

Elders Endure to the End as Godly Examples

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the dangers of backsliding among elders, using examples from the past and urging sensitivity to the Lord's voice. It highlights the importance of keeping Jesus at the center of our lives, loving Him above all else, and daily taking up our cross to die to self. The speaker warns against self-justification, the love of the world, and the neglect of faith and conscience, using biblical examples like Saul, Demas, Hymenaeus, and Alexander to illustrate the consequences of spiritual decline.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 15:35, 2 Timothy 4:10, 1 Timothy 1:19, Acts 24:16, Acts 24:16, Acts 24:16, Acts 24:16, Acts 24:16, Acts 24:16

Topics: "Backsliding", "Keeping Jesus Central"

Description

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Transcript

One of the things that has concerned me is backsliding among elders, and we've seen instances of that in the past years. Some elders have fallen away, and recently we had a case also in India of someone who was with us for a long time. No backsliding happens suddenly.

Nobody falls away all of a sudden. It's always a gradual process, and if we are sensitive to the Lord's voice, we'll be alerted to it. And very often it is when other things than Jesus himself become important to us.

Something in the world, politics, elections, yeah, the beginning of backsliding. When Christ himself is not the center, we have to run the race looking only unto Jesus. And I say that is something we need to emphasize.

I mean, some of you may think, I'll never backslide. Well, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. That's the word.

Very important for all of us. We are calling us to be disciples, and Jesus said, in order to be disciples, we must love him more than father, mother, brother, sister, children, husband, wife, everyone, and even the

brothers in the church. We have to love him more than we love one another.

And nobody must be our favorite. Jesus himself, always in front of us. And the other condition, Jesus said, as we all know, is that every single day of our life, without exception, we take up the cross, which means I die to my own preferences, my choices, my interests, all of that, die to it.

Every single day. I mean, if we could deal with death to self in one single blow, Jesus would not have said, if you want to follow me, take up your cross daily. So obviously that is not something that can be dealt with in one single blow.

It should be our attitude. Galatians 5:24 says those who are Christ have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts, but we know the flesh is alive in us. What does that verse mean? It means my permanent attitude to the flesh, I've decided once for all, it's like marriage.

I've decided once for all to be married to the woman God gave me. But every day I have to love her. Every day I have to be faithful to her.

And if you're really a serious husband, every day you'll seek to encourage her. So that's the only way we preserve our marriage from, I mean, a lot of people, their marriages are, well, they love each other a lot and the day they're married and as time goes on, instead of loving their wives more, they sort of backslide there too. Same thing happens with the Lord.

It's a daily thing. And Paul went even further to explain it from his own experience. He didn't say daily.

In 2 Corinthians in chapter 4, he puts it like this, 2 Corinthians 4. He's talking about the verse 4 of the glory of Christ, who's the image of God, to be seen in us. And for that to happen, he says, we have to, verse 10, 2 Corinthians 4:10, we have to carry in our body the dying of Jesus always, verse 10, 2 Corinthians 4:10. That's not daily.

That is 24/7. What Jesus said in Luke 9:23, take up your cross daily and follow me if you want to follow me. Paul says, I discovered that I need to have that attitude 24 hours of the day.

What is the result of that? He says it twice. First of all, so that verse 10, the life of Jesus can be manifested in our body. That is our goal.

Our goal is not preaching. Our goal is not building the church. It's all secondary.

Our goal is that the life of Jesus Christ might be manifested in our body in the way we look at people, in the way we look at women, in the way we look at money, in the way we look at our fellow believers, the way we look at our fellow elders is consider them equal with us. In the way we consider, look at backsliders, in the way we look at Pharisees, treating the Pharisees exactly like Jesus treated the Pharisees. There's no softness there.

The way we look at Babylon and Babylon in Christianity, the way Jesus looked at the corrupt system that existed in his day. And further, he goes on to say, again, in verse 11, 2 Corinthians 4:11, here he uses the word constantly. It's always in verse 10 and constantly in verse 11, emphasizing that this is not something we just decide once and then it'll be true.

