

Hold Fast to God's Hygienic Words

by Zac Poonen

God answers every prayer, sometimes no, sometimes wait, sometimes yes, and it's essential to have a trusting relationship with Him to receive His answers.

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Scripture: 2 Corinthians 7:1, 2 Timothy 2:20-21, 1 Peter 4:17, 1 John 1:7, 1 John 3:2-3

Topics: "Spiritual Cleansing", "Christian Holiness"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of cleansing ourselves both spiritually and morally to be vessels of honor in God's household. It encourages self-judgment, daily purification, and striving for holiness in preparation for the second coming of Christ. The message stresses the need to retain the high standard of God's word, cleanse ourselves from defilement, and live selflessly like Jesus, seeking the glory of God in all things.

Transcript

Just a word about what we just heard about unsaid prayer. I think most Christians have the experience that a lot of things we pray for we never get and then gradually a sort of unbelief comes in into our heart about all these promises which are in his word. Some amazing promises, you know, ask anything in my name I'll give it.

If you're honest I'm sure you face that type of thing yourself as I did in a young Christian but the more I've come to know God the more I've come to see one thing that every promise that Jesus made is absolutely true. When we are young and immature we don't understand that but as we grow and become mature we understand. It's like little children, they know so much that their parents love them and they wonder sometimes why their parents don't give what they ask for but if you're a parent you know that you don't give your child everything that he asked for because either it's not good for him or her or they're not ready for it and they get it a little later time so I've seen, I can say that, I never say God doesn't answer prayer.

I say God answers every prayer if you understand it like this. Think of the traffic lights as red, yellow and green. Red means stop or God says no.

Yellow means wait, you're not yet ready to get the answer. Green means sure, I'll give it to you right now. So when God says no you can't say he didn't answer, he did answer but he said no.

So when God says no very many Christians say he didn't answer me, of course he did. The answer was no and sometimes he says wait because it's not good for us and sometimes right now, I'll give it to you later, and sometimes he says yes. So the way I say it is God answers every prayer.

Sometimes no, sometimes wait, sometimes yes but it's never a prayer if you're in touch with God that he answers because this verse that we read, I'd like to look at it before we go further. In 1 John 3, this is our memory verse, whatever we ask, verse 1 John 3, 22, whatever we ask we receive from him because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight. But it also says in verse 21, if our heart does not condemn us, then we have confidence before God.

So when we come before God, it's very important to make sure that our heart is not condemning us, convicting us about something not said right. Do you remember Jesus once said that if you're angry with a brother, it's Matthew 5, 22-24, and then you come and pray to God, the Lord says leave your offering there, don't go further in your prayer, stop, go back to your brother, settle that matter with him, then come and give your offering to God. So if a person doesn't listen to that and says, well I'm just going to give him an offering, don't be surprised if he doesn't get an answer because his heart does not have confidence before God, there's something he's not listening to.

That's why I've been stressing a lot these days about always forgiving others, immediately. The best time to forgive somebody is immediately, because the longer you wait, there'll be more problems. It's like I was saying, the best time to remove a thorn from your foot is immediately.

And if you wait, it gets infected. The best time to fix an injury in your hand is immediately. You delay, it gets infected.

The best time to forgive somebody is immediately. As soon as someone has hurt you, or you heard that someone did something against you or said something against you, even if you don't see where he is or she is, say, Lord, I forgive that person. I have followed that principle ever since I got light on it, and it's made a lot of difference in my life because in the early days, not only, I would say, why doesn't God answer that prayer, I'd often be gloomy and discouraged because I wasn't removing these thorns from my feet and over a period of time, you accumulate many thorns and you wonder why your feet's getting infected.

So that's a little recommendation I give to you. God always answers prayer. And sometimes your waiting period can be a long, long time, because you're not ready to receive that answer to prayer, because there are things you've not settled in your own life.

See, God is not a slot machine where you put in a prayer and you get an answer. It's not like that. In God speaks, answers our prayers in a relationship.

It's not you send a request, you get an answer. It's not like that. It's not at all.

It's a relationship. And if that relationship with your Heavenly Father is broken by sin, or sometimes by unbelief, you don't live in a trusting relationship, then answers to prayer either don't come or you never get what God wants you to have. I'm absolutely convinced that many, many believers do not receive all that God wants them to have.

I know from my own experience, for many, many years, I never received all that God wanted me to have. First, because I was in churches where I never heard the truth, the full truth, I mean. The Bible says, and

Jesus said in John 8 32, you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.

So I've learned from that. I remember in my early days, wondering which church has got the truth. Because every church was holding the Bible and saying, we've got the truth.

We believe the Bible is the Word of God. There are many, many cults today that don't honor Christ, they don't even believe that Jesus Christ is God, who say we believe in the Bible. And so what the way the Lord cleared it up for me was from John 8 32, if a church is preaching the truth, and you understood it correctly, it will set you free.

If what you're hearing is not setting you free, that's not the truth. Or you got it wrongly, you haven't understood it properly. If something you hear brings you into condemnation, either the guy who preached it didn't know the truth, or you received it in a wrong way, misunderstood it.

That's why you're in bondage. I don't believe that God wants his children to be in bondage for a single moment, to anything, to sin or self-condemnation or discouragement or anything. It's never the will of God.

And if you find yourself ever, ever, ever in such a situation, you say, Lord, show me why. What is the truth here that I haven't understood, which keeps me in bondage? Because you said you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. I want to know the truth that will set me free.

