

New Covenant: Doctrine or Life?

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen's sermon emphasizes the transformative nature of the New Covenant, highlighting the importance of true repentance and the inner life over mere external compliance to doctrine.

Duration: 1:13:11

Scripture: Genesis 3:24, Matthew 7:22-23, Matthew 11:30, Matthew 16:24, John 17:3, Galatians 6:3, Philippians 3:8, Hebrews 2:14, James 4:10

Topics: "The Cross", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of embracing the way of the cross, symbolizing death to self and living a life that reflects the nature of Jesus Christ. It highlights the dangers of seeking man's interests over God's interests, the significance of dying to self daily, and the necessity of being filled with the Holy Spirit to partake of the life of Jesus. The message challenges listeners to prioritize spiritual growth, humility, and a deeper fellowship with God, rather than seeking personal accomplishments or recognition.

Transcript

So, we call ourselves a New Covenant Christian Church and I think in all these five years there's a lot that you have heard about the New Covenant both in maybe videos that you watched at home on the internet and also messages that you've heard from different ones we've shared here through the years. So, we considered some of the marks of spiritual growth which is the spirit of thankfulness, humility and deeper fellowship among ourselves. What are some of the dangers as we seek to pursue this life? I think one of the dangers which I have seen because we've been planting churches for 40 years, I've seen one of the dangers is particularly for clever intelligent people which most of you are or if not all of you is the danger of thinking that because we understand the doctrine and we can explain it clearly and that we are better than other churches that don't understand the doctrine or that don't preach it.

That can be a tremendous deception. The Bible says in John chapter 1 and verse 4 that in Christ was life and that life was the light of men. Jesus told us where to be to be the light of the world.

What does that mean? In the old covenant here we read of the light as the life of Jesus. It's very clear in him was life and that life was the light of men. So, that's why he said I am the light of the world in John chapter 8 and verse 12.

I am the light of the world. But he also said in John chapter 9 in verse 5 that I am the light of the world only as long as I am in the world. Once I leave the world, I mean it's very clear as long as I am in the world, I'm the light of the world.

We know that he's not in the world now. He said in John 17, Father I'm coming to you. I'm no longer in the world.

Then he gave that responsibility to us. He said in Matthew 5.14, you are the light of the world. He looked at his disciples and said you're the light of the world.

So, if somebody were to ask you who is the light of the world today, say we. We as a church. Is he not Jesus? Jesus said he was the light of the world as long as he was in the world.

I believe his word in John 9 verse 5. Then he turned around to us and said you're the light of the world. Now that's an awesome responsibility and that's why we don't like to say it. We don't like to say we're the light of the world because we look at the way we're living and some of us may be pretty ashamed of the way we live and say how can I say we're the light of the world.

That's what should bring us down on our faces and say why are we living like that? Why are we living in a world? Why are we living in a way that we're not the light of the world? Something's seriously wrong. Okay, if you're newly born again for a couple of years, that's okay. It's like little children take about two years to get steady on their feet and we read in the Old Testament that when God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, it took two years for them to come to the borders of Canaan.

You read that in Deuteronomy 2.14 that after two years they came to the borders of Canaan and God told them to go in and they didn't go in. So they wandered for another 38 years. So what I see from that is Canaan is a life of victory and triumph picture of it and God expected them to come to that in two years.

So I see that as God's plan that if you're born again, if you're really sincerely born again, in two years you should come to life of victory. If you haven't, I think part of the reason is there's not been a proper repentance. That means we are born facing sin with God on our back.

Repentance means a 180 degree turn where God is in front of us and sin and the world are behind us. Now with many, many Christians, that is not true. Sin and the world are not behind them and that's because they heard an improper gospel.

A gospel that emphasized faith, believe, believe, just confess your sin and believe and did not emphasize the most important thing, repentance. So without repenting or repenting 90 degrees instead of 180 degrees with one eye on the world, one eye on God, they try to believe and confess their sin and imagine, I'm okay, you're not okay. The message that John the Baptist brought as a forerunner to Christ is the message that is the forerunner of the gospel.

The gospel is salvation through Christ but there's a message that prepares the way for the gospel. That's the message of John the Baptist, repentance. That is a turning around.

So just like God sent John the Baptist and he said, I've come here to raise the valleys and bring down the mountains and make the crooked places straight and to remove the rough places and make them smooth. These are four different pictures he used about repentance, bringing down all the high thoughts and lifting up all the depressed valleys and making the crooked things in our life straight and making the rough

places smooth. You read that in Luke chapter 3. He was preaching repentance and that was the preparation for faith.

Paul said in Acts 20, I preach repentance and faith everywhere I go. So that is the reason why and if that's been true in your case, you can see perhaps that is the main reason why people have not grown spiritually or not come into a life of victory in two years or can be here for five years and still be defeated even though you've heard and heard and heard and heard and still you're yelling at each other at home and still lusting and pursuing after money and things like that and you've got all the right theory. But the light which is the life of Jesus is not shining and that's okay.

