

God's Dwelling Place - 3rd Floor, a Powerful Church

by Zac Poonen

To build the church of Jesus Christ, we need to focus on making disciples, not just converts, and to put Jesus first above everything else.

Duration: 1:01:45

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:17-18, Luke 14:25

Topics: "Church"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the concept of God's dwelling place and how it relates to building the church. The foundation of God's dwelling place is His perfect love for us. The first floor represents our personal walk with the Lord, ensuring that our hearts are clean and pure. The second floor represents a godly home, which serves as a training ground for building the church. The speaker emphasizes the importance of discipleship and fulfilling the conditions of discipleship in order to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ. The sermon also touches on the Great Commission and the importance of making disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey God's word. The speaker encourages personal evangelism and emphasizes the need to do everything for the glory of God, rather than seeking recognition or praise from others.

Transcript

So we come to our concluding session on the subject of God's dwelling place, to review what we have already covered. We started with the foundation, that is, God's perfect love for us. We have to begin there.

And we moved on from there to build the first floor, which was our personal walk with the Lord, a clean heart, so that the rivers of living water don't get polluted as they flow through the human channel. And then we saw the second floor, which was a godly home, which is the training ground for building the church, which is a larger home. God trains us in a small family to build a bigger family.

And when we come to building the church, we must think of the church as a family, a new family that God has given us. Now, to a lot of people, unfortunately, that is not true. And that's why they never experience the true joy of church life.

Church is an institution to many people. It's like a club to other people. You know the difference between a club and a family.

A club is a place where you come and meet friends and have a good time together. But it's not family. Family is different.

To a lot of other people, church is like a big institution where you come and listen to a lecture, pay your fees and go home. None of these is the church that Jesus intended. The Bible speaks of the church as the body of Christ, as the family of God.

When we are born, we are born into, think of two trees. One tree is called Adam, in Adam, the other is called in Christ. We are all born into Adam initially.

And some of us get plucked out from that tree and transplanted into this tree. Now we are not in Adam, we are in Christ. And our connection in Adam is completely cut off.

And if we have really become disciples, our union with this tree is going to be very firm. And not only with this tree, but with all the other branches in this tree. Which means the other disciples.

Now unfortunately through the years, the message of discipleship has gradually disappeared from Christian preaching. The emphasis for many years and even today has been on accepting Christ so that you don't go to hell. Whereas even though Jesus did say, we must go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

And he who believes and is baptized will be saved and he who believes not will be condemned. He also said in another place, this is Mark 16 which I just quoted. In Matthew 28 he said, when you go into all nations, make disciples.

So there are two sides to the great commission. One is the Mark 16 side, which is we must preach the gospel to every single creature on the face of the earth. Tell them that Jesus died for their sins and they must believe and get baptized.

That's it. That's all that's mentioned in Mark 16. And it also says that in that ministry when you go out, there will be signs and wonders that will accompany you.

You will heal the sick, you'll cast out demons, dangerous animals and poison won't affect you and you'll speak in tongues and all that. It's all related to evangelism among new people. The other side of the great commission, like the other side of the currency note, is Matthew 28.

And in Matthew 28 Jesus said in the last few verses, go into all, make disciples of all nations. That means don't just preach the gospel to them. And Mark 16 is the first step.

But the ultimate purpose is make disciples and baptize them. And after that, teach them to do every single thing that I have commanded you. So there the emphasis is not on signs and wonders.

It's on teaching obedience to God's word. So one must lead on to the other. The Mark 16 ministry must lead on to the Matthew 28 ministry.

So if some people are doing Mark 16, other people should be doing Matthew 28 to complement that ministry. So when you have a situation where people are doing only the Mark 16 type of ministry, you're

going to have a very, very shallow church. And that's exactly what we see in the world today.

There's preaching and then when people are saved, they're told to again go out and preach. And the more people are saved, they are told to go out and preach. There's a tremendous accumulation of numbers.

Many of them half converted. Many of them not even half converted. They've just gone through repeating some formula.

Very little change in their lives. And this multitude of thousand people who are supposed to be converted bring tremendous dishonor on the Lord's name. Because they're not disciples.

They don't have Christian standards. Their marriages are in a mess. They're not upright in their place of work.

They do all types of unrighteous things. But yet they've all claimed to be believers. They're baptized.

They've satisfied the ego of some evangelist who was counting numbers. But to build the church of Jesus Christ, you need more than that. You need to go by the other side, Matthew 28.

To me, it's like if you're building a table and you build the legs and then you build the top. Then only the table is complete. And Mark 16 is like one side and Matthew 28 is the other side.

And if you keep on doing Mark 16, you just have legs. Not one single completed table. And that's the condition with a lot of Christian churches.

You look through there and you don't even find one disciple. There's so many converts. But in every group, I've seen this among Pentecostals, Charismatics, Baptists, Methodists, Holiness groups, Lutheran.

