No.

You know who they battled in the Old Testament? The Philistines, the Amorites, the Moabites, the Syrians, the Egyptians. They were always fighting human beings. From Genesis to Malachi, you never find one single case of anybody fighting the devil.

They were always fighting with human beings. And when Israel split up into two groups, as Israel and Judah, they fought with each other also. So, whenever you find people fighting with each other, this is the

Old Covenant.

Or they find fighting with human beings. But the moment Jesus came, He never fought with human beings. He never fought with the Pharisees or Sadducees or Herodians.

He was fighting the devil. And He says, Now, I'm going to give you disciples, My disciples, that authority. But you're not going to have that authority if you're alone.

No. You cannot overcome the devil alone. And that's why they couldn't do it in the Old Testament.

He says, Now, whatever you... Matthew 18, verse 18. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven. Now, what can we bind on earth? Satan's activity.

We cannot bind Satan himself. That Revelation 20 says, Jesus will do one day. But I can bind his activity.

When it says it is bound in heaven, it's not speaking about the third heaven where God is. It's speaking about the second heaven where Satan has got his headquarters, which in Ephesians 6, 12 is called the heavenlies. Satan, by the way, is not in hell.

He's in the second heaven between God's third heaven and the earth. And from there he sends his demons and controls and influences everything in this world. And he says, I'm going to give you authority to bind something here and those powers in the heavenlies will be bound.

And that problem will be solved in your church, in your home. Sometimes what you need to do in your home or in your church is to bind the activity of Satan. Otherwise the problem is not solved.

And I remember when there was a big strike in Bangalore in India way about 35 years ago. And all the factories went on strike for more wages and there was a commotion in the city. And one day there was a police firing and some people died and it was almost as though Bangalore, our city, was in a powder keg.

Somebody would just have to light a match and the city would explode. So in our church we called a prayer meeting. And I said, the police can round up all the hooligans who cause these problems but the police cannot bind the evil spirits who are causing these problems.

That's our authority as a church. We live in this city and we've got the authority to bind these satanic spirits that are causing these problems. So we called three evenings of prayer meetings in our church and prayed to bind the satanic spirits' activities.

And by the time the third day was over, the problem was solved. Peace came into the city. There are certain things the police cannot do, but the church can do.

And I could tell you other stories of how we have influenced political things in our country. Because the church has got authority. If you don't use it, it's never used.

It's like somebody's put money into your bank account and you don't draw it. You remain a beggar. The Lord has put tremendous authority into our hands in the church.

When you don't use it, then you remain powerless. And He says, no, in this matter of binding, and also you can lose people, it says. That means here is someone who's bound by the devil.

We can lose him. But the very important condition in verse 19, there must be two people, not one. To do this binding and losing.

If two of you... Now, there was no such thing in the Old Testament. The Old Testament is one person. Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist.

But they were fighting with the prophets of Baal and all these earthly enemies. There, one person is enough. Moses could bury the whole Egyptian army under the Red Sea, one man.

Elijah could finish off all the 450 prophets of Baal all by himself. But when it came to the demons, neither Elijah nor Moses could do anything. Now, when we are handling demons and demonic activity and satanic activity in our homes, attacking our children, attacking our churches, the gates of hell, trying to fight against the church, you need two people.

Minimum is two, not one. You cannot do it alone. If two of you agree, and these two people have to be in agreement, in symphony, and then they ask for this binding in Jesus' name, the Father will give it.

When He says you can ask for anything, the context is binding satanic spirits. And then He says the reason is because where there are a minimum of two people, I am in the midst. You see that? That is a body.

When two people are there, there is an expression of the body of Jesus Christ. And the devil is scared of that. He is not scared as much of individual Christians.

An individual Christian can cast out a demon. I don't need another person with me when I cast out a demon. There are many times I have just cast out a demon all by myself.

I don't need any help. But casting out a demon is a very easy thing, because the demon is scared of the name of Jesus. And if you know that, if your life is clean, and you know that Satan was defeated on the cross, anybody can cast out a demon in Jesus' name.

I have never in my life seen a demon stay more than once if I tell him, in Jesus' name, get out. Every single time, it goes. With one sentence, it takes about ten seconds.

