

Fellowship With God Must Come First

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of true fellowship with God and one another, highlighting the need for a blameless conscience, quickness to ask forgiveness, and the practice of forgiveness. It stresses the significance of maintaining fellowship based on righteousness and purity, both vertically with God and horizontally with others, to build a strong family in the home and church.

Scripture: Acts 24:16, Matthew 5:23, 1 John 1:5, Psalms 16:11, Ephesians 2:14, Colossians 3:10

Topics: "True Fellowship", "Forgiveness and Righteousness"

Description

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Transcript

We were looking at a couple of words that are not found in the Old Testament. One was mystery, a truth that can be understood only by revelation. That's the other word which is not found in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament was understanding. The New Testament is revelation. Understanding will make you a scribe.

Revelation will make you a disciple. And the scribe has to become a disciple to his disciple. Another word that is not found in the Old Testament is fellowship.

In the Old Testament they didn't have fellowship. They had friendship. And friendship is very different from fellowship.

And what a lot of Christians have in many churches is friendship. Where they care for one another, help one another. You can join the Freemasons.

The Freemasons also have a lot of friendship. They care for one another. They send money for each other.

It's amazing how much they care for each other there. So you go to a church where everybody cares for one another, it may not be fellowship. It may be just friendship.

Some people like to be in a small house church because it gives them a sense of importance. They get lost in a big megachurch. So it's not because they're interested in building their body that they come to a small house church.

It's because they get a sense of importance which they wouldn't get in a big megachurch. So we shouldn't fool ourselves that I'm interested in building the body of Christ because I go to a small house church. Maybe because you want to feel accepted and welcome.

Not because you're gripped by the truth of building fellowship. So in a small church you get the opportunity perhaps to share the word sometimes, which you never get in a megachurch. So there could be various reasons why people choose a small fellowship and a meeting in a home.

It doesn't mean they're interested in building the body of Christ. To be interested in building the body of Christ, you must understand what fellowship is. And many Christians have not understood that.

So let me turn you to 1 John, chapter 1. See, in an earthly family, it's friendship, caring for one another, helping one another. And you know, in a good family, we'll make any number of sacrifices for each other. But the fact that you're willing to make a sacrifice for another brother does not mean you have fellowship with him.

It could just mean good friendship. You know, if he's moving his house, you go to help him to move his house. The Freemasons will do that, who don't even believe in Jesus Christ.

So there are many groups like that where they're not churches, they're clubs. Clubs where they help one another. And a lot of house churches are good clubs where they help one another.

They're happy to come together every now and then. But fellowship is an altogether different thing. In fellowship, our fellowship always begins vertically.

Before it goes horizontally. With the Freemasons and worldly clubs, there is no vertical element. It's all horizontal.

Help one another, care for one another, care for the poor, do so many things. And it's very impressive in human eyes. You know, for example, if you run an orphanage or care for the poor people in some country, I mean, you can get a Nobel Prize for that.

There are many people who help the poor, who get Nobel Prizes. Do you think Jesus would ever have got a Nobel Prize? I don't think so. The world killed him.

They didn't want him. And even today I tell you, the world does not want Jesus Christ. The real Jesus, the world does not want.

They will never give him a Nobel Prize or the President's Award for Freedom or whatever it's called. No. Jesus was despised and rejected by the world because he emphasized the vertical aspect of fellowship first.

And not just caring for the poor and helping the poor. Jesus did not start a home for lepers or for blind people. He didn't even start an orphanage.

His main three-and-a-half years, I mean, on the way, he met a demon-possessed person or a blind person. He healed him and all that, but ultimately he came to bring man into fellowship with God because if that was not taken care of, whatever you do in the horizontal level is an absolute waste of time. For example, you run a home for the people who are in a country like India, you have a lot of poor people, beggars on the streets, and you run a home to care for the poor people.

It's very good. You can do it in the name of Jesus. It's an excellent work.

But if you have not led that beggar to salvation, you've just made the final steps of his pathway to hell a little smoother. He doesn't go by a rough road to hell, but he goes by a smooth road to hell. I don't want to do that.

I want to lead people to Christ, to God, not just make their lives easier. So I see that there's a lot of things that even Christians can appreciate, which are not primary in God's eyes. It's not that we neglect it.

But remember, in the cross, the vertical arm is always longer than the horizontal arm. Never forget that. You never see a cross with a small horizontal arm and a long, sort of a short vertical arm and a long horizontal arm.

You never see that. The vertical arm is always longer. Our relationship with Jesus and with God is primary.

And from there must come our horizontal relationship. So otherwise, you know, I can live in sin and have good so-called fellowship with one another. And that's what happens in a lot of churches and a lot of little house groups where they care for one another, help one another.

But the individuals, they are not living overcoming lives. Some of them are watching pornography on the side. They have really helped one another.

It's a deception. It's not Christianity. It's not the body of Christ.