Every single group that you name, you find converts. Because it takes time to make disciples. And people don't want to spend that much labor.

There's not exciting things to report like an evangelist can report. You know, evangelists can report statistics. Today we are 10, then we are 20, then we are 50, then we are 100, then we are 200 and so on.

And I say, how many of them are disciples? That's what God's counting. You were 10, there were none. You're 200, still there are none.

What's the use of that? Such a church is not going stronger, it's growing fatter. You know the difference between a fat man and a strong man? They may both weigh the same on the weighing scales, but there's a lot of difference. And there's a lot of difference between a fat church and a strong church.

A fat church is just increasing in weight, numbers. A strong church is increasing in disciples. Maybe very small, but strong.

So, what does it mean to be a disciple? Perhaps we should look at that first of all. In Luke chapter 14. Because this is what Jesus told us to go into all the world and make.

And if we don't make a person a disciple, let me say, it'll be impossible to build a church. You cannot build a church if the people are not disciples first. You're gonna have tremendous problems if you don't first make them disciples.

So what do we do? Luke chapter 14, verse 25. Great multitudes were going along with him and he turned and said to them, Three conditions of discipleship. And if you want to build the church of Jesus Christ in any part of the world, in any of these 20 centuries, and certainly in the 21st century, you have to proclaim these conditions of discipleship and make it absolutely clear that if you don't fulfill these conditions, brother, you are not a disciple.

That's it. Number one, verse 26. If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

It's cannot. What must a man do to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? His love for Jesus Christ must be so great that in comparison to that love, even his love for his father and mother is like hatred. That's the meaning of this verse.

He's not talking about literally hating your father and mother, but in comparison with our love for Jesus. In another place it says, he who loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me. That's the way it's put in Matthew's gospel.

So the point here is something like, you know, the light of the stars and the light of the sun. Your love for your parents, brothers, sisters, wife, children must be like the light of the stars. Your love for Jesus must be like the light of the sun.

Now when the sun comes out, like right now, are the stars still there? Yes or no? Yes. Can you see any of them? No. So is your love for your parents and mothers, father and mother, brothers, sisters, wife, children there? Yes, it is.

But you can't even see it compared to your love for Jesus. It is so supreme that the light of the star is like darkness now. That love for Jesus is so great that love for your parents is like hatred.

That's the meaning of this verse. That means, if my Lord tells me to do something and my father and mother say something else, and if I'm a grown-up adult, I'm talking about grown-up adults, not little children, I have to listen to the Lord. Not my father and mother.

We have to teach non-Christian people who are converted, that if your father tells you to bow down to an idol, you have to say, Sorry, I'm a Christian. I respect you highly, dad, but I can't obey you. I cannot bow down to an idol.

He has to love Jesus more than he loves his father. It doesn't mean he disrespects his father. He has to honor his father and mother, but he does not have to obey them when it comes to a choice between them and God's word.

So, here he's talking about a devotion to Christ, which so, so surpasses his love for his father and mother, so surpasses his love for girlfriend, boyfriend, brother, sister, marriage partner, children, anything. He says, if you don't love Jesus like that, you are not a disciple. Examine yourself in that light.

I have discovered through the 27 years that we've been in the ministry of planting churches, that most people fail at this point. And that's why they have endless problems in their lives. They are trying to be a part of the church, but they are not disciples.

But you can't build them in the part of the church, and they become the biggest problem in the church. So, for myself, I have wondered, what shall we do? So many of these people like to come to our meetings, because they like to hear a rich word of God. Everything else is so boring and dead in the other denominations.

So, we don't want to drive them away, because we have hope that maybe five years from now that fellow will be willing to pay the price to become a disciple. And so, why should we drive them away? If we drive them away, they'll never become disciples. So, we don't want to drive them away.

They come, but I recognize that the real church is within this church. And this whole crowd that gathers here is not the church. Within this crowd is the real church.

Those are the ones who are the real disciples. And those are the ones I'm going to work with. That's how Jesus did it, you know.

He used to preach to crowds. But within that crowd were his twelve. And that was the real church.

So, that is the situation we find in many, many places. And I would never give any responsibility in the church to that outer crowd. They are welcome to come to all the meetings.

If they are born again, they even break bread, but they will not have responsibility in the church. The leadership and everything will only be given into the hands of those who have understood discipleship. Now, if we don't follow this principle, we are not going to build the church of Jesus Christ.

We're just going to build one more congregation to the millions of congregations that already exist. And the gates of hell will prevail against it, without a doubt. So, when we're building this third floor, we've got to make sure that the bricks are the right material.

That they are disciples and not just converts. People who are, who have put Jesus first above father, mother, brother, sister, wife, children, as far as we know. We don't know people's hearts, but we proclaim the conditions to them and say, you have to put the Lord and His commands first.

And most difficult of all, your own life. Father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters. It doesn't mean a man neglects his wife and children.

