

Devotion To Christ Is Primary

by Zac Poonen

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Scripture: Philippians 3:8, James 4:5

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Description

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Transcript

It's always a joy to be here. Two of the hazards of, occupational hazards of traveling preachers is, especially in the villages in India, is eating defiled food and getting sick. And the other is losing one's voice.

So I had experienced both of that in the last couple of weeks. So I have to speak a little softly, which is always a good thing to do, all the time. And I have, was thinking today about how quickly the churches, which the apostles planted, declined.

And so much depended on, sometimes one godly man. Paul told the church in Ephesus, in Acts 20, I know what's going to happen after I leave. I've been here three years, he said in Acts 20, and no wolf could come inside.

That's amazing. As long as Paul was there, the ravenous wolves that Satan sent, not one of them could enter the church. But he says in Acts 20, the moment I leave, they'll all come in.

And some of you may not be familiar with that passage, please turn to Acts 20. Paul was speaking to the elders in Ephesus. He gathered all the elders in Ephesus, Acts 20, 17.

And he had been there for three years. He had never stayed in any place for three years. He stayed in Corinth for one and a half years.

But here, it says he stayed for three years, verse 31. Night and day, for three years, I kept on admonishing you with tears. With tears means Paul preached with passion.

And day and night means he'd probably preach early morning before people went to work. And then late in the evening again, after they came back from work. John Wesley used to do that.

He'd get up at four o'clock and go and preach somewhere at five o'clock in the morning for people who were before they went to work. And then he'd go and preach to them in the evening. That's how Paul preached house to house, it says here.

And he declared to them, verse 27, the entire purpose of God. He didn't. He preached discipleship.

He preached every single thing that is included, the whole circle. No segment of the circle was left out. The whole purpose of God.

And, but he says, I know, verse 29, after my departure, savage wolves will come in and will not spare the flock. You see, how come these wolves could not come in when Paul was there? It was one man who kept the wolves outside. And if you study church history, the wolves of Satan are never kept outside by a number of people.

Satan is never scared of numbers. He's scared of one godly man. And he knows every person through and through.

You can fool everybody in the church that you're a godly man, but you can't fool the devil. He knows who's godly and who's not. You can fool others.

You're a godly woman. You can't fool the devil. And the fact that the wolves could not come into that church was an indication that there was at least one godly man there.

It's amazing how, even though it is the New Covenant, and it's a body through which God works, unlike the Old Covenant. And we can understand in the Old Covenant, perhaps it was one Elijah who brought fire down from heaven and made the whole nation turn back to God. We think that in the New Covenant it's different.

It's a body, two or three gathered in Jesus' name. And yet, I've seen in my own experience in the last 40 years of ministry with CFC churches, and as I've studied church history, God is very, very often dependent on one man. You take, for example, Paul out of the New Testament.

What is left? So, there's an opportunity for all of us to be like Paul. But the fact of the matter is, history reveals that all are not like Paul. And that was the reason why the decline came in.

The same church in Ephesus, you read, I believe it was one of the most spiritual churches, you read Ephesians, and you find it's the most spiritual letter in the New Testament. Paul spoke wisdom among those who were perfect. He says in 1 Corinthians 2 and Ephesians were the ones he wrote the deepest

spiritual truths.

But you go to the second letter to the Ephesians, you know where that is? Revelation chapter 2. The second letter to the Ephesians. Decline has come in, exactly like Paul said. The wolves had come in.

The external activities were still there. But that inner life had gone, gone so badly that Jesus said, I'm going to remove the lampstand from here. What that meant is that I'm not going to be in your midst anymore.

You can continue with your meetings and your conferences and your singing and everything else, but the Lord says, I will not be here. That's what he meant. Imagine having a church where the Lord is not there, but they're still carrying on with their meetings.

That happened in Laodicea. He says, I stand at the door and knock. So where is he? He's outside.

That's happened to so many churches. It's not their doctrine that primarily they go astray. Today we think so much that there are cults and different groups that don't preach the way of salvation properly or something like that.

But it's not that. There are a lot of churches that preach the way of salvation correctly. The Lord is not in the midst.

Savage wolves have come in. And there's a reason for it. In the Old Testament, I mentioned about Elijah.