It's like the animals, which Adam rejected. So it's very important to understand this. So when John writes here, and remember, John was about 95 years old when he wrote this letter.

And he had walked with God for 65 years, his spiritual life. And he saw, he read in Revelation chapter 2 and chapter 3, the condition of five of those seven churches, which means 70% of the churches in those days were in a pathetic condition. Only two of those seven churches were really pleasing to God.

And these were churches planted by the apostles. But they backslid so quickly. And John, seeing all this, writes this letter, which many people feel was written after the book of Revelation.

And he says there, there are no, you know, when I read the first letter of John, I see the things that are really important. And the things that are not important. Because Christendom today is in pretty much the same shape as you read in Revelation 2 and 3. There are a few good churches like Philadelphia and Smyrna, but most of the others are corrupt.

And John, seeing all this, I read this letter from that perspective. I say, Lord, I know what is important in today's generation for Christendom to hear is the first letter of John. Because Christendom today is in the same condition as the chapter 2 and 3 of Revelation, where there are a few good churches and many bad ones.

And what did John speak about? This man who had seen miracles and all types of things. You know, he never speaks one word about miracles or healing in the whole letter. One would think, oh, we can bring miracles and healing into today's Christianity and solve the problem.

John doesn't think so. What about speaking in tongues? He doesn't even mention it. Now, I'm not against speaking in tongues.

I have a gift myself. But I don't believe that's the answer. It's not miracles.

It's not speaking in tongues. Interestingly, he doesn't even speak much about evangelism, the things which so many people today feel are the great need. And it has not improved.

I've heard it for 50 years. I was born again 59 years ago, and I've heard all these things for 50 years, and I've seen that the condition of Christendom has not improved. It's just superficially there's a lot of gloss, but inwardly it's become worse than it was 50 years ago.

John writes about the thing that's essential, fellowship. And he also mentions what I call the first great mystery. Turn to 1 John.

He says in verse 1, Don't believe every spirit. 1 John 4, verse 1. Test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know.

How do you know the Holy Spirit? By this you know the Holy Spirit, the first great mystery. They confessed that Jesus came in the flesh, came like me. The flesh means he was tempted like me, and did not sin.

It doesn't say Jesus became a human being. He came in the flesh. That's the mark of the spirit of God.

That means the emphasis is on the overcoming life, the first great mystery that I spoke about in the last session. Now, you know, nowadays many people frighten Christians by saying, Don't question that. You see those fellows lying on the floor and kicking their legs, and you say that's not the Holy Spirit.

So don't ever say that. You're questioning the Holy Spirit. Don't speak against somebody.

I'm not scared. I say that's not the Holy Spirit. People lying on the floor and kicking their legs, and people being pushed onto the floor by somebody.

I'll tell you why. Because I never see Jesus doing it. And Jesus was the perfect spiritual man.

I never see him lying on the floor kicking his legs, or pushing other people down. He was always lifting people up, not pushing them down. Pushing them down is the opposite of what Jesus did.

And there's a word in the Bible for it. It's called antichrist. That's not the spirit of Christ.

Now, when people say, Don't blaspheme against the Holy Spirit, I say, hang on, there's another verse that says, in 1 John 4, Don't believe every spirit, but test the spirits. And that's what I'm doing. And you're not going to frighten me by saying, You're speaking against the Holy Spirit.

No, I'm testing the spirits. And I say this is not of God. Because you guys are not emphasizing overcoming sin.

You're not emphasizing that Jesus came into the flesh and overcame sin. You're not asking us to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. You're like some magician up on the platform doing magic tricks.

I'm not interested in that. And you will see in the final day, that many people, Jesus said that, there will be people who come to him, you read in Matthew 7, 23 and 24, who will say, Lord, Lord, we prophesied in your name, we cast out demons in your name, we did many miracles in your name. And Jesus said, I'll say to them, I never knew you.

You lived in sin. So we'll discover in that day, that the important thing will be, what was your attitude to sin? And not how many miracles you did, or how many people you killed. So John understands all that.

And so he doesn't mention about all that. He says the important thing is fellowship. 1 John 1. He says, there's a life that was with the Father.

Verse 2. We have seen a certain life. Verse 1, we have touched, we have heard, that life, we have seen it with our eyes, we have looked at it, we have touched it. He's talking about Jesus.

And this life was manifested, and we have seen and testified to you, that eternal life, which was with the Father for all eternity, and now manifested to us. He's saying that in Jesus, I saw eternal life. And eternal life does not mean a life that never ends.

No. Because people who go to hell, their life also never ends. They don't have eternal life.

Eternity means that which has no beginning, and no end. Many people misunderstand that. They think, I possess eternal life, means I'll never die.

But people who go to hell never die either. But that's not eternal life. Eternal life is a life that has no beginning, and no end.

And only God has that. And when he says we get eternal life, he's not saying you get a life that will never end. You already have that as a human being.