It doesn't mean that a man comes to the meetings of the church and does not help his wife at home. That's not the meaning. We're not talking about devotion to the church.

We're talking about devotion to Jesus. You know, this is the mistake I've seen some people make. They say, well, we put the Lord first and His work second and my family third.

I say, no. The Lord first, your family second and God's work third. Because you can't do God's work properly if you don't have a proper relationship in your family.

It's like the three stories. The Lord first and then your family and then the church. Don't put the church as more important than your home.

It's not true. Some people have done that and have reaped a mess in their family life. I say, that's their own fault.

I mean, the Apostle Paul, who didn't have a family, could put the Lord and His work next. But otherwise, if you've got a family, that's a big responsibility. We had a situation where some brothers would work in the factories the whole day.

And every day, when they finished work, they would come straight to the church meeting hall and have a long 2-3 hour time of fellowship and prayer meeting before they went home. Doesn't that sound very spiritual? It was very religious. It was not very spiritual.

And when I heard of it, I stopped that prayer meeting. I said, your wives have been waiting the whole day for some help and here you are, sitting, enjoying yourself with the brothers in the meeting hall. You should go straight home from your work.

Don't come to the meeting hall. Go and help your wives who are struggling with the little children. And then, and you don't have to have meetings every day.

Don't think spirituality is to have meetings every day. No. These are the activities of religious people.

Jesus is first. Jesus must be first in our life. And that doesn't mean meetings every day.

Sometimes people equate Jesus with meetings. It's not true. The Pharisees went for such a lot of meetings and still went to hell.

People in communist prisons, 14 years in a communist prison, never attend a single meeting and go straight to heaven. So it's not a question of the number of meetings you attend. It's a question of devotion to Jesus Christ.

So don't mistake what I'm saying as though the Lord's work is the same as the Lord. He's not talking about His work. He's talking about devotion to Jesus Christ.

That if the Lord has called me to do something in His word, I put that above father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters. And our own life, that leads on to the second condition of discipleship. My own life is where I have to take up my cross.

The second condition, verse 27, whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple. Every single person who comes to our church must first of all be taught to put Jesus Christ above everything in his life. Above his job, his house, his property, his family, his everything.

If a person is not willing to pay that price, like the rich young ruler, say, brother, you cannot be a disciple. And the second thing we have to teach a person, we are making disciples now, don't forget. The second thing we have to teach them, if we want good bricks for this third story, is how to hate his own life.

This life that we have inherited from Adam. Now there's a lot of teaching today which sounds very spiritual. They say, how can you love your neighbor as yourself if you don't love yourself first? It's a lot of rubbish.

It's psychology. You never find it in that type of logic in the Bible. Jesus said, you've got to hate your own life.

So many times. And people are trying to get around that by saying, how can you love your neighbor as yourself if you don't love yourself first? Sounds very spiritual, sounds very logical. The only thing is the Bible is not meant for logical, is not written for logical people, it's written for spiritual people.

And spirit is different from mind. And spirit can understand a lot of things mind cannot understand. Doesn't it sound very logical? How can you love your neighbor as yourself if you don't love yourself first? Absolutely right.

If you're not a spiritual person, you'll swallow that, hook, line and sinker. And you'll get led astray. No.

Jesus said, love one another as I've loved you. So I don't have to love myself to love my neighbor as myself. No man ever yet hated his own flesh.

But what I have to hate is this self-life I've inherited from Adam. Now if you're talking about worth, I agree that a lot of believers have a very low self-esteem, a low sense of worth, and particularly in a lot of western countries where they've never experienced the true love of a father. You know, many fathers have been unreasonable, strict.

Sometimes people have come out of broken homes where they've not had a good father who has encouraged them. And so they have a very low self-esteem. They think humility is to think I'm worthless.

No. God never says you're worthless. God says you're a sinner.

But your worth is very great. The prodigal son had made a mess of his life. But he was very valuable to the father.

So you may have made a mess of your life too. That doesn't matter. You're still very, very valuable to the father.

That sense of value in God's eyes is very, very important. But that's not the same as loving ourself. We must distinguish the two.

To see that God values me very highly even though I'm a great sinner is something I believe Jesus taught, emphasized, and we must teach and emphasize. But to love my own life, do you know what is the most oft repeated statement of Jesus in the four Gospels? The statement of Jesus that comes about six or seven times in the four Gospels. If any man will seek to save his life, he will lose it.

But if he's willing to lose his life for my sake and the Gospels, he will find it. That is the most oft repeated statement of Jesus and the least understood statement of Jesus among Christians. That is the meaning of taking up the cross.

The cross, to take up the cross means to die to my Adamic self-life. The self-life which demands privileges, respect, honor, which wants to seek its own, I have to die to that. Die to the opinion people have about me, all this, I have to die.

This is the meaning of taking up the cross. And every single person who comes to the church must be taught to die to himself. And Jesus said in Luke 9.23, we got to die daily.

