

(Knowing God's Way) 9. New-Covenant Servants and New-Covenant Churches

by Zac Poonen

To be a true servant of God under the new covenant, one must be free from sin, free from mammon, and free from seeking to please men.

Scripture: Psalm 34:18, Ezekiel 10:4, Matthew 5:3, Matthew 18:20, Luke 16:13, Acts 5:13, Romans 6:22, 1 Corinthians 14:24-25, Galatians 1:10, Colossians 1:18

Topics: "Servanthood", "New-Covenant Church"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the characteristics of true New-Covenant servants and churches, highlighting that anyone can serve God if they are free from sin, mammon, and the desire to please men. He critiques the misconception that only those who abandon secular jobs can be servants of God, asserting that true servanthood is about spiritual integrity and prioritizing God's kingdom over material wealth. Poonen also discusses the essential qualities of a New-Covenant church, which include the presence of God and the transformative power of His glory, rather than mere adherence to traditions or patterns. He warns against hypocrisy and the dangers of seeking personal gain within ministry, urging believers to focus on genuine discipleship and the pursuit of God's glory.

Transcript

New-Covenant Servants

There are three passages of Scripture that tell us who a true servant of God is under the NEW covenant. When we read those three passages without any preconceived opinions, we will discover that all of us can be servants of God, in this day and age, if we want to be.

Under the old covenant, only the Levites could be servants of God. They were not supposed to do any earthly work and were to be supported by the tithes of the other tribes of Israel. Babylonian Christianity today teaches that under the new covenant too, only those who give up their secular jobs can be servants of God - and that they must be supported by the tithes of other Christians. But this is the teaching of man's tradition and not that of Scripture!

(1) Free From Sin

"Being made free from sin and become servants to God" (Rom.6:22).

This is the first requirement - to be free from sin. It is obviously easier to be free of one's earthly job than to be free from sin. Jesus worked in a secular job. Yet He was a servant of God even then.

A man who gets angry and loses his temper cannot be a servant of God. He may be a preacher or even a chief-pastor, but he cannot be a servant of God. Many pastors shout praises to God in "other tongues" on Sunday morning and then shout angrily at their wives in their "mother-tongue" the same afternoon. Is the Holy Spirit able to control us only when we speak in other tongues, but not when we speak in our mother-tongue? That is a deception. I thank God that I have spoken in tongues for 22 years. It has edified me and delivered me totally from depression, gloom and discouragement all these years. But I thank God that the Holy Spirit also controls my language when I speak in my mother-tongue - to my wife, to my brothers, to strangers and to beggars.

A man who lusts after women with his eyes cannot be a preacher of the gospel or a servant of God. Only one who is radical enough to be willing even to pull out his eye to avoid sin can be a servant of God. When was the last time you wept on your pillow at night, because you slipped up with your eyes? If you are casual about this matter, you will backslide inwardly little by little until one day you fall publicly.

A man who tells a lie in order to make a little more money or in order to gain some honour for himself is actually a servant of the devil - for the devil is the father of all lies. He cannot be a servant of God.

One who cannot love ALL his enemies, or do good to ALL who harm him, is totally unfit to preach the gospel. If you have the slightest bit of bitterness or unforgiveness in your heart against anyone, then the best thing for you to do is to keep your mouth shut, go home and repent and cleanse your heart of those evils. You cannot be a servant of God.

(2) Free from Mammon

"You cannot be a servant of God and a servant of Mammon. You must hate one and love the other. You must hold on to one and despise the other" (Luke 16:13).

This is the second requirement - to be free from mammon (money and all material things). Again, it is easier to be free from one's secular job than it is to be free from mammon.

You have to make a choice as to which you are going to serve - either God or Mammon. Many "full time workers" are seeking to serve God AND Mammon. They earn more as so-called "servants of God" today, than they would ever have earned if they had been in a secular profession. Anyone who has not had to sacrifice earthly comforts, money and material things in serving God is NOT really serving God at all.

Any believer can be a servant of God - but he must be free from loving mammon. In fact, if you read the above verse carefully, you will find that Jesus said that we had to hate mammon and despise mammon in order to be servants of God.

If you can say before God that that is your attitude towards mammon or at least that that is the attitude that you want to have towards mammon, then you qualify to be a servant of God - not otherwise. How many full-time workers qualify by the standard that Jesus has set here? Very, very few!

The test as to who we serve is discovered by whose orders we obey - God's or Mammon's. Whose claims have priority in our lives - God's or Mammon's? No-one can serve two masters. When money calls you, if you respond immediately, you are a servant of mammon.

Why is it that most preachers travel only to preach in comfortable places where there are rich believers. How many are interested in regularly visiting the poor believers in the villages of India and establishing them in the faith. Those are the true servants of God in India.