But you get the life of God. That is eternal life. Eternal life is referring not to the quantity of life, but the quality of life.

It's the life of God. And he says this is the life which was with the Father from all eternity, and was manifested to us in a human flesh, in Jesus. And we have seen it, and we have heard, and what is the purpose? The purpose is fellowship.

And you see both arms of the cross here. Our fellowship is with the Father, and with the Son of Jesus Christ, the vertical, and we want to have fellowship with you. You must have fellowship with us.

That's the horizontal arm. So the cross is a beautiful picture of fellowship. Not just of somebody dying for our sins, which is very important, but also fellowship, which that freedom from sin must lead us into.

Overcoming sin is the first step. But it must lead us to fellowship. So I see that on the cross, not only that Jesus died to take away our sin, which is very clear.

A number of things that happen on the cross. One is He took away our sin, our old man's desire to sin. He was crucified with Christ, you read in Romans 6. The devil was defeated on the cross, you read in

Colossians 2, verse 15.

And in Hebrews 2, verse 14-17, the devil was... That's another thing that happened on the cross. And the other thing that happened on the cross, you read in Ephesians chapter 2. See, there are a number of things that happen on the cross. Most people only know one thing.

Jesus died for our sins. But as I said, our old man was crucified with Him, Romans 6. And the devil was defeated on the cross. Colossians 2 and Hebrews chapter 2. And here's the other thing.

We read in Ephesians chapter 2 that verse 14, He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, breaking down the barrier of the dividing them all, and by abolishing, verse 15, in His flesh, the enmity that He might, last part of 15, might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace. He reconciled them both in one body to God, through the cross. So here's something else that through the cross, He put to death, verse 16, the enmity.

So, that's another thing that happened on the cross. He is stretching out His hands like that on the cross, which is symbolic of His bringing together the two greatest opposites in the world. And the two greatest opposites in the world are not people of two different races, but the Jews and the Gentiles.

Jews and non-Jews. The Bible speaks a lot about the Jews and the non-Jews. And this is what He's speaking about in verse 11.

Remember that formerly you, the Gentiles, were called uncircumcised by the Jews. You were excluded, but when Jesus died on the cross, He brought both these groups into one body. It's an amazing truth.

This is fellowship. If you fellowship only with people who are exactly like you, same intellectual level, same race, same community, same language, you haven't understood the cross yet. In the cross, God brings together people who are completely different into fellowship with one another.

That's another thing that happened on the cross. Many Christians have experienced only one part of what happened on the cross. My sins are forgiven.

Praise God. But if you want to move on from there to victory over sin, sin shall not have dominion over you, Romans 6.14, then you need to see that your old man was crucified on the cross as well. And then you want to go on from there to resisting the devil so that he flees from you instead of you fleeing from him.

I tell you, most Christians that I've met are so scared of the devil they are fleeing from him. But the Bible says you resist the devil and he will flee from you. But you've got to see that he was defeated on the cross.

That's why I resisted him. That's why we have authority over sin. And then, one more thing on the cross is all barriers between human beings are broken down.

It says here, verse 14, about a barrier of a dividing wall. There is a dividing wall between different groups of human beings caused by race. That's something which very often people talk about in the news media.

Racists. Race bringing a dividing wall. But it's not only race.

It could be intellectual, where intellectuals fellowship together. And some churches are like that. Some churches only people at a certain intellectual level come into that church.

You go into some really rich sort of churches, you see the people there at a very certain level of society, highly educated or very wealthy. There are churches like that in California. There are only the wealthy people who go there.

You won't find a poor man there. No. That's not the body of Christ.

That thing that Jesus broke down on the cross is built up again. You know it's possible to build up again what Jesus broke down? Turn with me to Galatians in chapter 2. Paul says that. Galatians is a great chapter also where he speaks about this breaking down of the barrier between the two.

Galatians 2 verse 18. If I rebuild what was once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. But he says no.

I've been crucified with Christ, verse 20. I don't live now. Now I don't see people according to what they were in the flesh.

See 2 Corinthians in chapter 5 and verse 16. 2 Corinthians 5 verse 16. Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh.

That means when I look at a person, I don't see whether he is my community, my race, my language, my intellectual level, my social level, my wealth level. No, these things don't occur to me. I don't look at him according to the flesh.

Even Christ, we knew him according to the flesh once, but we don't know him that way anymore. But if you are in Christ, verse 17, I'm a new creature. Now I'll tell you something.

What we read there in 2 Corinthians 5 verse 16, very, very few Christians have come there. I'm saying that after observing Christians in many, many lands through many, many years. But you ask yourself, let's not judge other people.

Let's judge ourselves. Can you honestly say that when you look at another child of God, it doesn't bother you one bit what race he belongs to, what community, what language, what education level, what social level. It makes absolutely no difference.

