

Freedom From Denominationalism

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen's sermon emphasizes the need for freedom from denominationalism to foster authentic Christian community and leadership.

Duration: 1:02:12

Scripture: Proverbs 6:16-18, Ezekiel 9:5-7, Matthew 6:33, John 8:32

Topics: "Denominationalism"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of seeking God's truth and total freedom from anything that binds us. He encourages humility, servanthood, and having a father's heart towards others in the church. The speaker shares personal experiences of sacrifice and testing in ministry, highlighting the need to be willing to pay the price to serve God. He also addresses the trap of seeking recognition and spiritual status through conferences and denominational affiliations. The sermon concludes with an invitation for those with a hunger for God to join the local church and engage in Bible study.

Transcript

Let's bow our heads before God and open our hearts that He can reveal His truth to us from His word. You shall know the truth and the truth will set you free. We want total freedom from everything that binds us.

Our Father, we seek You. We pray that the mighty power of the Holy Spirit will again be in our midst, give us clarity, thinking, understanding, stir our minds, stir our emotions, bring us to an obedience to Your word, that we will come to the point of surrender and give up our will to do Your will, give up our ways to do things Your way. Heavenly Father, hear us.

We seek You with all of our hearts. Thank You in Jesus' name. Now we want to come to our concluding study on what we've been thinking of as six-fold freedom that Jesus gives us.

And we saw the first of those freedoms is a freedom from sin, second a freedom from a legalistic attitude, and a freedom from the world, freedom from fear, and then finally we saw freedom from soulishness. And now we want to, so far we've been thinking of our personal life. All these five freedoms are related to our personal life.

But in the New Covenant, God deals with us as a church. Ultimately, Jesus is going to present to the Father not a bunch of individuals, but one new man, of which He is the head. So He's going to present to

the Father a bride, one bride, not multitudes of people who have overcome sin and overcome legalistic attitudes and overcome the world.

No, ultimately all these people have to become one body. And that is what many, many Christians don't have any light on. Many people will, in fact most people don't even have any light on souliness, a lot of people don't even have an understanding of what world is, or legalism is, a lot of people don't even know what sin is.

So, we want to think today about freedom from denominationalism. The Christian world is divided into denominations. I read somewhere there were 30,000 denominations in the world, about 2,000 in India alone.

Not 2,000 churches, 2,000 denominations. A denomination is a group of churches that go by one name, they have a central headquarters, they'll have local pastors, over the local pastors will be area superintendents, and over the area superintendents, number of areas will be under district superintendents, and over the district superintendents will be state superintendents, and a country superintendents, and a continent superintendents, and a world superintendents. It's a pyramid, very similar to the Roman Catholic Church, where you have a pope on top, cardinals, archbishops, bishops, parish priests.

It's not only in the Roman Catholic Church, there are some Protestant churches like that also, Assemblies of God for example, they've got a general superintendent in the United States, and they've got district superintendents, area superintendents, pastors, and it goes all the way down. Now the question is, does the Bible teach this? Or is it unimportant? Do we say, it doesn't matter? You know some people when they hear about souliness, ya ya, they say it's all splitting hairs, it doesn't matter. Okay? It's obvious that such a person thinks multiplication is a waste of time, because they are in kindergarten.

So we don't argue with a kindergarten student that multiplication is important. Okay? In the same way, some people say, oh this is all not important. Fine, I'm not speaking to such people.

But those of us who believe that all scripture is inspired by God, that the Lord gave the apostles wisdom through the Holy Spirit to make a new wineskin into which this new wine is to be poured. What we have been so far speaking in the last five sessions was the new wine. And now we want to talk about the new wineskin into which this wine is poured, so that there is no waste.

If you pour the new wine into the old wineskin, Jesus said the wineskin will burst. The old wineskin was a denomination. It had a headquarters in Jerusalem, the old covenant.

It had a high priest who was the top man. Under him there were priests. They were all supported by the tithes.

Every priest was supported by the tithes of the people because they didn't do any other work. They were not supposed to do any other work. They had to get... and tithes, by the way, in the entire Old Testament, tithe was not money.

Remember this, when people try to tell you about tithe, tithe was never money. It was grain or whatever they produced and they'd come and give it to the Levites. Just like in some of our village conferences, when they bring offerings to God, they bring potatoes and rice and things like that.

So they gave their produce from their crops, one-tenth of their crops they gave to the Levites. And that's how the Levites were supported. And that was old covenant.

And the Levites were paid like that and they were the ones who were not supposed to do any other earthly work. And they were supposed to do what, like pastors do today. Now when you come to the New Testament, you don't find that sort of thing at all.

You don't find a central headquarters anywhere. And the clearest example of that is Revelation chapter 2 and chapter 3, where you read of the seven churches. And the Lord told John to write a separate letter to each of the churches.

Now if it was like the Methodist church or the A.G. church or the Salvation Army or the C.S.I. church, then the Lord would have so told John, just send a letter to the bishop and he'll distribute it to all the churches. But there was no bishop. There was no archbishop.