But when it comes to binding the activity of Satan, demon possession is a demon inside a human being, and you command the demon to get out in Jesus' name, it goes. But the activity of Satan that's causing confusion in a church, or causing confusion in a home, or confusion in your children, or somewhere, it needs to. Because that is not a demon possessing someone.

It's a demonic activity. Two must bind that activity in Jesus' name, and that is where there's, when two are there, Jesus is in the midst. What about if there's only one believer there? He can cast out a demon.

But he needs a body, an expression of the body, and the minimum for the expression of a body is two people. And that is the reason why the devil is dead against two people becoming one. You don't know the importance of it, but the devil knows it.

The devil knows scripture better than all of us. He knows what will destroy him. He knows that if two people get united with Jesus in the midst, immediately he's lost his power in that situation.

So what does he do? He does everything possible to make Christians lonely individuals, living holy lives. Even a husband and wife living in a home, can be two lonely individuals living under the same roof, but not in fellowship with each other. Jesus is not in the middle.

How do we know whether Jesus is in the middle of you husbands and wives? Very easy to find out. How do you talk to each other? Would you talk in the same way if Jesus were physically there between you? You can find out immediately. Is that the way you would talk to your marriage partner, if Jesus was physically standing there between both of you? No.

That proves Jesus is not in your home. I'm sorry to say that, but he's not there. You can put a verse on the wall saying the Lord is the head of this house, but he's not there.

You have to actively pay the price, to have Jesus in your midst. In your home, I really believe that the devil brings tremendous confusion, into the lives of many of our children, because the husband and wife are not one. They appear to be one in the church, but there's a big gap between them.

And the devil walks right in. A gap created by a husband and wife, who were supposed to be one in Christ. Now, worldly husbands and wives, they're not being one, we can understand.

But if Jesus says, if two are agreed and I'm in the midst, Jesus is like the bond, that holds a husband and wife together. I'm a firm believer in that. That is the way you can preserve your children, from being ruined and spoiled.

The best thing you can do to bring up your children, is not just teach them the Bible, that's good. Bring them to the church service every Sunday, good. Husband and wife must be one, with each other at home.

The devil will not stop you, from teaching your children the Bible. He may do, but he's not much bothered by that. He won't stop you from going to church on Sunday, but he'll do everything to stop you and your, marriage partner from becoming one.

He'll do everything possible, because he knows, then I lose my power in this home. He says, I don't lose my power in a home, by people teaching the Bible. I don't lose my power in a home, by taking them to church, they can do it as much as they like.

And you see the havoc, the devil has done, in so many Christian homes, across the world. And the parents just don't know why. They say, we're taking our children to Sunday school, we're teaching them the Bible, we're bringing them to church, and they're growing up like this.

I'll tell you why they're growing up like this, because you and your wife, opened the door for the devil to come right in. And you're wondering why he came in. Why don't you keep that door shut, by being one with each other.

Why don't you let Jesus be in the middle all the time. It's not just giving them information about the Bible, and telling them stories about, feeding the 5000, and David killing Goliath, and all that is very good Sunday school stories. But they will still grow up to be worldly, and useless to God.

If you and your husband, and you and your wife are not one. The same thing in a church. We have proved that, number of times, in our own home, my wife and I, frequently pray together for our children.

If we slip up, and hurt one another, we're quick to apologize, say Lord forgive me, I'm sorry. That's why I always tell, newly married couples, one bit of advice, for married couples, newly married, or old married. Be quick to ask forgiveness, and be quick to forgive one another.

Most important lesson, in marriage relationships, we're not perfect, we may accidentally say things, there's misunderstanding, but it can be sorted out, within 10 seconds, not 10 days, 10 seconds, if you are quick to ask forgiveness, and quick to forgive. The door is closed. You don't do that, because you stand on your pride, and say, no, I'm not going to ask forgiveness.

I've often asked married couples this question, if both of you have a misunderstanding, and that can happen in any marriage, no matter how many years you've been married, who should take the first step, in restoring the relationship? It's a very important question. If you go to the villages of India, they'll say, I know, the wife, of course, because the husband is king. In all barbarian cultures, you know, have you seen these pictures of the cavemen dragging their wives by the hair, out of the cave? The husband is king.