None of these earthly differences make a difference to you. Then you have understood something about this aspect of the cross where he made two into one. And Jews and Gentiles are the greatest opposites in the history of humanity.

Every other type of racial difference is nothing compared to that. The Jews wouldn't have anything to do with Gentiles. I mean, you see that among Jewish people even today.

They're very, very exclusive, more exclusive than almost any other group. And Jesus broke it down. In Ephesians 2 you read about an enmity.

It says in Ephesians 2 verse 16, he put to death the enmity. There's an enmity in my flesh. You may not realize it, but that's what brings conflict between husband and wife.

Even though they are the same community, the same language, the same intellectual, everything, and yet, conflict between husband and wife. Why is that? There's an enmity in the flesh which has to be put to death. So it's not just a matter of community.

There's something within me that makes me seek my own. And if that's not put to death, even if your wife is the same community, same language, same intellectual level, everything's the same, you'll still have that problem of fellowship. That's why there are divorces.

Divorces are not because people of different races divorce each other. People of the same race, same intellectual level, same community, same language, and yet they divorce because there's something in it inwardly. And these are so-called Christians who say their sins are forgiven.

The husband says his sins are forgiven. The wife says her sins are forgiven. Both claim to believe in Christ.

Both claim to be water baptized. And yet they divorce one another. What's that? It's unimaginable.

Is that Christianity? No. That's a million miles away from Christianity. And yet it's going on all around us.

And you may not divorce your wife, but perhaps your culture prevents you from doing that. But you could be living at home just as two individuals who have no fellowship with each other. So you say you love one another, but there's no fellowship.

It's a deception. So we can't build this beautiful family of God if you haven't even understood how to live with my wife, leave alone anybody else. Very, very important to understand this.

So to understand the cross, that on the cross, all this enmity, Ephesians 2, verse 16, was destroyed. All this dividing wall, verse 14, was broken down. Jesus abolished this enmity, and he made two into one.

Only Jesus can make two into one, and I'll tell you this, it can only be done on the cross. If a husband is willing to hang on the cross and die, and a wife is willing to die on the cross, they can become one. Every other psychological technique will not work.

It will make them friends. Techniques. Call your wife a number of times from a place of work saying, I love you, honey, I love you, honey, I love you, honey.

These things don't work. It's the cross that will make you one with each other. All the other psychological techniques are like covering up the, you know, plastering a broken wall without fixing the wall itself.

It doesn't solve the problem. So it's very important to understand in the church, when you go to a larger scale, if it doesn't work at home, how can it work in the church? If I can't even have fellowship with my wife, who's got the same faith, the same doctrine, and the same community and everything else, how in the world am I going to build a church as a family where people are different races? It'll be superficial. It'll only be on Sunday.

It'll be just helping them in external things and saying, we are the body of Christ. No. The body of Christ.

How is it these two... Other things people say, you must spend time with each other. Spend a lot of time with each other. That also does not build fellowship.

It's good to spend time with each other, to spend time with other brothers in the church, or, you know, have a regular time, go for a walk with your wife every day. It does not necessarily build fellowship. It's only the cross that will build it.

It's only on the cross the enmity is signed. We need to understand this. For example, how is it these two hands work so well together? You see someone playing the piano or an organ.

Without looking, they're just playing, and their feet pressing the pedals and all. Such coordination. Is it because these two hands are always hanging around together? No.

How often do these two hands hold each other like this? Rarely. And people who don't pray, never. So it's not by hanging around together that they work together.

There's only one reason they work together. Both are connected to the head. They have a perfect connection.

That's why this hand never slaps the other one or hurts the other one. It's always there to help the other one. If there's an injury, immediately the other hand goes to help it, never to hurt it.

Can you imagine a husband-wife relationship like this? What do you think? It'd be like heaven on the earth. Heaven in your home. You think the devil wants that? Definitely not.

It's by connection to the head. If this hand, for example, suddenly gets paralyzed, its connection to the head is gone. And then it cannot work with this hand.

These two that were playing the piano so beautifully, now it can't. Not because it's... Even if you hold hands together, it doesn't work. The connection to the head is gone.

Remember this, my brothers and sisters. It's the vertical arm of the cross that determines the horizontal one. When your fellowship horizontally breaks down in your home or in the church, it's because the vertical is broken down.

That's why John says, our fellowship is with the Father, and then with one another. It's very, very important to understand this. In Colossians chapter 3, I want to show you another verse.

Colossians, in chapter 3, we read about the body of Christ in which there is no distinction. Colossians chapter 3. It says here, verse 10, Colossians 3.10, You put on a new self, which is renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created it. A renewal in Christ in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew.

Well, Greek means non-Jew. Or, in your case, you can say anyone who is not like you. Not your community, not your language, not your intellectual level.

No distinction. Circumcised or uncircumcised, different religious convictions. No difference.