Many Indian full-time workers now live in America and claim to have a burden for India. This is sheer hypocrisy. Yet multitudes of believers are fooled by them. If they really had a burden for India they would have lived in India itself. There is nothing wrong in a believer re-locating his residence to another country. But the motive in his re-location is what matters. Jesus also relocated His residence from heaven to earth. But what was His motive? Was it comfort and ease and money? Or was it that God might be glorified and needy people helped. You too must decide why you decided to relocate from one place to another. That will indicate to you whether you are a servant of God or of Mammon.

The devil knows that a man who serves Mammon is useless to God. And so he leaves such preachers alone. The greatest insult that the devil can give you is to leave you alone and to allow you to get honour from worldly people and from the worldly leaders of apostate Christendom.

A servant of God thinks constantly about how to win souls and build the church. That is what he dreams about at night too. A servant of Mammon however thinks and dreams day and night about how to make more money. We cannot fool our "subconscious" - because it knows, more than anyone else, exactly what we desire. If we love Mammon, let us be honest and tell God that - and ask Him to deliver us from it. There is great hope for honest believers - but NO hope for dishonest hypocrites.

We hear these days of many "miracle crusades". But I am still waiting to see one crusade where the miracle of "not asking people to give money" is seen!! Jesus and His apostles never took an offering from people in any of their meetings. Yet blind, foolish believers today admire preachers who unashamedly ask for money and even imagine that these are great servants of God. The clearer light of the judgment-seat of Christ will reveal that such preachers were only serving themselves and not God.

Believers draw a dividing line to separate those who are evangelical in doctrine from those who are liberal. But in such a case, the devil and all his demons will also be on the "evangelical" side, because they are all evangelical in doctrine (Jas.2:19)!! But God draws a line to separate those who love Mammon from those who love God. Then we find that the devil and his demons are found among the lovers of Mammon.

If we seek God's kingdom first, God will give us all that we need for our life on earth, without our pursuing after them. I have found this to be true in all the 40 years of my Christian experience. Heaven and earth will pass away, but God's Word will not pass away. We must all be living demonstrations of the fact that God supplies ALL the needs of those who seek His kingdom first. Although none of us may be able to say that we have consistently sought God's kingdom first at all times throughout our Christian life, we should certainly be able to testify that we have not run after money. If we are preachers, we should also have this testimony that we do not go anywhere to preach just because we know we can get money there, that we do not seek to please the rich, that we do not ignore the poor, that we are not interested in taking up offerings, that we do not make our financial needs known to people and that we do not expect people to give us money. Paul could testify to having lived such a life. He said that he lived like that in order to expose all the money-loving preachers in his time who claimed that they too were serving God like he did (2 Cor.11:10-13 -Living Bible).

In our day also, there is a great need in India for living witnesses like Paul, who will expose the money-loving preachers that are found in abundance in Christendom in India. We know very well why the

devil hates us and our ministry so much, that he makes believers (who have never come to our meetings or heard us speak) call us heretics, antichrists, terrorists, false prophets etc., It is because we are troubling Satan's kingdom so much by exposing the fact that full-time workers who love money and preach the gospel of Christ are actually servants of Satan (See 2Cor.11:15 in the context of verses 10-13).

Jesus said that if we were not faithful in the use of Mammon, God would not commit the true riches of His kingdom to us (Lk.16:11). When we see the blind imitation of Western Christians by Indian Christians, the terrible lack of revelation on God's Word, and the boring preaching of today's preachers, we can understand clearly that the reason for all this is that these preachers have NOT been faithful with money.

(3) Free From Seeking To Please Men

"If I seek to please men, I cannot be a servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10).

This is the third requirement - to be free from seeking to please men.

Once again, it is easier to be free of a secular job than to be free from seeking to please men.

If we preach God's Word to please men, we are servants of men and not of God. When a preacher wants to be invited back once again to a prestigious convention where he can get more money and honour next year, he can be tempted to modify his message so that nobody is offended by what he says. Thus he becomes a servant of men.

When you pray in such a way in public as to impress men, you are worshipping men's opinions and not the living God. God does not hear such prayers, because they are offered to men and not to Him.

In the same way, we could examine ourselves concerning the way we dress, the way we talk to people, and even the way we walk. If any of these things are done to impress men with our "holiness" or perhaps our "humility", we are servants of men and not servants of God.

Even if you seek to please your wife/husband, you cannot please God.

The more you please God the more you will be called evil names by men who do not know God - even by religious leaders in Christendom. Jesus was called "the prince of devils". How much more His disciples will be called by such names - because they do not seek to please any pope or archbishop or chief-pastor or any human being on the earth.

New-Covenant Churches

Nowadays many believers are fed up with their own denominations, and are leaving them in search of a new-covenant church. There are also many groups that claim to be "New-covenant churches".

But how are we to identify a new-covenant church? Certainly not by the pattern of its meetings. It is possible to imitate many things in the pattern that we see in a powerful church, and yet never become a powerful church ourselves.