And the trouble in a lot of places today is people are trying to build the church but people are not willing to take up the cross. Well, you are going to have a problem then. The bricks are bad.

No wonder the wall collapses. We got to make sure that the bricks are good. You know, in India, when masons, we have a lot of cheating in India when it comes to people bringing bricks to a construction site.

They bring a truckload of bricks and it's all mixed. Some will be good and some will be bad. And sometimes you have to soak it in water to find out which is good and which is bad.

Some of them just crumble in water. And I have seen masons build, all our houses are built with brick in India. The man who is carrying the bricks will pass a brick up to the mason and the mason will always look at it, tap it and then only fix it into the wall.

And he has got experience to know whether this is a good brick or not. I believe there is something like that that we need to do when we are elders of churches to see whether this brother is really fit to be a part of the church. Is he a disciple? Does he really put Jesus first above everything else? Is he a person who loves his self-life? Is he being taught to hate his self-life? To die to himself every day? Is he at least trying? Even if he is not always successful, is he at least trying? Does he want to go this way? That's the question I ask.

None of us are perfect in taking up the cross but I say, are you willing to take up the cross? Are you willing to die to your reputation? To your own will? To your own choices? To seeking your own? If you are not willing for that, you cannot be a disciple. Because that's the way of the cross. And this is the second condition of discipleship.

My own life. It says here, I must hate, verse 26, my own life. Hate all this and my own life if I am to be a disciple.

And that is the life I have inherited from Adam which wants to stand up for its rights and wants to give another person a peace of my own mind and am I willing to die to that when somebody provokes me to anger? And my own life wants to react and give him a peace of my mind? And as a result I lose peace of mind? Or am I willing to die? Die. That's what the Lord calls me to do. Think if you have a church where you have brothers and sisters who are eager to go to the cross every day.

Can you imagine what a wonderful church that would be? Where there is no fighting for position or honor and person is willing to yield and not fight for one's rights. That's the way the Lord wants His church to be. But today we try to build a church with a whole lot of people who are still living the life of Adam.

Even though they are born again. Seeking their own. And then of course you have problems.

And the third thing, the third condition of discipleship here is in Luke 14 and verse 33. No one of you can be my disciple who does not give up all his own possessions. Another difficult verse.

You cannot be a disciple of Jesus if you don't give up all your possessions. What does that mean? Does it mean I have to sell my house and car and including my shirt? It's also a possession. Do I have to stand naked and walk around naked? Is that the meaning of giving up all one's possessions? Even in that case, even Jesus didn't do it because he at least had the clothes he was wearing as his own.

And he certainly had some money. Judas Iscariot had quite a bit of money in that bag. So if giving up all one's possessions meant that, then Jesus' little savings bank, which the Judas had, would have disqualified him himself from being a disciple.

Obviously it cannot be anything more than what Jesus himself did. But I think the answer is in understanding what possessions means. Possessions are what you possess as your own.

You see, I can drive a car which may not be my own. You know that. Somebody may have loaned it to me and I use it.

I can live in a house which is not my own which somebody may have allowed me to stay in free of rent. I can have a lot of things which are not my own. I can... A brother may have loaned me things to use.

Equipment. Furniture. And none of these are my possessions.

That car is not my possession. The house is not my possession. The furniture is not my possession.

They're all... This belongs to this brother. This belongs to this brother. None of these things are mine.

So you understand what possessions... And yet I'm using them. I'm using the house. I'm using the car.

I'm using the furniture. And so what this verse means is that everything I have must be given to the Lord. And now the Lord allows me to use them but I don't consider any of them as my own.

Even though the car is registered in my name, it's not mine. It's the Lord's. He's allowed me to use it.

It's a loan from the Lord. Even though the house is registered in my name, it's not really mine. I consider it the Lord's for the Lord to use exactly as He likes.

The money in the bank account is in my name but it's not mine. It's for the Lord. He can use it for whatever He likes.

This is the attitude of a disciple. He does not... He may have a large house. He may have a good three or four cars.

That's not the point. The point is he does not consider any of those things as his own. He does not possess them.

It's like Abraham. For many years he possessed Isaac and God saw that this was an idolatry and God said to him, go and take Isaac on the altar and kill him. Abraham said, okay.

He took Isaac and as he was going to kill him, God said, stop. Okay, I've seen your heart. You don't have to kill him.

You can take him back home and from that day onwards, Abraham never possessed Isaac. He had Isaac but he never possessed him. He had given Isaac over to the Lord.

You and I need to do that with every single thing which we consider valuable on this earth. Stocks and shares and money and property and even our clothes. Everything.

Possessions is anything that I encourage people to make a list of it. I say make a list of all the things that are valuable to you and deliberately one by one hand them over to the Lord. Say, Lord, this is one of my possessions.

I really love it. But it's yours. It's yours.

It's yours. Like I told you about that little child who came and urinated on my table. Now if that table was my possession, I'd be terribly upset even if I tried to suppress it and control it and look as though I was at

rest and all that.