If Christ is in the middle, barbarian, Scythian, slave, and free man. See, the Greeks were the most cultured people in those days. Very cultured and careful and civilized.

And the barbarians were the ones who were completely uncivilized. Can you imagine a Greek and a barbarian having a fellowship together? Only Jesus could do it. And the Scythians, the Scythians are the ones whom the barbarians thought were barbarians.

They're worse. They're the lowest of the lot. The barbarians would look at the Scythians and say, they're barbarians.

And God brings all of them together. Slave and free man. Christ is all.

Christ is everything. That's it. So the basis of fellowship is when I say, listen to me, Christ is everything.

Other things are unimportant to me. What language you are, what race you are, what community, what your intellectual level is, how educated you are, whether you speak English properly or not. There's absolutely no difference to me.

Christ is everything. Those who can accept that come into friendship, fellowship rather. The remainder can only have friendship or being courteous and good.

And I don't believe we can become a family of God in the church if we don't understand this. So turning back to 1 John, in chapter 1, we saw what John says, seeing the pathetic condition of the churches in his time. It's just like if John were to be here today and he saw the pathetic condition of so many churches, he'd say the same thing.

Hey, listen, you guys need to understand what it is to have fellowship with the Father and then fellowship with each other. Fellowship. And then when we think about... One more thing.

See, it says here in 1 John 1 and verse 4, these things we write to you that your joy may be made complete. There is a fullness of joy that comes through true fellowship with the Father and in true fellowship with one another. Psalm 16, verse 11, is one of my favorite verses.

It says there, Lord, in your presence there is fullness of joy. I don't know whether you know that verse. It's a beautiful verse.

In your presence is fullness of joy. Psalm 16, 11. So what I've said to myself on the basis of that verse is this.

In God's presence there is fullness of joy. So anytime I don't have fullness of joy, I say to myself, I'm not in God's presence. Right now I'm not in God's presence.

Whatever I am, I'm not in God's presence right now. Something's wrong. Something's broken up in my fellowship with God.

That's why the joy has gone out of my life. Because in God's presence there's fullness of joy. And I make that a rule for my life.

I seek honestly before God, to live before God, a life where I rejoice all the time, 24-7. Rejoice in the Lord always. Because I want to live in God's presence.

And I'm telling you this in Jesus' name, having proved it for a number of years now. If you live in the presence of God, whatever may happen around you or whatever does not happen around you, you will have fullness of joy. Fullness of joy doesn't mean smiling all the time.

No. If you see somebody smiling all the time, you think he's off his head or something. It's not fullness of joy.

Fullness of joy is an inward. You can have joy in the midst of sorrow. When some loved one has died, you're not in love.

It's sorrow. But there's joy in the Lord all the time. God is on His throne.

Okay, my loved one has died. Something went wrong. I lost my job.

God is on His throne. The devil is being defeated. My sins are forgiven.

The important things are all okay. I have fullness of joy in the Lord. This is the life of victory God wants us to live.

And when we are like this, the fellowship in the horizontal level will become much easier. When our fellowship with God is right, our fellowship horizontally will also come. But I must begin with my fellowship with God.

Very, very important. And for that, it's very important that I keep my conscience clear all the time. And that's why he says here, after talking about joy, in 1 John 1, he says, the next thing I want to tell you in relation to this fellowship with God, our aim is that we have fellowship with God, verse 3, and fellowship with one another.

Then our joy will be made full, verse 4. And the other thing I want to say to you, he says, is this is the number one message that you need to hear if you want to retain this fellowship and build a family. The number one message. Verse 5. This is the message that we have heard from him, announced to you, that is, God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all.

He never tolerates sin of any sort. Adam and Eve were turned out from the Garden of Eden for one sin. They did not commit two sins.

One sin, they were out. That teaches me right at the beginning of the Bible how serious sin is in God's eyes. The next picture I see of how serious sin is in God's eyes is when Jesus is hanging on the cross.

And he who had been one with the Father from all eternity, the Father forsakes him. Imagine that. I don't know what it is.

You've understood the depth of this. The Father forsaking the Son on the cross for three hours only because there was sin there. Not his sin.

Mine. And yours. And it was so bad that Jesus cried out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? The only time he never got an answer from heaven.

Every prayer of Jesus there was an answer from heaven except that one. I can never get over it. And that was because of my sin.

And I say, Lord, help me to remember that whenever I'm tempted to see you hanging on the cross. And like that hymn says, he who could bear the world upon his shoulders could not bear the load of my sin on the cross. To see that, the Father forsaking, God is light.

There's no darkness in him at all, whether it is Adam or whether it is his own son Jesus. He'll forsake him when sin comes. Once I see that, I realize that God's not going to overlook some sin in me just because he loves me.

He didn't overlook sin when he saw it on Jesus Christ's son. There's no sin that he will tolerate in your life or mine. It's like a loving mother who says, I don't want a single sickness in my baby.