I just want to turn to 1 Kings chapter 19. Elijah felt like that once. He says to God, he wasn't the type of person who had self-pity and felt sorry for himself.

He was a fearless man. He was not afraid of kings or anybody. He says, but when he came before God, he says in 1 Kings chapter 19, Lord, 1 Kings 19 and verse 10, I've been very zealous for the sons of Israel who have forsaken your covenant and torn down your altars and killed your prophets.

And I alone am left. I'm the only one left, Lord. And they're trying to kill me.

He wasn't afraid of dying and going to heaven to be with the Lord, but he was afraid of what would be the condition of Israel if he went away. These prophets, their burden was always that. They were not so keen to live on the earth.

They were always persecuted, hated, bad-mouthed, and people called them bad names, but they had such a burden. What will happen to this group if I leave? Lord, I alone am left. That's the burden Paul had.

What will happen to me? What will happen to this church when I leave? The wolves will come in. And imagine sitting around. I don't know how many elders there were when Paul spoke to those elders, maybe five.

Imagine five people sitting in front of Paul, elders who have been elders in the church in Ephesus. And he turns around and tells them, picture this in your mind, Paul speaking to five elders and saying, fellas, when I leave, not one of you will be able to keep the wolves outside this church. How do you think they felt when they heard that? If you were one of the elders, how would you feel? You say, who does Paul think he is? What an arrogant guy, as if only he can keep the wolves out.

What does he think of himself? What arrogance to say something like that. Only I can keep the wolves out of this church. But the fact of the matter, it was true.

When Paul left, that church declined, went to the dogs. The Lord left it. So we see there, and Elijah says the same thing.

He had watched Israel for so many years, all backslidden, the prophets all backslidden, and he says, I alone am left. And the Lord says in verse 18, yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Beal, and every mouth that has not kissed him. Now many people, I've heard many, many people say from that passage, Elijah thought he was all alone, that he alone could draw God's people back to him.

But God says there were 7,000. No, there were not. They were not like Elijah.

Not one of those 7,000 could bring fire down from heaven. Only one man could bring fire down from heaven, and that was Elijah. There can be 7,000 believers, but only one can bring the fire down from heaven.

And we should long to be like that. Then what was the 7,000? They had a negative testimony. What is that? Verse 18, I do not bow to Beal.

I've not kissed the idol of Beal. It was negative. What do you do positively? Well, there's not much to say positively, but I don't do this.

And I tell you the testimony of a lot of Christians is negative. I don't smoke. I don't drink.

I don't womanize. I don't watch R-rated movies. I don't scream at people.

I hope so. I don't do this. I don't do that.

I don't do the other thing. It's all negative. What about Elijah? His testimony was not, I don't bow down to Beal.

His testimony to Ahab was, in 1 Kings 17, verse 1, as the Lord God of Israel lives before whom I stand. His testimony is positive. Not, I don't bow down to Beal.

I stand before God. I live before his face every single day. Those 7,000 didn't have that testimony.

That testimony was, I don't do this. I don't do that. And it's good to ask yourself, which of these two groups are you in? You say like, Elijah, I live before God's face every single day.

Or is it, I have a good testimony because I don't smoke. I don't drink. I don't gamble.

I don't do this. I don't do this. There's a whole list of negatives.

Not like that other fellow there who has some of these bad habits. Dear brothers and sisters, we can be like those 7,000. And pat ourselves on the back that we don't do this.

We don't do that. I don't yell at my wife. Great.

So it's still negative. I don't get angry. We talk about that a lot in the church.

I don't lust after women. Great. And you say we have achieved something because I don't lust after women.

I don't get angry. Wow. You're better than so many other Christians.

But you're still part of the 7,000 who haven't bowed to Beal. Because it's a negative testimony. I don't love money.

Add that to the list. It's again negative. Elijah's testimony is I live before God every day.

It's not I don't do this and I don't do that and I don't do the other. Be very careful about that because I want to say to you very frankly, it's very easy to be like that. God's done a great work in this church.

I can see that. I travel around all CFC churches and I know where God's done a work and he hasn't. I'll tell you honestly, I fear even for this church that your testimony can be negative and don't have a glory in there.