I'd have been in terrible unrest in my heart. But if it's not your possession, you use it. You see, you're not much bothered.

Somebody borrows your vehicle or something and scrapes it or accidentally, not deliberately. And it's okay. You say, well, that could have happened to me when I was driving it too.

That's my brother. He borrowed it and accidentally got a scrape on it. It's okay.

And if someone comes to needs a little brother in the church, needs an accommodation for the night, to me, you know how I look at it? I say, supposing I was living in a rented house and the landlord has permitted me to live rent free for ten years. And one day, his son is passing through town and says, can I stay in my dad's house? That's your house. Can I stay there for the night? What will I tell him? I say, sure.

Your dad's allowed me to stay here for ten years rent free. Why can't you come and spend a night here? That's how I see a believer coming and staying in my house. It's not my house.

It's a house which his father has allowed me to stay in rent free for so many years. It alters our perspective on even having a visitor in our home. I'll tell you that.

It certainly has altered my perspective. You know, life becomes so free when you become a disciple. You really become free.

All these hang-ups and problems and tensions and unrest and all disappear when you release your possessions unto the Lord. Don't possess them. A lot of Christians, I don't believe they've become disciples because there's something in their life which is valuable to them they have not released to the Lord.

Their money particularly. And they're trying to be a disciple but still clinging on to their money. Like the rich young ruler, trying to be a disciple of Jesus while still clinging on to the money and Jesus said, you cannot do it.

I mean, you can still hang around the crowd and sit there and listen and sit to it in all my meetings but you can't be a disciple. I might as well tell you that straight. Jesus told him that straight.

And you know, some of us go through life without being disciples in this area, we're going to have tremendous regrets in the final day. I mean, you're going to die clutching your money. What are you going to do with it? When you could have been free from it, I don't mean give it all away, I'm just saying that you don't possess it.

I'm saying that you say this is the Lord's and if he wants all of it, he can have all of it. You remember the man who came to the Lord and said, Lord, tell my brother to divide the family property with me. We are only two brothers, dad is dead, I'm entitled to 50%.

I'm not asking for more than 50% but my brother won't give me my 50%. Maybe he gives me only 10% or 20%. Now, if that man had gone to Moses, you know what Moses would have said? He would have said, call your brother.

We'll sort it out straight away. This is totally unrighteous. But the mistake he made was he went to Jesus.

Don't go to Jesus with such things. He'll say, forget it, let him have it. You know people who go to court about something and say, Lord, please help me to win this court case.

You think he's going to help you? I'm sorry. Go to Moses. Pray to Moses, don't pray to Jesus.

You see, we're under grace and Jesus said, I did not come here to teach you how to get your share of the family property. I came here to teach you how to release it and let him have it if he wants you. And if God, what God wants you to have, you'll get.

Don't worry about that. Do you think that what God wants you to have, Almighty God cannot enable you to get? You've got to be off your head. Your God is too small.

My God runs the universe and what I'm supposed to get, I will get. I mean, God can just kill that brother and get a whole hundred percent, leave alone fifty percent. God can do anything.

And if he decides that that fifty percent will be too much for me to ruin me spiritually, perhaps it's a good thing that my brother keeps it. So that I live with just what I need and I survive and the result is I become a spiritual man. Otherwise I may get taken up with administering this fantastic property I've inherited from my father that I have a problem.

God knows what is best for us. My brothers and sisters, release your possessions into God's hands and you'll never regret it. You'll never regret it.

I remember as a young man when I was working in the Navy, I used to give more than fifty percent of all my monthly income to God for his work. I didn't just give it anywhere, I would only give it to those whom I really knew were doing the Lord's work. Of course I'm not saying that as an example, I was single I didn't have any expenses and I could easily I earned a very large salary and I gave away more than fifty percent of my income.

I spent bare bare minimum on myself and clothes and food. Very simple food, very simple clothes. Gave away most of my income to God's work or to get Bibles for other people and things like that.

And when I finally left the Navy, after working for eight years I had less than the equivalent of one rand in my bank account. That's how I stepped out to serve the Lord thirty-six years ago. Of course the flip side of it is that God has given me back a hundred times like he promised in scripture, which is another thing altogether.

But what I'm trying to say is God is never in debt to anybody. He'll never be in debt to anyone. Never.

Don't ever cling to things. I remember when we started our literature and tape ministry in our church. Now as it is, we were doing it completely without profit.

I don't take any royalty from my books, no royalty from my tapes, CDs, nothing. Absolutely nothing. Not only that, I do all the work.

I do the DTP work and set up the whole book and do all that. It's all free labor. And send it to the printer.

And then we were going to publish it in our own church and the Lord said to me, it's not enough that you are careful yourself. Even as a church, remember the money changers in the temple. That's what the Lord said.

