

# Following the Ways of the Apostles

by Zac Poonen

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*This sermon emphasizes the importance of repentance and faith in the Christian life, highlighting the need to turn our minds from earthly things to heavenly things through repentance. It discusses how many Christians are focused on worldly values and the necessity of aligning our values with God's kingdom. The message stresses the significance of repentance as the key to living a truly Christian life, turning from earthly desires to heavenly priorities.*

**Scripture:** Acts 17:1, Matthew 11:25, Colossians 3:2, Acts 20:21

**Topics:** "Repentance", "Aligning Values with God's Kingdom"

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## Description

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## Transcript

When I started sitting and preaching a few years ago, that's the first time I decided to study in the New Testament how Jesus preached. And what was his posture? Was he standing or sitting? And you know, I was amazed to discover that almost every single time he sat and spoke. I had never discovered that for 50 years.

So then I asked the Lord, why did you sit and speak? I saw in the Old Testament the prophets always stood and spoke. So then I understood something. The prophets were like teachers.

You know, like in a school, the teacher always stands and teaches. For claiming a message. But Jesus was trying to build a family.

And like a father. And when a father sits with his children around the dining table, teaching them the word. He doesn't stand.

He sits. More than whether you stand or sit. The main thing I discovered was Jesus wanted to build the church as a family.

The church was never meant to be an organization or a group. It was to be a family. Where the leader is like a father.

And the father is always very close to his children. He doesn't keep himself distant from his children. Today we have many preachers who are very distant from their congregation.

Very difficult to meet them. Very difficult to speak to them. Jesus was not like that.

Paul was not like that. None of the apostles were like that. Christianity has drifted far away from the faith of the apostles.

Not only in these external things that I mentioned. In the message. So I want to show you something from Acts of the Apostles chapter 17.

Here is the background of this. It says here in Thessalonica verse 1, there was a synagogue of the Jews. Acts 17 verse 1. In Thessalonica, there was a synagogue of the Jews.

And Paul went there and took the scriptures and began to reason with them. And he proved from the scripture about Jesus Christ having to suffer and rise again from the dead. And he said this Jesus verse 3 is the Christ, is the Messiah.

The Jews had the same Bible, that is the Old Testament, which Paul was using. But they said no, Jesus is not a Messiah. He is a false prophet.

It was not just a slight difference. They were complete opposite. Using the same Old Testament, the Jews said he is a false prophet and Paul said he is the Messiah.

How is that possible? I mean, if two people study the same mathematics book, they get the same answer. They won't find two opposite understandings from the same chemistry book or mathematics book. The reason is, in all earthly books, you only need to use your mind.

And two intelligent people will get the same answer. But when you come to the word of God, the mind is not enough. It's the heart that determines whether you understand God's word.

Jesus once said in Matthew 11 25, God has hidden these things from the clever and the intelligent people. Jesus said in Matthew 11 25, God has hidden these things from the clever and the intelligent people and revealed it to the children. So, why is it clever and intelligent people can't understand it? What do children have which intelligent people don't have? Humility.

Do you need humility to understand chemistry or maths or physics or any other book in the world? Any book in the world, all you need is intelligence. Except one book. That's the Bible.

And that's why it says there in Matthew 11 25, God has hidden these things from the clever and the intelligent and revealed them to babes. He's hidden it. They can't understand it.

But little children can understand it. It means those who have the mind of a child. And that is the mind of humility.

So, when Paul read that book with humility, he saw this is Jesus is the Messiah. But the Jews were proud, so they thought he's a false prophet. No, the New Testament is written by the same God who wrote the

Old Testament.

So, the same principle applies now. You try to understand it with your intelligence, you can go astray. Because it's not like a history book or a chemistry book.

The number one requirement to understand the Bible is the humility of a child. So, remember Matthew 11 25. God has hidden these things from the clever and the intelligent.

And he's revealed them to little infants. It was there in the Old Testament, it's there in the New Testament. So, if I want to understand the Bible, the humbler a man is, the more likely he is to know the truth.

So, to understand the Bible, I will not go to an intelligent man. He'll lead me astray like those clever Jews. But a humble man like Peter, or John, or Paul, he can explain the truth to me.

