

Freedom From Legalism

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being free from legalism and living in the freedom and joy of the new covenant, where we are transparent and authentic in our relationships with God and others.

Duration: 1:01:45

Scripture: Matthew 23:3

Topics: "Legalism", "Holy Spirit"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the need to break free from legalism and embrace the true spirit of Christianity, which values people over rules. It highlights the danger of being trapped in a cage of strict regulations and the importance of adorning gifts and doctrines with a Christ-like life to draw others to God. The message calls for repentance, especially for leaders, to manifest the love and beauty of Jesus in their interactions and to focus on genuine transformation through the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

So, we continue our study titled as a sixfold freedom. And in our first study, we saw what it meant to be free from sin. That cage that the bird gets out of, the first cage is the cage of sin.

But that's not the only cage that we need to get out of. There is another cage called the law or legalism. And we need freedom from a legalistic attitude.

Freedom from the spirit of the law. We are not free from the law in the sense that we don't keep the law. Jesus kept the law more than anybody else in Israel ever did.

He kept it perfectly. But he didn't have a legalistic spirit. He was so different from these other people.

The man who kept the law perfectly did not have a legalistic spirit. And it's the same today. The holiest people on earth do not have a legalistic spirit.

It's unholy people who have a legalistic spirit. And very often, many preachers and teachers and pastors, the only way they can keep their congregation somewhat separated from the world is by making a lot of rules and regulations. They feel if they don't make these rules and regulations, all our congregation will all become worldly.

And then we will just become like any other worldly rotten church. Of course, there are some pastors who don't mind that. They are quite happy with the worldly rotten church.

But some others desire holiness, and the only way of holiness that they know is the old covenant way. Thou shalt not do this, thou shalt not do this, thou shalt do this, and thou shalt do this. And they've got lots of rules and regulations like the law of Moses.

And it does bring an improvement. Do you know that the nation of Israel was the best people on the earth morally? They have the highest moral standards, not because of the Holy Spirit, not because of the grace of God, but because they have certain rules which the other nations didn't have. So if you build a church with a lot of rules, definitely your church will be better than other churches, but it'll be just as dead.

Spiritually. It'll just look nice on the outside. That's all.

And that is what I mean by being free from a legalistic spirit. Jesus was so determined to get to the root of the problem. He wasn't interested in superficial holiness.

A holiness which is an illusion. You imagine that you're holy when you're not really holy. You imagine that you're clothed with the righteousness of Christ and you're very holy when you're not really holy.

It's a great deception. It's like the story of the emperor's new clothes. If you read that, the children's story where the tailors tried to fool the emperor by making him wear nothing and make him feel that he was wearing grand clothes.

It was a deception. A lot of Christians are living in that type of deception. Whereas genuine holiness is a holiness that's visible in our life, but it doesn't have a legalistic spirit.

So if you want to be genuinely holy, you got to not only be free from sin, but in your freedom from sin, you got to be free from this legalistic spirit. That's why Romans 6 deals with sin shall not rule over you. Romans 6.14. And then you go into Romans 7, which speaks about being free from the law.

That is the next step. That's the other cage. Some people can be free from certain sinful habits, but then they're living inside this cage of legalism and their attitude to other people.

And that's the second cage we need to get off. And a lot of religious teachers don't understand it. And so they lead a lot of people astray.

I was just reading a little while ago, Jeremiah chapter 8. Jeremiah chapter 8 and verses 8 to 10. Jeremiah chapter 8, verse 8 to 10. I'm reading it in the Message Translation.

You say we are the proud owners of God's revelation. But look where this revelation has gotten you. Stuck in an illusion that you're holy when you're not.

Your religion experts, your teachers have taken you for a ride. That means they have fooled you. You think you know it all.

But look at them. They know everything but God's Word. And verse 10.

Everyone is after money. Prophets and priests and all the people in between. They twist my words and doctor the truth.

That is the condition of Christendom today. Twist God's Word to make it fit whatever appeals to them. Now, Paul was the great preacher who tried to deliver people from a legalistic attitude.

He was a great legalist himself once upon a time. And it's the ones who have been legalists who understand how wretched that pit is. I know I've been a legalist.

And I understand what a wretched pit it is. And I can understand that Paul understood it much better than Peter. What a pit legalism was.

And so he was determined to deliver people from it. So in this connection, I want to read 2nd Corinthians in chapter 3. 2nd Corinthians chapter 3 and chapter 4 are wonderful chapters where he compares this old covenant legalistic spirit with the new covenant spirit of freedom. You know, this is the place where we have this great verse.

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, verse 17. There is liberty. Liberty from this legalistic attitude.