But the sad thing is, it's not bringing us down on our faces in weeping and saying, Lord, why isn't that happening? I've been here so long and why isn't that happening in our life? We're not disturbed by it. That's a serious thing. I've often told people that the fact that you sin is not as serious as the fact that you don't weep after you sin.

That's more serious. That shows a lack of sensitivity. It's like, you know, when we get a little injury on our hand, we immediately react to it and want to do something about it.

If you get a cut, you don't just leave it. But if you had leprosy, you wouldn't even feel that because lepers don't have sensation. So when I sin and it doesn't make me weep, it's an indication of our conscience having lost its sensitivity.

It's a serious condition. It's spiritual leprosy. I know a lot of people who have come to our church in Bangalore and have said to me after a few years there, Brother Zach, I don't really believe I was saved until I came here.

I said, why? He said, I thought I was born again and saw the church I attended. But I was so defeated by sin and I realized that I never knew what repentance was until I came here. I never got a clear understanding of what sin was until I came here.

So until you understand what sin is, how can you repent from it? If you know where south is, then you can turn around from south and face north. But if you don't know where the south is, then how do you turn around and face north? So if you don't know what sin is, you can't repent. So you don't know what darkness is, you don't know what the light is.

And that, I believe, is where the devil has blinded so many people concerning what is darkness. The darkness in our life is basically due to our self-centeredness. That our life is centered around myself.

We grow up like that, the entire world lives a self-centered life. Whether they are politicians or businessmen or academics or mega church pastors, very often it's self projecting themselves. And if my life is self-centered, I'm really following the way that Adam went.

Even if I've added a little religion to it. Because, you know, the way Jesus is being preached by many preachers today is, He will bless you. Well, who in the world doesn't want to be blessed? There's not a single human being in the world who doesn't want to be blessed.

Come and Jesus will bless you and He'll forgive all your sins. He will take you to heaven and He will even bless you materially. And He'll make you healthy.

But every human being in the world wants to be healthy. Every human being in the world wants to be wealthy. Every human being in the world wants to be blessed.

And every human being in the world wants to go to heaven. So the entire world should respond to such a gospel. And most people do.

But Jesus said the way to life is narrow and very few find it. So that must be another gospel altogether. And that's the deception that's going on in Christendom today.

So that's the thing we have to stand against and proclaim as error by the light of our lives. In the Old Covenant, if you read Psalm 119, we read there Psalm 119 and verse 105. Psalm 119, verse 105.

Lord, your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. You see there in the Old Testament, the light was the written word, the law, and the messages of the prophets. Thy word is my light.

What is the light in the New Covenant? The life of Jesus. In him was life and the life was the light of men. So in what way was Israel supposed to be a light in the Old Covenant? By going, by keeping the law and keeping everything written in the word as long as they kept those commandments, God was happy with them.

You are my witnesses. But in the New Covenant, it's not by keeping certain commandments that we manifest the light. So remember this very clearly in your mind.

In the Old Covenant, the word was the light. In the New Covenant, it's the life of Jesus that is the light. And I believe these two are symbolized in the two trees in the Garden of Eden.

There's a tree of knowledge of good and evil. And there's a tree of life. To me, in one sense, that is a picture of Old Covenant and New Covenant.

Because knowledge of good and evil is not wrong in itself. Don't we want our children to know what is good and what is evil? To do evil is wrong. But to know what is good and evil, why did God tell Adam, if you eat of that, you will die? Why does the knowledge of good and evil bring death? We need to understand that.

You see, you could have spent five years here recognizing more and more what is good and what is evil. It's evil to shout at my wife. It's good to speak kindly to her.

Knowledge of good and evil, many, many things. And through the years, the more you hear, the more you hear, you understand what is good and evil. And you may be sitting around the tree of knowledge of good and evil the whole time.

Because this book can be the tree of knowledge of good and evil to you, or the tree of life. It all depends on how you approach it. I show you that from the New Testament.

This is the big difference between the Pharisees and Jesus. The Pharisees knew the scriptures. Jesus knew the scriptures.

The Pharisees prayed. Jesus prayed. The Pharisees fasted.

Jesus fasted. Do you know the Pharisees even did evangelism? They crossed land and sea to make proselytes, we read in Matthew 23. Jesus did evangelism, traveling around.

The Pharisees gave their money to God, and Jesus gave also. So what was the difference? There's a lot of similarity. And yet one was all religious, and the other was spiritual.

Living under the old covenant makes a man religious. Living under the new covenant makes a person spiritual. There's a world of difference between the two.

And it's very, very easy to sit in a new covenant church, and to take the letter of the law, and just be a Pharisee. Say, I thank you that I'm not like other men. I thank you that we're not like other churches.

And yeah, the Pharisees had a pretty good life. Jesus himself gave a certificate to the Pharisees. Do you know that? He gave two certificates to the Pharisees.