I want to say that to all of you, dear brothers and sisters. All the differences you find in Christendom are because intelligent people are trying to understand the scriptures. And so, they get different answers.

So, among the Jews also, there were different groups. The same Bible, the Pharisees read it one way, the Sadducees read it another way. But neither of them got the truth.

Both of them felt Jesus is a false prophet. Can you imagine how blind you can be, that you read the Bible and believe the exact opposite of what the Bible says? But the one whom God sent to earth, they killed, thinking he's a false prophet. The whole Old Testament was referring to Jesus coming to earth.

But when he came to earth, into the synagogue, they said, this is the devil. So, the same thing can happen today. So, when Paul went into the synagogue and preached from the same Old Testament that they were studying every Saturday, some people accepted the truth.

The humble people, their eyes were opened. And all the clever, intelligent people there said, no, this is wrong. It was a conflict between the intelligent people and the humble people.

The humble people also may have been very intelligent. But their primary quality was not intelligence, but humility. If you look around, most of the clever people in the world are quite proud.

Even in a school, classroom, the boy who comes first is quite proud. You don't find a humble person who's right at the top. There are a few, but they're very rare.

So, these humble people understood it. And they joined Paul and Silas. But the others opposed them.

And I want you to see what those who opposed Paul said. Listen to these words. Acts 17, verse 6, the last part.

They shouted saying, these men who have turned the world upside down have come here. What did they say Paul did? They turned our world upside down. That means their world.

In the synagogue. They have turned everything upside down here compared to what we believed for so many years. But what was Paul actually doing? He was turning an upside down world right side up.

See, when God created man, He wanted man to walk upright. He created him in his own image. That means, and he told Adam, all things will be under your feet.

That means, if God was his head, all the earthly things would be under his feet. That's how God created Adam. And Eve.

All material things were going to be under their feet. And God would be his head. But that's what the devil changed in the Garden of Eden.

He made them disobey God. That means God is no longer the head. And the devil got that place.

And immediately, Adam and Eve became upside down. Physically, they were still standing upright. But spiritually, inwardly, they became upside down.

They got a wrong sense of values now. The devil's values became more important. And God's values went down.

God's values went down. And these upside down men and women, Adam and Eve, produced upside down children also. Their first son Cain was upside down.

That's why he killed his brother. A person who is walking with God on top will never kill anybody. It's because he was upside down that he killed his brother.

And they had upside down grandchildren. And ever since then, every human being in the world has been spiritually upside down. That's why you never have to teach your children to tell lies.

They know it automatically. Because they are upside down. What you have to teach your children is to speak the truth.

You never have to teach your children to fight with people. They know that automatically. What you have to teach your children is how to live at peace.

You never have to teach any human being how to grumble or complain about things. No need, because they are all upside down. What you have to teach them is how to be joyful always and stop complaining.

This is the upside down world into which Jesus came. And Jesus lived with his head up, spiritually. Everybody in the world thought this man is upside down.

Because he was the only man walking upright. Jesus was the only person walking upright. And all those who followed him, like Paul, also walked upright.

That is the meaning of repentance. And where such a repentance is not preached, Christians will remain upside down. Supposing you tell a group of people Jesus died for your sins.

Believe in him. And he will forgive you. And you don't tell him to repent.

They will remain upside down and believe in Jesus. And they think they have become children of God. They have not become children of God.

Because their values are just like the people in the world. That is why you have Christian husbands and wives who fight just like any worldly husband and wife fight. That's why Christians grumble and complain just like worldly people grumble and complain.

That's why Christians love money just like everybody in the world loves money. What is the difference? They believe in Jesus. But they are still upside down like everybody in the world.

Because whoever preached the gospel to them never preached about repentance. Repentance means telling people your values are all upside down. If you want to come to Christ, turn around.

So when a preacher comes along and starts preaching such a message that you have to give up these worldly sense of values No, when a preacher says you have to give up this world's sense of values and get God's sense of values and get God's sense of values then people think this man is preaching something wrong. We can preach the values of God and people think that's wrong. Because they are upside down.

So that's what happened to Paul. The Jews could not understand that. But that's the question we need to ask ourselves.