Remember the money changers in the temple whom I had to drive out. And I said, yes Lord, I want to keep that in mind. Those money changers were doing religious buying and selling for a profit.

At the end of the day, they had a gain from their religious work. And we decided we're not going to do it that way. At the end of the day, when we have totaled up all the money we have spent on books and tapes and CDs and all the money we have gained, there should be no profit.

We may have sold some books and tapes at a higher price, but then we gave away so many free as well at the same time. So at the end of the day, at the bottom line, there's no profit for anyone. For me or for the church or anyone.

That is God's way of doing work that we don't use Christian material to make profit for ourselves. Money is a very important factor. Everywhere I have gone to serve the Lord, I have always said, I don't want any gift from my ministry.

If you can afford to pay my fare, pay my fare. 99% of places in India, they can't even afford to pay my fare. And I say, I don't want you to pay my fare.

Money will never be a factor in my serving the Lord. The moment that becomes a factor, I'm no longer serving God. The moment money becomes a very big thing in a church, you're no longer serving God.

It's God plus money. And you cannot serve God plus money. That is impossible.

So money is a very important thing to be released from in our building the church. Every brother and sister must be released from attachment to money in the church if we are to build the church as the body of Christ. Okay, we have seen something about the conditions of discipleship.

The New Testament speaks about in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 about the church being the body of Jesus Christ. Like it says in 1 Corinthians 12 the body is not one member, verse 14 1 Corinthians 12 verse 14, but many. And we being many are members in the same body.

Verse 12. So there the real New Testament church and the head is Christ. It's a beautiful picture.

A body is something every one of us can understand. The head means the brain. Whenever the Bible speaks about the head it's referring to the brain.

Which controls eyes, because it speaks of the eye as separate from the head here, notice. So it's obviously referring to the brain controlling the eyes and the ears and the tongue and the hands and everything. And I want you to see something here.

What is the reason why so many believers have tension with each other? It's because they try to have a relationship with each other which is not through the head. That means you have a buddy-buddy type of relationship with that brother or that sister. You like him or you like her because you're of the same community or you speak the same language or you have the same temperament or there's some similarity which draws your attention or you like to talk about the same things and you're close to that person as a friend.

Your connection with that person is not through Christ. That is a guarantee that you're going to have problems later on. Because how does my right hand have fellowship with my left hand? It's through the head, you know that? It's through the brain.

My right hand does not just cling on to my left hand and have fellowship with it that way. It's not like that. Everything is through the brain.

My foot has fellowship with my hand through the brain. You see a person playing the piano. Ten fingers functioning together, the feet on the pedals and eyes and ears and many other parts of his body all coordinating together the muscles inside and everything but the whole thing is controlled from the brain.

Every little finger, foot, eye, ear, everything and such beautiful coordination. That is a picture of how the body of Christ should function. That's a local church, must be a living expression of the body of Jesus Christ.

That means, it doesn't matter if it's only ten people, that's okay. Ten or a hundred. It should be an expression of people who are working together with different gifts.

It doesn't mean everybody is a great preacher. How many tongues does your body have? Only one. It doesn't matter if there is only one brother in your church who can speak well.

So what? That's fine. But the tongue is not everything. There are people who are invisible.

Like the heart. Have any of you ever seen your heart? What an important function the heart fulfills. Such a hidden ministry.

Pumping, pumping, pumping, pumping, pumping. Never expecting anyone to even think about it or say a thank you. It just continues, continues.

When do you think of it? You think of it when it stops. Or when you have a heart attack. Then you begin to realize, hey, I've got a heart.

I never realized that for 60 years it was doing such a first class job, I never even stopped to say thank you. You know there are people like that in the church? Who pray and pray and pray. I thank God with all my heart for people who pray for me.

They are the heart of my ministry. You'll never see them. You see me up here.

There are people praying, praying, praying, praying, praying, pumping. One day God will reward them. I believe that with all my heart God will reward them in the final day.

Because do you think your tongue can speak without your heart pumping? And if you've got that idea that it can happen? No. It's the heart that pumps and pumps and pumps and pumps and pumps and pumps and the tongue is able to speak. So don't think because your ministry is hidden, it's unimportant.

Every member in the body of Christ who is a disciple has got a ministry. And the head determines that ministry. And you have to recognize what your ministry is, seek the head for it and don't covet and try to get a ministry for yourself.

You know there are a lot of people who say, oh they are suppressing me and they are not allowing me to have ministry. Who is the one who gives you a ministry? It's the head. Not some brother.

Don't look to a brother for a ministry. Look to the head. I know through the years when I was a young Christian how there were many people who were much older people who were jealous of me and who

tried to suppress me.

I said fine, I won't get into conflict with them. They are elders they would not let me preach in the meeting hall so I used to preach on the streets. Nobody wanted to come to the streets with me.

They all wanted to preach in the meeting hall. The streets were all open and I could preach there. That's where I learned to preach.