So who asks forgiveness first? Always the wife. You know, I was in a meeting in India, I'll tell you, and there was a 60 or 70 year old man, at the end of this revival meeting, we asked for testimonies, and he said, boy, 70 years old, this is the first time I've heard that I've got to ask forgiveness from my wife. He'd never heard such a thing in his life.

But he'd been a so-called Christian. That is traditional heathen culture. So, now we are Christians.

Who should ask forgiveness first? Who should take the first step to restore relationship? I'll give you an answer from scripture. When God and man had a distance that came between us, who took the first step? Who was it? Who? God. Not man.

Why? Because he was most spiritual. So, in a husband-wife conflict, who should take the first step? The one who is more spiritual. So, since both of you think you are more spiritual, you should be just running into each other's arms.

Why isn't that happening? You see the deception. This is how the devil fools us. Take God's example.

Close the gap. There's tremendous power in fellowship and unity. And Satan does not want people to know this message.

And that's why you hardly ever hear it being preached. Have you ever heard it in any preacher preaching? The importance of this unity in overcoming Satan? Many of you have heard hundreds of preachers in the last 30-40 years. Some of you have been believers.

Have you heard a message on this? Why has the devil concealed it? It's there in the Bible. All of you have read Matthew chapter 18 sometime in your life, many times in your life. How is it you haven't seen it? The God of this world has blinded the minds of even believers from seeing things that will liberate them and set them free from the opposition of Satan.

Jesus said, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. It's the opposition against Satan that we need to counter in the church. And that's why it's very important in a church that there's leadership, there's unity in the leadership.

See, your children may fight with each other. That will not make the devil come between, into your church. I assure you.

If you have 10 children and they're all fighting with each other, the devil cannot enter your home. Because the authority in that home is not the children. It's the parents who determine whether the door is open or not.

They are the authority in the home and God looks at the authority in the home. The authority in the home is not these children. Let them fight and quarrel with each other as much as they like.

The devil cannot enter. But the moment the husband and wife begin to allow a gap to come between them, the devil is just waiting for that. And that's why he whispers things in both people's ears to draw them separate from each other.

Don't be such a fool to listen to what the devil says. When the devil tells you something about your wife or your husband, don't listen to him. Ask yourself, is that the Holy Spirit telling me that? Or is it the devil telling me that? What is the purpose of it? The purpose is to bring confusion into my home.

The Holy Spirit is never interested in bringing confusion into your home. Don't listen to him. Don't listen to the devil.

The devil's got a lot of evil spirits and he'll give you very convincing arguments. Very, very important. If you don't do it for the sake of the Lord, at least do it for the sake of your children to protect them.

It is second best. The best is if you do it for the glory of God. Now the same thing in a church.

You know, a little fellowship starts and pretty soon it disintegrates. The devil is one. And very often it is in the leadership.

In a church, what I've discovered through 40 years of our own ministry is everybody in the church does not have to be united. It's wonderful everybody is, but I don't think I've ever seen a church in my life where every single person is united like a body. It would be great if it were like that.

But like in the home, as I said, it doesn't matter if the 10 children are divided, the husband and wife, the leadership must be united. So I told you, the apostles appointed elders in a church. And the elders must be united.

Then the devil can't come in. Let me give you my own testimony. God started a work in our home, in the house church 41 years ago.

And there was another brother and I through whom the work started. And we were the elders from day one. Two of us.

And we are very different from each other. Very, very different. And those of you who know him will know he is very different from me in personality and temperament and community and everything.

But we love Jesus. And God brought us together to plant the church. And one of the things we decided from the beginning was we would operate in unity.

We have had many disagreements. Disagreement is not disunity. Please remember this.

Disagreement is not disunity. Disagreement means we think slightly differently about a certain problem. But the disagreement can lead to disunity if you are not careful.

And we made sure that disagreements between us did not lead to disunity by one simple principle. That when we were considering something and we had our different views none of us acted like a tyrant towards the other saying, you jolly well agree with me. I am the leader here.

No. Jesus was the leader. And we decided, okay.

I would say to him sometimes Don't you disagree with me, brother? He would tell me he disagrees with me or I disagree with him. Okay? Then we will not proceed in this matter till we are united. We can wait.