See, in the Old Testament because people did not have the Holy Spirit a lot of people in the Old Testament believed certain things in their lives but their lives did not change. They did some foolish things. For example Abraham was a godly man according to the standards of 4000 years ago.

But when he was in a difficult situation he thought people will kill me to take my wife. So he said my wife is my sister to save his own life. Now Peter would never have done such a thing.

He would never have said his wife is my sister. Why the difference? Because Peter had the Holy Spirit. But Abraham did not have the Holy Spirit.

He tried to fear God and all but in a difficult situation he behaved just like any worldly person. And you read a second time Abraham did the same thing. He said my wife is my sister.

Why did he do that? To save his own life. He said they may kill me and take my wife. So he told his wife say you are my sister.

And the king took his wife away to his house. Imagine Abraham did not mind his wife being taken away by the king. Just to save his own life.

That is how many Old Testament people were. You see David is a good man in many ways but when he saw a pretty woman he committed adultery with her and killed the husband and married her. And this is David, the great man in the Old Testament.

But do you think Paul would have done that? If Paul saw a pretty woman he would not keep looking at her. He would never commit adultery with her because David's life he did not have the Holy Spirit within him. It makes a tremendous difference when the Holy Spirit comes inside.

Without the Holy Spirit coming inside some of our values are still all mixed up. Our value changes when the Holy Spirit comes in. That is one of the clearest marks that the Holy Spirit has come inside and taken control of your life.

That my value system has changed. Things that I valued before I don't value so much now. Other things that I did not value become more valuable now.

Because before that I did not have the light. When I was 19 Before I was a nominal Christian going to church, reading the Bible praying everything. I did not kill anybody or commit adultery.

I never robbed people. I lived a decent sort of life. But my value was just like the people in the world.

They were Hindus, I was Christian but our values were the same. That is how it is with many Christians. I used to go to the movies and watch movies just like anybody in the world.

But one day Christ came into my life. The Holy Spirit came in and changed my values. Immediately something happened.

I did not want to go to those cinemas again. I stopped watching movies from those cinemas. A few days after that a couple of my friends I was in the naval base there and we used to have in the naval base in India there was a cinema theatre inside the base for all the naval people.

There was a cinema theatre inside the naval base. Some of my fellow officers came and said let's go and watch today's movie. I did not have the courage to say to them I've stopped going since two days ago I've stopped going to the movies.

Because before that I myself used to take them. But how to tell these people I've become a Christian now. They would have thought what were you before? Were you a Hindu or something? What would they think? They don't understand being born again and all that.

So I didn't have the courage to say I've stopped going to the cinemas. I didn't have the courage to say I've stopped going to the cinemas. So I started going with them.

As I walked down the road there was a cry in my heart. Lord please deliver me from this. I don't want to go to the cinema today.

I don't have the courage to tell these people I'm a Christian. I walked half a mile to the cinema theatre and we walked and walked and walked there. And when we reached the theatre there was a big notice there We did not get the cinema reel so it is cancelled.

Today's cinema is cancelled. I felt like shouting Hallelujah. Lord has answered my prayer.

Other two friends of mine were very discouraged. They were wondering why I was so happy. That was my first experience of answered prayer.

And it was only a silent prayer in my heart. There I learnt that if there is a silent prayer in your heart sincerely God answers that. Then I came back home came back to my room and the Lord said to me Next time I won't do that for you.

Next time you must have the courage to stand up and say I'm a Christian. I've stopped going to the movies. Because if you don't say that you won't become strong.

I want to make you a bold witness for me. And you must not be ashamed to say that your value system has turned upside down now. Not upside down but right side up.

Now I've become upright. Till now I was crooked. So that's what repentance does.

It makes you right side up. Till now till then we are upside down. The whole world is upside down.

Spiritually speaking if you look at the world everybody is with their head down and legs up. And even many so called Christians are like that. They say they believe in Jesus.

But they have the same values as the people in the world. They fight like everybody else. They get angry like everybody else.

They lust with their eyes like everybody else. They murmur and grumble like everybody else. They are upside down like everybody else.

But with their upside down they say we believe in Jesus. They are not true Christians. Because they have never repented.