Good certificates. They weren't all evil. There were a lot of things wrong with the Pharisees.

There were two good things he said in Matthew 23. One is Matthew 23 and verse 25. He said, you clean the outside of the cup.

Isn't that a good testimony that our external life is clean? Isn't it good not to be a drunkard, or a gambler, or sexual molester, or you know, very gracious and good externally? You keep your external life clean. The Pharisees were like that. Jesus gave that certificate.

If Jesus gives you a certificate that your external life is clean, that's great. There's one more certificate he gave to them, and that was in verse 2 and 3. He told his disciples, everything that the Pharisees sit in the seat of Moses, the other people who proclaim the law, everything they tell you to do, do. Isn't that a good certificate? Jesus wouldn't say everything that the Jehovah's Witnesses tell you to do, do, or everything that the Roman Catholics tell you to do, do.

About whom would Jesus say every single thing that they tell you to do, do? I would say in a New Covenant Church. Everything they tell you to do, do. Whatever they teach from the pulpit is absolutely spot on, right.

And yet they were Pharisees. Is that possible? So what are the two things Pharisees had which are good? Absolutely right doctrine and a very good external life. Do you have absolutely right doctrine and a good external life? You could be a Pharisee.

Jesus also had absolutely right doctrine and a good external life, but he had something more. He had an inner life that was pure. He had a private life where nobody could see that was pure and full of love.

That is what makes the difference. So all of us sitting here, we may have the right doctrine and a good external life. Everybody sees it and admires you, thinks you're a wonderful Christian because they can only see your external life.

You know, all of us, we know, I mean, apart from members of your own family, all the others you meet here, you actually know only about less than 10% of their life. 90% of their life you never see. Even a wife does not see that major area of her husband's thought life.

She sees zero in there, even if they've been married 50 years. He could be absolutely impure there and his wife may be thinking she's such, he's such a pure man because externally he's pure. That is the great area of deception.

And that's a great danger that new covenant churches can face. And the only way we can overcome that, is if you refuse to live before the face of man and say, Lord, it's only your opinion about me that matters. I refuse to live before my wife or my husband or what they think of me.

It's good. It's good to have a good testimony before men. Let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

So I'm not devaluing a good external testimony. It's very, very important. I mean, if your life is bad before men itself, then it's hopeless.

At least we should come that that is a minimum standard that our light shines before they see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven. What I'm saying is that's not enough. Jesus wasn't living before men.

He lived before his Father. In Isaiah 53, the well known chapter about Jesus and his crucifixion and his death on the cross. We read these words at the beginning.

Isaiah 53. I don't know whether you noticed it. Sometimes a little phrase you can miss.

What is the first thing mentioned in Isaiah 53? It's not about the cross. It's not about us bearing our sins and carrying our griefs and being afflicted by God and smitten. All that comes later.

The first thing mentioned about Jesus in Isaiah 53, verse 2, is he grew up before his Father like a tender shoot, like a root out of a parched ground. And before men, the rest of that verse says he has no form or majesty and nor appearance that people should be attracted to him. And he was despised and rejected, verse 3. That's okay.

But he grew up before his Father. This is where we are to follow Jesus. So, the tree of knowledge of good and evil is something that tells us what's right and wrong.

And external life, we can set it right according to that, and yet not enjoy eternal life, which is the nature of God within us. A person who is partaking more and more of eternal life, which is the life of God, will find that his inner life becomes purer and purer. It's not just his external testimony before men.

That is new covenant Christianity. That's what Jesus said is the new wine. The old wine is what the Pharisees had, a good external testimony, but a pretty corrupt inner life.

And I fear, I fear that many who understand new covenant truths could be living like that. And we don't want to get a rude shock when Christ comes again and discover that you were no better than somebody sitting in an old covenant church, except that your external life was better, or your knowledge and understanding of good and evil was better. That's the great danger.

So, we read in John chapter 5 about this difference in, you know, Jesus spoke to the Pharisees. And he says in John 5 and verse 39, you search the scriptures. Well, that's a very good thing.

We do it too. A lot of people today don't search the scriptures, I'm sorry to say. We have a generation of Christians growing up today who know more about television than God's Word.

A lot of Christians, they consider themselves Christians. I don't know how they call themselves Christians if they spend more time before television than the Word of God. What sort of Christianity is that? I can't imagine Jesus living on earth, even if you're living today, watching television more than reading God's Word, or knowing God's Word.

There's something fundamentally wrong with that type of Christianity, where they can spend hours watching sport in just a few minutes in God's Word. And you could be a new covenant Christian with that attitude. It means that this is a ritual I have to go through, because I'm a Christian, I have to sort of go through the ritual of reading the Bible every day.

But my real interest is not sin, not sinful things, but a lot of other things. You know, the Bible says all things are profitable, all things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. And the difference between a carnal, soulish Christian and a spiritual Christian is this.