I've decided in my life that not right from the beginning, because unfortunately, I never had a spiritual father who taught me all these things. So I had to sort of discover it over a period of many, many years. But once I discovered it, I said, Lord, I will never be in bondage.

I refuse to be in bondage. I refuse to be in bondage of fear of Satan, that he can harm me. He cannot touch me.

I hope all of you are completely free from the fear that Satan can trouble you here or trouble you there. I've seen believers who've been for years with the fear, even preachers and pastors who feel that Satan troubling me here and Satan's troubling me there. I said, do you believe in a Christ who defeated Satan on the cross? He's alive, but he's paralyzed.

I mean, it's like a snake that's alive but paralyzed. It's not dead. Satan's not destroyed, but his power to harm you is gone.

God's taken away his armor from him. And it's very, very important to understand that we don't live in fear. We don't live in fear of the devil.

We don't live in fear of people who can harm us. Because God has said that if you will love me and walk in my purpose for your life, Romans 8, 28, everything will work for your good. There's a condition, always there's a condition.

Even for initial forgiveness of sins, there's a condition, repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. So there's a condition. If you love God and you want to fulfill his purpose for your life alone, there's a guarantee from God in Romans 8, 28 that every single thing that ever happens to you, that people do to you, or people don't do which they promise to do, will all work for your good.

Isn't it amazing that somebody promises to do something for me and he doesn't do it? That also is going to work for my good. I'm undefeatable. That's a Christian life.

That's how Jesus walked on this earth. You know, once when, I'll never forget this, it's been a great help to me for many, many years when Jesus stood before Pilate and Pilate sort of threatened him saying, don't you know I've got power to crucify you or release you? You're at my mercy right now. And Jesus stood there like the king.

Pilate was a coward. Pilate was a slave there to the opinions of men. Jesus stood there like a king and told Pilate, you have no power over me.

Imagine telling a judge, you have no power over me except what my father gives you. It's amazing to live like that in your place of work. You don't have to say that to your boss, but you can have that attitude if you recognize even your boss in your place of work.

Don't say it, but remember this. You have no power over me. Once when religious people took me to a court because I exposed their wrong doctrines.

I said this under my breath to the judge sitting in front. You have no power over me except what my father gives you. I've said that in many situations.

Remember this in your heart. That's why it's a wonderful life to love God and call according to his purpose. We have, I think, at least 2000 people in some of our churches who are from non-Christian homes.

Many others are from nominal Christian homes, but many from non-Christian homes where they worship idols and things like that. And these are young people living in those homes. And I say to them, you know, your parents, honor your parents, love them, respect them, always speak kindly to them, good to them.

But remember, they have no power over you. Once you come under the authority of Jesus Christ, he controls everything. Do you know this wonderful verse in Proverbs 21 and verse 1? It's a great verse.

I often quote it to many, many people in different situations. If you don't know it, you must remember it. Proverbs 21, the king's heart is like rivers of water in the hand of the Lord.

He turns it wherever he wishes. You know, there's a difference between rivers and man-made canals. If you notice, clearly, if you're flying in a plane, you can make out which is a river and which is a man-made canal.

A man-made canal is always straight. Turns at right angles. It's made by man because that looks neat.

But God's rivers are not like that. There's no river which is absolutely straight and turns at a right angle. Rivers are always curved and sometimes it's going east and all of a sudden it's going west.

Then it's going south and then turns around and goes north. That's how rivers are. And the Lord says here that even the king, when he says the king, that means the highest authority in the land.

And that includes everybody all the way down to the last beggar in the country. He can turn the heart of that king in a completely opposite direction to the way it's going right now. It's an amazing thing to look at these promises and say, Lord, I want you to fulfill that in this particular situation.

And it's a wonderful thing when we've gone through life and had this experience in numerous situations in our life where we have seen God actually turning a situation of an authority, an authority over us to completely opposite. And that guy doesn't even know that God is influencing him because he's influencing

him because I'm his child. It's a wonderful thing when you have a few experiences like that.

We realize we look forward to the greater confidence for the future. We never live in fear because we have a father in heaven who is providing and caring for us if we love God and are called according to his purpose. And one result of that is it makes us more relaxed in our life and it enables us, believe it or not, to love others more easily.

The reason why sometimes you find it difficult to love others is because you're not secure in God's love for you. I'm absolutely convinced about it. When we are insecure, we feel threatened by people, circumstances, bosses, evil people.

And then we react by not being able to love somebody whom we should love. It's a wonderful thing to be relaxed in God. Like they sing in that song, there is a place of quiet rest near to the heart of God, a place where sin cannot molest, near to the heart of God.

That's where we must always live. And when we live there, trusting God, taking care of us in all our situations, it's easy to love. That's why the first commandment is not love your neighbor as yourself.

The first commandment is love God. Because when you love God and you're called according to his purpose, everything works for your good. Then you can love your neighbor as yourself.

Remember this, if you can't love your neighbor as yourself, it's because you're not at rest in God's perfect love for you. And you don't love him supremely. There's something else on earth or someone else on earth you love more than God.

You're going to have unrest all your life. I can predict it. But come to the place where God is first and everything in your life.

And you'll be at rest in him and you'll be able to love each other effortlessly. And all those tensions that come up in homes between husband and wife will disappear. There will not be murmuring and grumbling in homes.

It all depends on our love for God. That vertical relationship is what determines everything in our horizontal relationship with people. Remember this.