See the word repentance is very clear in Tamil. It's a turning of the mind. The turning of the mind.

The mind which has got other sense of values has now got the right sense of values. So that is the question all of us need to ask ourselves. You know people say have you accepted Jesus as your saviour? I say that's not enough.

Because the new testament begins not with accepting Jesus as your saviour but with repentance. The new testament begins with repentance not with accepting Jesus as your saviour. John the Baptist was the forerunner for Jesus Christ.

And what did he preach? Matthew 3 verse 2. Matthew 3 verse 2. Open it. The first message in the new testament. Before that it was only about the birth of Jesus.

No, his birth. But now comes the first message in the new testament. What is it? Matthew 3 verse 2. Repent.

Turn your mind around like the Tamil says. No, like the Tamil says. Turn your mind around.

Because the kingdom of heaven has come. Till now you are having a kingdom of earth. Till now you are having a kingdom of earth.

The Jews were taken up with this land God gave you. The land of Canaan God gave you. Now he is going to give you something heavenly.

So turn around. Make your mind heavenly now. That is the first message of in the new testament.

Now when the holy spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost Acts of the apostles chapter 2. Peter got up and preached a message about Jesus Christ dying for their sins. Jesus Christ Peter preached a message that Christ died for your sins. And they said what shall we do? No, they asked a question.

Acts 2.37 What shall we do? And Peter replied Acts 2.38 Repent. Same message that John the Baptist preached. So the first message on the day of Pentecost was also the same thing.

Repent. Turn around. Get your mind on heavenly things now.

And when you come to the end of the bible in the book of Revelation See this is about 65 years after the day of Pentecost. Where John at the age of 95 was writing the book of Revelation. And the Lord had given him a message to 7 churches.

And 5 of those churches had gone back into sinful ways. And what is the message that Jesus gives to those churches? What message did Jesus give to those churches? The first church. Revelation 2.5 Repent.

The church at Ephesus. To another church. The church in Pergamon.

What is the message to them in verse 16? Third church. Thyatira in verse 18. Verse 21 message is repent.

And the fourth church is Sardis in chapter 3 verse 1. Same message. Repent. In verse 3. What do you have heard and received? Repent.

And then the fifth church. Which is in verse 14. 3.14 the church in Laodicea.

The same thing. Repent. Be zealous and repent.

So you see the entire New Testament begins and ends with repent. Turn around. Even these churches that started well after sometime they became upside down again.

So that teaches us that a church can start repenting and after sometime become upside down again. What we learn from this is a church can start repenting and become upside down again. I am sure all these churches when they first heard the message of repent they turned and put heavenly values first.

But over a period of years slowly slowly they started going back and after a few years they were upside down again just like before they were converted. And so they are upside down again like the rest of the world. Like all the idol worshippers.

But they are now calling themselves a church. But they are upside down. That's the condition of many Christian churches today.

Because we believe in Jesus. Jesus died for our sins. He rose up.

But their values are upside down. So what is the most important message for such Christians? Same message that Jesus gave to the five backslidden churches. You people were once upside down.

Then you repented and came right side up. And now after a few years you have become upside down again. So again I have to give you the message which I gave you at the beginning.

Repent. That is actually a message for unbelievers. Peter preached it to unbelievers.

John the Baptist preached it to unbelievers. In Revelation he is preaching it to believers. He is saying become right side up again.

So if the Apostle Paul were coming to a church today and he sees them all with this worldly sense of values and not a heavenly sense of values what is the message that Paul will preach today in all most of Christian churches today? He would say to them look at your lives. You love money just like everybody else. You watch dirty movies like everybody else.

Some of you even watch pornography like other unbelievers. Sexually dirty movies. But you say you believe in Jesus.

And you even break bread. Paul will say don't deceive yourself. If your values are upside down don't call yourself Christian.

It is not just a label you stick saying Christian. You need to turn around again. See it is a fact that many believers loved Jesus more many years ago when they first accepted him.

And how did they back side again and became upside down again? I will tell you. I think they were sincere when they were first converted. Even some who came from non-Christian religions accepted Christ and became Christians.

But then they joined the church. That church was full of worldly Christians. They said so many wonderful doctrines and their doctrines were correct.