Every church had its own elders. And so you had to send a separate letter to each church, because each church was independent church. Even though some of them or most of them were only 30-40 kilometers from each other.

Not far. It's not even as far as Mysore from here. There was a church between here and Mysore, that'd be two or three churches.

But they were not one denomination. They were independent churches. They were planted by the apostles.

And the apostles initially would ask somebody to leave the meeting and come back after one or two years and appoint elders over those churches. That was the way every single church in the New Testament was planted. And that is the type of leadership that is found in the New Testament churches.

Paul told Titus, I left you in Crete so that you can appoint elders there. And we read in Acts 14.23, the apostles appointed elders in every place, because each church was an independent church directly under the Lord Jesus Christ, who was the head of that church. They may have had fellowship with each other, but there was no central coordination or somebody controlling the finances.

You see, in this type of pyramid structure, you find it in some charismatic groups also. The person at the top, I mean, you may call him a pope, or in some cases they call him an apostle. And below him are all these different layers of... It's just like a company, you know, CEO on top and managers and deputy managers and assistant managers and all that.

But what happens in this type of structure is, right from the lower churches, they have to give their tithes. And the tithes come up to this level and this level and this level and this level. And by the time you're an apostle, you're a millionaire, because you're getting tithes from so many churches.

It's coming up all the way up to the top. And that's how a lot of people get corrupted. Now, Paul wasn't getting anything like that.

He was the greatest apostle on earth. And he said there were some times when he was just struggling to get money to buy food. And once, when he was in the jail, he wrote a letter to Timothy.

Hey, he says, Timothy, I forgot to bring my woolen shawl with me, my blanket. I don't have the money to buy another one. Can you please make sure when that brother comes, please send that blanket with him? This is the greatest apostle of the first century.

What a difference from the type of people today. He never took any money from people. He, I mean, from most churches, he didn't.

He did take from the church in Philippi. But from most of the other churches, he never received any gifts. He worked with his hands.

Boy, these were men who knew God. And they planted New Testament churches. Now, how do we say that denominationalism is a cage? It is a cage.

And if you've seen it and you understand all the trappings of it, it's a system which binds people. It can't be independent. You have to do.

For example, if you're a parish priest here, you just got to do what your bishop tells you. You don't have an option. If you don't do what the bishop tells you, you get kicked out.

And you got to send your report regularly to the bishop what's happening. And the bishop has to send the report, I suppose, to the archbishop and to the cardinal and go all the way to the pope. And one day the pope says, OK, now this is a new doctrine we're going to believe that from today onwards, Mary was born without sin.

So all the way down to the bottom, everybody's got to believe, Mary was born without sin. Just because 150 years ago, some pope got a bright idea that Mary was born without sin. It's a very binding system.

It's the same with any other denomination that's got a pyramid, where you have a central control. And there's another thing which you see in this type of pyramid structure. You can find it in a Baptist denomination or a Pentecostal denomination or Indian Pentecostal church or Catholic.

You see, the man at the top appoints pastors or parish priests, call them what you like. So one fellow will be transferred from there to here. And then this guy will be transferred there.

And a lot of these people are itching for a transfer to the Gulf, where they can get more money, or to America, IPC church in America, they get more money there. So they'll butter the president. And I don't know what else they do, what bribes or what, I don't know what they do.

But they get a posting there and they're lucky. It's like these people who want to post things as traffic police or something, because they can make a lot of money there. Or some other court registrar or something.

It's the same type of stuff that goes on today in Christendom. It's corrupt, it's Babylon to the core. It's money, money, money and Christianity all mixed.

It's the money changers back in the temple. Now many of you young people have never been in these systems. So I tell you, you really don't appreciate what you have in your churches.

I sometimes wish some of you would go and spend one year in one of these churches. You'd come running back, say, boy, Lord, take me home. I've been in that for 16 years and I've seen what happens

there.

I wasn't a part of it, but I moved around and I saw what was going on. And I got a thorough guided tour of Babylon. I know every street and every nook and corner, everything I know there now.

So I appreciate the value of Jerusalem, the true church, much more than I think any of you here. But it is a cage, it's a prison. You can't be free.

If you're a leader, you've got somebody else telling you what to do. You can't make your own decisions. And you can't have an independent connection with Christ.

It's a limiting system. I'm not saying there are no godly people there. I think in many denominations there are some very, very godly people.

You can find a godly person in the Roman Catholic Church. I personally think Mother Teresa was a very godly woman. But she was not in the new wineskin.

No, it was an old wineskin, but she was a very godly woman. And you can find godly people in the Brethren and the Pentecostals. I'm not talking about individual godliness.

But if your eyes have been opened to see that New Testament Christianity is more than individual Christianity, it's a corporate, corporate means along with other believers, relationship. By this shall all men know you're my disciples. By the fact that you live a holy life, no.

By this shall all men know you're my disciples, that you love one another. So you've got to have one another in order to show that you're Jesus' disciples. Now this was not true in the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament it was all just individuals. One Elijah lives a holy life and one John the Baptist lives a holy life. But that was finished with John the Baptist.