Both may stick to doing only lawful things, but the spiritual man is from the 100 lawful things that he can do, he selects 10 profitable things and does that. And there are very few Christians who do that type of selection of the way they use their time, or spend their money, or the way they live their life. And if God sees that, I ease my conscience by saying, I'm not doing anything unlawful.

Well, you keep a good testimony and you may get to heaven. I hope so. But you can get there with a lot of regret about the way you lived on earth.

I don't know whether you're familiar with that verse. If you're not, let me show it to you. 1 Corinthians 6 and verse 12.

All things are lawful for me. He didn't mean by that sinful things, Paul had already come to give up sin. He was saying, among the things that I've given up sinful things, but among all the other things that I can do now, which are not sinful, they're all lawful.

But among them, maybe only 10% is profitable. And I select what is profitable and spend my life doing that. Yeah, I have a little time for other things, but those are not the main things in my life.

And so, all things are lawful but I won't be mastered by anything. He refused to be mastered by anything on this earth. You shall know the truth and the truth will set you free.

If there's anything on earth that masters me, I'm a slave to that. It may not be a sinful thing, maybe a good thing, maybe eating, maybe a sport, maybe my profession, maybe a job, and that masters me. It's the most important thing for me in my life.

I want to say to you, my dear brother, sister, you're not a new covenant Christian at all. You're an old covenant Christian with a little bit of new covenant whitewash, which fools people. But you know in your life what masters you.

A new covenant Christian is mastered by God. The law, Jesus explained the law once when people asked him. He said, it is to love God with all your heart, soul, and strength, and mind.

That the Pharisees missed. So, coming back to John 5, I was pointing out that verse, he was speaking to the Pharisees and he said to them in John 5 39, you search the scriptures, which is a very good thing, but your mistake is you think that eternal life is there, that eternal life is in these pages in ink. This is only paper and ink.

There's no eternal life in paper and ink. It can give you knowledge, it can give you information, correct knowledge, correct information. It's like reading a good chemistry book.

You get correct information on chemistry. So, you can get correct information about God and about Jesus by reading the scriptures. But you think eternal life is there, it's not there.

That was the mistake of the Pharisees. They thought eternal life is in a book. You read it, you know the scriptures, you know the verses, you know all the teachings of the new covenant, and I got it on life.

No, it is these that bear witness of me, Jesus said. So, the scriptures bear witness of Jesus. And if we don't see Jesus in the scriptures, then we missed it completely.

And he says, you're unwilling to come to me, that you may have this eternal life. So, you see the contrast there between the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Let me read to you like this.

You go to the verse 39, you search the tree of knowledge of good and evil, because you think eternal life is there. But it's not there. But you won't come to the tree of life, that you may have eternal life.

So, I believe that is one of the dangers we face, was that being satisfied with our external testimony, being satisfied that our knowledge of doctrine is all accurate, very accurate, that we can explain the new covenant so clearly that other people can understand it. Understand it what? Intellectually. It just makes you a good soulish Christian, not a spiritual one.

Because you still may be satisfied doing lawful things and not selecting the profitable out of the lawful. But yet, your testimony is very good. You know, if you examine your life and see whether you constantly, I want to ask you, do you constantly compare your life with Jesus' life or not? I seek to do that every day.

And for many years now. I think I've understood new covenant doctrine for a number of years now. But I've discovered through the years that that's not enough.

I'm not purifying my doctrine, because there's very little left to be purified. I've studied it pretty thoroughly and my doctrine is pretty accurate. But I'm purifying my life.

You search the scriptures and you think eternal life is there. It's not there. And through the scriptures, you're supposed to come to me.

Turn to 1 John and chapter 3. See, we've all got this doctrine right, because we've heard it many times, Romans 8-29, that we are predestined to be conformed to the image of God's Son, Jesus Christ, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. So we've got it right. I mean, if you have a questionnaire on new covenant, I think most of us would get probably 100 percent, which only proves you've got a good knowledge.

You've got a good understanding. Our intellect is wonderful. And the cleverer you are, the more you get marks for that questionnaire on new covenant theology.

But it doesn't mean that necessarily that your life is like that. So we've understood our goal is to become like Jesus Christ. That's a destination I have to go to.

And like you've heard me say, if your ticket says San Francisco to New York and you get into, how do you know you got into the right plane? Well, every hour you should be getting closer to New York. If you're not, you're in the wrong plane. You're in the wrong flight.

How do I know that I'm going in the right direction? Predestined, my destination is becoming like Christ. Every year, I should be becoming a little more like Christ. And the best person to tell you whether that's right or wrong is your marriage partner.

They can tell you, darling, you're becoming more Christ-like. Something has changed in you in the last one year. Not your knowledge is better, or you preach better, or you share better, or you pray better.

Pharisees could do all that. So 1 John 3 says, we know here's the destination. In the middle of verse 2, right now, beloved, we are the children of God.

Verse 2, we are born again. But it has not yet appeared what we shall be, our destination. When he comes, we shall be like him.