But they loved the world. Their pastors loved money. And so gradually these Christians went back to that upside down life after a few years in that church.

And after a few years that church is full of upside down people. Instead of the church helping these people the church corrupted these people who came there. Now what does God say to such a church? If the Apostle John was here the Lord would say go to that church and tell them come right side up again you will become upside down again.

If the Apostle John was here he would have told the church go to that church and tell them come right side up again you will become upside down again. Do you know what the church will do to the Apostle John? What will the church do to the Apostle John if he preaches that today? They will kick him out. They will say get out of here.

They will say you are preaching all wrong things. We are all okay. We believe in Jesus.

And that's what happens to true servants of God today. A worldly church will never accept the truth which God wants to tell them. That's why the Bible says the prophetic word is rare in the last days.

That means that means most preachers do not hear a word from heaven. They have just gone to some Bible school and accumulated knowledge in their head. And their preaching is like a job to earn their living.

They only preach for money. And they know that if I preach something that will hurt people I won't get any money. Let me not hurt anybody.

Let me get a good offering from everybody. Just let me say some nice things to them and God will comfort you and care for you and heal you and all that. And never rebuke them for their sin.

Never rebuke them for their worldliness. Because if you do all that they won't get any money in the offering bag. And the preacher won't get so much money.

That is the tragedy of today's preachers. So God's people remain upside down. And that is why we need to again hear the message to those five churches.

Repent. Turn around. You saw in the New Testament how the message which was first preached to unbelievers by John the Baptist and Peter on the day of Pentecost.

To the unbelievers. They preached to the unbelievers. The last book of the Bible, the same message is being preached to believers.

Revelation. See how it has turned around. The message to the believers is now the message to the unbelievers.

That is exactly the condition of Christendom today. And that is the message that is not being preached. Everybody is being comforted saying God will make you rich and God will make you healthy and God will do everything for you.

You got to believe. You got to believe. That's what they hear.

But if you were to go to the Apostle Paul See Paul, you preached to Jews and Gentiles and so many people all over the world. What was your message to all these people? He said okay, I'll tell you. This is the answer of the Apostle Paul.

Acts chapter 20. Here it says Paul sent to the Apostle Paul verse 17. He called all the elders of the church in Ephesus.

Acts 20 verse 17. He called the elders of the church in Ephesus. And he told them you know verse 18 from the first day I came here what I was preaching.

Acts 20. Publicly and from house to house I was preaching only this. To Jews and Greeks verse 21 I was preaching the same message.

Two things. Only two things. See verse 21.

Repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That repentance part has been lost now. Everywhere in Christendom what you hear is believe in the Lord Jesus.

Trust Him. Trust Him to forgive your sin. Trust Him to make you healthy.

Trust Him to make you wealthy. Trust Him to solve your problems. Trust Him to give you a good job.

Trust Him to do many wonderful things for you. And you ask them what about this first message of repentance? If you preach all that the offerings will go down. That is what has happened in Christendom today.

You know what the Old Testament prophets did? Any of the Old Testament prophets Elijah Elijah Elisha Isaiah Jeremiah Hosea Amos Zechariah Malachi They always preached what was missing in Israel. Every one of them preached repentance. Yes All the prophets preached repentance.

John the Baptist preached repentance. Peter preached repentance on the day of Pentecost. And we saw John preach repentance to those five churches in Revelation.

And Christendom will say you are turning the world upside down. Our church you are turning it upside down. No no no turning it right side up.

You need to understand what it means. Let me show you Colossians in chapter 3. Colossians chapter 3 and you will understand what I mean by being right side up. See our mind is in our brain in our head.

And it says here in verse 2 Set your mind on things above and not on the things of earth. When your mind is set on the things of earth your head is down. Your legs are up.

When you are right side up your mind is set on the things above. This is the meaning of straightening up and repentance. So repentance means your mind is now set on the things above.

Repentance means your mind is now set on the things above. Why? Verse 1 Because we are raised up with Christ. Now we are seeking the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

So my mind must be there. That is a true Christian. But if your mind is down here on the things of earth then you need to repent.