Jesus said after John the Baptist is the kingdom of heaven that is preached. Up till then it was another kingdom. And in the kingdom of heaven there is a new wineskin where each church is a local church.

The church in Corinth was a local church. It was a carnal church. Some distance away there was another church.

It was a church of Ephesus. It was a spiritual church. Now if they were all one denomination then the carnality of Corinth would have infected Ephesus.

Because here Ephesus is not independent. This carnality spreads to there. Corruption spreads more easily in a denomination.

But it can't spread if each is a local church. That's why you have a church in Ephesus here, where it's backslidden. The elder has lost his first love.

And the church has lost its first love. And then you move on and you come to another church. Smyrna, not far away, 30-40 kilometers.

And it's not at all infected by the backsliding of Ephesus. It's wholehearted, suffering, persecution, faithful. And the Lord says, excellent.

He condemns Ephesus, but he doesn't condemn Smyrna. Now if it were all one denomination, they'd have been just like the others. Because the bishop would have made sure that the whole thing was corrupt.

But thank God they didn't have a bishop over all of them. They had a local elder in Smyrna, who was a wholehearted brother. And a church, the quality of a church depends on the quality of its leader.

You can't escape that. You see that in Revelation chapter 2 and chapter 3. If the leader is a godly man, the church generally becomes godly. If the leader is a lover of money, you have a church filled with the lovers of money.

If the leader is immoral, the church has immorality. And I mean, I can guess. The Bible doesn't tell us anything about the elders in Corinth.

But when I see that they were tolerating immorality in Corinth, with one fellow living in immorality, I can guess that the elders were also a bit immoral. Nobody knew about it. Now in the same way, you go to Thyatira, and there was a man whose wife was running the church.

She was pulling the strings from behind the scenes. He'd go to the elders' meeting and discuss with the elders, and he'd come back and tell his wife, and wife said, No, no, no, don't do that. We can't do that.

This Jezebel would tell her husband to go back and tell the elders not to do it like that. And he'd go back, and like a good puppet, he would tell the elders what to do. That happens even today.

We have some brothers who are very faithful puppets of their wife. Wife comes and says, puss, puss, puss, puss, puss. They go and they puss, puss, puss, puss, puss to the other brothers.

Yeah, the church is destroyed like this. Because they listen to their wives instead of listening to God. It's happening.

What to do? There are Jezebels all around. And then you have the other church next to it, Philadelphia. He didn't let his wife tell him what to do.

He just listened to God. And what a wonderful church he had. So, one church could not infect the other church.

Because they were all independent. Even though they are 30 kilometers away. Sorry, your infection doesn't come here because there's a gulf between you and me.

We're not one denomination. And that's why the Lord established local churches. That's the way He prevents corruption.

So you can't guarantee. You see, for example, when you look around today. You take a Methodist church.

There may be a Methodist church where you have a very God-fearing pastor. And you go to the next Methodist church, that guy is not even born again. The same thing can happen.

You go to a Baptist church where one fellow is not even born again. And then another Baptist church, the man's a man who's filled with the Spirit and he's on fire for God. But what happens in the denomination is after four years there, or four or five years.

He's finished all his sermons there, so he can't preach anymore. His book of sermons is over. So he's got to go to another church after four or five years to preach those same sermons somewhere else.

So he's transferred. Another fellow comes in and that guy is not born again. And the whole church is destroyed.

Because the central office transfers people. Now in the New Testament, there was no question of transfer. I mean, an elder in Corinth was not transferred from Philippi.

He just grew up in Corinth and became an elder. And the elder in Philippi was not transferred from Ephesus. He just grew up in Philippi and became an elder.

That is the pattern of the New Testament church. People say it's impossible. It's not impossible.

We have seen it work in our midst in the last many years. Where we don't transfer an elder from here to there in order to run that church. Or like transfer of pastors, it goes on all over.

Priests and pastors are transferred all over the country in every denomination. But local churches are God's plan. Where nobody is there from above to tell this person, this is the doctrine you got to believe from now on.

He grows up in it, in that church. And there may be another church he's in fellowship with 30 kilometers away. And that may be carnal.

And you can be spiritual. Now, we have seen that over the last 30 years. As God has raised up different churches in Tamil Nadu and Kerala and Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra.

We have seen one thing that every church is as spiritual as its leaders are. Just, I mean, you have seen that. You got to travel around, you'll see it.

Just because that church is spiritually linked with CFC, it doesn't mean it's spiritual. That depends on whether the local elder there is spiritual or not. So if the local elder there is not spiritual, just because he is linked with CFC doesn't mean it's a spiritual church.

I mean, Paul planted Corinth, church in Corinth, and the church in Ephesus, and the church in Thessalonica, and the churches in Galatia, and the church in Philippi. But they were not all the same quality. How is it? Churches planted by the same apostle are not the same quality.

Because the local leaders were not spiritual. In some places, the local leaders were spiritual. Godly people who didn't love money, kingdom of God was uppermost for them.