And the reason why the world is in such chaos is because most of them have no vertical relationship. And even most so-called Christians don't live in a fervent, vertical relationship with God. Their prayers are usually a shopping list.

Like you go to the grocery store with a shopping list. They go to God with a shopping list of prayer. Give me this.

Give me that. Give me the other thing. Usually material things and healing and things like that.

Well, everybody in the world wants those things. But if you want everything to work for your good, the only way is to love God with all your heart and say, Lord, I want to fulfill your purpose in my life. Second Timothy is what I wanted to share with you this morning.

Second Timothy and a number of things in this chapter have spoken to my heart even today. But particularly one word I want to begin with. See, this is Paul's last letter to Timothy.

And Timothy was like his son. There are sometimes relationships that God brings about in a church where even though God is our father and he's the only one we call our father who art in heaven, yet God gives us not only physical earthly fathers, but spiritual fathers on earth to guide us just like our earthly fathers protected us from evil and error and guided us. If you had a good father, you got a number of things he'd have protected you from and guided you so that you don't mess up your life.

The same way, Paul was a spiritual father and he did not hesitate to call Timothy his son. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he says, Paul, second Timothy one verse one, Paul an apostle to Timothy verse two, my beloved son. And Timothy had this very intimate relationship with Paul as a spiritual father.

Now, I don't believe Paul accepted anybody as a spiritual son. There was something in Timothy that attracted him to Paul and Paul said, OK, towards you I'll consider you like my son. And you need to understand the reason for it.

Turn with me if you don't already know that verse in Philippians two and verse 19 to 21. And there you'll see why Paul accepted Timothy as his son, spiritual son. Paul says to the Philippians, I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly so that I may be encouraged when I learn of your condition.

Why Timothy? Because Paul's got many co-workers. I have no one else who's got the same spirit. Kindred spirit means kindred is a word which is like when I say my kindred is speaking about my relatives.

And so what Paul is saying is Timothy's got a kindred spirit. That means the same spirit as I have. That's what makes him close to me.

He's not my physical son. And in fact, I met him only when I was about 18 or 19 years old or 20, perhaps, in Acts 16. He was already born again.

As far as I know, Paul didn't lead. Paul was not the one who brought him to Christ. Paul met him much later, but he saw him as such a wholehearted person in Acts chapter 16 that he said, I want this young guy to be on my team.

Paul was very careful about whom he had on his team. We read in Acts 13 about one man called John Mark. Paul didn't want him to go.

Acts 15, God didn't, Paul didn't want him to go with him anymore. He was another young man and he said, no, I don't want John Mark to come with me anymore. Because he's, when the going got tough, he left and went away.

I don't want such people. But Timothy, he said, I want him to go with me. And he said, I've got no one else who's got the same spirit, who is genuinely concerned for your welfare.

Paul was like that. He was always concerned about the welfare and the spiritual growth of other believers. And any true servant of God has to be like that.

And Timothy was like that. And he says all the others. Now, he's not talking about the unbelievers.

If you talk about all the unbelievers in the world, they seek their own. That is understandable. That's how they live.

Every unbeliever in the world seeks his own. But here he's speaking about some of the fellow Christians who were his co-workers. There were people who were Paul's co-workers, who were born again, filled with the Holy Spirit, had gifts of the Spirit.

But Paul could discern that they were seeking their own. Not everyone who is filled with the Spirit necessarily is seeking the things of Christ. They're filled with the Spirit and they don't live filled with the Spirit.

If they lived filled with the Spirit, it would be different. Many people usually have one experience of being filled with the Spirit and that's it. But Paul, but Timothy lived in a continuous fullness of the Spirit.

And so the result was he did not seek his own interest, but sought the interest of Christ. Because what does the Holy Spirit do? The Holy Spirit brings to us the same motivation and desires that Jesus had. When the Holy Spirit filled Jesus, he was wanting to please the Father, never seeking his own.

And the same Holy Spirit comes to us. We won't be seeking our own interests, but we'll be seeking the interest of Christ Jesus. So that fullness of the Spirit has been so devalued in our day to just somebody who speaks in tongues, which is very often just a lot of gibberish and calls it that.

That's not the primary mark of being filled with the Spirit. If a man is filled with the Spirit, he will not seek his own interest. He'll seek the interest of Christ.

That's how Timothy was. And when Paul found one person like that, he said, Timothy, you're my son. So he writes to him as my beloved son.

And Timothy was, his whole life was so blessed by Paul writing. Paul did not write personal letters to many people. He had many co-workers, but we don't know that he wrote personal letters to all of them.

But to Timothy, he did because he had that type of relationship. You see, as a human being, Paul could not take care of all of God's children and write to all of them. But those who were very close to him, he could correspond with.

And the thing that brought people close to Paul was that the people didn't seek their own interest. They were out and out for Jesus Christ. They never sought anything which is their own gain.

And Paul had seen in different situations how Timothy would deny what was beneficial for him, but would seek the just glorifying God. Imagine if you have a church like that. Imagine if this church was like Timothy, everyone, where a discerning man like the Apostle Paul could look at you.

And I tell you, God gives discernment to his servants in such a way that they don't need to know you much. In a few minutes of conversation with you, they can discern where you live, what your aim in life is. And imagine that Paul could look at you and say, there's a person I can discern who's not seeking his own interest at all.

He wants what will glorify Christ. He wants what's good for others. And he wants to serve the Lord Jesus and he wants to serve others.