That is the subject here. He's not dealing with freedom from sin here in these chapters. He's talking about this cage of legalism from which the Holy Spirit breaks open the door and says, come on, fly out of here.

Don't sit in here. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. So he's comparing that old covenant government with the new covenant government.

We can look, government is a better word that we understand today rather than ministry. So let me read this from 2nd Corinthians chapter 3 and verse 7. I want to read a fairly large section of Scripture from the message Bible and I want you to listen to me. This government of death.

That was the Old Testament. It's called the government of death. A legalistic attitude will make you live under the government of death.

If you're a legalistic preacher, you're going to bring death into your congregation. This government of death with its Constitution chiseled on stone tablets had a dazzling inaugural. Moses' face as he delivered the tablets was so bright that day, even though after a little while that glory faded away that the people of Israel could not even look at him any more than they could look at the sun.

If that was the case with the government of death, can you imagine how much more dazzlingly bright the government of the living Holy Spirit will be? He's comparing. He says that Moses' face could shine like that with the law. Can you imagine what we should be like with grace? If the government of condemnation, that's the Old Covenant, was impressive, how about this government of affirmation? Even though that old government looked very bright to those Israelites, it is pretty dull compared to this new government.

Okay, he goes on to say, verse 13, unlike Moses, we've got nothing to hide. Moses had something to hide, his face. Now we think that Moses was hiding his face because he didn't want people to see this bright light.

That was one reason. But here it tells us another reason that he was hiding it because underneath the veil, the glory was slowly fading away and going away. Why is it we want to hide certain areas of our life? Because underneath that, there is no glory.

Why is it you want to hide your home life behind a veil? Because it's not what you give everybody the impression that it is like. And so we hide certain areas of our life with a veil because there's a glory there

that's fading away. That's what it says here.

But we've got nothing to hide in the New Covenant. This is the wonderful thing about the New Covenant is, I don't have to hide my home life. I don't have to hide my financial transactions.

I don't have to hide any area of my life. I say, I wish you could come into my thought life and see what's going on there. This is the wonderful thing of the New Covenant.

If you've got something to hide, that's the Old Covenant, that's Moses. And occasionally, Sunday morning, lift the veil and look at it and then back again. Is that your life, my brother, sister? Is that the life you've been living for so many years? Areas of your life that you have to hide underneath a veil? It's because you're a legalist.

You didn't know it. It's good to know it now. A legalist is one who concentrates on the outer life.

It's what Jesus said. The outside of the cup, polish it up very nicely. Make it look really nice.

And when people say, boy, what a humble brother you are. You glory in that. And it's all rotten inside the cup.

And it doesn't bring you shame and sorrow and weeping. You just glory in the empty praises of people appreciating the outside of the cup. When they say, oh brother, you've got a wonderful church.

And you get proud of that. Oh boy, what an elder I am. And you don't know all the maggots and the disease inside that cup, which God sees and you see, but you hide it.

If you have to hide anything, you're in the old covenant. He says, in the new covenant, we have to hide nothing. It's all open.

We've got nothing to hide, unlike Moses. Everything is in the open with us. He wore a veil, so that the children of Israel would not notice that the glory was fading away underneath that veil.

And they did not notice it, because it was very cleverly hidden. Just like people don't notice what's happening behind the veil in your life. And they did not notice it then, that this old covenant life has got a glory that's fading away.

And the sad thing is, they don't even notice it now. A lot of Christians like that. This legalistic life has got a glory which is fading away.

They don't even notice it now. That there's nothing finally left behind that veil. It's all empty and dark.

So, only Christ can get rid of that veil. And when you get rid of that veil, they can see there's nothing there. That's great.

When you see there's nothing there, then you can turn to God. And then when you see there's nothing there in that old covenant life, the life of rules and regulations, all hollow and empty. You try to build a church with rules and regulations, don't do this, don't do the other thing.

And you think you've got a pretty good church. And then you see inside it's all rotten, people fighting, quarreling, all types of filthy sins underneath. These sisters who don't wear ornaments and who cover their heads and wear white saris.

And all the gossiping and backbiting and unsubmitive attitude to their husbands. That inside of the cup is filthy. The outside is so holy.

Get rid of that veil. And when you see there's nothing there, they can turn to face God. And when they turn to face God, God removes the veil and you see face to face and His glory shines upon you.

That's the picture He's using of the new covenant life. And suddenly they recognize when they come into God's presence that God is a living personal presence and not a bunch of rules chiseled on stone or printed in a book. God's not a bunch of rules printed in a book.