It would have been possible for the Philistines to build a tabernacle exactly like the one that Moses built, because the details were all clearly given in the book of Exodus. But there was one thing about that tabernacle that no-one would have been able to imitate - and that was the fire of the glory of God that rested upon the tabernacle. That was the one distinctive mark by which the true dwelling place of God was

identified in the wilderness. Without that, the tabernacle was an empty shell. When the tabernacle was later replaced by the temple in Solomon's time, the glory of God filled it. But later, when Israel backslid, that glory slowly moved out (Ezek.10:4,18,19). That temple then became an empty shell. It is the same with many churches today.

The one identifying mark of a new-covenant church is the presence of God in its midst. When the spirit of prophecy is powerfully present in a church-meeting, those coming to that meeting will fall on their faces and "acknowledge that God is there" (1 Cor.14:24,25). When Jesus speaks prophetically in the church, our hearts will burn, just like the hearts of the two disciples burned on the way to Emmaus, when Jesus spoke to them (Lk.24:32).

God is a consuming fire. When God came down into the bush through which He spoke to Moses, and the bush burned, no worm could survive in that bush. In exactly the same way, no sin can remain hidden or unexposed where the powerful, burning presence of God is found today. Such a church alone is a new-covenant church. The eyes of Jesus are like a flame of fire (Rev.1:14) and He is constantly searching and exposing sin and human traditions and Phariseeism in all the churches which he is building.

The master key to the kingdom of heaven is poverty of spirit (Mt. 5:3). Without this, we will not be able to build a new-covenant church. To be poor in spirit is to be broken before God constantly with a sense of our own need, because we have a great and intense longing to be perfect even as our heavenly Father is perfect. "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted" (Psa.34:18). And when He is near, His presence brings the fire of heaven into our hearts and through us to others wherever we go.

Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) made a serious mistake when they joined the powerful new-covenant church at Jerusalem where the presence of God burned like a fire. If they had been in the church at Corinth (in later years) they would have lived long lives. Ananias might even have become an elder there - because the church at Corinth was a carnal, dead church. But in the fiery new-covenant church at Jerusalem, this couple just could not survive. God will expose and remove those who live in hypocrisy in any new-covenant church.

If there is anything that dishonours God in our life at home or work place, we are in great danger if we remain as members of a truly new-covenant church. If your basic aim in life is not to seek the glory of God, but something for yourself or your family, it is far better that you leave a new-covenant church where God is powerfully present and His Word powerfully proclaimed. It would be better for you to join a dead church. At least you may then live long - unlike Ananias and Sapphira!

There are many churches today that call themselves "new-covenant churches". But they are as dead as the dodo bird!! The name means nothing. The question is whether Pharisees and hypocrites can live comfortably there or whether they are exposed and get offended and leave. In a new-covenant church, many will get offended with the preaching of the Word and leave the church. It is written of the church at Jerusalem, that "many people didn't dare join them" (Acts 5:13)

If our desire as elders is to increase our numbers rather than to make disciples for Jesus, we will gather Pharisees and hypocrites in our churches. We will never build a new-covenant church. When the presence of Jesus is powerfully present in a church, the disciples therein will be taken up with seeing His glory. The proof that we have indeed seen the glory of the risen Lord will be that the things of earth (like comfort and honour and wealth) will have become dim in our eyes, and will no longer have the attraction that they once had for us.

In a new-covenant church, there won't be just powerful preaching of the Word but powerful, living examples of the Word too. It is not new doctrines that make an impact on others for God, but holy lives. New-covenant servants don't just preach to others, they invite others to follow their example too (1 Cor. 11:1).

We should weep when our example is not a worthy one. We should hang our heads in shame when we bore people with dry, un-anointed messages. It is impossible to become cold or Pharisaical if we follow Jesus. We are far away from Jesus if we have only dreams and visions to talk about, but no word from the Lord to feed the people with. It is impossible to bore people, when we ourselves are on fire for the Lord.

Jesus was raised from the dead so that He might have the first place in everything (Col. 1:18). God fully backs all those who have this as their ambition. What this means is that we give up our own plans and rights and let Jesus tell us what we are to do, how we are to spend our money and time etc., If this is your only ambition in life, you can be certain that God will use you to build a new-covenant church in your locality.

Many claim that Jesus is in their midst just because they quote His Name (Mt. 18:20). But they are deceiving themselves. If He is really present in their midst, then why are the meetings so boring? Why is it that lives are not being transformed? Even a short time spent in the company of a truly godly man makes a deep impact upon us such that, it even changes the course of our lives. How much more of an impact there should be upon our lives if we have spent even a short time with Jesus Himself. So if lives are not being transformed through the church-meetings, then we have to admit that the Lord's presence is not there in our meetings. Then we are NOT a new-covenant church.

We will never be able to build a perfect church here on this earth. Even in the first church that Jesus built - His twelve disciples - there was one traitor. So we cannot expect anything better. But where Jesus builds His church today, there will be a core at the centre of that church of people who have seen His glory and who have been gripped by it. Their hearts will be aflame with a fire that the Devil cannot quench. Through them the Lord will build a new covenant church for the glory of God.

Source:

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