We would have reached our destination, becoming Christ-like. But how do you know whether you're going in the right direction? That it says in the next verse. If you have this hope, or if you're going the right direction, you will be purifying yourself constantly.

To what extent? As he is pure. In other words, you will not stop purifying yourself until you become like Christ, which is only when he comes again. So how do I purify myself? There is a cleansing of my life, like I've said many times, which is the guilt of my sin.

I can do nothing about it. I cannot purify my sin, cleanse it away. It's only the blood of Jesus and his death on the cross that can take care of my past.

But in this future of my life, I have to purify myself with God's help. The past, God takes care of. The future, I have to take care of.

To me, it's the picture of Egyptians God killed in the Red Sea. He buried them all. The Israelites didn't have to lift a finger.

But the Canaanites, the Israelites had to kill themselves. God didn't say, okay, I'll kill the Canaanites for you. You see the difference between the two? One is the old man that's crucified with Christ.

The other is the flesh, which I have to crucify. Galatians 5.24 says, those who are Christ's crucify the flesh. But Roman 6 says, the old man is crucified by God.

The Egyptians were buried by God. The Canaanites, I have to kill myself. The Old Testament picture is exact.

That's why it's good to study the Old Testament. And the Egyptians are all buried in a moment. One moment, the old man is finished.

It's not a gradual process. It's like baptism. Baptism symbolizes your old man is buried and you're up again.

It's in a moment, it's over. But the flesh is a lifelong thing. It's like the Israelites went into the land of Canaan.

And each of those giants represent different lusts in our flesh, desires and passions. And they had to kill them one by one by one by one. And the New Testament speaks about conscious sin and unconscious sin.

And we need to know the distinction. I have to finish with conscious sin constantly. And as I finish with conscious sin, God shows me a little more of what I was unconscious of, on Christ like areas that I didn't know about.

And I can deal with that and move on. That is the mark of Christian progress. This is the way that I know I'm in the New Covenant.

That someone asked me this, Brother Zag, what is the proof that God is blessing you? And I said, first of all, let me tell you, it's got nothing to do with my ministry. A lot of people who cast out demons and prophesy and heal the sick, who will stand before Jesus and say, boast about all that and the Lord say, I didn't even know you. Can you imagine that? Anybody who glories in a ministry doesn't have a clue how it's going to be in the day of judgment.

Jesus said that in Matthew 7, 22 to 23. Many will come to me. Many means hundreds of thousands of people, preachers, who will stand before Jesus and say, Lord, Lord, we did miracles in your name.

We cast out demons in your name. We prophesy. That means we preach great sermons in your name.

And Jesus doesn't say you're telling lies. You never did that. No.

That's because if they were bluffing, they wouldn't dare to bluff Jesus. Even if they were trying, he would have told them, hey, that's all a lie. You never did any of that.

And you never did it in my name. No, he accepts it. In Jesus' name, you preached, you cast out demons, and he did many miracles, not one or two.

You read Matthew 7, 23. Many miracles. But I will say to them, depart from me, you who lived in sin.

So that shows me one very important thing about the day of judgment, that the important thing in the day of judgment will not be how much ministry you had, but what your attitude to sin was. Because when it comes to ministry, you can feel so inferior to someone who's so gifted. And I've seen that in the church, that some are extremely gifted.

They got 10 talents. You got only one. But God's not going to evaluate us on the basis of how many talents you had.

You don't have to feel discouraged that you can't preach like somebody else or do miracles like somebody else or cast out demons like somebody else, because that's not going to be the important thing in the day of judgment. The important thing in the day of judgment is going to be, was there sin in your life? Did you deal with sin in your life? And that puts us all on the same level. Who here can say that somebody else

has got an advantage in dealing with sin? We've all got the same flesh.

We've all got the same access to the Holy Spirit's power, if we want to. We all have the same opportunity to humble ourselves. God gives grace to the humble.

Who's preventing you from humbling yourself and getting God's grace? Nobody. Only you yourself. And if you get grace, the Bible says, sin will not rule over you when you're under grace.

I mean, this is a verse that I've often, I never get tired of repeating it. Romans 6.14 says, I can never sin as long as grace is over me. If I'm under grace, during the moments I'm under grace, sin cannot rule over me.

The moment I move away from that covering of grace, sin gets power over me. And when is it I move under the, from the covering of grace? When I become proud. God gives grace to the humble, 1 Peter 5.5, but he resists the proud.

And I sin because at that moment, God has not given me grace. I made this a law, a rule in my life that anytime I slip up, even if I slip up in a word that was unchrist-like, one word that was unchrist-like, that's a sin. I say, Lord, I slipped up there, and I know why I slipped up.

I didn't get grace from you. That's why I spoke like that. Oh, that's why I did that thing.

And I didn't get grace from you because you saw something area of pride in me, which I still haven't seen. Please show it to me. That's what I always do.