That's wonderful. I want to be like that. I hope you want to be like that, too.

So the word that I wanted to mention here is verse 13. Paul writes to Timothy saying, retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me. And particularly that word retain means don't lose it.

It's a word that is impressed on my heart this morning to share with you. There are a number of things that you as a church and many of you have received, you've heard me over the Internet through the years. Some truths that have gripped your heart and changed your life.

And it's very easy to lose them, to become so familiar with them that the power is lost, even though you still hold the doctrine. It's very, very easy to hold a doctrine and not live in the reality of it. I've seen it.

See, we've been preaching this truth in India for 42 years now. And so I've got a little bit of experience of seeing what happens over a period of time. And I've seen people who are gripped by the truth tremendously, wholeheartedly and would give up everything for it.

And a little later, they just become like every other believer in Babylonian denominations. But they're sitting in our church, they're sitting in a CFC church, but it's not the spirit. They think that because I left that church and it came to this one, I'm no longer in Babylon.

That's a deception. You can have the spirit of Babylon sitting right in this church. You can have the spirit of Babylon in your heart because it's an individual thing.

The purest church on earth was the church that Jesus built with 12 disciples, and one of them was a crook. It was not just the spirit of Babylon. Jesus said, you have a devil, you have a demon.

The devil was in Judas Iscariot, but he was sitting in Jesus' church. And do you know that Judas Iscariot did miracles? You read Acts chapter 10? He was one of those who went out doing miracles in Jesus' name. But ultimately, he opened himself to the devil.

He didn't retain. He didn't hold on tight to what was given to him in the beginning. If you don't hold on tight to what is given to you, it'll slip from your hand.

You have to hold on to the standard, the high standard, which is not found in most of Christendom, of sound words. And the word in the Greek language for sound is hygienic, from which we get the word hygienic. That word hygienic is originally a Greek word.

It's got to do with total cleanliness. It's the type of word used in operating theaters in hospitals, where they will never use anything unhygienic. I mean, if a surgeon's knife falls to the ground, you don't touch it.

You don't even pick it up because you'll dirty your hands. And even after you scrubbed your hands for 5-10 minutes with soap and water, you still put gloves on, sterilized gloves. It's got to be totally hygienic because you're dealing with human lives.

That is the word used here. Hygienic words of total purity. Retain that standard which you have heard from me.

Paul says, I've been your spiritual father and I've taught you things which are a very high standard, Timothy, such as you'll never hear anywhere else in the world. Now hold on to that. Don't give it up.

Don't treat it lightly. Treat them as a valuable treasure. In fact, that's the word he uses in the next word, next verse.

God, through the Holy Spirit, the treasure which has been entrusted to you. I wonder if you realize that some of the truths you have heard over the internet from me or from here in this church are a treasure which you have to guard, value, hold on to, retain. Because it's easy to slip out of their hand.

It's easy to be slack and careless about it. It's easy to be influenced by other Christians who don't have those standards. One of the words which the Lord spoke through Haggai, if you turn to the Old Testament, in the book of Haggai, he asked this question to Haggai.

Haggai chapter 2, verse 11. Ask the priests for a ruling. If a man carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, that means sanctified according to the rules given by God in Leviticus, that's what they meant by holy, and with that touches other food, bread, wine, oil, will that other food become holy? No, holiness cannot be transmitted from person to person.

That's the message here. Okay, now the opposite of that, but if anyone was unclean from a corpse, he started a dead body and he's unclean, he goes and touches one of his food, will that become unclean? Yes, sin can be transmitted. It's a simple lesson.

Holiness cannot be transmitted. You've got to get it directly from God through the Holy Spirit. Sin can be transmitted by other people with whom you associate.

That's the message here. Very simple. I mean, you can use a human illustration from the operating theater.

If you take a sterilized glove, absolutely hygienic from the hospital operating theater and touch something dirty with it, will that become sterilized? No, but the opposite is if you take something dirty and touch a sterilized thing, that sterilized thing gets dirty. So, holiness can be transmitted even from the earthly illustration, you see that. Holiness cannot be transmitted, but sin can.

And so, it's very important to be careful that we don't allow other people to transmit their uncleanness to us and defile us. I mean, if you think yourself as a, say, a sterilized hand that the Lord wants to use in the operating theater because it's been scrubbed clean and by the blood of Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit, and then you allow that to be polluted by touching something which is dirty, you're not fit to be used by God. I'm absolutely convinced that this is the reason for all the boring dead sermons without the anointing that are spreading all over the world.

I mean, 90% of the sermons I heard in my life were absolutely dead, boring, unanointed, which was only information, which were clever things, which made you admire the preacher, but we never led people to godliness. Contact with that preacher never led a person to holiness. In fact, contact with a lot of preachers lead people to compromise and worldliness and sin.

For one classic example of that, you see the amount of divorce. There is in Christendom today. Malachi chapter 2, God says, I hate divorce.

It's a very clear word. In case you haven't seen it, let me read it to you. Two verses in Malachi.

Malachi 2, verse 16, I hate divorce. And further on, he says in just six, seven verses later in chapter 3, verse 6, I, the Lord, do not change. I, the Lord, do not change.

Malachi 3, verse 6. It's just eight verses after that. I hate divorce, and I don't change. How is it we have a Christendom today, which not only accepts divorce, marries divorced people, and pastors become divorced, marrying their secretaries? Where is Christendom gone? And the sad thing is, where are the people who raised their voice against all this? Now, I want to be merciful to those who are ignorant, and their unconverted days, they didn't know these laws, they lived in a corrupt Christendom and got divorced over there, and then come to the church, repentant, God forgives them.