We will not proceed. Our unity is more important than this particular action. So there are many areas.

Sometimes we agreed, yeah, this is what we need to do. We could move forward. Other times we are not quite sure whether we are agreed on it.

We have different opinions. He did not try to force me to have his view and I did not try to force him to have my view. Because if I did that it would be like a tyrant.

We were brothers, not tyrants. And the result is I want to tell you something. In 41 years there has never been a day when we have not been able to have fellowship with each other even though we disagreed many times.

We would speak quite strongly in our disagreement. But we never broke up and the result is the devil has never been able to enter our church in 41 years. And I want to recommend that to you.

Same thing can happen in your place. If God puts you with another brother in leadership to begin a new work he may be completely different from you. Make sure you are one.

If God has put you together that is the beginning of a local church. Why is a local church called a body? How is a body formed in a mother's womb? It's not like two similar units becoming one. No.

Two similar units becoming one will never produce a human body. It's two dissimilar units completely different from each other becoming one in a mother's womb. That is the beginning of a human body.

It's like that. When God wants to build a church he brings two people who are dissimilar from each other and makes them one. That is the Jew and the Gentile.

People who are different in culture, community, whatever it is makes them one. This is the miracle of the church. And that's why whenever I see in some place two wonderful brothers who are completely opposite from each other but working together to build a church I see there is tremendous hope here for a wonderful church to come but the devil will try to destroy them.

Do you know that he succeeded with Paul and Barnabas? The Holy Spirit had said, we saw that in Acts 13 Separate me Saul and Barnabas for the work to which I have called them. Can you have a clearer word than that? The Holy Spirit? And they went out together in church after church after church was planted. What a wonderful ministry it was in Acts chapter 13 and Acts chapter 14.

But then a little disagreement arose between them. And it was not about doctrine. It was about what shall we do about this chap called John Mark, young fellow who came along with us and who left us half way.

Now, John Mark was not called by God but he just joined with Paul and Barnabas to go along with them. Paul said fine, Barnabas said fine, come along. But he happened to be the nephew of Barnabas.

He was Barnabas' sister's son. And half way through he found this is tough. This is not easy working with Paul and Barnabas.

Anybody who worked with Paul will find it is tough. He's not an easy going type of chap. It's rough, rough and tough.

You'd sometimes go without food for a few days and go through rugged journeys and all. And Paul, John Mark said this is not for me. I'd like to be a quiet pastor in some church without all this problem.

He went back. So after some time when Paul said to Barnabas in Acts 15, 36 let us go back to these churches we planted and see how they are doing. Now some people think that evangelism is the most important thing.

And once you've reached some people with the gospel there's no need to go back there again. You've got to go to other places who haven't heard the gospel. There is a very famous slogan in the western missionary world which says why should anyone hear the gospel twice before everyone has heard it once.

Doesn't that sound very logical to you? Why should anyone hear the gospel twice before everyone has heard it once? You say, yeah, that's right. But I want to ask you, all of you sitting here how many of you were converted by the very first time you heard the gospel? Anybody here? Just you heard the gospel once and you got converted? Not me. I've hardly found anybody who was converted by hearing the gospel once.

And if people had followed that slogan none of us here would be converted. It sounds right to the human brain. Why should anyone hear the gospel twice before everyone has heard it once? But the end result will be nobody will be saved.

Because most of us need to hear it a number of times before we respond. And if Paul and Barnabas believed that they wouldn't have gone back to the same people. Paul would have said, hey, there's a whole world that's not evangelized.

I've heard of countries like India and Africa and all that. Forget all these people. Here we planted churches, forget them.

Let's go somewhere else. But they said no. These are newborn babes.

They have to be built up to maturity. They believed in making disciples, not converts. That's the trouble with Christendom today.

They make converts. And those converts backslide and go to hell. It's like catching fish.

And there's so many holes in the net. The fish go back into the sea. And the next evangelist comes.

And he catches them again. There are holes in his net also. They go back into the sea.

And there's an endless cycle of evangelism, of converting the same people again and again and again. And nobody's made disciples. See, there's a lot of difference between the way Paul did his evangelism and today's evangelists.