They built a spiritual church. And some other places, you know, like the Jews, they boasted that Abraham is our father. Some other churches, they boasted, hey, we were planted by the apostle Paul.

We're not just ordinary fellows like you guys. You guys were planted by Apollos. We are planted by Paul.

How does that make you spiritual? It doesn't. They gloried in such stupid things like that. But the elder was a man who was just interested in pursuing his own goals and ambitions in life, and make a good living, and also have the honor of being the elder of a church associated with Paul.

And the church never became spiritual. We have churches like that in our midst. The only thing they glory in is we are linked with CFC in Bangalore, spiritually, but utterly carnal.

And if some brother from CFC goes to that place and finds this church that's linked with CFC spiritually is carnal, you know what my recommendation to him? Don't go to that church. We're not a denomination. You don't have to go to that church.

Go to another church there. Maybe the Methodist church, if that's more spiritual. Go there.

Can you imagine me giving that advice? I do. Because I'm interested in that guy being spiritual. Not that guy going to some church that comes here for the conferences.

I couldn't care less if they come for the conferences. Is the leader a spiritual man? Is he a godly man? Does he know God? And if the Methodist pastor there knows God more than this guy who's in some church linked with CFC, I tell him to go to the Methodist church. Do you think God has got some type of denominational spirit? Not at all.

Denomination is a cage. And if you say, oh, wherever I go, I must go to a CFC church, whether it's dead or alive. You'll be in a cage.

Definitely you'll be in a cage. I'm trying to liberate you from that cage. You go to a so-called CFC linked church in one place and the leader is carnal, I'd say don't go to that church.

Don't waste your time there. Go and look around for a more spiritual church and go there. Because you got to grow.

Or you go to one CFC linked church and the guy gets up and preaches for one hour every Sunday morning from Genesis to Revelation. You don't know what he spoke and he himself doesn't know what he spoke. And you waste your time like that Sunday after Sunday.

I'd say don't waste your time there. Go to some place where you can get a solid word that help you to grow spiritually. Where they love one another.

I don't care what denomination calls it. Maybe better than the so-called CFC linked church. We have come to that condition today.

But this false sense of loyalty is human. It's denominationalism. And look at the condition of so many of these people who are sitting in these so-called CFC linked churches.

Utterly defeated by sin. Lovers of money. Living for themselves.

They're not disciples. They don't hate father, mother, brother, sister, wife and children. They yell at each other at home.

They're angry. They lust. They live in every wretched sin.

And they say we're linked to CFC. We have Abraham for our father. And John the Baptist said forget about Abraham being your father.

God can raise up children for Abraham from the stones. And I believe we have come to that stage. Sure.

I've seen that. I've seen in some places where people in other churches have far greater zeal to spread the message we are preaching than our own churches. What does that prove? Here and there is somebody gripped by this message.

But they're not linked to CFC officially. But they have a far greater zeal to spread the word. One or the other.

Because they've been gripped by the message of victory over sin. I say God recognizes that church in that place. And not this CFC linked church.

And that's why when elder brothers, you know a lot of people come here and they say, Oh, Brother Zach, we'd like to start a church in our hometown. I say go right ahead. But I'm not going to support you till I see God supporting you.

When God supports you, I'll support you. Because I'll always go behind God. I won't go ahead of God.

If I see God support you, I'll definitely come behind God and support you. But you've got to get God to support you. You're not going to get Brother Zach to support you.

Sorry. You see, any elder brother who's retaining his throne by buttering me and trying to get me to support him, he's crazy. He's really crazy.

He's got to screw loose here. Because I'm not going to support him. I'm sorry, I'm not going to support him.

If God doesn't support him, I'm not going to support him. If he doesn't live a holy life, I wash my hands and I say I have nothing more to do with it. You better run your church as you like.

Because I want to see you are living in the fear of God and God is bearing witness to your life and there's an anointing upon your life and an anointing upon your word and you brought up your family right. And these things are not there. What are you saying I'm linked with CFC and Brother Zach? It's fit for the garbage bin.

Throw it in the garbage bin. Worth nothing. Almighty God must bear witness to you.

The Bible says that God bore witness to Jesus. Even Jesus. When he was on earth.

The father had to bear witness to him. Where are you and I? Definitely we must have God bearing witness to us. And so it's very important to recognize the local nature of each church.

Otherwise we'll be in a trap. When you consider marriage, you'll say oh is that person a part of a CFC linked church? Well that guy who sits in a CFC linked church may be a carnal man and may not be a good husband for you. And that other person who is from some other church may be more spiritual.

But we have some crazy elders in our churches who, not all of them, a few of them, very few of them who say you must marry from within the church. Who said that? Which verse is that? The Bible only says you must marry a believer. I heard one elder told somebody I won't come to your wedding if you don't marry somebody from the church.

What's that? I wonder if such a person is even fit to be an elder. What sort of carnality is that? I won't come to your wedding if you don't listen to me. Are you God? It's crazy.

And I'm 100% against it. I'm 100% against all this carnality, wherever it is found. Brothers and sisters, you know the great need in our midst for genuine godliness.