But I'm talking about people who say they were born again, and then go completely against the Word of God. And Jesus' clear teaching in Matthew chapter 5. I'm just saying one example. I could give you many others.

Look at the number of Christians, born-again Christians, who watch R-rated movies. How did that happen? They say, well, that little bit of uncleanness is only for about five seconds. The movie is two hours, it's only five seconds.

I'll tell you something, particularly if you're a man. Twenty years later, you won't remember the story of the movie, you'll remember those five seconds. You polluted your mind forever, because you didn't understand that sin is easily transmitted, holiness is not.

And the devil is the god of this world, who controls the entertainment world, and tells Christians, oh, that's innocent, that's not so bad, there's a good storyline there, you must watch it. And you get your kids to watch it, and they grow up polluted in their mind, thinking, well, it's okay, dad said it's okay, mom said it's okay. You're polluting your children.

You've got to be very, very careful about the influences in the world. You won't become less spiritual, if you don't get that, if you don't understand the story in that movie. I believe we need some type of relaxation and entertainment, but make sure it's clean.

Make sure it's pure, that you don't defile your mind. Men who have polluted their minds in their younger days with pornography and other things like that will tell you from their experience that the memory of that is not easily erasable from the mind. It comes back again and again, even 50 years later, because the memory retains particularly anything that is sexually provocative.

Just like memory retains the evil that other people have done to you, and does not easily retain, remember the good that other people have done to you. Somehow, human nature is like that. So, we've got to be particularly careful about these things.

Particularly careful. That's why I said as soon as somebody does evil, we have to forgive and release that person and say, Lord, I don't want to retain that in my memory. I want to overlook it.

There are two things we must ask God to help us to forget. One is evil other people did to us and the good that we have done to others. Two things that we must try our best to forget.

Even, you know, because I'm an elder, people sometimes come and tell me about their problems and sometimes, unfortunately, some of their sins, which I try my best to keep them quiet from saying, I say, go and confess your sin to God. I'm not a priest for you to come and confess your sin to me. Go and confess it to God.

But I also say, Lord, if somebody has said something to me, I want you to erase it from my immediate memory and back in the lower levels of memory, we can erase nothing. But at least from the top levels of memory that it doesn't come back to me. I don't want to remember the evil that other people did.

I don't want to remember the bad stories that other people have told me as an elder telling me about their problems. I don't want to hold that. I want to keep my mind pure because I want to always be in touch with you.

I want the rivers of living water to flow through a channel in which there is no rust or corruption or impurity. It's not enough that the water flows through us. There must not be a pollution in the channel.

And all of us are meant to be channels through which God's word flows through us. Keep that channel pure. You cannot produce the living water.

Neither can I. That God will supply. But make sure the channel is clean. So, retain the standard of hygienic words.

I would urge you, my brother, I believe this is a prophetic word that the Lord wants you to have as a church here. To hold fast and retain that high standard of spiritual hygiene that you have heard from me, Paul says, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. And you can't do it on your own.

So, he says in the next verse, God, it's with the Holy Spirit. Seek for the Holy Spirit's help who dwells in you to keep this treasure. You have to see it, first of all, as a treasure.

I mean, if you had an earthly treasure of gold or a lot of currency notes that you were carrying, boy, how carefully you would keep that. So, we have to see this as a far greater treasure than anything else that we can have on this earth. And he tells us a story here of people who turned away from him in verse 15.

There were people, he gives the example of believers who took these, maybe Paul told them also, please retain this. These hygiene, and they say, yeah, yeah, we are okay. And they were careless about it.

And the end result was they turned away. And he mentioned some names, Phagellus and Herodogenes. But he says, in contrast to that, there was this wonderful brother called verse 16, who was not ashamed of my chains.

See, one reason why people turned away from Paul was he was not a popular preacher. Everybody likes to hang around a famous, popular preacher. Boy, he's world famous.

His name is known in Christian circles. Now, today, everybody appreciates Paul. But in Paul's lifetime, he was despised.

He was called the leader of a cult. I don't know whether you know that. And so, people were ashamed to be associated with him.

Let me show you Acts 24. When Paul was giving his testimony before Felix, who was a governor or judge or something, Paul was brought to stand before the governor, Felix. And the governor told Paul to speak.

And Paul says, listen to this. This is Paul standing as an accused criminal. He was not a criminal, but he was accused by the Jews.

He said, I want to tell you what I really believe. Verse 14. I admit to you that according to the way which these Jewish people call a cult.

Yeah, I belong to that. These fellows call me a cult leader or a sect leader. Same thing.

But they can say what they like. But I'll tell you what I believe. And listen to this.

I serve God believing everything written in the Law and the Prophets, which is the Bible. 39 books in those days. It was called, it wasn't called Bible in those days.

It was called the Law and the Prophets. What we call the Bible today. I believe everything in the Bible.

I serve God. And I have a hope in God, verse 15, that there will definitely be two resurrections. One resurrection for the righteous.

Another resurrection of the wicked. Which won't be at the same time. And listen to this.

In order to be in the resurrection of the righteous. Verse 16. I do my best to always maintain a conscience which is blameless, not only before God, but before men.