So let me use an illustration. See supposing these are the heavenly thing and this is the earthly thing down here. So if I tie a rubber band here and I stretch it down to the things of earth because I have to be occupied with my job 8 hours a day I have to look after my family provide for them take care of my children I have to spend many hours being occupied with many earthly things.

When I have finished all that and I leave it this rubber band comes up here again the rubber band which is stretched to earthly things for 10 hours a day once it is over the rubber band comes up to the heavenly things again. Is that how it is in your mind? That you stretch your mind to finish all your earthly tasks even 12 hours a day 16 hours a day when it is all over it switches back to the heavenly things again. In other words when you are free from all your earthly tasks where does your mind go? Is it to think about heavenly things? Then you are right side up.

But with many believers it is not like that. They are just like the unbelievers. The rubber band is tied down here to the earthly things.

On Sunday they stretch it up here for about 2 hours. I sing and praise the lord or sometimes on a Friday evening at 7.30 we will stretch it up like this meeting for about 2 hours. Once the meeting is over the rubber band is released back to the earthly things again.

The exact opposite of a spiritual Christian. This is inward in the mind only you know which side your rubber band is tied to. Is it tied to the heavenly things and stretched to the earthly things? Or is it tied to the heavenly things and stretched when needed for earthly things? Or is it tied to the earthly things and taken up to the heavenly things once or twice a week when you go for a meeting? This is how most Christians are.

What is the message for such Christians? You will never, never, never have a satisfying Christian life till you repent. Christians are divided into so many different doctrines. Infant baptism, adult baptism, child baptism, spiritual baptism.

So many different doctrines. But all of them their mind is attached to earthly things. The most important thing to doctrine is earthly things.

All these other doctrines are just like a different color wash. Yellow wall, white wall, green wall. It's all just color wash.

That is the tragedy of so much of Christianity today. Because they have heard only one message. They have heard.

Believe, believe, believe, believe, believe. The important part before that repent is missing. In electricity at a switch open a switch you will see there are two wires there.

When you put on the switch all that the switch does is make the two wires touch. That's all. You open any switch.

I have done it myself, I know. The moment you put on the switch it touches. No, when you put on the switch the wires touch.

The lights come on. When you turn off the switch the wires are separated. The light goes off.

You can never have a switch with only one wire. No light will work. You open any switch anywhere in the world you open it.

If you open a switch anywhere in the world there are always two wires there. The switch makes it touch the light comes on you turn it off the lights are separated the wires are separated the light goes off. These two wires are a picture of repentance and faith.

When they touch you get the light of God in your life. You remove one and you only have faith. It will be darkness, darkness, darkness.

You only have repentance not faith. Then again, darkness, darkness, darkness. You can't have one alone.

You need repentance plus faith. Then the lights come on. Then the light of God comes into your life.

That's why you can have two believers believing the same thing. 100% agreed in that doctrine. But one is a bright light for God.

The other believer believing the same thing is full of darkness. Why is that? Because one has got repentance and faith, the other has only got faith. I hope you have discovered what is missing in your life.

Whether you accept it or not that's up to you. But I believe that if you accept it it can bring the light of God into your life. Ask yourself one simple question.

Are your values about worldly things the same as people in the world or complete opposite? What do people on the earth value? Money? The honor of men? Sinful entertainment? And more interest in worldly things than in knowing the word of God? More interest in reading the news on the internet or the newspaper than reading the scriptures? And if a Christian is like that, his mind is on earthly things. He is his conscience, he will read the bible for 5 minutes. But his mind is not on that.

His mind is 100% on the world just like everybody else. He only has got a little Christian whitewash. That's not Christianity.

So I hope we take this seriously. Whether you call yourself believer or unbeliever it doesn't make a difference. What are your values? That is the important thing.

Let us pray. While our heads are bowed in prayer let us ask ourselves if God spoke to us anything today. And if God has spoken something to you say, Lord please help me to take that seriously.

Because this is a matter of life and death. So you say, Lord please help me to choose the right. To choose the right way.

Heavenly Father we pray that you will let this word sink into everybody's mind. And when they go to bed tonight help them to think about it. We pray in Jesus name.

Amen.

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Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/teHVN0qhJSk.mp4>

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