It must be positive that you live before God's face. That the fact that you come into this meeting, you bring the presence of God into this meeting. Imagine 50, 60 people bringing the presence of God into a meeting.

People will sense it. Boy, today I met with the Lord. The Lord was here.

Many years ago, I asked the Lord, what is the mark of a New Testament church? You see, I grew up when I was baptized. I was in the Orthodox Church, you know, before I was born again. They pray to Mary and pray for the dead and all.

Then I got born again at 19 and I joined the Brethren Assembly. They were very strong on pattern, New Testament pattern. Everything must be like this, like this.

We don't call anybody a pastor. We have elders. Many, many good things, which are according to the pattern, but it was a dead pattern.

They studied the Bible every Sunday, like studying a book of chemistry or something. It was all accurate information. But I didn't go away from the meetings I attended those days saying, boy, I met with the Lord.

No. They talked about New Testament pattern. I said, I want a New Testament pattern.

I saw the Lord, what is the mark of a New Testament church? Is it that we don't have anybody called a pastor? Is it that we don't circulate letters asking for money? All that is good. Is it that we baptize by immersion, only born again people? Is it that we break bread in a proper way? We don't believe that that is the body and blood of Jesus as a symbol. No, none of these things.

What the Lord showed me was 1 Corinthians 14, that in your church, people should go away at the end of the meeting and say, 1 Corinthians 14 25. The person comes in and he worships God and says, God is certainly among you. Unbelieving.

It's an unbelieving man, an ungifted man. Verse 24 comes in and he acknowledges, hey, God is here. Not a particular doctrine.

Not that I don't do this and I don't do that and I don't do the other thing. God is here. That's what people said when the fire fell from heaven.

It wasn't a doctrine Elijah preached. The fire of God came down and people said, boy, God is here. And I want to urge you, my dear brothers and sisters, that that should be your longing for every single meeting.

You say, Lord, we want to go away from every single meeting of the church feeling we met with God. We met with Jesus was there. And I believe that one man can bring it, the presence of the Lord.

Paul could bring it into that church in Ephesus. And the moment he was gone, that was the end. The Lord himself withdrew after a little while.

He gave them a little time, but he withdrew from there. And the reason was, see Paul's words in Philippians 3 when he talks about Timothy. It's the quality of man that determines whether the Lord will commit himself to that person and say, I will stand by that person.

That when he's there, he'll recognize that I'm there. And when he's not there, he won't sense my presence at all. Each of us should long to be like that type of person, young and old.

Lord, I want the presence of the Lord so much with me. I may not be a great preacher or great singer or gifted. The presence of the Lord is what you should long for.

Every one of us. Paul tells about Timothy in Philippians 2. He wanted to send somebody to the Philippian Christians. And he says in Philippians 2.19, I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you so that I can be encouraged by the Lord of your condition.

The reason is I don't have anybody else who has a similar spirit to mine. Kindred means a relative. His paraphrase would be, I don't have a single co-worker who has the same spirit as me.

Imagine, Paul had so many co-workers. But Timothy was unique. I mean, if you check doctrine-wise, they all had the right doctrine.

But there was something about Timothy which brought him into a kindred spirit with Paul. And there were two things that characterized Timothy. Like the two arms of the cross.

Vertically, verse 21. He was concerned about the interests of Christ and not his own. And the horizontal arm of the cross, verse 20.

He was genuinely concerned about the welfare of his fellow believers. Those are the two arms of the cross. Concerned about the interests of Christ and not his own.

And concerned for the welfare of others. And that's a good test by which all of us can examine ourselves. All of us.

Do you have these two arms of the cross in your life? Can you say that it's not a question of what you do or what your activities are. I come for all the meetings. I even come for the prayer meeting.

Great. You can do all that, my brothers and sisters. And yet you can be seeking your own.

Can you honestly say before God, Lord, the passion of my life is the interest of Christ Jesus. It's primary. Nothing for myself.

I don't seek any of my own interests in the plans I make. The decisions I make. When I decide to move to a place or take a job or do anything.

Lord, it's your interest that's primary, not my own. That's the type of man that Paul stands by. That God stands by.