If a doctor says, well, your baby is 90% okay but 10% he's a little sick, you think the mother is happy with that? 99% your baby's okay, it's just 1% the possibility of some serious sickness. You think the mother is happy with that? No. The mother said, dog, I want my child to be 100% free of sickness.

That's exactly how God feels about us. Trouble is that we don't see sin as seriously as we see sickness. If we did, we would hate it much more.

One of the schemes of the devil is to keep our eyes blind to the seriousness of sin. Do you speak a rude word to your wife once in a month? How can you speak a rude word to your wife only once in a month? Does that make you a holy person? Will God tolerate in saying, well, you did it only once a month? He never tolerates. Never, never, never.

If you take it seriously, I believe that God will lead you into such a life. God will lead you into a life where your eyes become pure. Where you are quick to turn your eyes away from anything that displeases the Lord.

Where you are quick to not just control your tongue, to control your tongue from speaking angry words as Buddhism or Yoga. That's not Christianity. It's good.

It's better than getting angry with somebody. Buddhism and Yoga are the second best. But I say the best is if God removes anger from the heart.

That's why Jesus came with an axe to the root. Not with a pair of scissors to cut off the fruit that is bad. The Old Testament was a pair of scissors cut off the fruit.

But Jesus came with an axe to the root. So, if I have controlled my temper, good. At least you didn't hurt another person.

But I don't think God will say to you, I'm well pleased with you. You know, once when I was reading that verse which the Father spoke from heaven, the baptism of Jesus saying, this is my beloved son in whom I'm well pleased. I asked the Lord, I stopped there and I said, Lord, can you say that about me? As you look down from heaven, can you look at me and say, this is my beloved son in whom I'm well pleased.

That's what Jesus came to make me. Or this is my beloved daughter in whom I'm well pleased. Do you have a longing for that, my brother, sister? I want to ask you whether you have a thirst and a longing I know for years and years I had this thirst.

I said, Lord, I want you to say that about me. I don't care how much I have to deny myself. I want complete control over my tongue.

I want complete control over my eyes and complete control over my thoughts. I'll be tempted, even Jesus was tempted. But I want to overcome them.

And I'll tell you this, if you hunger and thirst for righteousness, the promise in Matthew 5 is you'll be satisfied. And God will be satisfied. And if I don't get that righteousness, to me, that is the clearest proof I'm not hungry and thirsting for it.

And then if I don't have that vertical relationship with God, I won't have it. Horizontally, what I have will only be friendship, which I can fool myself is fellowship. Oh, I care for them.

We hang out together. We have a great time together. We joke together.

We laugh together. When they're in need, I go and help them. That's friendship.

Good. But it's not fellowship. Fellowship is based on purity, inward purity.

And friendship does not need inward purity. There are a lot of wicked people who are friends. There are murderers who are friends with each other, adulterers who are friends with each other.

But you can't have fellowship in Christianity if there's impurity in the heart. So he says here, we're talking about fellowship on John 1, fellowship with the Father, fellowship with one another. And the first message is God is light.

And there is no darkness in him at all. You've got to see from the Old Testament how he did sin and how Jesus had to die to deliver us from him. And so if we walk in the light, verse 7, we have fellowship with one another, with God and with one another, and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin continuously.

If that's not happening, I can't have fellowship with God. And so what I see is I have to take sin seriously, very seriously, because that's the only thing that hinders my fellowship with God. But very often we don't feel that that is the only thing that will hinder you from true fellowship with your wife, husband, others, sin.

You say, what does my watching pornography secretly have to do with my fellowship with my wife? Well, I can have wonderful fellowship with my wife. And secretly watching pornography, secretly being unrighteous in financial matters. For example, I cheat in money matters in my office.

I say, it doesn't affect my fellowship with my wife at all. It won't affect your friendship with your wife, but it will affect your fellowship with your wife. Definitely.

You say, what's the connection between that and my cheating in financial matters in the office? A lot of connections, because when you're cheating in money matters in your office, your fellowship with God is broken, and then what you have with your wife is no longer touched. Or with anybody else. If we walk in the light, we have to be free from sin.

That means anything that's conscious, we are conscious of sin, we have to confess it. And forsake it. And ask the Lord, the blood of Jesus, verse 7, to cleanse us from all sin.

What is the subject? Subject is verse 1 to 4, fellowship with God. And fellowship with one another. I don't know whether Christians have understood this.

I don't know whether you've understood this. That your fellowship with your wife or with others in your church depends very much on righteousness in your private life. Righteousness in money matters.

Righteousness in sex matters. Righteousness in our attitude towards others. Then you see that what you have thought was fellowship until now is actually not really fellowship.

It's friendship. A lot of husbands and wives have a very good relationship with each other. And the husband may be having secret sin in his life.

I don't mean he's fooling around with another woman. No, he may be very faithful in that area. But other areas where he's not righteous.