Today, if you go to some of these world-famous evangelists and go to them and say, hey, brother, I heard that you went to so many countries and thousands were converted. You healed and so many people were healed and so many thousands converted. I read all these reports.

Where are these believers today? You know what these evangelists will say? I don't know. I hope they went to some local church. Can you show me? You went to Africa, India, Asia, China.

Where are they today, these believers, these thousands that you converted through your crusades? I don't know. But if you went to Paul and told him, hey, Paul, I heard that you went to Philippi and brought some people to Christ. Where are they? He says, come with me.

He'll take you to the church in Philippi and say, these are the people I brought to Christ. Do you see them? This one, this one, this one, this one, this one, this one. Here, they're all in a church.

And Paul, I heard that he went to Thessalonica also and brought some people to Christ. Where are they? Come, I'll show you. He'll take you to Thessalonica and show you that local church.

He said, these are the people I brought to Christ. Every one of them is here. Paul, I heard that you went to Galatia and there were a number of churches planted there.

Come, I'll show you all those churches. They're there. These are the people who are now converted.

Which evangelist today can say anything like that? As far as I know, not even one. Does God, has God stopped working like that? He hasn't stopped working like that. We have seen Him work exactly like that in India.

Churches, people converted. They come together in churches. And we go visit them again and again and the numbers increase.

That is how the early church planted. They brought people together and built a local church. So Paul says, let's go back and visit these people again.

Acts 15, 36. And Barnabas, you know, after all John Mark was his nephew. So let's take him along as well.

I know he slipped up the first time. But let's take him along. Probably a bit of partiality because he was his nephew.

And Paul said, nothing doing. I won't get any third rate compromiser to come with me a second time. He was a tough guy, Paul.

No compromise. Barnabas was the gentle, gracious type of person. Which is more needed in the church? What do you think? I said, both are needed.

You need a Paul and a Barnabas to work together. Because Barnabas could have told Paul, Hey listen, Paul. Don't you remember when everybody didn't want you? They all suspected you? When you first came and you were converted from your Judaism.

And you came to Jerusalem. Everybody suspected you. Don't you remember? I was the one who introduced you to all these people and made you accepted.

Let's give John Mark a second chance. Paul said, no. That's it.

And it says here, the disagreement between them was so great. Verse 39, so sharp that they separated. They broke up what the Holy Spirit had brought together.

If the devil could do that with Paul and Barnabas, you think he won't do that with you? But that is written for our instruction. Paul and Barnabas were young. They were not mature.

If you had gone to Paul 15 years later, and said, Paul, what do you think? Do you think you should have broken up with Barnabas? He would have said, no, I've got more wisdom now. If you asked Barnabas, do you think you should have broken up with Paul? He said, no. If he had the maturity and wisdom we have now, we would have stuck together.

But we were immature, zealous. And that's what happens. What Paul and Barnabas lacked was a spiritual father.

They didn't have a spiritual father because they were first generation missionaries. Timothy was lucky. He had a spiritual father in Paul.

So if Timothy and Silas were working together and they had a conflict, they could say, hey, let's go to Paul. He will advise us. But when Paul and Barnabas had a conflict, who would they turn to? There was nobody there.

And that's unfortunately the situation very often today. Two brothers working together. They have a conflict.

They have nobody to refer to because they don't believe in having a spiritual father to guide them. Or they just don't have one. So Timothy was very lucky that he had someone who he could constantly refer to and say, what should I do, Paul, in this situation? And Paul would advise him.

Titus, for example, read that Titus would contact Paul and Paul would tell him, you need to appoint elders over there and this is what you need to do. And he probably even consulted Paul. Who should I appoint as elders there? This is how the New Testament worked, in unity.

And obviously we can be merciful to Paul and Barnabas, we can say because they were first generation missionaries, first generation apostles. It was just beginning. But there's no excuse once you come to the second generation because they have the first generation to guide them.

But that unity is so important for the Lord to destroy the works of the devil. Now I want you to turn with me to Acts of the Apostles in chapter 20. In Acts chapter 20 we read, Paul is coming towards the end of his life and he called all the elders in Ephesus together.