That's the type of man who will bring the presence of God into a meeting. One man. And that's the type of man when he goes away, the wolves come in.

Paul was like that. Timothy was like that. Zero interest in their own, what they're going to get out of it.

What are you going to get out of it, Paul? Zero. What's Christ going to get out of it? Everything. That is true Christianity.

That is true discipleship. Anything less than that is not worth being called a Christian. And Paul was delighted that he had one other person like that in Timothy, who also was like that.

He had such a passionate devotion to Christ that he would sacrifice all his own interests in order to be devoted to Christ. And also that led to, since Christ was concerned about the people in the churches, Timothy was concerned about the people in the churches too. He wasn't just attending meetings.

He wasn't attending meetings. He was genuinely concerned about the welfare of the people who sat in those meetings, which is very different from attending meetings. A lot of Christians congratulate themselves that I never miss a meeting of the church.

Oh, really? That's great. But you may not have any concern for the welfare of the people in that church. There's a lot of difference.

He was genuinely concerned for the welfare of others. And that is the spirit of Christ. The spirit of Christ filled Paul and Timothy.

In practical terms, what does this mean? Turn with me to 2 Corinthians in Chapter 11. 2 Corinthians 11. For many years, I used to wonder what the tree of life stood for in the Garden of Eden.

I knew that everything in the Old Testament had a symbolic reference or looking forward to some fulfillment in the New Testament. For example, the circumcision was the cutting off of the flesh physically. And in the New Testament, Philippians 3.3 says, I have no confidence in my flesh.

Spiritual, casting off of confidence. Confidence in the Sabbath. The first day that God made Adam was a day of rest for him.

Not work, but rest. Adam began to work on the second day onwards. The law said six days you shall work and one day you shall rest.

But for Adam, the law was different. Adam, your first day is with me, God. Then you go out to the garden and work.

The work in the garden can wait. I want you to fellowship with me. That's how God intended man to be.

Not six days you work and then one day you go before God. One day you get along with God and then you do everything else. That was the way God planned for Adam.

So that's the meaning of the Sabbath that we, Hebrews 4 says, it is entering into God's rest. So everything in the Old Testament had a significance. The glory of God on top of the tabernacle.

That the presence of God, because everything else in the tabernacle could be imitated by the Philistines. You know, if the Philistines got a copy of Exodus, they could make a tabernacle exactly like the one Moses made. Exactly.

Because all the details are there. Down to the smallest little thing. But there's one thing they couldn't duplicate and that was the pillar of fire.

How could they produce that? That was the most important part of the tabernacle. I've been in a lot of Bible studies and some brethren in Pentecostal groups study the tabernacle. This means that and the curtains mean this and the pillars mean this and the altar means that.

And I say, hey, that's all great. But if you don't have the pillar of fire there, all this is meaningless. That's the most important thing.

Even if you don't understand the meaning of all the other things, the pillar of fire, the presence of God. So what is the meaning of the tree of life? Everything must have a meaning back in the Old Testament. I could understand how the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

To know good and evil means to know what's right and what's wrong. That's what we teach our children when they grow up. Babies, they grow up, you teach them what's right and what's wrong.

But you can teach a baby what's right and what's wrong and the baby will have no contact with God at all. There are many people in the world who live with a good conscience, who don't know God at all, who are atheists. I personally know atheists who hardly ever do anything crooked or upright in financial matters, who don't cheat others.

Atheists, no contact with God. That's knowledge of good and evil. They know this is right and that's wrong, so I won't do what's wrong.

But God did not want Adam to live like that. And, you know, we can also grow up in a church like this. And live at a higher level of what's right and wrong, a little higher level than, say, the Methodists and the Baptists and others.

We know right and wrong a little more. But you could still be living from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Only thing, your knowledge of good and evil is more refined.

I know, for example, that anger is wrong, which others don't know. Or I know that lusting after a woman is wrong, or divorce is wrong, or love of money is wrong. So I know what's good and what's evil.