That's the way of backsliding. A person who goes into verse 10 and 11 will never backslide. And I want to encourage all of you to live in those verses, constantly being delivered over to death.

That means God takes care of that. He arranges it. Verse 10 is my choice.

I choose to carry in my body 24 seven. That's my attitude towards self. That's been the cause of all the heartache and problems in my life from the time I was born.

Self. And I've learned to hate it. All its opinions and ideas that come up in my mind, which I think I should air and tell others about self, self, self.

Sometimes it's indecent self. We have got rid of that. Sometimes there's a decent self where we express our views and we got to die.

Always bearing in our body the dying of Jesus. That's the only way the life of Jesus will be manifested in our body. And it's when the life of Jesus is manifest in our body that we have a prophetic word for God's people.

Otherwise, we can prepare a message, sit down one day and take a concordance and maybe listen to some messages on the internet and make a few points and we've got a message. That's not prophetic. It's that the life of Jesus is manifested in our body.

God will give us a word according to the need of our people every single time. He'll give that to you for the next 50 years. If you are going to be an elder there for the next 50 years, you've got to have faith for that.

It all depends on whether the life of Jesus is being manifested in our bodies. And for that, there is only one way. I have to choose death to self.

And self is so subtle. There are so many. It's like an onion.

Layer after layer after layer. You can peel off. You know, I've often spoken about peeling off layers of self, but I've discovered through the years with many people, they peel off something and after some time, those layers are back again on.

You've got to watch it. The layers that you're peeled off, don't come back on. The things you gave up once upon a time, don't come back into your life again.

And then God cooperates with us. That's verse 11. We who live are constantly being delivered over to death.

Who does that? God. God delivers us over to death by allowing us to be humiliated by other people, by taking us through tight circumstances, maybe difficulties in your surroundings or in your job or in the church, perhaps with different people. You are delivered over to death for Jesus' sake.

And in all those situations, I must recognize that it is God who's delivering me over to death, not man. Man has no right over me once I've surrendered to the Lordship of Christ. Man has absolutely no right over me.

He cannot touch me. The devil cannot touch me. If we walk this way, my brothers, I want to say to you that what it says in 1 John 3, 17 will be true.

As Jesus is, so will you be in this world. I know how that word came to me in 1 John 3, 17. As Jesus is, so also are ye in this world.

And I thought of it in relation to Satan, that Jesus is never afraid of Satan. That's just a negative way of saying it. The positive way of saying it is that Satan was scared of Jesus.

Wherever Jesus went, the demons got all worked up. You know how once we read in the synagogue in Nazareth, a demon-possessed or somewhere, a demon-possessed person got all worked up when Jesus spoke. Now, that demon-possessed person sat there comfortably when years and years the Pharisees spoke.

Can a demon-possessed person sit comfortably in your church when you speak? They shouldn't. They should be disturbed. And they were disturbed when Jesus came up.

And the demons are always stirred up when Jesus comes. And wherever we go, it must be like that. That the devil must be scared of you.

That's the way it came to me. As Jesus is, so am I in this world, 1 John 3, 17, which means the devil would be scared of me. It came home to my heart that as I was once scared of the devil, the devil's going to be scared of me.

That's our authority, brothers. It's not just that somebody appointed you an elder and everybody respects you and so you can speak and everybody listens to you. That's not the basis of our authority at all.

The basis of our authority is that the devil's scared of us and Christ has anointed us and that anointing remains upon us. And we are careful to preserve that anointing all the time. Every single elder.

And where there are multiple elders, you've got to be careful that you don't just say, oh, that brother's taking care of it and he'll always have a word. No. Every one of you must seek the Lord to have a word, even if it's only one person who speaks most of the time.

There must be because word is not just what we share on Sunday morning. If you are elders, we have a responsibility for all the people in our churches and we have to be available, first of all, to the Lord to hear what he has to say to us. So, it goes on to say here in 2 Corinthians 4.11 that we are delivered over to death with the same goal, that the life of Jesus might be manifested in our mortal flesh.