And if you do that, I guarantee you will walk on this path of self-purification by the power of the Holy Spirit, that you will not be the same person next year that you are right now. You'll be more christ-like. You'd have progressed towards your destination.

You're on the right flight then, moving in the right direction. I just want to save all of you from self-deception. The Bible speaks about deceiving ourselves, and it's one thing for the devil to deceive us.

It's okay, but the Bible often speaks about deceiving ourselves, and that's what I'm trying to save you from. See, for example, Galatians 6 and verse 3. If anyone thinks he's a somebody when he's a nobody, he deceives himself. Do you recognize that you're a nobody? Maybe you recognize that when you got first converted, that you are a nobody.

But I've seen very often people, after they've been a few years in a church, they no longer feel that they are nobodies. They are now senior believers. They're sort of somebodies in the church.

That's why they don't grow. They're deceiving themselves. If anyone thinks he's a somebody when he's a nobody, he deceives himself.

Do you know that you're supposed to be a nobody till the end of your life? Because that's the only way we can give Jesus the right place. I don't know, some of you may have seen that video of mine, of a message I gave in CFC Bangalore, where I got seven or eight brothers to come up one by one and hold a zero in front of them. I said, one by one, I gave them different titles.

Okay, here's the most handsome man in the world. Zero. Here's another, the cleverest, the most highest IQ man in the world.

Zero. Here's the one who won a number of gold medals in the Olympics. Zero.

Here's the great scientist who discovered great things. Zero. Here's the mega church pastor who preaches well.

Zero. And like that, a whole lot of zeros. I should put them all together.

What are they? Zero. You know, that's actually from a verse that Nebuchadnezzar, can you imagine getting light from Nebuchadnezzar? Yeah. Nebuchadnezzar once made an amazing statement in Daniel chapter four in verse 35.

If you haven't seen it, you've got to see it. Get some light from Nebuchadnezzar the king after he repented. He says in Daniel 4.35, all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as zero.

It's amazing. All the inhabitants of the earth are zero. Paul said that in 1 Corinthians chapter three, just so that you know that I'm scriptural when I teach it.

1 Corinthians chapter three, verse six. He's talking about the church in Corinth, how it grew. I planted that church.

Apollos came along later. He was a great teacher. Watered that church.

But God was the one who caused the growth. It's like a little baby. You can take care of it, but God's the one who brought it to birth, and God's the one who caused it to grow.

So then, the one who plants is nothing, the one who waters is nothing. God who causes the growth is everything. Paul says the same thing as Nebuchadnezzar.

I may be a great apostle planting churches. I'm zero, Paul says. Apollos is a very eloquent teacher.

He's also a zero. It's only God that's everything. So in that message, I finally took another big one, and I put it in front of them.

I said, let me call just one of them. I said, just one. You see how his value suddenly increases from zero to 10, and that one represents Christ.

When a person has Christ, if he doesn't have Christ, he's a zero. 10 of them all together are still zeros, but one of them gets Christ. One in front of him, he gets value.

And now I said, I want to show you what fellowship does. I said, one more brother, please come in here. It doesn't become 11, it becomes 100.

One more brother joining in fellowship becomes 1,000, and all the way it becomes the millions. So we need to recognize till the end of our life, Lord, I want to be a zero. I want to be a nothing before God.

I believe that God does so many things to reduce us, the high thoughts we have as descendants of Adam, because we give value to the wrong things. Why do people get proud? They get proud because they've accomplished something. People have accomplished something, even if they act humble in their mind, they think we're pretty important.

And if you're one of those who's accomplished things in life, may God have mercy on you. It's good you've accomplished it, but don't let it make you think that you're somebody. Nothing.

You're a zero. Maybe you're very good looking. Every time you look at the mirror, you feel so nice that you, God made you so handsome or so pretty.

You're another zero. You compare yourself with other human beings who are not so, don't happen to be so good looking as you are. If you've studied chemistry, you know what molecules are? Molecules are, all matter is made up of molecules.

And a good face is just a different arrangement of molecules. If those molecules in your face were arranged slightly differently, you'd be very ugly. So what we are admiring is the arrangement of molecules.

It's worth nothing, intelligence and accomplishments. What all stupid things human beings boasted. We're all nobodies.

The only thing that has value is Jesus Christ. And how much of his life you have. If you don't discover it now, I guarantee you'll discover it when you stand before Jesus in the day of judgment.

I don't have the slightest doubt you'll discover in that day when Christ comes again, and you stand before him, that accomplishment in any field on earth, intellectual, professional, sport, good looks, everything was zero. And the only thing that will matter in that day is in the one life God gave you on earth. How much did you partake of the life of Jesus Christ in your inner life? Whatever men may have thought of you, it's absolutely no difference.

Men thought of the world of Annas and Caiaphas, the high priests who crucified Jesus. What did God think of them? Annas and Caiaphas were the mega church pastors of those days. What did God think of them? He thought more of that humble fisherman Peter, who was not recognized.