But what about the tree of life? That's what God wanted Adam to live by. And that's described in this verse, 2 Corinthians 11, verse 3. I'm afraid that as the devil, the serpent, deceived Eve by his craftiness. How did he deceive Eve? He deceived her by drawing her away from the tree of life to the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Paul tells the Corinthians, because Paul spent a year and a half in Corinth, you've got such a lot of information from me, I'm afraid that the devil will draw you away into all this accurate information, accurate new covenant teaching, and draw you away from the tree of life, which is simple, pure devotion to Jesus Christ. Do you know, my brothers and sisters, there's a lot of difference between simple, pure devotion to Jesus Christ and avoiding overcoming anger, overcoming sexual lust, overcoming the love of money,

overcoming anxiety, overcoming judging others, go through the whole Sermon on the Mount, doing all of that, and you're going to be still stuck around the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And even what you share with others, maybe some of the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Accurate, absolutely accurate information. But it's not leading you or those who hear you to a fervent devotion to Jesus Christ. This is the most important thing in the Christian life.

Elijah said, I live before God's face. Paul said at the end of his life, I want to know Christ more. I said, Paul, you've already known him for 30 years.

Yeah, it's nothing, man. There's a vastness about God, and I need to know him. I'm passionately longing to know him more, more and more and more.

That is true Christianity. And it's very easy for you folks in a good church like this, not to concentrate on that, to miss out on that. And then if that happens, same thing will happen to the church in Ephesus, even if you're the best church today.

Once you move away from simple, fervent devotion to Christ where you say, I desire nothing on earth but you. Lord, I want nothing for myself. Can you honestly say that to the Lord? Lord, I want nothing for myself.

I ask for nothing for myself. I want everything for you. My life, my energy, my time, my money must all count for you.

That's what it means to seek his kingdom first and his righteousness. It doesn't mean you give up your secular jobs. It doesn't mean anything except that everything has now got a different focus.

You're not just thinking of avoiding this sin and avoiding this sin and avoiding that one. You're thinking of a passionate daily devotion to Christ. You know, it's like the Bible describes the New Testament as a relationship with Jesus Christ.

This bride-bridegroom relationship was not there in the Old Testament. Old Testament was laws and there were very upright people. Even Elijah did not have a bride-bridegroom relationship with God.

It's one of the greatest privileges of the New Covenant. There were many upright people in the Old Testament. Can you think of John the Baptist running after women? No.

He was such an upright man. Do you think John the Baptist was interested in money? I believe he was more free from money than most of us sitting here. And he was an old covenant man.

But what did he have? He had such a devotion and respect to Christ that he felt, I'm not even worthy to carry his sandals or untie his laces. Imagine untying the laces of Jesus' sandals. And John the Baptist said, No, I'm not worthy even to do that.

Such a devotion and respect for Christ. It wasn't, I don't do this and I don't do that and I don't do the other thing. No.

There's a lot, lot more than that. And yet he did not know that bride relationship was not there. He said, I'm only a friend of the bridegroom, not the bride.

It's a very intimate relationship the New Covenant brings us into. You're all familiar with the words I often quote which says, The first promise in the New Testament. I'm sure you all know it.

You've heard me say it many times. What is it? Tell me somebody. Matthew 121.

He will save us from our sins. And even in a verse like that, he will save his people from their sins. It's possible to have the emphasis on being saved from sin.

Whereas the emphasis should be on he. He. Himself.

So the margin of my Bible says, he himself. Apparently that's how it is in the Greek. He himself.

So the first promise in the New Testament is about him. It's not even being saved from sin. It's he himself.

It's my devotion to Christ. From there I get saved from sin. Otherwise being saved from sin can become my gospel.

No. It's devotion to Christ. That's the tree of life.

Jesus himself. I want to testify that this is what I've sought to work on all the years of my life. Building the church and planning churches.

It's all secondary. Writing, secondary. He himself.

I've sought him to be the passion of my life for many, many years. It's Jesus himself. It's not a thing.

You know people seek for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It's a thing. No wonder you don't get it.

What is the purpose of the baptism of the Holy Spirit? Is it just experience? I feel sorry for all these people who make speaking in tongues the most important thing. I'll tell you what speaking in tongues has done for me. It's my love language with Jesus Christ.

It's like you know a wife who's deeply in love with her husband. Tells him things she doesn't want anybody else to hear. A good wife.