Both these verses emphasize that the ultimate goal is that the life of Christ, the life of Jesus, and that's referring to the word Jesus always refers to, the way he was on earth. It's not that Christ was in heaven. Jesus was on earth, that life that was manifested in Israel for 33 and a half years, that that life will be manifested in my mortal body, in my mortal flesh.

And then he goes on further from there is another stage in verse 12, where he says here that as this death works in us, it's not only that the life of Jesus is manifested in us, but the life of Jesus begins to be produced in others. We're not to be satisfied that people come up to us at the end of a meeting and say, oh brother, that was a wonderful word. That was an anointed word, prophetic word.

We got to move past all that. And that, thank God they're blessed and thank God that they're encouraged. But if the life of Jesus is not manifested in them, verse 12, we'll still come short despite all the wonderful anointed messages we preached.

We got to have this as our goal. I want the life of Jesus to be manifested in my flock. It has to be manifested in me first.

Verse 10, I have to do my part of putting self to death every single moment of every single day, always 24 seven. And God will cooperate with me by constantly, verse 11, delivering me over to death in various circumstances, my place of work, in my home, maybe with your wife or children or neighbors or maybe with others in the church, he will deliver you over to death. And you'll see whether you want to die or whether you want to assert yourself.

It's very dangerous. You know, particularly if you're an anointed brother, it's very easy to assert yourself because you're an anointed brother. But the moment you assert yourself, it's not under the anointing.

It's that human self. And I've seen that happen with some elders in some of our CMC churches in the years in India where because God bore witness to them for some time, they began to think that they could assert themselves with the authority, which is just a human authority. It was no longer divine.

Yeah. But I thank God that some of them repented of that and got light on it. No, it's the authority of Christ.

It's the life of Jesus to be manifested in us. The authority of Christ was very different from human authority. He could turn around to his closest co-worker, Peter, and say, get behind me, Satan.

You're not choosing the way of the cross. Boy, that was his closest co-worker to risk losing his closest co-worker by getting offended. But Peter was so gripped by the fact that Jesus loved him so much.

And that's the thing that'll hold people to us in our church, even when we correct them and rebuke them, when they know that our love is so great that we laid out our life for them. And when they see that spirit in us, even if you say, get behind me, Satan, they won't get offended. Of course, we haven't reached that level of authority to call anybody Satan.

Jesus had, but maybe ours is a little lower level, but there may be a place to rebuke some of our closest co-workers. And if they get offended, well, that'll prove something about their own relationship with Christ. But Peter didn't get offended when Jesus asked him, I believe around the same time, you compare Matthew 16 with John chapter 6, will you also go away? Get behind me, Satan? Will you go away? He says, Lord, to whom shall we go? What he has spoken are the words of eternal life.

What a relationship Peter and Jesus had that when he's rebuked for avoiding the way of the cross and telling Jesus, no, don't go to the cross, and he's rebuked and called himself Satan, he considers that those words, the words of eternal life. Yeah, that's wonderful when your fellowship with your fellow believers has come to such a place where you can rebuke them strongly and they recognize that those are the words of eternal life. If they are mature, they'll recognize it immediately.

If they are not mature, they may recognize it after a few days or weeks when they realize God speaks to them and those words are meant for your salvation. But dear brothers, I feel that we have to work on this and backsliding is so close to all of us and it's the daily cross, the moment by moment cross that will preserve us. And I think of one of my great heroes from very early in my Christian life was Elijah in the Old Testament and John the Baptist in the New among human beings other than Jesus.

And this one word of John the Baptist, two sentences of John the Baptist are things that come to my heart in this connection. I want to show them to you. We're thinking of the life of Jesus being manifest in us.

John chapter three, when people came, when some of John's disciples and said, hey, Rabbi, John chapter three and verse 26, you know, some of our followers, these people are telling John the Baptist, these guys

are all following you. You're the one who drew them to God and now they are leaving us and following this man called Jesus. John 3, 26, they're going to him.

Is there a smell of that in any of us when you find that another elder is becoming more popular or your fellow elder is being more respected by the church members? Can you say with John, well, John 3, 27, a man can receive nothing unless it is given from heaven. And boy, these are the type of godly elders we need who are delighted to hear that people are going after the other brother, not after me. That's godliness.