He's a living personal vibrant presence. Have you tasted God like that? That's true Christianity. And when God is personally present as a living Holy Spirit in your life, in your family life, in your church life, then that old constricting bunch of rules and regulations can be thrown away because it's obsolete.

We are free from that. Nothing between us and God. And our faces shine, our hearts shine with the brightness of His face shining upon us, a loving father who's looking down upon a child.

A child who's got a lot to learn, a child who's still struggling to learn how to walk, but one who is the delight of his father. This is new covenant life. And so we are gradually transfigured into the likeness of Christ.

Our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God begins to enter different areas of our life and we become like Him. This is New Testament life. I wish you could see the excitement of this.

I mean, it thrills me when I think of that old life of rules and regulations and you must do this and you must do that. It all goes away when you're dealing with God. God Himself.

I believe very few Christians have understood this type of life. I think many of you haven't understood it. So much of the old covenant still clings to us.

And so He goes on in chapter 4 to say, since God has so generously allowed us to know what He is doing. I mean, that is a great thing that God's allowed us to know this new covenant of what He's doing. We're not going to throw up our hands and get discouraged just because we run into some difficult times occasionally.

And all of us do that in our place of work, in our home, there are difficult times. We're not going to give up because God has shown us what He's doing with us. We refuse to wear masks.

God, great. We refuse to wear masks and we refuse to play games. Christianity is not a game.

And we don't have to wear any masks. God accepted me just as I am with all my warts and all the peculiarities and idiosyncrasies and things that are wrong in my life. He's changing me and I can accept you just as you are.

You don't have to pretend to be holier than you are. Just be yourself and we'll get along fine. Because that's how God accepted me.

That's the wonder of new covenant life and new covenant fellowship. You don't have to strain, at least with me, brothers and sisters, you don't have to strain to try and act spiritually. Then it becomes difficult, fellowship.

Just be yourself and we'll have wonderful fellowship. We're not content with ourselves. I'm not content with myself.

I hope you're not content with yourself. God is changing us. Little by little.

Like we've often said, you know that board we see in some places, in some buildings that are being repaired. The inconvenience is regretted. We are being renovated to serve you better.

I'm carrying that board around with me all the time. My inconvenience to you is regretted. Renovation is going on.

I'm being renovated to serve you better. And one day you'll see this polished, perfect building. Please be patient.

And I see that board in you also. Don't imagine that you're not perfect. You're being renovated too.

I can see that board and that's why I'm willing to bear with the inconvenience as you bear with mine. It's wonderful. So we don't give up.

This is new covenant life. We're not living on a bunch of rules and regulations. We're happy.

We're happy all the time. And we don't play games. We refuse to wear masks.

We don't manipulate things behind the scenes. We don't maneuver and try to fool people. We don't twist God's word to suit ourselves.

2 Corinthians 4.2 Rather we keep everything out in the open. Everything we do and everything we say is right out in the open. The whole truth is on display.

There's nothing to hide. So those who want to seek can see and judge for themselves in the presence of God. And if our message, verse 3, is obscure to somebody, that means they can't understand it.

It's not because we are trying to hide something. It's because these people are going the wrong way. And they're not paying attention to what we're saying.

They're following the devil. They're not realizing it. If they wanted to follow the Lord, they would understand what we're saying very quickly.

But you know all of us have got a prejudiced mind. We're born in a certain church tradition. And we think certain things are important because of our inherited culture and our church tradition.

And that sometimes becomes more important than God's word. And that's what brings us into a lot of bondage. See, you can look at a person and pass a judgment on that person just by the way the person is dressed.

You know, I'll never forget that beautiful story I heard in one of David Wilkerson's tapes where he said when he was a young preacher in his 20s, this is early in the 1960s when he was preaching in California to a bunch of hippies who were converted. Hippies were the people who had long hair and didn't wear shoes and just wore a vest and very casual in their life, in their dress style and all. But they were born again, a number of them.

And they didn't change their dress when they were born again. And David Wilkerson came with a suit and tie and preached in the first message to all these people dressed up like this with long hair and all that. And he told them, please dress properly when you come into the presence of God for the next meeting.

And some of the elders of the hippies, that church, came up to David Wilkerson afterwards. I mean, David Wilkerson himself tells the story. And they wept.

They were not weeping for themselves. They were weeping for David Wilkerson, the preacher. They were saying, Brother Wilkerson, we're sorry.

We did not see Jesus in you today, in your message. Your suit was hiding Jesus. It's a lovely way they put it.

Your dress was hiding Jesus. We couldn't see Jesus. It was only your dress.

And our dress was different. And David Wilkerson says, God really spoke to my heart. Those brothers spoke the prophetic word to him.