A husband who loves each other dearly. Express their love in intimate things which they don't want a single soul to hear. They don't want their children to hear.

They make sure the bedroom doors are unlocked when they whisper their love words to each other. To me that is speaking in tongues. But I don't know whether that is to most people who just babble away two or three syllables in a church and call it speaking in tongues.

I think it's an absolute insult to the Holy Spirit. Absolute. It's one of those counterfeits that the devil has planted upon the church and told people you got it.

What have you got? Some babbling? I saw it and I remember seeking for this when I was 23 years old. And I never knew anything about Pentecostals. But I remember the first day I went to a Pentecostal church when I was 23.

Seeking for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. And I saw what was happening there and I came away to my room. I was in the naval base those days.

And I said Lord I don't want that. That's not what I'm looking for. Give me the real thing even if it takes 10 years.

And it took 10 years. But I was determined that I will not be satisfied with a cheap counterfeit. Just to say I've joined the club.

Who's bothered about impressing people I've joined the club? I don't belong to any club. I belong to Jesus Christ. And I know that when God deigned to give me that gift it was a love language between me and Christ.

It was to help my devotion to Christ. That's what Paul says. I thank God I speak in tongues more than all of you.

Because he was more devoted to Christ than all of them. But he says in the church I will not even speak one word in an unknown tongue. Because that's private.

You don't whisper things to your husband or wife in public. You know everything in the Bible falls into place. When you see that Christianity is a fervent devotion to Jesus Christ.

And when the devil has taken me away from that. Onto being upright in my job and not cheating and giving money for God's work. And all these good good things which have taken me away from simple fervent devotion to Jesus Christ.

And we can train our children also to love. Don't cheat in exam. Don't do this.

Don't do that. Very good. Upright children.

They have no devotion to Christ. I fear that's happening to the second generation in many places in CFC. They're upright.

Better than many others. But where's the fervent devotion to Christ in our children? If that's not there my brothers and sisters. We have lost out.

Another generation will go straight from God. Just like the church in Ephesus. We have to battle it.

We have to battle it. And we parents have to preserve that devotion to Christ. And you can't pass it on to your children if you don't have it yourself.

So he says I'm afraid that the devil like he deceived even turned him. Turned her away from the tree of life to just a lot of good and evil. This is good.

This is evil. We can study the whole Bible and say this is good. And this is evil.

And that's right now. I'll avoid all the evil things. And I've done all the good things.

We can get all our sisters to veil their heads. We break bread regularly. And we do baptism the right way.

We've understood speaking in tongues also the right way. Wonderful. Everything perfectly.

What's missing? Fervent devotion to Jesus Christ. And the devil has succeeded in turning us away from the tree of life. That is the thing.

And I'll tell you, if you have fervent devotion to Christ, even if you don't understand some of these other laws, it won't be so important. It's fervent devotion to Christ. And it's one area in which you need to grow in our love for the Lord.

This is what pressing on to perfection is. Pressing on to perfection is not finally I got rid of my anger. We had a brother who came to our church in India, was a Hindu.

He said, overcoming anger. I practiced yoga and I overcame it before I ever came to the church. With yoga.

They learned to, he didn't, what he thought, what he meant was he didn't get angry with his lips. It was all in the heart. That's not victory.

That's not the type of victory Jesus gives us. Jesus delivers us from anger within. And they don't, yoga and Buddhism can't give you that.

But that's, you know, that I can get a reputation for being upright in different areas. That I have eaten every one of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, every fruit from it. And it's produced death.

I met people like this who are so exact in all these things. You don't want to be near them. They're too holy to be near.

They don't love Jesus. We don't want to be like that. How to come here? See the price that Paul paid in order to come to this.

See Philippians in chapter 3. I've often thought about this passage. How did Paul come to this place of fervent devotion to Christ? Philippians 3, verse 7. Whatever things were gained to me, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Okay, let's go step by step.

Can you think of the things in your life that are a gain to you? Things that you value? Maybe your job. Maybe your house. Maybe your education.

Maybe your children. So many things. Which are a gain for you.

And you say, no, I will not value anything outside of Christ. Do you know that? Jesus said, if you want to love me, you've got to hate your wife and your children. You've got to hate your children.