And I said fine, if God doesn't want me to preach in the church, I won't preach there. I'll preach wherever God wants me to preach. And then gradually, after God had broken me sufficiently, he could give me a wider ministry.

What I'm saying is that, look for your ministry to the head. He will show you what it is. And don't think it should be a public ministry.

It could be a hidden ministry of prayer, it could be a hidden ministry of evangelism, personal evangelism, witnessing to others, maybe passing out a tract or a booklet or a tape to a neighbor and winning that person and bringing that person to the church and nobody gives you the credit for it. Why do you want credit? Isn't it enough if the Lord rewards you in the final day? Do you want somebody to pat you on the back right now and say, you're a great person? Forget all that. Do everything for the head.

Think of various parts of the human body that do so many functions that we don't appreciate. Liver, pancreas, some people don't even know there's such a thing called pancreas. So what? It doesn't matter if you don't know it.

It's still there. It still does the job. Kidneys, so many parts of the body which only a doctor can explain all that, but there's so many parts doing a tremendous function and it doesn't bother whether you know if it's existence or not.

It's still doing the function. It's amazing if we can have a body like that where everybody says, Lord, I've got a function. I may not be able to speak publicly.

So what? I'm going to support that brother who speaks 100%. Who's got the gift. I'm not in competition with him.

My gift is something else. My gift is to encourage him. My gift is to pray for him.

Maybe the Bible says, you know, Romans chapter 12, have you seen this gift which nobody covets? It's very interesting. There's a gift which hardly anybody or I think nobody covets. It speaks here about the gift of prophecy in Romans 12, 6. A lot of people covet that.

Service, verse 7. Teaching, a lot of people covet that. Exhorting, a lot of people covet that. But giving, do you know that giving money is a gift? Have you ever heard of anybody coveting that? Oh God, give me the gift of giving money for your work.

All the other ones listed there, leadership, oh yeah Lord, leadership and prophecy, teaching, exhortation, but in the middle of that is tucked away this little gift of someone who has the gift of giving money for God's work. Nobody covets it. It says give with liberality.

So even that is a gift, you know. Hospitality, some people have a tremendous gift of inviting people home and making them feel at home, new people who come to the church. Not everybody can do it, I've seen that.

Not everybody can do it, but some people have an amazing gift of it. Some people have the gift of helping others, you know, in practical ways. When somebody is sick, taking a meal for them.

These are all gifts in the body of Christ. And it's all these gifts put together that build up the body. It's not just one outstanding preacher who gets up there.

And when you have a body functioning with everybody satisfied with their own function, do you know that my hand has always been perfectly happy to be a hand? And the left hand, which is even more wonderful, has been perfectly happy to be a left hand. It has never coveted or feel jealous. My right hand signs all the cheques.

And it has never wished, I wish I'd get one chance to sign a cheque. And maybe one day I get a fracture in my right hand, does the left hand say, Ah! Now is my chance! And it signs the cheque and the bank rejects it saying, I can't recognize that signature. No, what does the left hand do when the right hand is broken? Oh, it immediately rushes to heal it so that it can quickly get back to his job of signing cheques.

Because he says, I'm useless at that. Nobody even recognizes the signature if I sign. So, you see how it is in the body.

There is absolutely no jealousy. If you are jealous of another person, I would say to you straight away, you have not seen the body of Christ. You have not seen it at all.

I'm not saying this to boast, but God is my witness. I am not jealous of a single brother or ministry in the entire worldwide body of Christ. Because I know my own.

I say, I do what God gifted me to do. There are thousands of people who are doing greater ministries, wonderful. I say, praise the Lord.

I'm excited because they are also part of my body. So what? I mean, they are part of the same body. They are doing work for my Lord.

It's the same company. We are making a profit. The devil is being defeated.

Praise God. There can be no jealousy once you have seen the body of Christ. It's when you are an individualist that you have a jealousy.

You know, every person is needed to build the body of Christ. Think for example, when you think of making an unbeliever a part of the body of Christ. That is what our ministry is supposed to be.

There are multitudes of unbelievers. Some of them have to become a part of the body of Christ. Think of the human body.

Here is a potato on the table. How does that potato become a part of my body? Listen. First of all, evangelism.

The hand goes and takes the potato and puts it into the mouth. That's called evangelism. Then what next? If you keep it in the mouth for the next 10 days, you know what will happen? It will rot in your mouth and you will spit it out.

That's exactly what happens to a lot of converts. The evangelist has not done anything more. The evangelist should have put that person in connection with other members of the body like the teeth.

Who chew it and bite it and crush it and then swallow it down the throat and finally it comes to the stomach where prophetic ministry throws acid upon it. It's not very comfortable when you have acid thrown upon you in the meetings of the church and it's made to feel really small and finally it doesn't look like a potato at all. It's smashed and broken and you know, at any point it can say, I'm fed up of this.

It can vomit it out and say, I don't want to be a part of this body. That's fine. But if you want to be a part of the body you got to be broken and crushed and acid poured on you and all types of things.