And he decided he would never judge. They were more godly than him. Even though he was in a suit and tie and they were with beads and no shuffles and no slippers and funny type of dresses and all that.

They were holier than him. Can you believe that? Can you believe a man who is dressed like that can be holier than you? Even today? Is it possible? I think some of you can never believe such a person can be holy. Even if you hear me preach that a thousand times you say, no, no, no.

That's because brother Zach is becoming very liberal nowadays. Say what you like. I believe that holiness is a matter of the heart.

I know it may change some of our outward behavior and dress and conduct and all, but that takes time. That's I say what I say. I don't expect a person to suddenly change like other people do.

I don't expect as soon as a child has joined kindergarten he must know multiplication, square root, division, calculus, everything. I'm just not so stupid. That's all.

I say it'll take him 12 years to learn calculus and I can wait. Some people can't wait. Oh, you're born again? You must know this, this, this.

What I learned in 30 years you must learn in one year. Do you know there are multitudes of stupid idiotic believers like that in the church today who expect another person to know in one year what they have learned in 30 years. Have you ever heard of anything more stupid in the world? Even the education people don't, worldly people themselves don't have that stupidity.

It's found in the church. Somebody else must have the light I got in 15 years within one year. I was also stupid like that but I've got out of that stupidity.

And I've learned to obey what Jesus said in John 7 24 Do not judge according to the outward appearance. A command which multitudes of holy Christians never, never obey. They disobey directly.

Jesus says don't judge according to the outward appearance. They say Lord, I will judge according to the outward appearance. Who are you to tell me not to judge according to the outward appearance? You

know there are multitudes of you sitting here who all the time are judging other people according to their outward appearance.

As soon as you see a sister you're checking whether she's got earrings and chain and all that. Do you think you'll be spiritual in a hundred years? Not in a hundred years! You can try. You'll come back a hundred years later to this conference if you live till then you won't be spiritual.

Till you learn to obey the word of God. Do not judge according to the outward appearance. John 7 24 But judge righteously.

1 Samuel 16 verse 7. Man looks on the outward appearance, God looks at the heart. That's it. So all that they have eyes for as in 2 Corinthians 4 verse 4 is for the fashionable God of darkness.

They think that he can give them what they want and so they don't understand the truth. Then he goes on to say our life started in verse 6 when God said light up the darkness and our lives filled up with light as we saw and understood God in the face of Christ not in a bunch of rules and regulations in the face of Jesus bright and beautiful and then he says if you only look at us you might miss that brightness because we are carrying this precious Lord and message in a clay pot which doesn't look very beautiful and the reason why God leaves it in a clay pot is so that people don't confuse God with us. We'll always be clay pots so that God's power is not confused with my weakness.

It's good that everybody sees me as a human being. My brothers and sisters, you know one of the marks of religious people. I don't mean spiritual people.

Religious people is they always try to pretend that they are not human beings. They act as if they are not interested in talking about where I can buy a cheap shirt. No, no.

We don't talk about such things. We only talk about Hebrews and Philipians and things like that. They act as if they are not human beings.

I tell you honestly, I'd like to know where I can buy a cheap shirt because I don't want to spend so much money. I mean I can also study Hebrews and Philipians but I'd like to know that too. I'm a human being.

But religious people always pretend in secret of course they are always trying to find out a lot of things about earth but they don't want you to know about it. They got this veil, you know, where they got to hide a lot of things. Hypocrites! Why not admit we are clay pots? We are not interested in the world but we got to live in the world.

So I don't mind talking about earthly things. It's not the people who always talk about the Bible who are the most spiritual. The Pharisees always spoke about the Bible.

They were not the most spiritual people at all. Jesus could talk about so many other things. He observed the birds.

He observed the flowers. He observed so many things which religious people just don't observe. So, He says we are in this earthen vessel and the power of God is manifested through us.

And we are not going to keep quiet on this verse 13. No. The Psalmist said, I believe so I said it.

We also believe and we are going to speak. You know, this is God's way. True Christianity is not being religious.

And we need to understand this very clearly. Jesus one of His greatest His greatest conflict throughout His earthly ministry was against religious people. You know that.

Always His battle was with religious people. They were always picking on Him. Saying, you're not keeping this rule.

Your disciples are not keeping that rule. They were always saying this rule, that rule. Here it says you must do this.

Here it says you must do that. Why aren't you doing this? And there are Christians like that today. They've always got a verse to quote to somebody.

Jesus wasn't going around quoting verses to people. Saying, why aren't you keeping this? Why aren't you keeping that? Why aren't you keeping the other thing? He just manifested the glory of God full of grace and truth. And people were drawn to Him.