Why? Because he was gripped by the life of Jesus Christ. And if you happen to be a very clever, respected person like Paul, you've got to give all that up. He says, I counted it all rubbish that I might gain Christ.

There's a way to gain Christ. It's not easy, but it's possible. Turn to Philippians in chapter 3. He speaks of all his, the things he could glory in.

Philippians 3. Verse 4, the last part, if anyone else thinks he's got a mind to put confidence, so he can glory in the flesh, I can glory more than all of you. He says, I'm first of all, part of the nation of Israel, God's chosen nation. Verse 5, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, that means both my parents were Hebrews, not just one of them.

And I was a Pharisee, the highest level of people who obeyed the law. And as to zeal, I persecuted the church because I was convinced that Jesus was a false prophet. And the Old Testament said we got to get rid of false prophets and their followers.

So I did that. He was completely wrong, but he was sincere. And as far as the righteousness, which is in the law, he was blameless.

He once stood before a high priest and told him, all my life, I have lived with a good conscience. How many people can say that? I can't say that. I can't say that from my childhood.

I always honored my parents. I never told a lie. I can't say that.

But Paul could, right from childhood. He was just like that rich young ruler who told Jesus, all these commandments I've kept from my youth. There are a few people who brought up in extremely God-fearing families.

Paul was one of them. He could say, all my life, I have lived with a good conscience, but he was completely wrong. Keeping a good conscience doesn't mean you're necessarily right.

He was totally wrong, going in the opposite direction, but he had a good conscience. Is it possible for you? Because it shows how insensitive our conscience is. Conscience is something which depends on what we have understood of the truth, and if you understood very little of the truth, that's your level of conscience, and you could be completely wrong.

That's why we need the light of the Holy Spirit to show us what we're really like in the light of Christ. So he says here, I was blameless, but all of that I count as loss for the sake of Christ. When I saw Jesus and realized what these other things were, zero.

And he says, I count all things, verse 8, to be loss, to be zero, in view of the surpassing value of knowing Jesus. And when he says about knowing Jesus, he's talking about life. You know, Jesus said in John 17, 3, this is eternal life, that they might know God and Jesus Christ from their sin.

He's talking about an intimate knowledge, not just the head knowledge. And for him, I've suffered the loss of everything. I'm willing to get rid of all these zeros I've gloried in in my life.

I want to ask you, my brothers, sisters, all of us have accomplished something in life, right? Maybe you did well in school or college or in your profession or in the Bible knowledge, or maybe you're respected in this church as a spiritual brother or a spiritual sister. You have accomplished something. Are you willing to count it all rubbish? Lord, the opinions of all the brothers and sisters in my church, the elders think highly of me.

Rubbish. That I may know Christ. And you know that word in the Greek I'm told is, I don't know Greek, but I've only been told it.

The word rubbish, it refers to human dung, human dung. All the honor of men, do you really consider all the honor of your fellow believers in this church and of the elders in this church as human dung? Then you'll come to know Christ. We value that so much and we inwardly glory in it.

And those are like brakes that hinder our vehicle from moving forward. You can have your foot on the accelerator and do so many right things, but if you've got your foot on the brakes as well, you're not going to go very far. That's exactly what happens.

I have to deliberately say that's all rubbish. It's all human dung. I'm not going to go after human dung.

What do I care about that person's opinion about me? Why does that mean so much to me? Why do I sit back and meditate on what somebody else thought about me or what somebody thought about my prayer or my sermon? It's amazing what all things we can glory in. I'm just trying to tell you that some of the dangers of people in New Covenant churches concentrate on the life of Jesus inwardly. That I may gain Christ, and he says this, he's writing this when he's nearly 65 years old.

He says, I still haven't attained, verse 12, I haven't become fully like Christ and therefore I'm pressing on. He says, there's only one thing I do, verse 13, forgetting what lies behind verse 13. Now when we look at that verse, we often like to use that verse to say, I like to forget all the mess I made in my life so far.

But when Paul says, forgetting the things behind, he says, I'm forgetting how Christ like I've already become. And he was probably more Christ-like than anybody on earth at that time. And he says, I forget all that.

All the churches I planted and all the ministries I fulfilled, all the people I raised from the dead and all that. He says, I forget all that. I'm pressing on to become more like Christ, to lay hold of, to the upward call of God, verse 12, last part, to lay hold of that for which Christ laid hold of me.

He knows that Christ laid hold of him to make him like Christ. He wrote Romans 8, 29, by the way. So he knows what he was laid hold of.

He says, I'm wanting to lay hold of that for which Christ laid hold of me. That's the only thing in my life. And what about all your ministry, Paul? It's just an overflow of my life.

I'm not concentrating on my ministry. I'm concentrating on becoming like Jesus, and there's an overflow from that which results in ministry and preaching and healing the sick and blessing people and planting churches. That's just an overflow.