Your individuality is gone in a sense and ultimately after a few weeks miracle of miracles. This potato has become flesh and blood and bones. How did it happen? Who did it? Was it the hand? Or the teeth? Or the throat? Or the stomach? Or the colon? Or the liver? Who did it? The body did it.

Some stupid evangelist may say I brought that soul to Christ. That's because he doesn't know. He only did the first part.

That's all. There's no such thing as an individual ministry in the body of Christ. The trouble today is Christian people have got their own ministries.

So and so evangelist is like hand ministries and stomach ministries and teeth ministries and it's all rubbish. There's no such thing as teeth ministries and stomach ministries and all individualistic type of stuff in the body of Christ. We must learn to work together.

Recognize the gift God's given to other people. And submit to the gifts that God has given to another person. If God has given a person an obvious gift our duty is to submit to that.

God has placed authority in the body of Christ. Which says and it says obey your leaders in Hebrews 13, 17. Authorities in the body of Christ.

Just like authorities in a home. Father and mother, children obey your parents. Authorities in society submit to the government.

Servants obey your masters, your bosses at work. Likewise in the church. And yet I found throughout the world people recognize that there must be an authority in the home.

They recognize there must be an authority in the office. They recognize there must be an authority in the society. But when it comes to the church, it's a free for all.

And that's why there's confusion. There's authority in the church too. And if you don't know how to submit to authority in the church, it's like a child who doesn't know, doesn't submit to authority in the home.

It's like a student who doesn't submit to authority in the school. It's like a man who doesn't submit to authority in the factory. It's like a man who doesn't submit to authority in a society.

He's a rebel. He's a nuisance. He's got the spirit of Lucifer.

And that can happen in the church. You cannot be a part of the body without submitting to authority. It's true that the Lord guides you individually.

Think of these little fingers. They're down here. And the head says, move.

It can move. The fingers can move under direct command of the head. But now, think of this situation where the head tells this hand to lift itself up.

And the head has not given a separate command to these fingers to move. Why do the fingers move? Why do the fingers say, hey, I'm going to stay here. If you want to move, you move.

No. It moves with the hand. Why? Because it recognizes that the head has placed this as a part of that team of members that are part of the hand.

And if God has placed you in a local church, you are to submit to the authority of that local church. That is God's will. Now the left hand fingers don't have to move because they're not part of this team.

These fingers are part of this team. When the upper hand moves, it has to move. Because it's part of this team.

You have to recognize in which place God has placed you. In a local church? Then you've got to submit to the authority of that local church. That is God's way.

One last thing. Fellowship between members is what the Bible calls the joints in the body. The joints are very important.

Think of the number of joints in just the fingers. There are three in this. One, two, three.

Every place where you can bend, that's a joint. And joints are like the heart. We don't recognize them much till they cause problems when people have arthritis.

But do you know that it's no use having a strong upper arm and a strong lower arm if the joint doesn't function properly? Your arm will be just stiff like this if your joints didn't function. It would be absolutely useless. Then it would be better to have a weak hand with the joints functioning.

And I say, give me two weak brothers who can work together much better than two strong brothers who can't fellowship together. That's like an arm that cannot be bent. The Lord has got a lot of people like this.

Strong upper arm, strong lower arm. They can't get along with each other. And the church suffers.

The body of Christ, one of the most important things, is fellowship. Yield like this muscle yields when it's pulled this way. And this muscle yields when it's put that way.

Yield. Submit to authority. Give in to the other person.

One day that person gives in to you. This is the way the Lord wants to see the body functioning all over the world. Does he see it? Unfortunately not.

But I believe that's what he's seeking to restore in this day and age. Even if it's in a small way, a representation of the body of Christ. I believe that's what God wants to do in your midst.

Wherever you live, don't be satisfied just say I attend some church. Is it a functioning manifestation of the body of Christ with God appointed authority and leadership? If not, however good it may be, it has come short of God's standards. And your desire should be for God's best in your locality.

Let's pray. There's much that we've heard this day about God's dwelling place. In the areas in your life where God has spoken to you personally, you must do something about it.

You must say, Lord, whatever the price, I want your best. I want your best, whatever the cost. I want to be led by you.

I want to be led by the head. I'm willing to submit to anybody you ask me to submit to. I want the body to be built.

We live in a day when there are so many who have misused this teaching on authority, seeking to lord it over people's lives. Such people have also violated the law of the body. For a true authority in the body of Christ will be a servant of others, seeking to build them up and not to build up his own name and his own reputation or his own kingdom.

That's the type of leaders we need to pray for also. God, give us godly servants as leaders. Humble men who seek nothing for themselves.

That's another rare thing. Let's pray that God will raise up such leaders and such expressions of the body of Christ in many places. Heavenly Father, apply these truths to our hearts and help us to glorify you and honor you in the short few days that you give us on earth before Jesus comes again.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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