How many of people are drawn to you when you quote all these verses? Pulling out your verses to people. You ask yourself my brother, sister. Some of you have been believers for many, many years.

You've understood truths for many, many years. How many people have you drawn to Christ by your life and by your witness in your town? You have known truths for so many years. And you've lived in that town.

How many people? Has God placed you there to attract nobody to Christ? Is it God's will that you live in a town for 20 years and you don't even attract one person to Christ? Oh boy! I would repent in dust and ashes if my life were like that. I want to tell you in Jesus name, God does not want you to live like that. At least not from now onwards.

And you're not going to attract them to Christ with all your rules and regulations. You're not going to attract them with your holy dress and all that. You're going to attract them with the beauty of Jesus Christ in your life.

You think of that man who was walking from Jerusalem to Jericho, beaten up by robbers, lying down there, half dead. And two denominational people go by going to their meeting. The priest going to his meeting, he doesn't want to be late for the meeting, ignores this fellow.

And the Levite carrying his Bible and going to his meeting ignores this fellow. They've got all their rules and regulations and this good Samaritan comes. He belongs to the most useless denomination.

And he picks him up, cares for him, pays for him. Now when that fellow recovered to his health, tell me which denomination do you think he'll join? Can you tell me? You think he'll go and join that Levite's denomination? You think he'll go and join that priest's denomination? No! Even if the Samaritan denomination has got a few doctrines wrong, he'll go there. Jesus said that's the man who showed love to his neighbor.

He didn't preach to him. He showed him the beauty of Christ. You know, that's the reason why more people are not being drawn through your life.

You've got all your strict standards, great! But there are standards like the standards of the Pharisees. Jesus had much higher standards. But his standards was love.

Love is the opposite of law. Please remember this. Love is the opposite of law.

The Pharisees had law. Jesus had love. And sinful women, sinful men were drawn to Jesus.

Love did not mean he lowered the standards. His standards were much higher than the Pharisees. But it was not this legalistic searching to see what type of person you are and making that person feel small with your so called holiness.

You know, I tell you there are some churches like that. You walk in there and you're a sinner and you immediately feel very uncomfortable because they make you feel uncomfortable because they say you're not sort of fit enough to be here and you're very relieved when they finally go and join some other church. Why in the world should God add anybody to your church like that? And there are some places where the numbers are increasing more and more.

And people are very happy. Oh, our church is growing. We were only so many.

Now we are so many. But what type of people? What type of people? People who fight and quarrel at home are coming to your church? That shows what your church is like. Birds of a feather flock together.

People who quarrel in their homes come to your church and your church has suddenly become double its size. Are you proud of that? You should be hanging your head in shame. Okay.

So, as I was saying, it's the radiance of Christ in our life that's going to draw other people to Him. The old covenant religion is a religion of laws and rules and regulations where I dress like this, I do like this, and I do like this. And the beauty of Christ is not reflected in my behavior or conduct or my generosity or helpfulness or anything.

And people are not drawn. And instead of repenting, we can turn around and say, Oh well, these people are not interested in godliness. They're interested in godliness but they're not interested in your version of godliness.

That's the problem. So I believe there's a great need for us to repent of a lot of legalism. Cages that we're sitting in when Jesus wants to set us free.

As I said, you know, the Pharisees were always getting into arguments with Jesus about, why aren't you doing this? Why aren't you doing that? And on the outside, it looked as if, like they say, I've become more liberal, that Jesus also was becoming more liberal than Moses. That's what they were saying. Moses had these standards but this Jesus is a backslider.

He's not holding up to these standards. I'll tell you, for example, do you know in the book of Numbers, I think it's chapter 15 and verse 32 or somewhere, where it says that they caught a man who was picking sticks. Numbers 15, 32.

And they took him before God and said, what should we do? This fellow was picking sticks on the sabbath day. Just picking sticks. He didn't light a fire.

He was just picking sticks to light a fire the next day. And God said, kill him! And Moses said, get him out here, this fellow who picked sticks on the sabbath day. Kill him! Because he violated the sabbath.

What about Jesus telling a man to carry his bed on the sabbath and walk? The Pharisees said, if a man was killed for picking sticks, who is this new preacher coming along saying you can carry your bed on the sabbath day? He's a backslider. He's a heretic. He's not preaching the standards of Moses.

You think Jesus was less holy than Moses? I'll take another example. In the book of Deuteronomy in chapter 23, you've heard me say this before. Verse 28.

Deuteronomy 23, 28. Sorry, not Deuteronomy 23, 28. It's yeah.

23 and verse 18. You shall not bring the hire of a harlot into the house of God. You shall not bring the hire of a harlot into the house of God.