You say, so long as I don't lose my temper with my wife, if I lose my temper in the office, does it matter? Yes, because your fellowship with God is gone. So it's very important for us to understand these two arms of the cross, that the vertical comes first. Even in my fellowship with my wife or anybody in the church, the vertical comes first.

Like I told you, these two hands work together perfectly because their connection with the head is perfect. The moment the connection with the head is gone with one hand, what you call fellowship is not fellowship. You can hold that hand.

You can hold your wife and say we are together. But no, it's paralyzed. Something is paralyzed.

You can hold it and pretend it is fellowship. It's not. I hope you understand.

It's very important to see this because I believe this is the area where a lot of Christians are deceiving themselves. So it's not psychology which teaches us so many techniques to build a relationship with your husband or your wife or with your friends and all. No, we're not teaching psychology here.

John was not teaching psychology. He was teaching reality where I don't have to make an effort. This hand does not have to make an effort to work with this hand.

It's spontaneous. When you go to pick up a chair, both hands go together to pick up that chair. There's no struggle for one hand to cooperate with the other.

That is true fellowship with the Father and with one another. I don't know whether you believe that is possible. I believe that is God's will, and we should work towards that, and I can work towards that only if I first acknowledge what I have right now is not fellowship.

It's just friendship because my fellowship with God is not right. So I want to say to all of you who probably, some of you, are very happy with what you call the fellowship you have with other brothers and sisters in your local church, consider, is this your fellowship or friendship? And the test is what is your relationship with God? In Paul's life, he says in Acts chapter 24, he gave a testimony about his life. He says in Acts 24 verse 16, there's something I do my best to maintain always.

A good example to follow, Acts 24 verse 16. He says, I do my best to always maintain a blameless conscience, first toward God and then towards all men. So a blameless conscience is also in two directions, like the cross, like the two arms of the cross.

I cannot have a blameless conscience toward God if I don't have a blameless conscience towards men. And Paul says, I do my best to maintain that. Why? It's very interesting.

See it in connection with verse 15. I know there will certainly be, verse 15, a resurrection, both of the righteous and the wicked. Paul is saying there's one thing I'm absolutely sure of.

There are going to be two resurrections. One of the righteous people, the other of the wicked. It's not one resurrection.

You read that in Revelation, two resurrections. One of the righteous, one of the wicked. And Paul says, I know which resurrection I want to be in.

I want to be in the resurrection of the righteous, and so what do I do? I do my best to maintain a blameless conscience before God and men. You say, hey, hang on, Paul. I mean, you accepted Christ 25 years ago.

Isn't that enough? You accepted Christ 25 years ago, and you got baptized in water, and you're filling the Holy Spirit. Isn't that enough to be in the resurrection of the righteous? He says, no, no, no. He says, I'll tell you what I understand.

I want to be in the resurrection of the righteous. In view of this, I do my best to keep my conscience clear before God and men. You think just because I accepted Christ 25 years ago, I can live with a bad conscience today and say, hey, I'm going to be in the resurrection of the righteous.

This is the deception of the devil. Don't be fooled by it. I say this before God.

I can honestly say this before God today. I do my best to maintain my conscience absolutely clear before God and before men. If I've hurt somebody, I would apologize straight away.

I'll tell you why. Because Jesus said in Matthew chapter 5, to whom was he speaking? He was speaking to his disciples. Do you know that the entire sound of the mount was preached? The multitude was listening, but he was speaking to his disciples.

You read in the very first verse. He sat down on the mountain, and his disciples came to him, and he taught them verse 2. The multitude were there, but he was teaching his disciples. What did he teach his disciples? Listen.

This is what he taught his disciples. Verse 23, 523. If you're presenting your offering at the altar to your disciples, and there you remember that your brother's got something against you because you hurt him with your angry words, verse 22, leave your offering there and go and be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

That's amazing. I don't know how many Christians take that seriously, that when I come to God, maybe it's prayer, and I suddenly realize, hey, I hurt somebody. I stop praying, and I call him up, meet him and say, listen, I'm sorry for what I did.

Please forgive me. Then I come back to prayer. How many people out there would do it? Jesus said it.

It's very, very important to recognize that I cannot have a good conscience before God if I hurt somebody. It doesn't matter who it is, maybe your wife. Sometimes it's easier to apologize to a stranger than it is to your wife.

It's a test of humility. Do I have the humility to acknowledge that I made a mistake? I'm sorry. You know, when husbands and wives come to me for counseling, or a wife comes to me for counseling, I ask this question.

Actually, I'm not asking whether your marriage partner, your wife, whatever sins or fails, we all fall. My question is, when your wife fails, does she apologize to you? When your husband makes a mistake, does he apologize to you? In most cases, they say yes. I say, well, that's a great hope for your marriage.

But I have come across one or two cases where they told me my wife never said she's sorry. I said, I'm scared for your marriage. There's not much hope for it.