That means if I hurt somebody, I ask forgiveness immediately. As we read in the previous chapter, when he hurt the, when he spoke rudely to the judge, he immediately said it right. Or immediately with God, if there's, if a dirty thought came into Paul's mind, he'd immediately said it right.

He wouldn't wait one second. If he hurt somebody, he'd ask forgiveness immediately. Always, always means 24-7.

I kept my conscience clear before God and before men. So what were the characteristics of the so-called sect leader? One, he served God, believing everything written in the Bible. And believing in the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked, and keeping his conscience absolutely clean.

That's what they called a cult in those days. And you see the same thing today. You know, when we started our church, it started in our home.

But for many, many years, in the early years, they called me a cult leader. They said, this is a cult. This is definitely a cult.

And Zach is the cult leader. And what were we preaching? We were preaching total obedience to everything in the scriptures. We were preaching keeping a clear conscience before God and men, and serving God in that way.

And we're believing that if you want to be in the resurrection of the righteous, you've got to keep your conscience clean. That's what they called a cult. It's okay, you can call it a cult.

He says, Paul says, I admit. What they call a cult, that's how I serve God. You can call it whatever you like.

But you know, one of the, it was, it was a protection for us, I'll tell you. It's a very dangerous thing for someone who is a world famous Christian to try and start a little house church. I'll tell you why.

Because all the wrong people will join it. But fortunately, I was not. 42 years ago, I was despised and called a cult leader.

And they published my Christian magazines, writing articles against me and people publishing tracts that this guy is preaching poison. I said, fine. The Lord said, don't, just keep your mouth shut.

Time will prove to them where they are and where you are. Just keep your mouth shut. Sow the seed.

20 years later, they'll see their harvest. They'll see your harvest and there'll be a difference. So I kept my mouth shut.

I never defended myself. But what I say is, because of that, a lot of people didn't come to our church. That was good.

The wrong type of people didn't come. Otherwise, we'd have been crowded. We'd have sort of gradually become a huge church and all the wrong type of people.

We only wanted disciples and God used this filter of being despised. To filter out people who are not serious. But some people came through the filter.

You know, some folks would be, I remember at least two or three brothers I can think of, who were transferred from another town to Bangalore, where we were, and they were in some other church and they asked their pastor, when we go to Bangalore, which church should we go to? It's a new place for us. The standard answer was, go to any church except Zak Koonin's church and you'll be okay. So some of them probably obeyed that, but one or two said, why does he say that? Let me go and check up what's wrong with this church.

And they came and they got hooked by the message of the gospel and they never left. Yeah, we've had cases like that. We had a brother who got married to a sister from our church, who belonged to another church.

He said, there's one condition, don't ever ask me to come to your church. CFC, I'll never come to it. You've got to come to my church and he was going to some other church.

So his wife was a wise sister. She said, okay, but she said, can you please come for one conference? That's all, I'll never ask you again. Come for one of the CFC conferences and then I won't ask you again.

So he said, okay, I want to find out exactly what these people teach and expose their wrong doctrine and he came for the conference and the first meeting he got hooked, changed completely and he has not left us in all these years and he's one of our senior elders now. What I'm saying is, in spite of these warnings, there were people who came through and joined Paul and there have been people through the years who come join us. So I've learned to thank God for this filter.

This filter of being called a cult or a sect. Do you know that Jesus was called a cult leader by the Jews? They said, this guy's not only a cult leader, he's actually Beelzebul, head of the demons. That's what they called him and Paul, we saw here, he was called a cult leader.

That seems to be through the years, God's way of protecting. Do you know Martin Luther, when he started the Protestant movement, the Roman Catholics just turned against him. This guy was a heretic.

Today, of course, people respect him as, oh, he was a man who started the Protestant Reformation and preached salvation by grace through faith. And then a little later, there was, you know, the Protestant Reformation, the Anglican Church came through that, through Luther's movement in England. But when

John Wesley, one of the greatest and the holiest men of God that Christianity has seen, when he came into the Anglican Church, the Anglican Church called him a heretic and put him out.

Today, of course, we consider him a great man of God. This has always been the way that God is used in a man's lifetime. This filter of, this group is a cult, this is a cult leader, and then, because God doesn't want those who are not serious about following him to come and waste their time in this church.

So I've learned through the years never to fight this, because I see that it's a wonderful filter that keeps away people who should not be wasting our time. The same thing with healing, you know, for many years, I see so many sick people in India and different places, and I tell you, I have prayed so many times to God to give me the gift of healing. And I promised God, Lord, I'll never take money from people like all these other healers do.

And I will go to the poor people first, not to the rich people who can afford to go to doctors. I'll go to the poor people who can't afford medicine, who can't afford doctors, who can't afford to go to the hospital, poor believers who need healing. I'll do that.

Please give me the gift, and I promise you, I'll never ever use it for any one cent of gain for myself. I give you my word. He never gave it to me.

I mean, I've seen occasionally now and then as we pray for people, people heal, but not as a healing gift. And I said, Lord, why is this? I mean, isn't it a good gift? And I see that Jesus, who had the greatest healing gift, who healed thousands, they finally killed him. Can you believe it? He was a heretic and a cult leader for the Pharisees.

All that multitude healing, was that a great revival? How many people waited for the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost after the greatest healer walked on this earth for three and a half years? 120. Is that all? And with all the healings and all that, in the early days of the church, there was quite a bit of it too. There wasn't so many people turning, but I saw the reason myself, and what the Lord showed me was that if I did have a genuine gift of healing, our church would be flooded with a whole lot of people.