In other words, a prostitute must not bring her tithe to the temple and saying 10% Lord, here's 10% of what I earned last month. No! That is an abomination to God. One day, a prostitute took not her tithe, but all her life savings and bought a vessel of perfume.

You know how expensive perfume is. And poured it at the feet of Jesus in Luke chapter 7. And the Pharisee who knew Deuteronomy 23 said, I thought this was a prophet. Now I know he's not a prophet.

Because he's accepting it. What the Old Testament law said, you should not accept. He's not a prophet.

He should have known what type of woman this is. It looked as if Jesus was breaking certain rules. You know the difference between Jesus and the Pharisees and it's important to know that because that's the difference today between a spiritual Christian and a religious legalistic Christian.

Jesus valued people more than rules. The Pharisees valued rules more than people. I have seen that in our churches.

We have elder brothers in our churches who value rules more than people. And there are other elders, godly elders who value people more than rules. So among our own elder brothers, we have Pharisees and we have Christ-like elders.

And the test is always this. Are rules more important to you or people? And you don't have to be an elder brother. You can be a sister or a brother.

Ask yourself, what is more important to you? Rules or people? Jesus said, God did not create man for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath for man. You know that verse. What was He meaning? He was saying God didn't have His Sabbath on the 6th day and said, hey, we got to create somebody to keep the Sabbath.

The 7th day He makes a man. Okay, now we made a man to keep the Sabbath. Is that what He did? No! He made man first and then said, we'd like to give this man a little enjoyment and rest first of all.

Let him have a Sabbath day of rest. What type of rule was that? The rule was like you join a company and the company says, hey, we'd like you to go for one month paid vacation before you start working. Is that a bad rule? Who wouldn't like to work for a company which as soon as you join it, they say start off with one month paid vacation and then come back.

That's exactly what the Lord told Adam. Listen, all that work in the garden, that can wait till tomorrow. Let's have a holiday today.

Let's go for a picnic. Great. Adam says, is this what God is like? Boy, I'd like to be with Him forever.

I'd like to serve Him forever. And I've discovered that God is like that. That's why I serve Him.

That's why I enjoy serving Him. If I'm 90 years old, I'll enjoy serving Him. I never get tired of serving God because He's such a wonderful person.

He's not a boring person. Not at all. Don't listen to these boring preachers and think that God is like that.

He's not like that at all. They don't know Him. That's why.

God's the most interesting person in the whole universe. Life is like a picnic all the time. Every day, living with Him.

He's not a person with rules and regulations. Hey, you didn't do this. You didn't do that.

You didn't dress properly. You didn't do this, that, and the other. No! He's not like that.

He's the most enjoyable person. He never scolds. He never criticizes.

If I do something wrong, He'll correct me and help me to do it right. Make me a better person. But He's not like all these Pharisees and these religious leaders who are always looking at you to see whether you've done everything right.

Oh, what a life it is to be free from that. Jesus broke those rules because He valued people. He said, listen, every rule that God gave was to help man and bless him.

He didn't make the rules and then make man to keep it. That's what you guys have got all wrong. Many people try to build a church like that.

Okay, the church, we've got all these rules. Now let's get some people to follow those rules. Make a list of the rules.

Hey, will you sign all this? Okay, you can join our church. Next fellow, you can't sign this, go find some other church. We've got these rules.

If you can sign it, you can be a member of our church. If you can't sign it, you can't be a member of our church. These are the Pharisees of today.

And we've got them in our midst. We don't have a written list of rules, but an unwritten list of rules, which is worse than a written list of rules. I tell you, I get sick and tired, just like Jesus got sick and tired of these Pharisees.

I want to share with you from Matthew 23 the how Jesus felt about these Pharisees. Just listen to this. Listen to this.

You know, God's law was supposed to be like a feast. Have you been to a really grand wedding feast? I mean a really grand one, where you had such a variety of dishes and everything. And you said, boy, that's

fantastic.

I'd like to go for a wedding like that. Do you know that God's law was supposed to be like that? An enjoyable feast. But instead of that, it says here, I'm reading this from the Living Bible in Matthew chapter 23 and verse 3 and verse 4. Instead of this is from the Message Translation.

Instead of giving you God's law as food and drink by which you can banquet on God, they have packaged it all up into bundles of rules loading you all down like a bunch of pack animals. Like donkeys. Instead of coming for a feast on Sunday morning where you're having a fantastic feast of all types of variety of Chinese dishes and North Indian and South Indian and everything there.

Instead of Sunday morning being like that. Sunday morning meetings are like a bunch of rules and a bunch of donkeys sitting there. Come on, carry this.

Ah, you're not carrying it. Whip them. Come on, hurry up.