She never says she's sorry. God never says he's sorry. She's in the same category.

But he never makes a mistake. But if we are humble, we recognize that we hurt others far more than we realize. Ask God to give you light on it.

I'm talking about fellowship. I'm talking about this thing we have up here, building a beautiful family for God in very simple things, to ask forgiveness from God and to forgive one another. I remember once I heard a knock at the door of my house, and there was a young couple standing there.

I've never met them in my life. And they said, hey, Brother Zach, you don't know us, but we've been listening to your messages and your books, and we just got married yesterday or something, and we're about to catch a train. We are rushing to catch a train.

We just wanted to drop in and see you. We don't have enough time to come inside your house. We just wanted to say hi at the door.

Can you give us a word of advice before we rush to catch the train? I said, sure. Be quick to ask forgiveness from one another and be quick to forgive one another. I'll go and catch a train.

You'll be all right for the rest of your life. Even 50 years from now, be quick to ask forgiveness and be quick to forgive. It's not everything, but it's a first step.

From there, God can lead you further. Like the Chinese proverb says, the journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. Marriage is like a journey of a thousand miles.

Take that first step of learning to quickly ask forgiveness and quickly forgive. And when someone asks forgiveness, don't act big. You say, I'll think about it.

That's conceit. Imagine if God went to Jesus and said, Lord, forgive me, and he said, I'll think about it. Where would I be today? God is so quick.

You know, sometimes I picture in my mind, the limitations of my mind, how God is in heaven, looking at this earth, planet Earth, such a little dot in the universe, and God is looking at it. And on this earth, the thousands and hundreds and thousands of Christians who make mistakes say, Lord, forgive me, and the Lord says, forgiven. And another says, in another corner, they'll forgive me.

Lord, forgiven. And I think God is always saying, forgiven, forgiven, forgiven, forgiven, forgiven. That's what he's doing all the time.

24 hours, because there are people all the time asking, Lord, forgive me. And I say, Lord, make me like that. Make me like you.

Forgiven, forgiven, forgiven, sure. Do you really want to be like God? Be quick to forgive. That's how God is.

That's important in fellowship, too, because as long as we live on this earth, we should make mistakes. Fellowship is God taking two imperfect people and joining them together perfectly. Two imperfect people

being joined together perfectly.

That's marriage, and that's how fellowship is, even in the church. And it's possible. God's not asking us an impossible standard, saying, never make a mistake.

Then I'd give up. I'd give up immediately. But he's saying, be quick to acknowledge.

Keep your conscience clear. God says, I do my best. What did he say then in Acts 24-26? He doesn't say, I do my best to never sin.

No. I do my best to keep my conscience clear before God and before men. That itself indicates that there are times when his conscience troubles him about something, and he immediately confesses it.

You know, for example, listen to this. We just read Acts 24-26. Turn back there.

In view of the resurrection of the righteous, which I want to be part of, I say, I keep my conscience clear always before God and men. And here is an example of it in the previous chapter. Acts 23.

We read Paul saying. It's very amusing. It's a bit humorous.

I don't know if you saw the humor of this. Acts 23, verse 1. Paul looks seriously at the council and says, Brothers, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God and before men and before God up to this day. And the high priest Ananias, verse 2, said to those standing, Strike him on his mouth.

And immediately Paul loses his good conscience. He tells the priest, You whitewash Paul, God will smite you. Would Jesus have said that? What is our standard? Holiness is what Jesus would do.

What did Jesus do when people struck him? He shot him. Forgave him. But immediately he says, I'm sorry.

I was not aware of this. He's immediately aware. That's an example of how this man who preached victory over sin, when he slipped up, he immediately said it right.

So when a person preaches victory over sin, he's not saying that I never slip up. It just means I've learned to walk. You know, we can say an eight-month-old child or a ten-month-old child hasn't learned to walk yet.

That's a picture of a defeated Christian. Has he got life? Yes. Is he born? Yes.

Born again? Yes. But falling, falling, falling, falling. But the day comes when he's not walking and running now.

This three-year-old is running. It's learned. That's a picture of having learned to overcome sin.

But will he fall sometime? Sure. He can be 50 years old and still fall. But he'll get up immediately.

That's the difference. That's the picture I get of what it means to overcome sin. It doesn't mean I'll never fall, but I get up immediately.

I've learned to walk. I've learned to run. But I may accidentally slip up, and it's rare.

Can you remember the last time you slipped up and fell? Physically, I mean. It's probably rare. You'll learn to walk.

It should be like that in a Christian life. Not saying I'll never fall, but I've learned to walk. I've learned to run.

God's helped me. So it's not an unrealistic standard that the Bible presents. This is the basis on which we can build a beautiful family in our home and in our church.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, please help us to be gripped by these fruits so that they can work in our life and bring fruit in the days to come. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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