Paul had elders meetings and we frequently have elders meetings in our churches. I meet with elders three, four times a year in India. And Paul had these elders meetings and he called the elders in Ephesus together in Acts 20 verse 17 and he told them, Listen, I've been with you guys for three years.

Acts chapter 20 verse 17 onwards till verse 35. He said, I've been with you for three years. He tells them in verse 31, Be on the alert.

Remember, for night and day for a period of three years I kept on admonishing each one of you with tears. Paul was a spiritual father to these elders. I don't know how many elders there were in Ephesus, maybe four or five.

He called these four or five elders and said, I want to tell you something. I have urged you, exhorted you, told you, corrected you, loved you, even wept for you. He says, Now I'm commending you to God, verse 32, and to the word of His grace.

And I want you to, it says in the last part of verse 28, sorry, in verse 28, Be on guard. First of all for yourself, then for the flock. If you don't guard yourself, you will not be able to guard the flock.

And which God is, which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as overseers, God which He purchased with His own blood. Remember, these people are purchased with the blood of Jesus Christ. And He's appointed you as shepherds.

But, even though I've given you all these exhortations, listen to this, it's very serious. I know, verse 29, that after I leave Ephesus, the wolves are going to come in, and the sheep are going to be scattered. Why is it the wolves could not come in those three years? Because they said, this guy Paul is there.

You don't have a chance as long as he's there. He's a man who knows God. He's a tough character.

But he's not going to be around for long. Once he goes, we can get in. Because these elders are useless.

We can trample over them and go right in. And Paul had the discernment to see that. Why were these elders so weak compared to Paul? And I'll tell you the reason.

You see that in the next verse. I know not only the wolves will come in, but from among yourselves, you five elders are going to speak perverse things and draw some people after yourself. One of you will draw a few disciples after yourself, and you will draw a few disciples after yourself, and you will draw a few disciples after yourself, and you become five separate groups here instead of one church.

Paul discerned that in these elders. Now this is exactly what's happened in many churches. So, what is the problem with these elders? In one sentence, they all sought their own.

What is the difference with Paul? He did not seek his own. The devil is scared of a man who does not seek his own, but seeks the things of Christ alone. And if you're one like that, I tell you the devil will be scared of you, even if you're all alone.

The tragedy is that, like in Paul's day, even today, most believers seek their own. Even when they're living individual holy lives, they don't realize that the fundamental root of sin is to seek your own. They think they're holy because, I've got control of my tongue now.

I don't get angry, praise the Lord. I don't watch pornography, praise the Lord. I don't lust after women in my mind.

I'm good, wonderful. I'm upright in money matters. I don't cheat.

I'm not in debt. I'm clear financially. And I go regularly to meetings.

I read the Bible daily. I have my times of prayer. Individual holiness, all perfect.

But, I may be seeking my own, in spite of all this. I've seen multiple people like this. Believers who are very upright in many ways, but deep down, they seek what is good for me and my family.

I will do what is good for me and my family, and if, along with that, I can fit in God's work, I'll do it. But central is me and my family. I seek my own.

You think Almighty God is going to use somebody like that in His service? Not in a million years. Because that's not the spirit of Christ. Christ did not seek His own.

Paul tells Timothy, Paul tells the Philippians in chapter 2, He says, I want to send somebody to you, Philippians, to work, and to encourage you. And he says, I've been looking around with my co-workers, Philippians chapter 2, I've been looking at my co-workers, whom shall I send to Philippi? And he says in verse 19, Philippians 2, 19, I hope in the Lord to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I can know about your condition. Because, listen to this, I don't have anybody else who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare, because all my co-workers are seeking their own, verse 21, and not those of Christ Jesus.

You know, when I read that verse, I said, Lord, the co-workers of Paul were seeking their own. They were born again, baptized in the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, they've given up their jobs for full-time work, but they were seeking their own. And Paul could discern that.

He was a sharp man spiritually. He said, these guys, yeah, they know, they can preach well, and they know the Bible and all that, but deep down, self is the center of their life. Their holiness is centered in themselves.

I can't trust them. Timothy is different. He does not seek his own.

He seeks the things of Christ. You remember, I looked at that verse earlier, when the Lord told Peter, Get behind me, Satan, because you're seeking your own interests. Is it such a terrible thing to seek one's own interests? No.