For humble, godly brothers whose one passion in life is not their profession but Christ. There are many elder brothers they take care of a church and then they realize Oh! I will get a better opportunity for advancement in my profession if I go there. All of a sudden they lose their burden for this church and go there.

You think such people are fit to be elders? Not at all. Not in a hundred years. They are seeking their own advancement.

That's all. I'm not talking about people who are transferred without, you know, you're working in a government office and you can't help it. You're transferred and you try your best to stay where you are and you don't get it.

This transfer is unstoppable and it's so difficult to get a job these days. You have to go on a transfer. Then you can believe in the sovereignty of God.

That God allowed you to move from one place to another. But what about a person who is seeking his own advancement? And say, I think if I go there I can make a little more money. What about this church you were supposed to be a shepherd about? Oh, just leave it and go.

Do you do that as a father? I mean a father who's got a number of children. And he says, yeah, I'm, you know, I found another place. You guys better look for another father.

I'm going over there. I'm going to pick up some more adopted children there. What type of father is that? That's not New Testament Christianity.

But I've seen that happen. Not in the Salvation Army, in our churches. People seeking their own.

And it's not new. The Apostle Paul said in Philippians 2, 19 to 21, Every one of my co-workers is seeking their own except Timothy. Can you imagine the sorrow in Paul's heart as he wrote that to the Philippians? I said, boy, the Apostle Paul, his co-workers were seeking their own.

And he found only one man who had the same spirit as him and that was Timothy. So then it's not a new thing. If we find today elders who are seeking their own and they go where it is convenient for them and their program is according to their convenience and church is secondary and my job and my profession and my convenience are primary.

How in the world can you build a church like that? God will never bear witness to that type of thing. Yeah, you can have your Sunday meeting and continue and go through the ritual of a Sunday meeting and occasionally a few more people will come there. But it won't be a powerful witness for Christ in your locality.

Because you're in a prison. The prison of denominationalism. You find your satisfaction by saying, I'm linked to CFC, I'm one of those invited for the conferences, you know.

You look at the other people in the city and say, you're not invited to the conference, I'm invited for the conference. What does it mean? You think that makes you spiritual? Not at all. It's a trap.

It's a denominational trap which I believe a lot of people in our churches are in. And I want to open the doors and set you free. The New Wineskin is a local church.

And I praise God that we now have coming for our conferences, some of you sitting here, who are not part of our so-called our churches. But who have a hunger for God. You know, I remember the days when we used to publish our monthly paper called Words of Life.

And I would ask some people in CFC, have you read this month's Words of Life? One month after it was issued. No. And there were other people in other churches who read it 3-4 times.

The 70-hour CD, which covers the whole Bible. I've asked a lot of people who have MP3 players, who listen to a lot of Christian music regularly on MP3 players, who have computers, have you listened to this? Are you interested in Bible study? Yeah. One or two things they have heard.

And I've met other people in other churches who have listened to it 2 or 3 times. Thank God, we're not in a denomination. God is no respecter of persons.

And I tell you, my brothers and sisters, please listen to me. You're gonna get a big surprise when Christ comes again. That He doesn't give you any marks for being linked to CFC.

He doesn't give you any marks for coming to a conference linked with CFC. He'll give you a mark for godliness. And if you're an elder brother, whether you built a godly church in your own locality, irrespective of whether you were linked to this group or that group or this brother or that brother or this apostle or that apostle, but that you, as a godly, humble person, built a church because you recognize the Holy Spirit appointed you as an overseer there.

That is freedom. So, I say this because a lot of people are patting themselves on the back that if they get invited to the conference, they are in the good books. Good books of whom? Not of God.

To be in God's good books, you got to be a humble person. You got to be a servant. You got to be a father.

You got to have a heart of a father to all the people in your church. You got to have the heart of a servant to serve them and wash their feet and change their diapers and wipe their bottoms because some of them are babies. You got to do that.

If you are not willing to do all those things, and spiritually speaking, I mean, then, just saying that we are linked with CFC or something and we have our regular conferences in our locality every year, we come, we have Brother Zach coming for our conference, so what? It doesn't mean a thing to God. It doesn't mean a single thing to God. My brothers and sisters, get out of this cage of denominationalism, of glorying in being linked to a spiritual church or a spiritual man.

It has zero value before God. If you can understand this, you'll be released from a prison today. And you will realize that being linked to Abraham as your father or Paul as an apostle means zero to God.

Are you, elder brother in Thyatira, are you listening to your wife? You, elder brother in Ephesus, have you lost your first love? What's the use of your meetings if you have lost your first love? You, elder brother in Pergamos, are you allowing the teachings of Balaam to come into your church? Look at the other elder brother in Philadelphia. What a wonderful church he is building there. Because he is a godly, humble

brother for whom his profession and his earthly job is not primary.

That's only a means of earning a living. If you went to the apostle Paul and you asked him, what's your job? He said, I'm an apostle. Are you an apostle or a tent maker? Oh, tent maker.