I fear there are people in our churches who make so much of their children to get honor for themselves. I have got upright children. It's back to the... Can everybody's attention on me? The devil is a master deceiver.

It looks so nice. I want to bring up my children in a godly way. Why, brother? So that they may be devoted to Christ and live for him 100% in their generation.

So often, I fear that many who come even to a good CFC church, it can be an attitude of what is the minimum I have to do to keep a good testimony in this church? And underneath it all, I live for myself. I live for myself and my own interests. And in that sense, I may not be different from anybody in the world.

Except that I got a little Christian whitewash over this seeking my own. Paul said about Timothy, he does not seek his own in anything. When he takes a decision, he doesn't think, how will this benefit me? What

does it mean to seek my own? That means when I'm thinking of taking a decision, and we take many decisions in life, I don't think of, how will this benefit me? But how will this glorify Christ? I'll tell you honestly, there are very, very few Christians who live like that.

But those are the ones who can bring the presence of God into a meeting. Those are the ones who can keep the ravenous wolves outside a church. And my brother, sister, you must be like that.

And if you're like that, I tell you, God will bless your children. Believe me. They may not accomplish all you want them to accomplish, but they will accomplish something for God in their lifetime.

If that's your goal. So much of self in our goals and ambitions. It'll all disappear when you come to the tree of life.

Fervent devotion to Jesus Christ. And do you know that that is what God desires from us? See, Paul says here, Everything that was gained to me, verse 7, I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. And verse 8, more than that, I count everything to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

This is like a lover saying, I found my beloved. I don't care for anything else. It's like the Song of Solomon.

I don't care for anything else. I found my beloved. For whom I suffered the loss of everything.

And I count everything on earth as rubbish just to get Christ. That's the expression that has come home to my heart many times. Do I really count everything as rubbish? Can I count my ministry as rubbish compared to Christ? I say, yes, Lord, any day.

My ministry is rubbish compared to Christ. I want you. I don't want a ministry.

I don't want a ministry. I want you, Jesus. I don't want honor in the church.

No, I want Jesus. A devotion to Christ. It's very subtle, these other things that come in, which look so spiritual.

I count it all as rubbish so that I may gain Christ. So if you were to ask the average believer, how did you find Christ? You got Christ without counting everything else as rubbish? Really? How did you manage that? Paul couldn't get Christ until he counted everything else as rubbish. How in the world did you manage to get Christ without counting everything else as rubbish? Perhaps you have not known Christ like Paul knew him.

And that's why the presence of God is not there when people meet with you or when you speak to them. There is a price to be paid. God honors those who honor him.

There's no doubt about that. And this is not something that you can imitate. It's not something you can duplicate.

It's the real thing. And the real thing has to come from God. It's not like some cheap perfume that you can imitate and produce somewhat of a similar odor, aroma.

No, you got to have the real thing. And that counts by, he says, I count it all rubbish so that I may gain Christ. I tell you, I've been a Christian for 60 years now.

I was 19 when I gave my life to Christ and I'm 79 now. But I tell you this, I still say to me the most important thing in life is Jesus Christ himself. I wake up in the morning and I say, Lord Jesus, I want you.

I don't want anything else. I sometimes lie in bed and say, you can take away everything from me. I take away things which I think are more important.

The most important thing for me on this earth are ministry and serving the Lord and building the church. He says, Lord, you can take it away. I don't care.

If I have you, that's enough. You must be like that, brothers. That's the way to preserve this church.

If everyone here is determined to come to the tree of life, which is simple, pure devotion to Jesus Christ. And as I said, the price you have to pay for that is you must see that everything else is rubbish. And, you know, it won't be a sacrifice then.

And when you finally go and dump all that garbage outside in the trash can, you don't come back and say, boy, what a sacrifice I made today. Do I feel like that? Do you feel that anything you've given up for Jesus is a sacrifice? Uh-huh. Then you haven't seen the value of Christ.

Paul said, I count everything as rubbish compared to Christ. And I need to hold that up before me all the time. Lord, I will always consider even so-called spiritual things like ministry rubbish compared to Jesus himself.