Thousands of people would come, because there are thousands of sick people. My phone would be ringing day and night. I wouldn't be able to sleep.

And the Lord said, I want to protect you from all this, because you'll never have time to make disciples. You'll be all the time trying to figure out among these 20,000 people sitting in your church, who really wants to be a disciple, and it'll be a job. So, I've seen the wisdom of God.

It doesn't work the way we think. Human beings think, boy, if you could go and heal in the name of Jesus, think of a number of people who would believe in Jesus. It looks like that, but God's ways are not different, because they're coming not for following Jesus.

They're coming for some personal gain. I saw that in the days when a lot of missionaries came to India in the early 1900s. Some were very God-fearing, but many of them, they preached in India.

The people who came to them were called Rice Christians, because rice is the staple food in many parts of India. They came because they wanted rice. They wanted food.

They wanted education. They wanted to learn English. They wanted a trip to a western country.

These are the reasons why they became Christians. Now, what type of Christianity will that be? I remember one place where I went to where non-Christians had been converted to Christianity, and you know the non-Christian God is Krishna, and their songs were all to Krishna, Krishna, Krishna. When they got converted, they just began to sing the same song to Krista, Krista, Krista, which is to Christ.

It didn't make any difference in their life. They just changed one syllable, and that was it. The life was just the same.

It looked like they were singing Christian songs. They were not. I saw this.

I saw this in those early days, and I said, Lord, I don't want to spend my life producing this type of Christianity. If you have the real thing, we have four or five people, and we are a witness for Christ. That's all that matters.

The important thing is not how many lights we have. It's better to have one powerful light. Think if we had street lights, which are just like candles.

You wouldn't be able to drive on the road, but if you have one powerful light, that's better than a thousand candles, and so I said, I don't want to be a church like a little candle. I want to be a powerful light, and I believe that's what God wants this church to be. Numbers is not the main thing.

It's important to reach out to others, surely. Paul says that to Timothy, and we should not forget that. If you turn to 2 Timothy, he tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 4, verse 5, the last part, do the work of an evangelist and fulfill your ministry.

He tells him that. You must reach out and bring people to the Lord. Be a witness, and I praise God for people in our church who invite their friends in their office to come to the church service, and they may be non-Christians.

They come, and they get converted, and they get converted, and then they bring their brother in, and he gets converted. I think of a young girl who was good friends with another Roman Catholic young girl, seven, eight years old, in school, and told her, hey, why don't you come to our church? She told her father, and the father came, and the father was converted. He's a member of our church today, and then the father brought his brother.

He's a member of our church. How did it start with one little girl? Can you be an evangelist when you're seven, eight years old? Sure. You don't have to preach.

It's so easy to say, why don't you come to our Sunday service? Just see what it's like. I mean, if you're not happy, don't come again. That's okay.

But we've told people, why don't you use the opportunity we have with literature? When you send a birthday greeting to somebody, you spend so much on a birthday card. For that same amount of money, you can also buy a little book and send that along with your birthday card, a little booklet, not a big, thick one, a little booklet and say, here's something that's changed my life. I'd like to give it to you on your birthday.

Please read it. I love you. To your friends or relatives, you never know what that little act of evangelism can do.

Who is there who cannot be an evangelist? So, if we are really gripped by, Lord, this message has changed my life. People have described evangelism like one beggar telling another beggar where we can get food. That's what we are.

Or one sick person telling another person, hey, this medicine healed me, man. You've got the same sickness. It can heal you.

Isn't that a kind act that we can do to others? We do that in earthly things. Retain the standard of sound words God's given us and do the work of an evangelist. And we pray that God will bring to us.

I mean, many people will come and they say, we don't want this and they'll go. Well, God bless you. We love you.

Some people will be with us for a while and they leave. Okay. We don't hate them.

We've had people who've been with our church for a number of years and who left. And when I see them on the streets, I never tell them, hey, come back to our church. No.

I say, I hope you're following Jesus Christ wherever you are. I mean, if you're going to a church where you're challenged to follow Christ, fine. So, we're not here to grab people and to increase our numbers.

But we want people to be radical disciples. We don't want to lower the standard in the church by lowering the high level of God's word that we proclaim from the pulpit and in your own personal life. I want to say one more thing here, which Paul speaks about Timothy in 2nd Timothy, and that is in chapter 2 and verse 20.

In a large house, and that is the church, there are many types of vessels. There are gold and silver vessels and vessels of wood and earthenware, some to honor and some to dishonor. You know, in many of the homes in India, there'll be these earthen pots in which they keep water and there are wooden crates in which you keep books or a lot of other stuff.

Those are not very expensive, the vessels of wooden crates and earthen pots. But there, they may have a silver vessel or a golden one, which somebody gave them as a gift, and that'd be locked up somewhere. They wouldn't even use it so much.

But those things have got essential value, the intrinsic value of those vessels are much more than these vessels that we use every day. So the emphasis here is not just whether God is using you. A lot of people say God is using me.

That's fine. You could be an earthen pot. You know, the earthen pots and wooden crates are probably used more in a house than the golden.

How many people use gold and silver vessels in their house every day? It's usually some stainless steel or earthen pots, but intrinsic value. If the house is on fire, you won't rush in there to take out your cooking earthen pot. You'll rush in there to take out your golden vessels.

And that's how it's going to be when the world is on fire and Christ comes. He's going to come for his treasures. And here it says, if you are an earthen pot today, not of much value, and you want to be a person of value to God, here's what you must do.