That's only to earn my living. I am an apostle. How many of you elder brothers would say, I'm primarily an elder brother of my local church.

Oh, but aren't you a teacher? Or doing some business? Yeah, yeah. That's only to earn my living. I'm an elder of a local church of which the Holy Spirit has appointed me as an overseer.

I think there are very, very few people who have that sense of calling. And that's why we are in a cage. Now, I believe God's called me to serve Him.

But I've supported myself all these 25-30 years. But I don't say that's my job. That's how I support myself.

That's only a means of earning my living and taking care of my family. That's not my calling in life. My calling in life is to serve the Lord.

And my mind is always like that. And many times, I'll tell you this, perhaps you don't know it. There are times when I have gone out to serve the Lord, it has resulted in loss in my earthly business, sometimes to 60-70,000 rupees.

And the Lord asked me once, will you do it again? I said, Lord, I'll do it again. I remember that happened once when I went to some place. And as a result of that, my being away at a critical time in my business, I do.

I lost over 60,000 rupees. And some of you are afraid of taking one day's leave without pay. You think you'll ever in your life serve God? And when I came back, I realized I had made this loss.

But I'd gone under the leading of God. And for one and a half years, I never knew anything. I said, I'll do it again, Lord.

I'll do it a hundred times because I'm your servant. I'm not a businessman. That's only a means of earning a living.

One and a half years later, see how good God is. He first tested me for one and a half years. One and a half years later, I was in a meeting where two brothers came up to me and said, Brother Zach, do you remember that particular conference you came to at such and such a month and such and such a year and such and such place? I said, I sure do.

I remember that very, very well. Because that was... I didn't tell them the reason. Because that was the time I lost a lot of money.

And these two brothers said, do you know, we got saved in that meeting. I said, Lord, one soul for 30,000 rupees? Great! Is it worth it or not? And God hid it from me for one and a half years to see whether I'd rejoice and do it again even if nobody was saved. And then only He let me in onto the secret.

I don't know if anybody else was saved, but these two told me. But what I want to say, my brothers and dear brothers, especially, if your profession or whatever means you do to earn your living is primary in

your life and God will test you on it. He's tested me on it numerous times.

He will test you on it. And if that is primary, I guarantee in a hundred years you will not build a local church the way God wants it in your locality. You got to change your focus and say, Lord, my job is only a means of earning a living.

And if I have to lose a promotion in order to stay here, I lose the promotion. I'm going to be here to build a church. Can you imagine what God will do to you and your local church if that becomes your focus? Then that honor me, I will honor.

The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to strongly support those whose hearts are completely His. 2 Chronicles 16, 9. If my heart is completely His, His eyes will roam around the whole world to support me. And I've seen that as I've traveled in different places around the world.

I've seen how mightily God has worked strongly to support me. And I know I only want to do one thing. I said, Lord, my heart is completely Yours.

I remember the days when I used to go away leaving my family with 2 or 3 little children and I'd be away for 4 or 5 weeks. And my poor wife had to look after them. One after the other they'd get chickenpox and things like that.

And I say it was worth it all. It's worth it all because God tested me in those days. He tested my wife in those days.

It was more difficult for her than for me. I was living comfortably in somebody's bed and she had to struggle with the little children but it was a test for her and for me. And God asked, are you willing to pay that price to serve me? Both of us said, yes, we'll do it.

Our children didn't suffer. They all grew up to be born again and love the Lord. You'll never suffer when you honor God.

But if you put your family first, it may not be your business, it may be your family. Ah, my family must be first. Well, I agree.

You must take care of your family and you must not neglect your children. But if you worship your family, that's an idolatry. It is.

If God calls you, you got to be willing to offend anybody. Are you willing to offend your father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters? We need to come back to discipleship. Dear brothers, what I'm trying to say is, let's get out of this cage of denominationalism where we think God accepts us because we are connected denominationally to CFC.

You are not connected denominationally to CFC. Let me explain that to you. All of you brothers, we are not a denomination.

I got rid of denominationalism years ago and I'll never in my life be a part of a denomination. I'm not on the board of any church. No.

Everybody's got their own property and that doesn't happen in the CSI. No, it doesn't happen in the Roman Catholic. It's this top bishop who controls everything.

That's another thing in denominations. The top man is on the board of all the property. I'm on the board of nothing.

We are not a denomination. We are independent local churches and if your local church is a spiritual godly church, God will bear witness to it. And if it's not, you can come here for ages for conferences.

You won't be any better. Listen to me. Your church will not be any better than the CSI or the Salvation Army or even the Roman Catholic Church in your locality.

It will not be. Don't think that sitting here are the most spiritual people in India. I'm not under any such delusion.

Not at all. Just because you come here, just because the doctrines we preach are so wonderful. Do you think all of us have got light on souliness and spirituality? No.

Even after listening to this message, I believe some of you will still be interested in going that souliness way. It's like that. You have to make a choice.

And if you're an elder brother, you've got to make sure that your church is a church God approves of. Not a church I approve of, because you can fool me. Many people have fooled me.