Everybody in the world seeks their own interests. The world is full of people who seek, What is good for me and my family? Isn't that how many of you decided to come to America? Ask yourself, What is good for me and my family? I will go to America. Fine.

You try to build the church of Jesus Christ like that, you'll never build it. All seek their own. Now there's, generally speaking, there's not considered to be a serious sin to seek your own, because everybody in the world seeks it.

But you can't build a church like that. You have to say, Lord, my interests are secondary. I want Christ's interests to be first.

And if I seek His interests first, all that I need will be added to me. And if I put His interests first, God will take care of my family. I remember many times when I had to travel on weekends in India, because the weekends were the only time I could have meetings in different parts of India.

And weekends were the only time my children were at home. And I wanted to be with my children, sure. But sometimes, and not every time, but sometimes I had to go away on a weekend.

And I said this to the Lord. I said, Lord, I'll take care of your family. You take care of mine.

And I want to tell you after 41 years, God has done a better job of taking care of my family than I've done in taking care of His. You can never lose out by honoring God. Now don't misunderstand me.

This does not conflict with what I said earlier, that building your family comes first before building the church. I'm not talking about that. I'm not saying that you neglect your children and let them become wayward.

I'm not talking about that. But there are some times when we have to sacrifice our personal convenience and family convenience for the sake of the church. If I'm not willing to do that, I'll never be able to build a body.

I remember once when I was standing in a railway station in India, waiting to catch a train to go somewhere for some meetings over the weekend. And my children were small, and some of them were sick. And my wife was alone at home, and I was thinking, and I stood at that platform at the railway station.

What if my children become more serious? And my wife is all alone, and we don't have a car or anything to take them to the hospital. And I was thinking like that, and supposing I cancel my trip. I call up these people and tell them, I'm sorry, I can't come because my children are sick.

They will understand. They'll say, fine, Brother Zach, we understand. And the Lord said to me something I've never forgotten in more than 30 years.

The Lord said, you can take whatever decision you want, but never let it be a decision based on fear. That was quite a word for my heart. Take whatever decision you like, but don't let it be based on fear.

Let it be based on faith. Fear is the opposite of faith. When fear comes in, faith goes out.

When faith comes in, fear goes out. So I said, okay, what am I taking a decision now? Is it on the basis of faith or on the opposite basis of fear? I said, it looked like fear. So I said, what will I do if I'm operating on faith? I'll go, and I'll trust the Lord to take care of them.

And I went. And we had good meetings. This is how many places, middle churches are established.

And I come back, and my children are okay. So the devil will very often try to bring fear into your heart in a situation. Oh, this thing will happen.

Oh, that thing will happen. And you think you are almighty God to take care of your family. You are not almighty God.

So it's a wonderful thing to understand this. Now, don't misunderstand me and go to an extreme on this. People have gone an extreme on this and destroyed their homes and their relationships.

But I'm just trying to tell you that in our work for the Lord, if I seek my own interests, I cannot build the body of Christ. It's very, very important. For two people to become one, privately, each of us must judge ourselves.

What should I judge myself? Maybe I've gone beyond overcoming dirty thoughts and all, okay, finish long ago. Getting angry, finish with that. And running after money, finish with all that.

Now, what is the ultimate, the still dirty stuff left inside me? It's not filthy thoughts. It's not love of money. It's not any of these things.

It's seeking my own interests. Lord, I've got to cleanse myself from that. That's that selfishness.

It's what remains finally. And if you don't get light on it, you can never build the body of Christ. Because that's what, you know, two people are seeking their own and they try to build the body, they won't build it.

And I believe that's the main reason why in many places nothing happens. Everybody's seeking their own. And when convenient, they'll try to do something for the Lord.

Consider yourself, whether that is true or not. So we must cleanse ourselves privately, judge ourselves privately. Then when we come together, we'll fit together perfectly.

I want to show you a beautiful illustration of this in the Old Testament, and we'll close with that. In the first book of Kings, in chapter 6, this is a story of Solomon building the temple of God. And Solomon building the temple is a picture of our building the church.

Because that was the house of the Lord in that day. Today, believers being built together as a body is the church. Okay.