This is what's happening in a lot of churches. No wonder people don't want to join that church. I will not want to join such a church.

I want to join a church where they have chicken biryani, spiritually speaking. Every day. And variety of other dishes too.

And where I'm not forced to eat what I don't want to eat. I mean, what type of wedding would that be? Come on, you've got to eat everything here. Thank God.

God's not like that. He spreads it out and says, enjoy yourself. I tell you, this is how the church is supposed to be.

A feast all the time. I want to be in a church like that where Christianity is a feast. I believe people will want to come to such a church.

That's how a church should be. Good food. Healthy food.

And instead of that, they load you down like a pack of animals and they seem to take pleasure in watching you stagger under those loads and they won't even lift one finger to help you. I can imagine how Jesus got mad with these Pharisees. Their lives are perpetual fashion shows.

Embroidered prayer shawls one day and flowery prayers the next day. Hypocrites. They love to sit at the head table as elders.

They love to sit in the elders meetings as elders at the head table. We got a lot of them. I tell you, anybody who loves to be an elder and who loves to come to an elders meeting is a fraud, a hypocrite, and a humbug.

Anyone who loves to be an elder, wants to be an elder, he's a fraud and a hypocrite and a humbug. And we've got some like that in our midst. And that's why things are going so slowly in some of our churches.

We need to repent. Just like here, they love to sit in the head table at church dinners, basking in the most prominent positions, and rejoicing in the radiance of public flattery, receiving honorary degrees, getting called doctor and reverend. I'm reading here, message translation.

It's not me. You heard me say that for 20 years and they finally put it in this translation. Don't let people do that to you.

That's what he says. Don't let people do that to you. Don't let them put you on a pedestal like that.

You all have only one teacher and you're all classmates. Great. You believe you're all classmates? Maybe I've been sitting in the class a little longer than you, but I'm a classmate.

You all have one teacher and you're all classmates. So blessed is that elder brother who sees himself as a classmate of that junior brother sitting in the classroom with that one teacher teaching on Sunday morning. That's how I want to be all my days.

I preached messages on Sunday morning. At the end of it, the Lord said, that was for you. I mean, I spoke through you, but that was for you.

You're also sitting in the class. I said, Lord, that's true. That's for me.

You have one teacher and you're all classmates. Don't set people up as experts over your life. Letting them tell you what you should do.

Save that authority only for God. Let Him tell you what to do. Can any of you sitting here tell me that in the last 30 years, I have ever told any of you what to do? Never.

Not even one of you. I have given you my advice. I've given you my suggestions and I've always said, take it to the Lord.

Do what the Lord tells you to do. You elder brothers, many of you who lord it over the people in your church. Expect them to just sit under your thumb.

You ask me, tell me, how many times have I asked you to do that? Never. I know God. Unfortunately, you don't.

That's why you try to put people under your thumb and make them do what you want them to do. Tell them what to do and get offended when they don't submit to your wretched authority. You haven't understood Christ at all.

No, I have to tell you straight. You tell me. Tell me to my face if I've ever told any of you elder brothers what you should do.

I leave you to yourselves. I have confidence in you. And your church may have been a better church if you had been more Christ-like to the people in your church rather than be a pharisaical leader who loves a prominent position.

And that's why the Lord calls you a humbug and a fraud. That's what he says here. No one should carry the title of father.

You have only one father. And he's in heaven. And don't let people maneuver you.

Listen to this. This is a word for elder brothers. Don't let the people in your church maneuver you into taking charge of them.

I know a lot of people have tried to maneuver me into taking charge of them. Brother, tell me what to do. I say, sorry.

I'm not going to take charge of you. You'll never be able to maneuver me to take charge of you. I remember in the Navy we were taught as he grew up to take independent decisions and he was told the story of a British admiral who wanted to teach his cap the commanders of the ship under him how to take independent decisions.

So one day in an exercise for war one of the commanders sent a signal to the admiral, sir shall I turn my ship left or right? And he replied, yes. So he sent another signal yes to turn left or yes to turn right. The reply was, no.

You got the message? Don't keep asking me for everything. Take a step. How will you learn if you don't take that step? And he goes on to say there is only one leader for all of them.

That's Christ and that's not you. I praise God for that. I'm not a leader for anybody.

I'm an advisor. Christ is your leader. Only Christ.

He alone is your leader. Don't ever forget that. Do you want to stand out as a leader? Then step down.

Be a servant. If you puff yourself up you'll get the wind knocked out of you. But if you're happy to be just yourself life will count for plenty for you.

Then he says to the Pharisees, I'm sick and tired of you. I've had it with you people. You're hopeless.