But I always think of you know these check posts where they have a a bar. The car comes to the check post and we check everything. And I say, OK, approved.

Go. But the guy fooled me. But there's another check post up there where Jesus Christ is manning and he gets caught there.

I've seen elder brothers who fooled me, got past my check post, they got caught a little later by Jesus over there. And that's my comfort. Thank God, I'm not the last check post.

There's another one coming up in front. And anybody who fools me will get caught there. It's happened again and again and again.

Brothers who fooled me, told me lies. Elder brothers who fooled me, I let them go and they get caught over there a year later, two years later, five years later. You can't escape.

You cannot escape. Because there's another check post there where the person sitting there knows everything. His scan machine is perfect.

Mine is not so perfect. So, don't ever glory in the fact that certain brothers approve of you and you think you're spiritual. That's a cage.

It's a cage of denominationalism where you think a man's approval satisfies you. I believe many of us should be mourning that Lord, look at the condition of my life. Look at the condition of my church.

Is that the way you want a church to be? You know, that's how the Apostle Paul lived. See, for example, in 2 Corinthians chapter 12. 2 Corinthians chapter 12.

I want to ask you elder brothers whether you ever had feelings like this about your local church. 2 Corinthians chapter 12. Paul says in verse 20.

He's writing to the Corinthian Christians and he says, I'm afraid that when I come I may find you to be not what I wish. That means your spiritual condition is going to be so pathetic. And you may find me to be not what you wish.

I'm going to come to you with a rod because you're my children and you won't like that. But, I may discover in this church which I planted, Paul says, strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances. I say, Paul, are you talking about a nominal Christian church? Or a church you planted? No, he says, that's a church I planted.

Paul, a church you planted has got all these things there? Yeah, he says, what to do? I'm afraid that when I come there, my God will humble me, not humble you. Humble me and I have to, not you have to mourn. I have to mourn over many of you who have sinned and not repented of the impurity and immorality and sensuality that they have practiced.

Supposing I have a number of children studying in school and the teacher says, I'd like to see the parent. And I go and see the teacher and the teacher says, Mr. Poonen, your son or your daughter, whatever it is, is behaving very badly. He doesn't do his homework.

He's always fooling around, rebellious to the teachers and fooling around with the wrong company, doesn't, walks out of class before this class is over and causes a lot of problems here. Who's going to weep? Tell me. My son or me? Me! If ever that happens, I'm going to weep.

He's quite happy. He'll probably be playing marbles or something there. But I'm weeping.

That's exactly how Paul was. He was a father and he wept when God said, Paul, whatever children do you have? How have you brought them up? And Paul wept. God is my witness.

I have wept when I have seen the condition of some of my children, spiritual children, I mean. I want to ask you, elder brothers, have you wept when you have seen the condition of some of your spiritual children? No wonder things don't change. No wonder the anointing of God doesn't come upon your ministry.

You're in the cage of a denomination saying, Abraham is our father, Paul is our apostle, we are okay. Nothing is okay. It's a cage.

Get out of it. Your local church is your responsibility. And if you, and if the elder brother doesn't weep, then some of the godly brothers and sisters there must weep.

Like in Corinth, there was a guy living in immorality with his father's second wife. People were screaming away in tongues, tongues, tongues, tongues, tongues in every meeting. Absolute chaos.

They were not even sharing their food with each other when they had lunch together. If other guys sitting there would be hungry and this fellow would be gobbling up all the food that he had brought, not even sharing it with others. They were taking one another to court and the elder brothers were sitting there and conducting meetings.

Let's sing hymn number 431. What all is going on? And I don't know whether they had choirs in those days and lot of good music and all that, but look at the condition of that church. And none of the elders could do anything about it, but there was one, one godly family there.

Mr. and Mrs. Chloe. You read about them in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 11. They, maybe they met with the elder brothers and said, Brother, I mean look at the condition of the church.

Don't you think we should do something about it? No, we're okay. We were planted by Paul and we go regularly for the conferences that Paul organizes. We're okay.

We are in his good books. And Chloe was weeping. Lord, what's the use of being in Paul's good books when we are not in your good books? Paul doesn't even know what's going on here.

They finally said, we got to let Paul know what's going on here. And even if the elder brothers say you're backbiting, you're not backbiting when you write to an apostle or an older brother. Not at all.

It's the most sensible thing to do. They didn't criticize the elders. It's not their business.

The family of Chloe, 1 Corinthians 1 verse 11, wrote to Paul, Paul, dear brother, here are the list of things that's going on here. We prayed about it. We wept over it.

We can't do anything about it. Can you do something about it? Thank God for the family of Chloe. Because of them, we got 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians.

Have you been blessed by 1 Corinthians? 1 Corinthians 13 perhaps? Chapter on love? 2 Corinthians? If you have been blessed, when you get to heaven, those of you who get there, please go and thank Mr. Chloe and Mrs. Chloe for it. I'm going to do it. I'll go up to Brother Chloe and say thank you for what you did.