And it's very beautiful. I don't know whether you've noticed this very lovely verse. Do you know the Old Testament temple was built of stones? Stones.

The whole building was built of stones. First, they would have a thing called a cornerstone. Perfectly at right angles in three dimensions, three directions.

That would be how they start the foundation. And then the whole building all the way up, stone, stone, stone, stones. And you know, stones are not evenly shaped.

It's not like bricks. And it says here in 1 Kings, chapter 6, verse 7, The house, this temple, while it was being built, was built of stone. But the stone was not shaped at the temple site.

They didn't bring the stone here and then chip it and chip it and put it next to the other stone and chip some more and make sure it fits. That's not the way they did it. It says the stone was prepared at the quarry.

And that mountainside where they cut the stones, there it was shaped to the correct shape. And so that when they brought it to the house, there was no sound of hammer or axe or iron tool heard in the house while it was being built. Have you ever heard of a house being built like this? Where at the construction site, no hammer, no axe, nothing to be done because it was all shaped out there already and brought here, just put together and fitted perfectly because the perfect work was done out there in the quarry.

To me that's a beautiful picture of how the church is built. That when we build a church, there is no sound of clash and iron and hammer and all between believers. We hear a lot of that in many churches.

Before they come there, privately, in their home, that's the quarry, they must allow God to shape them. Shape them, all the hammer, axe and all must be done in private. And then you come with other believers and you fit perfectly with the others.

To me that's a beautiful picture. And I say, Lord, I don't know whether other people in their quarry are doing their part, but I want to do my part. In my quarry that is in my home, I want the Lord to use His hammer and His axe and every iron tool on me to fit me perfectly.

Not in the place where I want to be. I have no choice in the Lord's temple where I should be. I never wanted to be a teacher.

I never wanted to be an evangelist. I never wanted to be one who plants churches. I just wanted to be one who loves Jesus Christ, that's all.

So He shapes me. I say, Lord, you can shape me in any way you like. And then He puts me in a place.

Are you willing to be that? That's the most useful work that you can do for God. To build the body of Christ. And He'll put another person.

He'll give you people who have the same desire. And I've seen that in place after place after place. It's not just in one place.

I've seen it in so many places. God's put together people. And when we come together in fellowship, there is no sound of clash and iron and hammer.

None of that. Isn't it wonderful to build the body of Christ like this? And I've seen it happen again and again and again in different places for 40 years. Building fellowship in the body of Christ.

But it can only happen if you allow the Lord to deal with you and your self-life. And you're seeking your own interests in private. In the quarry.

Which is your private life. All by yourself when you're alone with God. And God shows you, you're self-seeking.

You judge yourself. And as you judge yourself and cleanse yourself and repent, another brother judges himself, cleanses himself, like that. You build a church of people who are judging themselves and coming together.

There the household of God is built. And you see the equivalent of this verse in the New Testament in 1 Peter chapter 4. 1 Peter chapter 4. It says here, in verse 17. 1 Peter 4, 17.

It is time for judgment to begin in the household of God. You know what judgment is? The hammer, the axe, all those iron tools, shaping, cutting, that's judgment. And it begins with us first.

This is the household of God. Where each person is allowing God to deal with him. Not with the other person.

He's judging himself. And that other brother is judging himself. And the other sister is judging herself.

They're not going around judging each other. They're not using the hammer and tong on other people. Which is what happens in many churches.

Even some preachers, they get up in the pulpit and they got hammer and axe at all the people in the church. That's not the way to build the body of Christ. These self-appointed prophets who think they are building God's church.

No. In private. Then when we come together, it will be the household of God.

Remember what I said, in every place from east to west, God wants a pure testimony. And that's been our theme in this conference. Building fellowship and building the body of Christ.

This is the way it's done. Every one of us can have a part in it if we are willing to let the Holy Spirit do that work in us in secret. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, please help us to apply these truths to our personal lives. And I believe that in many parts of the United States, not just in Texas, maybe Florida, maybe Texas, maybe California, Missouri, many states around here, you want to build a pure testimony for your name. I pray that you will raise up people like that.

That there can be a testimony for your name that will put the devil to shame. That will be a testimony to the powers in the heavenlies of what you can do. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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