Those are the people who build the church. The rest are building their own kingdom. Others may not recognize it, but the devil recognizes it.

This guy's just building his own kingdom under the pretext of new covenant and not freedom from Babylon and all that. It's just all words. And he says here, he says, I'm so delighted that people are following him, that I'm being pushed a little more in the background and somebody else is going up.

Wonderful. This, my joy is now full. Think of that.

He's not sort of reluctantly allowing that other brother to become more popular. He says, I'm excited. I'm full of joy to see this, that someone else who came long after me is ahead of me now.

These are the people who will build the body of Christ. I wish we had every CFC elder like this. I mean, this is the mark of a true father.

We're supposed to be fathers. I always tell the elders in India, you are fathers. Remember.

And tell me which of you fathers would not be delighted if your own children went ahead of you in education, in understanding, in the ability to speak or in acceptance of your children became very well known more than you are. Would that bring even an atom of jealousy in you? No. Because you're a father.

If that brings an atom of jealousy in you that some brother in the church is becoming more accepted than you. Or some new elder has been appointed and you've been an elder for 10 years already and some new brother is appointed and he's getting more respect and there's more anointing in you. You should say with John Baptist, my joy is made full.

Praise God. God's given them something which I don't have. And it goes on to say in verse 30, Christ must increase.

I must decrease. And Christ cannot increase if I'm not desperate to decrease. Not just if I reluctantly say, all right, I'm willing to decrease.

Not like that. I'm desperate. I want to decrease so that Christ can increase.

That's the person whom God will always have his anointing upon. If that's your passion. And it's not something we can just talk about, brother.

I can talk about it, but God knows my heart and God knows your heart, whether this is your passion. That I must decrease. It's not an optional.

I must, M-U-S-T. I must decrease. It's the passion of my life.

And he must increase, must be the passion of our life. And if you keep going like that, I'll tell you where you'll end up. See John chapter one.

John chapter one, they came to John, it says here, and asked him, John chapter one in verse 20, hey, are you the Christ? Are you the promised Messiah? He said, no. Are you Elijah? You know, God said there's going to be a Elijah in the last days. In fact, Jesus said John the Baptist was the Elijah of the last days.

If the Jews accepted him, he said, are you Elijah? No. Are you that prophet that Moses said in Deuteronomy 18, a prophet will come? No. Then what are you? I like the answer.

Verse 23. I am a voice. How many of you want to be that my brothers? To be only known as a voice.

In these days when there's video and all that type of stuff and all YouTube videos and everything else, it's very easy to want to be more than a voice. And if my passion is not to be just a voice, we're not going to increase in the anointing. Maybe there is an anointing, but I don't believe that an anointing should be at the same level.

Growth means growth in Christ likeness, growth in anointing, growth in revelation. Yeah, that is growth. When children go to school, they grow in their understanding of English, their understanding of mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology.

There's a growth in every area, not just one subject. No, it's a poor student who grows only in one subject. So there must be a growth in our anointing and one mark of it will be that we become smaller and smaller in our own eyes and people are more and more people treat us like ordinary brothers.

They don't treat us as somebody special. Many preachers in the Babylonian system are special. I mean, we may not be like those famous preachers who have a bodyguard of people around them, but that's not good enough that we're not like them.

We have to become ordinary brothers where people can come and slap us on the back and say hi, and you don't get offended with that. How dare you slap me on my back? No, we're just ordinary brothers. I hope we'll remain that.

I want to be an ordinary brother, even with the youngest brothers in the church. In India, you know, young children are taught to call the older brothers uncle, uncle, uncle. I used to tell people, hey, listen, as long as there are about 14 or 15, you can call me uncle.

After that, you please call me brother Zach, okay? Because I don't want to remain your uncle forever. I want to be your brother in Christ, and I want you to grow up from the age of 14 and be a brother. I want you to be your brother.

Call me brother Zach. I want to be your brother, and I want you to grow up to be my brother, too. There's a great example given as a warning in the Old Testament, and that is of Saul.