You're religion scholars. You're Pharisees. Frauds.

Your lives are roadblocks to God's kingdom. You don't let anybody you don't enter yourself and you don't let anybody else enter. Let me ask you straight.

How many people have entered God's kingdom through you? How many people have entered God's kingdom through you in the last 10 years? How many people have come closer to God through you in the last 10 years? Can you count one somewhere who came closer to God because of you? My brothers and sisters I'm not trying to condemn you. I want to say probably because you're so religious and not Christ-like. And every conference just makes you more religious and stern instead of radiant with the beauty of Jesus Christ.

Let's repent and get rid of this legalism that's given us such long faces and strict rules that nobody ever gets into God's kingdom. I mean I'm preparing you for the judgment seat of Christ so that you don't have any regrets there. Follow the word now and you won't have any regrets when you stand at the judgment seat of Christ.

Say, Lord there must be something wrong with me. I'm not drawing people to Christ by my life. I'm just preaching rules.

God have mercy on us. He says there you go halfway around the world to make a convert and once you get him, you make him into a replica of yourselves. Double damned.

You're hopeless. What arrogant stupidity. And he goes on to say a number of things.

You keep such accounts of your typing further down. Verse 23 But you don't, you're not interested in things like fairness and compassion. You religion scholars, you're hopeless.

Verse 25 You shine the surface of your cups and bowls so that they look sparkle but the inside is all full of maggots. Clean the inside, he says. And you know the rest of that.

Jesus detested people who lived by rules and regulations even though their external life looked so nice. Do you know what we need? We need the fullness of the Holy Spirit that makes our lives beautiful. I remember when God baptized me in the Holy Spirit and I was all confused because I didn't know whether this was really from God whether the gift of tongues was something I had manufactured or whether God had given it to me.

And the next day I read in Matthew chapter one the angel speaking to Joseph and saying, don't be afraid this is of the Holy Spirit. It's the Holy Spirit that's come upon Mary. And God gave me a whole message through that that my experience was of the Holy Spirit.

30 years ago in January 1975 when I was at rock bottom, total failure ready to give up my ministry ready to stop preaching ready to utterly defeat it. God met with me and turned my life around and it's never been the same since. That's why I believe in the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

That's why I know the whole answer to the Christian life is not rules and regulations. I'm sorry that after I had that experience I did get deviated into legalism for a while but thank God I came out of it. And I'm out of it free now.

But at that time the Lord said to me that just like the Spirit had come upon Mary to produce Jesus in her the Spirit had come upon me to produce Jesus in me. Boy. And the Lord said that many of the gifts of the Holy Spirit had been so counterfeited in the world.

It's what the Lord said to me in 75 January had been so counterfeited that a lot of people were losing faith in the genuine gifts of the Holy Spirit. Like speaking in tongues and prophecy. And the Lord said to me and I'll never forget it.

The Lord said take this gift and adorn it with a Christ like life so that people will once again begin to have faith in the genuine gifts of the Spirit. Dear brothers and sisters, it may not be gifts of the Spirit. It may be New Testament pattern, church.

Why aren't people having more faith in that? Because this doctrine we are preaching this pattern we are preaching of New Testament church is not being adorned with a Christ like life. It's being adorned with rules and regulations. And we need to turn away from that.

We need to get out of that cage that that bird flew out of. Lord I've had enough of sitting in this cage of rules and regulations. I want to get out into the free air of God's Holy Spirit.

Where love characterizes my life. Where I value people more than rules. And if somebody is violating some small little rule, I can be merciful.

And I can be kind. And manifest the life of Christ to that person and not make that person feel rejected. Even if that is a woman like the Samaritan woman who has been divorced five times.

And is today living with a man who is not her husband. That I can show the love of Christ to such a person like Jesus did show the father to such a person. That is Christianity.

May God help us to get out of our little caves and our little cages. And repent deeply, especially leaders and elders. Repent of the fact that you've not manifested Christ and the love of Christ and the beauty of Jesus in your relationship to people and the way you speak to people.

Think of the abrasive way you speak to people. That's not Christ. Repent of it.

You don't speak to your wife like that. Why do you speak to other brothers like that? I want to ask all of you elder brothers. Do you speak to your wife the way you speak to other younger brothers? How gentle you are when you talk to your wife.

Why are you so rude to some younger brothers? You don't care for them. You care for your wife. You want fellowship with your wife.

But you don't want fellowship with that younger brother. God have mercy on us. There's a tremendous amount of repentance needed if we are to become free of legalism.

Let's pray.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/17/SID17137.mp3>

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/kL5nH0u1aqc.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/freedom-from-legalism/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net