Because you wrote to Paul. We got two wonderful letters. And do you know the problem in Corinth was solved? The elders couldn't solve it.

But one godly family, they didn't criticize. They had a concern and a burden. Let me show you Ezekiel and chapter 9. It's a very important chapter.

Ezekiel chapter 9. If you find the condition of your local church is not what it should be. And you're not an elder brother. The first thing you need is stop gossiping and backbiting to all the people in the church.

God hates those who bring disunity among the brothers. Proverbs chapter 6 says that. I think it's verse 16 to 18 or so.

God hates those who sow disunity among the brothers in a local church. God hates them. And don't be one of those who God hates by going around sowing disunity in your local church.

First of all, have a genuine concern. Find out the facts accurately. Very important.

Don't just listen to gossip and spread it. And don't just listen to your wife. She may not be spiritual.

She may be just another gossip transmitter. But have this concern that you read in Ezekiel chapter 9. It says here. It's a picture of the glory of God departing from the church.

It says, I saw the glory of God verse 3 going out to the gate of the temple. It was leaving. God says, I'm quitting.

I've had enough of this. And the Lord said to Ezekiel, Lord said to this angel, go through the whole city and today God is saying, go through that particular local church. Your local church, wherever you're from.

There's no denomination. Your local church, wherever you're located, whichever place. God says, go through that church and put an invisible mark.

Put an invisible mark on the foreheads of all the men and women who are weeping and groaning because of all the sins that they see going on in that church. And the angel went looking for who all are weeping here. Not who all are gossiping and saying so and so is like this, so and so is like this.

That the world is full of. But who all are weeping and groaning in secret like Paul. Oh God, forgive me.

Look at the condition of our church Lord. Your name is being dishonored here. And the angel looks to put a mark.

And then the Lord said to others, now go through after this first angel and strike. Verse 5. Don't have pity on anybody. Don't spare anyone.

Slay the old men and the young men and the maidens and the little children. Anyone who doesn't have the mark. But if somebody has a mark who is groaning and weeping, don't touch him.

So the angel went to slay the people who didn't have a mark. And it says in the last part of 6. Verse 6. The elders were killed first. Because these elders were not groaning and weeping over the condition of their local church.

They gloried in the fact that Abraham is our father, Paul is our apostle. They were not weeping and groaning over the condition of their local church. They were glorying that we go to the conferences.

And then he said to them, defile the temple. Fill the courts with the slain. And thus they went out and struck down one after the other.

And as Ezekiel saw people falling, falling, falling. Oh Lord, you mean nobody is weeping about all this? One after the other. And the Lord said, the iniquity of the house of Israel is great.

My eye will not spare anybody. It's amazing. It says in the middle of verse 8. I alone was left.

Everybody was killed. It's a vision. The Lord was telling Ezekiel, you are the only person weeping over my name being dishonored.

All the others, they come there. They are elder brothers. They conduct the meetings, preach their long sermons.

Bore everybody and go away. They don't weep at home over the condition of their business. They keep busy with their business.

They have no time for the other things. Everything else is secondary. Business is primary.

Their job is primary. And where in the world can such people be elders in a church? But alas, that is the condition of a lot of Christendom today. And do you think the people who are paid pastors are any better? No.

They are also seeking their own. When can I get an increase in my salary? And which rich person can I hang around with to get a gift? Etc, etc, etc. Christendom has come to that stage.

I want to say, brothers and sisters, we are in a terrible stage in the world today. And a lot of the condition in many of our churches is not much better. How shall we solve it? If God can find people who qualify to get this mark, who groan and weep.

Lord, I don't want the glory that Abraham is my father or Paul is my apostle. I weep because things are not what they should be in this church. Whether you are an elder or not, God will listen to your prayers and do something and you'll get out of that cage.

And you can liberate people in your church and confound the devil. Let's go that way. And I want to be free, Lord, from denominationalism.

I want to build the body of Christ in my locality. Maybe only 10 people. Jesus had only 11 and He tried to build them together.

If you got more than 11, you got more people than Jesus had in His church. If you got more than 7, you got more than Noah had in His church. Let's build the church, the local body of Jesus Christ with the few people you have there.

Make them a functioning body where each person loves Jesus fervently and wants to live for God and seeks the kingdom of God first and don't glory that more and more people are coming in, third-rated, useless believers who just want to come to some place where they can sing a few songs and have a nice time and in some places have a Sunday meal and go home. That's not the church of Jesus Christ. We need to break free from all these ideas and say, Lord, we want to build a solid, local church like the church in Philadelphia, like the church in Smyrna that you came down and examined and said, I know your works, I approve of you.

I pray there'll be a passion for that in all of our hearts. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, help us, that's all we can say.

Please have mercy on us and help us to be in our localities, not part of a denomination or glorying in any stupid thing like that, but a local church that you can approve of, elder brothers in the local church whom you can approve of whose genuine passion is to glorify Christ by their life, by their family life, by their devotion to you and by their Father heart and concern and shepherding heart for the people in their flock. Raise up such men, we pray. Give us shepherds after your own heart in our churches, we pray.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

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