Saul is a picture of the preacher who doesn't judge himself daily, who doesn't seek to manifest the life of Christ. Turn with me to 1 Samuel and chapter 9 and see how Saul began. When Samuel went up to Saul, and when he was just nobody, he was just going around looking for donkeys.

His father's donkeys were lost, and this is the man who was going around seeking for donkeys, and one day Samuel comes up to him and says, you're going to be a king. And look at Saul's reaction to that in 1

Samuel 9 and verse 21. Am I not a Benjamite? 1 Samuel 9, 21.

I'm from the smallest of the tribes of Israel. Benjamin was the youngest child of Jacob, and Saul says, I'm from that tribe, and it's a small tribe, and in that tribe, my family is the least of all the families in that tribe. How in the world can you say that all Israel is looking for me? Verse 20, that I'm desirable for all of Israel.

Oh, no, no, no, no. That's how this man started, and I think many of us also start like that. And see further, when he was actually, you know, they were seeking to find a king, and they cast lots before the Lord.

We read in chapter 10, one by one they cast lots, and it says here, the tribe of Benjamin, 1 Samuel 10, 21, the tribe of Benjamin was chosen out of the 12. You know, they were choosing, casting lots to find out who's going to be the next king, and then from that family, the Matrite family was chosen from that tribe, 1 Samuel 10, 21, and from that family, Saul, the son of Kish, was taken. Now, one would have thought this guy has already heard Samuel say, and he must have been just hanging around saying, hey, I'm sure there's going to be me, because Samuel has already told me.

He'd be always hanging around there, waiting for his name to be chosen, but he wasn't there. They could not find him. And it says he had gone and hidden himself, verse 22, inside the baggage.

I don't know. Maybe there were a whole lot of suitcases there, and he was hiding underneath them. Imagine.

Yeah, what a humble man he was that he wasn't just acting humble, saying, oh, well, no, no, no, I don't deserve to be this. No, it was not pious humility, false humility. He was genuinely humble.

He really felt, I am not fit to be. You know, when Paul said, I'm not fit to be an apostle, he meant it, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and I wonder if we have that. I'm not fit to be an elder.

I'm not qualified. The calling is so high. Or do we have such a low estimation of eldership in the body of Christ? They say, oh, of course.

I qualify. I'm the best of the lot here. That's why they chose me, and that's why they don't choose somebody else.

That's how he started. But a little later, once he became the elder of Israel, we read one Samuel told him, one Samuel 13, verse 8, wait for seven days, and I'll come and offer the sacrifice. You know, there was a law in the Old Testament that no king could offer sacrifices.

No king could be a priest, and no priest could be a king in Israel. That was reserved for Jesus, the only king priest of type of Melchizedek in Genesis 14, before Israel began as a nation. But in Israel, there was to be no king who was to be a priest.

And so Samuel said, I will come and offer the sacrifice. But he waited. We read, and Samuel did not come on Samuel 13, 8, and Saul said, okay, I can do it.

God so far anointed me and given me victory over the Philistines and done a great job through me. And so definitely, God, you know, it's easy because God's borne witness to us in one area. We can begin to think that I can move into other areas too.

Uh-huh. Go outside the boundary God's drawn for us. God's drawn a boundary just like the kings had a boundary and the priests had a boundary in the Old Testament.

There's a boundary God's drawn around all of us. Paul recognized it. He didn't go into the boundary of others.

He didn't think that, yeah, because God's blessed me here, I can go and do something there. No. It's very difficult to remain in small thoughts of ourselves, especially after God has blessed us in a unique way in some particular area.

That's what happened to King Saul. And these things are written for our instruction. And so he offered the offering, which he had no right to do.

And Samuel came immediately after that. I mean, God could have allowed Samuel to come just 10 minutes earlier, but God held up Samuel somewhere to test Saul. I'll tell you, God will do certain things to test us too.

And Saul failed. And Samuel said, what have you done? And Samuel had, Saul had some silly excuse. We had to be careful that we've done something wrong, that we don't find an excuse to justify ourselves.