I want to be passionately devoted to Jesus Christ. The Christian life is a love relationship. If it's not that, it's not genuine.

Song of Solomon, if you read it, like a love relationship between a believer and Jesus Christ. That's how I read it many times. It's a tremendous challenge to me.

Personal devotion to Christ. To me, it's one of the best books in the Bible that teach me personal devotion to Christ. Where he means more to me than everything else.

Where when he calls, I'm willing to drop everything and go. See James in chapter 4, it's not just here. You find that all over scripture.

James 4, Paul says, sorry, James says, verse 5. Have you ever understood this verse? James 4, 5. Do you think the scripture speaks to no purpose? He jealously desires the spirit which he has made to dwell in us. What's the meaning of that phrase? You know, in the Greek language in which this was written, there were no capital letters and small letters. So the translators had to decide whether to put a capital S there, referring to the Holy Spirit.

Or a small s referring to our spirit. And I think they made a big mistake. It's referring to our spirit.

God the Father doesn't jealously desire the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit already won. Always won.

What he jealously desires is my spirit. That my spirit, you know, the godly jealousy of a husband. Who wants his wife only to be interested in him and in nobody else.

She is jealous if she's ever interested in somebody else. That's a godly jealousy. I want my wife to be taken up with me.

That's the meaning of this jealousy. That my spirit, God is jealous that my spirit will be taken up with him. Not with anything else.

Not even with victory over sin. No. But with him.

He's jealous for that. And it says here, verse 6, he'll give us grace to live that life. This is true Christianity.

Remember when the lawyer once came to Jesus and said, what is the greatest commandment? Simple. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength. That's it.

That's the vertical arm of the cross and love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets hang on that. And this is Jesus' answer.

Love the Lord with all our heart, soul, strength and mind. Nothing else is important on earth. In Song of Solomon, there's a little illustration of this which we can learn something from.

In Song of Solomon, there was a time in the bride's life Chapter 3. When he longed after him. It's a believer who longed after Jesus in the early part of his Christian life. Song of Solomon.

On my bed, night after night, I sought the Lord. Let me paraphrase it. I sought Jesus because my soul loved him.

And when I could not find him, I got up from my bed and went about looking for him. Verse 3. Those are the elders in the church who are not very spiritual. Whoever those elders were, the watchmen.

I said, have you seen those who my soul loves? They couldn't direct me. But I just left them and I found him. Verse 4. Who my soul loves.

And I held on to him and I would not let him go. Lord, I found you. But a little later, we read in Chapter 5 and Verse 2. Again, she's in bed.

The bride. But my heart was awake and I heard a voice. My beloved is now calling me.

Open to me, my darling. And now that's what she say. Lord, I have taken off my dress.

How can I put it on again? How can my feet are washed? How can I get it dirty again? And the Lord puts out his hand through the opening. And finally, after a while, my feelings were finally aroused. Then I got up.

And when I went and opened the door, Verse 6. He had gone. See the difference? In Chapter 3, she was running after looking for him. And now when he comes for her, she's busy doing something else.

She's busy with something else. Are you like that? Busy with something else when the Lord wants you to be with him. I've had experiences like that.

Which I'm ashamed when I think of it now. But they've taught me a lesson. Sometimes I'm writing a Christian article.

A Christian article. And the Lord says, drop that for a while. Spend a little time with me.

And I say, just hang on, Lord. Just 15 minutes, I'll be with you. And I finish the article.

And I look for the Lord. He's not there. The sense of his presence is not there.

I've experienced that exactly like that. And then I think of back to earlier times when I was just longing after him. When I drop anything and go after him.

And I say, Lord, that's what I want. Every day of my life. That I shall count everything else as rubbish.

Compared to you. And if that is not true a single day of my life. I have to say to myself.

Satan has deceived me. Dear brother and dear sister. Don't let this church.

Sink and drift like many, many other churches. You're a part of it. You can help preserve it.

If you preserve your fervent devotion to Christ. Let this church gather around the tree of life. Not around the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Not around the tree of this is sin and that is sin. I must avoid it. I don't bow down to Baal.

No. I want to live before God. I want the fire of God to be in our midst all the time.

Amen.

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