He says in this large house, verse 20, there are these two type of vessels. But if you, verse 21, cleanse yourself, you can be one of those valuable vessels of honor, sanctified, useful to the master prepared for every good work. So he's saying that you can convert yourself from an earthen pot to a golden vessel.

How? By cleansing yourself. This is one of the messages that we have preached in the church right from the beginning. There are two types of cleansing.

One is the cleansing that God does, which is relating to my past sins. I confess my sins and he cleanses me from all my past. I cannot do that.

A million good works I do cannot cleanse even one sin of mine. But the blood of Jesus cleanses it completely, blots it out. He says, I won't remember it.

Only God can do that. That's 1 John 1 7. The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. But this is another cleansing where we have to cleanse ourselves.

If I want to become, be transformed from an earthen pot to a golden pot, and every one of you have that opportunity, you can be a vessel of intrinsic value to God, that God can accomplish something where don't just leave it to the preacher. Those are the dead Babylonian churches where one preacher does everything. You may not have the gift of preaching.

That's okay. But you can be a vessel of gold that can be of tremendous use in God's kingdom, even though you may be just witnessing to people on your own, and drawing them, maybe just drawing them into the church and people see your life and are drawn to Christ. You're also building the church.

So, in 2 Corinthians 7, 1, also we read that word which says, since we have these wonderful promises, 2 Corinthians 7, 1, let us cleanse ourselves. The entire Christian world knows about God cleansing us from our sin by the blood of Christ. There are very few churches that preach, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, 2 Corinthians 7, 1, thus you can perfect holiness in the fear of God.

Perfecting holiness in the fear of God is a message which is almost unpreached, not preached. In 99% of Christendom, and where they do preach, some people say, you just claim it. Claim it and you become holy.

Well, it doesn't seem to be seen in their life. These guys who claim it still get angry and tell lies and all types of things. We got to cleanse ourselves if you want a perfect holiness.

It's the only way described in Scripture. And to be ready for the coming of the Lord, 1 John chapter 3, same message, 1 John chapter 3, verse 3. Everyone who has the hope, the hope is chapter 3, verse 2, that when he appears, we shall be like him. We shall see him as he is, 1 John 3, 2. If you have this hope of the second coming of Christ, what will you do? You will cleanse yourself.

If you're not cleansing yourself, I want to say your hope of being ready for the coming of Christ is a deception. Don't let anyone sitting here imagine that you're ready for the coming of Christ. If you're not cleansing yourself, everyone, it says, not most of them, everyone who has this hope, verse 2, of seeing him as he is, will purify himself until he reaches his standard of purity.

This is the standard of hygienic words that we have proclaimed in our church, not words from any man, words from inspired Holy Spirit-inspired Scripture. Hold fast to it, because we are living in a day when a lot

of preaching which will make that slip out of your hand. One last verse, 1 Peter 4, and verse 17.

1 Peter 4, 17. Here it speaks about the family of God or the household of God. How do you know that you belong to the household of God, that you belong to NCCF? I suppose you have some criterion to be a member here that's easy to attain to.

But to the household of God, that's another thing. In the household of God, it says in verse 17, we judge ourselves first. That's how I know I'm part of the household of God.

I judge myself every single day. God is my witness that I live a life of judging myself every day, cleansing myself every day, perfecting holiness a little more every day. Why do I do that? Because that is the way I acknowledge I have not yet become like Jesus Christ fully, but I want to become like him.

If you say, all of us will acknowledge that we are not like Christ, nobody here is fully like Christ. I think all of us will also acknowledge I want to be fully like Christ. But we don't follow the process of going from here to there.

I'm not yet like Christ. I want to become like Christ. How do I go from here to there? Purify yourself every day, cleanse yourself, judge yourself.

So what do I judge myself? I'm not committing adultery or murder. I'm discovering mostly little, little aspects of selfishness, where I think of myself more than about Christ and his kingdom, where I think of myself and not about the other person, perhaps not about my wife or not about others who I need to deny myself in order to live and serve as a Christian. Those are the areas in that selfishness is like a huge onion, and you can peel off one layer at a time.

And boy, the onion is, I can certainly say the onion has become thin in my life, but there's still a whole lot of layers there, which need to be peeled off before Christ comes. There are many layers of selfishness in your life too. Ask God to show it to you so that you can become more like Jesus, who was totally selfless, who never sought his own in anything.

The most wonderful life that a man ever lived on this earth was the life Jesus lived, where he sought the glory of God in everything and never sought his own. It was such a blessing to others. That's the way he wants every one of you to live.

You may not be preachers, it doesn't matter, but you can live in this way. It'll transform your home, into a fortress of heaven, the best sort of atmosphere in which your children can grow up. Everything God plans for us is for our good.

Seek it, my brothers and sisters. Retain the standard of hygienic words that you've heard. Never let them slip and guard them through the Holy Spirit.

Let's pray. Don't let these words slip out of your mind, my brothers and sisters. Please take it seriously.

Take it as a prophetic word from the Lord to your heart. Retain, hold fast. Don't let anyone take it out of your grip.

Don't lose it. Keep the standard of hygiene you've heard from God's Word. Heavenly Father, help us all, we pray.

We know by your grace, we can hold on to these words right until the time you come back to take us. We want to trust you. By the Holy Spirit that we will do it, that you'll preserve this church as a shining light for you in this area.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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