Self-justification, like Saul did here, is the mark of a Pharisee. Luke 16, 15, you are those who justify yourselves before men. And that is an abomination before God.

And remember that verse, justifying yourself before people, when you know in your heart you did something wrong and you try to find some clever excuse to cover it up is an abomination before God. Luke 16, 15, you are those who justify yourself before men. And Samuel, Saul tried to justify himself and he said, yeah, the people were scattering and that you hadn't come as you said you would.

And look what happened. Look what he lost. You, verse 13, you have not kept the commandment of the Lord.

You know, listen to this. Read verse 13, 1 Samuel 13, 13. The Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever.

But he's not going to do it now. Now the Lord is looking for a man after his own heart. David wasn't born yet.

And Saul was king. David was not born. David was 30 years old when he became king and Saul had reigned for 40 years.

And that itself proves that David was not born when Saul was king, when Saul appointed king. And the Lord has appointed that man as a ruler over his people. And I want you to see one more thing in, I don't have time to show you all the verses, but there's a wonderful chapters chapter 13, 14, 15 of 1 Samuel to see how Saul backslid.

And then we read him after that one warning, he still didn't take it seriously. 1 Samuel 15, the Lord told Saul, go and kill everything. Put everything to death.

And Saul used his mind, his human wisdom to say, well, why put all to death? Why not keep the good sheep and offer them a sacrifice to God? And he kept the good sheep. We read, you know, the story in 1

Samuel 15. And when Samuel comes and he says, yes, I will obey the Lord.

Verse 20, then Samuel says, well, what's all this bleating of the sheep that I hear? And listen to these words of Samuel. Verse 22, you wanted to offer a special sacrifice to God. Do you think the Lord has got delight in sacrifices as much as in obedience? To obey is better than sacrifice.

I believe that all of us have sacrificed something to be elders. You certainly sacrificed a lot of time that you could spend with your family. Every one of us.

That could have been spent with your family, which was sacrificed in order to be available to God's people. And probably we think of other sacrifices we have made financially and in terms of convenience in our home and many things. I know what it is because I know for in the early years, for six years, the church used to meet in my house.

And CFC started in 1975. Of course, it is a bigger sacrifice for my wife because so many people would come in. So many people didn't have a respect for the privacy of others.

In India it is very much like that, particularly those who are brought up in the villages. And we had a lot of ministry people in the villages. They would come to our house and walk into the bedrooms without asking anyone.

And people would come and expect something to eat or drink and we had to offer it. And there was a lot of inconvenience. And we can think, you know, we won't say it, but we can think that maybe you also sacrificed things to be an elder.

Sure, I can believe that. But we can congratulate ourselves or meditate on all the sacrifices we have made for the Lord and not realize it is a drop in the ocean compared to the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary. That's why we must never lose sight of the cross.

And the Lord says, what's the use of all these sacrifices? To obey is better than sacrifice, 1 Samuel 15, 22. And if this, to all the sacrifices are worth, all the sacrifices you have made as an elder are worth nothing. If you don't obey the Lord when he says, you should not lust with your eyes after even one woman.

You should not even for a moment on the computer look. Forget pornography, but look at a picture of some scantily dressed woman who comes up on the side of your screen when you're watching something else. And you're not to say, well, I wasn't watching that.

I was watching this. To obey that my eyes don't wander there is more important than all the sacrifices we make. To obey when it says, if you get angry, you're guilty, Matthew 5, 22 onwards.

And on top of that, you get angry again, you're more guilty. And again, you carry on in that, you deserve to go to hell. To obey in the area of anger and sexual lust in our mind, to obey in those areas is more important to God than all the sacrifices we make to be elders.

I mean, I'm talking to people who are serious about wanting to retain the anointing to fulfill God's purpose in their life. I hope you're all like that. So the example of Saul is such that finally God tells Samuel in 1 Samuel 16, I have rejected him.

Saul was Samuel's favorite. And it's a sad thing. It says in verse 1 Samuel 15, 35, the last part, the Lord regretted that he had made Saul king.

I mean, this is the Lord coming down to our level and speaking in our language. He knows the future. But I say, Lord, is it ever going to be written about me that you regretted that you ever gave me a responsibility? May it never be.

Lord, may it never be. I'd rather lose everything on earth, including my ministry, but I want to please my Lord and my Savior. That's more important to me than any ministry or title.

It's all garbage to me, to please him who gave himself for me. That should be our passion. That word is never, never in time or eternity that there should be any sorrow in the Lord's heart because of me.

That should be our attitude, brothers. And it's, you know, the relationship which I've sought to preserve in my own walk with the Lord. I'm not primarily a servant of the Lord.

I'm primarily the bride of Jesus Christ. That's number one for me. And I hope it is for you as well.

I remember one of our foolish CFC elders in India got up in this church and said to others to try and intimidate them, I'm a priest according to the order of Melchizedek. I told him, brother, did you tell those brothers and sisters that they're also priests according to the order of Melchizedek and only Jesus is a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek? All of us are kings and priests. We have to be very careful as elders that we do not give people the impression that we're sort of one level above them.

I've always been very strong on one thing in authority, and that is in the church authority is never imposed from above, but accepted from beneath. Never imposed from above, but accepted from beneath. I've said publicly in my church in Bangalore, I said, brothers, I'm not your elder if you don't accept me as an elder.

I have no lust or desire to be an elder to anybody here. If you accept me, I'm here to guide you and lead you, but I have no desire to rule over you or to tell you to do this, that, or the other. I mean, I give you advice for your own protection, but you don't have to listen to me.

Like John Wesley said, you don't sin if you disobey me. You sin if you disobey God. That's been my attitude always.

I say I give advice to people, and my attitude is you don't sin if you disobey me. No. You sin if you disobey God.

You need to be very, very careful to, as elders, remain as ordinary brothers. Like Paul said, I'm the least of all the saints, least of all the apostles, least of all the saints, chief of sinners, whom God in his mercy picks up and gives a task to do for him. So the warning that God gives us in the Old Testament is something we have to be thinking about, and it's not only in the Old Testament.

I want you to think of Demas in the New Testament. Colossians, you read in Colossians in chapter 4 that there was a time when Demas was a co-worker of the apostle Paul. Demas sends you his greetings.

Yeah. That's verse 14, except Colossians 4.14. Along with Luke, Demas and Luke. Luke was the closest co-worker of Paul, and he says Luke and Demas.

Imagine being put in the same category as Luke, and the same guy a few years later, with great sorrow, Paul says, 2 Timothy 4.10, Demas has loved this present world, and has deserted me. It's a very strong word, he's deserted me. See, to get onto Paul's team wasn't easy.

If any of us were selected by Paul to join his team, it would have been a tremendous honor. Paul wouldn't pick any Tom, Dick, or Harry to be on his team. He was very discerning, and he was very selective of whom he would allow to be on his team.

And Demas was selected, and one day, he left him. I wonder what the reason was. When he says he loved this present world, there are three things the world offers.

Money, pleasure, an easy life, and honor. So, it's possibly one of these things, or all three that Demas went after. He discovered this, you can't make much money when you work with Paul.

This guy won't even take money when it's offered to him. And it wasn't much honor, because Paul was at such a high standard that the other people thought he was too strict and all that. So, you didn't get much honor, and certainly, there was no pleasure in this rugged life that Paul lived.

So, those things became too much for Demas, and he deserted Paul. We have to ask ourselves whether in our hearts there's any desire for a fairly easy life. Yeah, I'm a respected elder, and I go for the two meetings every week that I have to take.

And I've always got something to share in those two meetings. But I like my comfortable lifestyle. I'm not going to give that up.

I want my comfortable lifestyle, and I need to pursue a little after making money as well. And I'm glad I've got a little honor in the church. Woe unto us if it's like that.

It's easy to be a backslider inwardly and not be evident to others that you're a backslider. You need to be very careful. Demas is forsaken.

A couple of other examples he gives here of Hymenaeus and Alexander. 1 Timothy, chapter 1, he talks about certain people, verse 19, who made shipwreck of their faith. That means their ship was sailing wonderfully.

And when it hit some rocks, and I'll tell you something, because I've been on ships for years, no ship captain will ever go and hit a ship against a rock. No. He's not so foolish.

The rocks that ships hit are hidden rocks under the surface of the sea. And that's why the charts, the sea is all charted. It goes to the coast, and a sensible captain will follow the charts so that he doesn't hit those hidden rocks.

So that's how they suffered shipwreck, among whom, verse 20, 1 Timothy 1, Hymenaeus and Alexander. And how did that happen? Two things. Verse 19, they did not keep faith, and they did not keep a good conscience.

That's all. To suffer shipwreck, all you've got to be careless about is conscience. Very, very important.

The smallest prick of conscience. I want to encourage you, my brothers, if you don't want to suffer shipwreck, set it right. Don't postpone it.

Have you hurt somebody? Ask forgiveness. Make a phone call, write a letter, email or something, and ask forgiveness immediately. Maybe your wife.

I hope you all have the habit of asking forgiveness from your wife as soon as you feel that you even accidentally hurt her. You didn't mean to. Something was misunderstood.

I'm sorry. Darling, I'm sorry. I want to be more careful.

Immediately. That's a good conscience. Even to a brother.

I've gone and apologized to people who are younger than my youngest son. Yeah, I spoke a little too sternly to somebody, discovered afterwards that it was not really his fault. I said, brother, I put my arm around him and said, I'm really sorry.

I was giving the wrong information about you. Please forgive me. Recently, I had to apologize to a group of people in one of our churches.

And I wrote to some of their older brothers among them. Brothers, I'm really sorry that I never realized that your elder was not treating you properly all these years. And I'm sorry I discovered it so late.

I should have been more sensitive to God that this was going on for some time and I didn't know. I'm sorry. Please forgive me.

We all said in Acts 24-26, I keep my conscience always 24-7 clear before God and before men. That's one. The other is faith.

Keeping faith and a good conscience, 1 Timothy 1. Faith means no matter what happens, 101 things I can't explain, I believe God loves me. I don't know why this happens or why it's turned out like this, but God loves me. I know that.

God's called me to live for him and to serve him. That never changes. I'm never going to doubt it.

God's called you to be an elder. Don't doubt it. Don't let unbelief come just because there's some little difficulty here and there.

Let the whole world turn against you. It doesn't matter. I don't care if the whole world turns against me or the whole world calls me a devil.

I know my calling. Be sure of that. Never give up that faith.

That's not arrogance. God loves me. It's not arrogance to believe that no matter what happens.

Never let any doubt come in your mind about God's love. Dear brothers, I'm sorry if I've sounded too strong to you. It's been the burden on my heart.

If we follow this, what will happen is we will never be in a bad mood. It's been one of the goals of my life that I must come to the place where I'm never in a bad mood, no matter what happens, 24-7. What happens, what doesn't happen, I say God is still on the throne.

That doesn't change. Jesus still died for me and rose again. The devil was defeated.

And I got a great hope for the future to be with my Savior and my father forever and ever. All the important things are in place. The small little things out of place doesn't matter.

Always rejoicing. Never, never in a bad mood. Very, very important.

Paul said it's easy for me to preach to others and finally be disqualified myself if I don't discipline myself in these areas. So I've sought to take those words very seriously and I'm challenging you, my brothers, the same challenge I apply to myself every day for many years. God bless you all.

Thank you for being my brothers, my fellow workers, and I'm your fellow worker and your brother. Let's bow our heads for prayer and then you are all free to share for a few minutes each in the next one hour. We are 16, 17 of us, so if you take three or four minutes each, that will be great.

Our Father, please help us to be faithful until the end. Change and decay all around I see. Help of the helpless.

Oh, abide with me always, Lord, help us. We know you will. We want to do our part to abide in Christ because we see so much of change and decay all around us.

Thank you. We know you'll help us. Help us to live in low thoughts about ourselves and to receive your grace continuously.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you, brothers.

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