I don't get occupied with that. There's only one thing I do, to lay hold of that for which Christ laid hold of me. Make that your goal.

In other words, get to the tree of life. Don't be satisfied with all the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. I know so much more of what is right and what is wrong.

And the more I listen to the internet sermons and more I listen to the messages here, I get to know more of what is right and wrong. And I'm avoiding certain wrong things and doing what's right things. It doesn't mean you're becoming spiritual.

It's life. It's life. There's a difference between imitating Christ.

You know, there's a very well-known book called The Imitation of Christ. I don't agree with it. Because imitation doesn't mean that you're the real thing.

I often use the example of training a dog to imitate a cat. I mean, there are people who train dogs to do all types of things now. Supposing a good trainer could teach a dog to say meow, meow, meow.

And it does it perfectly until it meets another dog that comes to fight with it. And the old nature comes out again. Does that sound a sort of familiar in your experience? Where you've struggled so long to behave Christ-like and then all of a sudden you encounter somebody who really works you up and then you discover, hey, the old man's not really dead.

No, we have to partake more and more of the life of Jesus. A cat can never say bow-wow and bark at another dog. It's impossible because of nature.

It's not been taught to say meow, meow. It's nature. We must not rest until nature has taken over.

And I often think of this. Why can't the Holy Spirit do that in you and me? If Adam could do such a wonderful job of communicating his filthy nature to me so well from my childhood that I could fight readily, get angry readily, and scream and yell and steal and tell lies easily, what a job Adam did. Don't you think the Holy Spirit could do at least an equally good job to give me the life of Christ? Or do you think Adam could do a better job giving me his life than the Holy Spirit can? We must not be satisfied with external behavior.

It's good. It is second best. Definitely.

It's always good to be with a well-behaved person who never gets angry and never gets upset and always very kind. That's second best. But the best is to have the life of Jesus where it comes from within.

That is not an act that's put on because if it's only put on, you never know when it'll change all of a sudden. A little bit of road rage and suddenly this disappears. Nature, don't be satisfied till the Holy Spirit's filled you.

That's why I say the most important thing in the New Covenant is not the doctrine. It is a life that comes through the Holy Spirit. That's why being filled with the Holy Spirit is the most important thing in the New Covenant.

Do you know that most of us can probably explain the New Covenant better than Peter? I don't think Peter could explain the New Covenant better than most of you who have sat here for so many years. But he was Spirit-filled. Spirit-filled.

That is the important thing. In Genesis chapter 2, we read of these two trees, knowledge of good and evil and life, and Adam could have easily accessed either of them. But by the time Adam is thrown out of the Garden of Eden, something has changed.

Notice that in Genesis 3. It says here, now God put a flaming sword in front of the Tree of Life. And there were a number of cherubs. Cherubim means cherubs, plural.

A number of angels that were guarding this Tree of Life and a sword that turned in every direction. Now that was not there before Adam sinned. Before Adam sinned, he could just walk up to the Tree of Life and take it, but now there's a sword.

You know what that symbolizes? It symbolizes death to self. That's the only way to get to the Tree of Life now. If I want to get to the Tree of Life, the sword has to fall on my self-life.

Around the Tree of Knowledge, there is no sword. Going around and around. That's why a lot of people prefer to go to the Tree of Knowledge and satisfy ourselves and have so much understanding now of New Covenant.

We can share things and sing New Covenant songs and so many things. There's no sword there. So what I say to you, there is no cross in your life.

No cross on which you are being crucified. You're in the wrong tree. That's the best way to find out.

If in your daily life there is no cross on which you have to die in your home life, going down the roads, in your office life, in your thought life, when you're just lying down in bed before going to sleep, or when you wake up in the morning. If there is no cross on which you're being crucified, on which you die, you are at

the wrong tree. Keep that as a principle by which you can discover which tree you're coming down.

You know, it's Tree of Knowledge of good and evil has got a lot of fruit in it. A lot of knowledge you can acquire about true Christianity, New Covenant Christianity, and all the rest of it. Amazing truths which most of Christendom doesn't even know or talk about.

You go to the internet and listen to all the sermons there and some of the things you know, there's nobody preaching there. I mean, you may hear it in CFC's messages, but nowhere else. And therefore you can think that I really got something.

If there's a cross in your life, you have really got something. Turn with me to Matthew Chapter 16. You know, this is why in many places, a New Covenant church is not built.

Because a New Covenant church can only be built with New Covenant people. So the New Covenant church is built around the Tree of Life, not around the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. You cannot build a New Covenant church with New Covenant doctrine.

A bunch of people who have got New Covenant doctrine, you can't build a New Covenant church. They could be around the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. But a bunch of people have taken up the cross every day, or bearing the dying of Jesus in their daily life, and thereby have the life of Jesus.

See Matthew 16. This is the first time that Jesus spoke about building his church. He never spoke about it before.

The first time, I will build my church, verse 18, the middle. And what is the mark of Jesus' church? The gates of Hades, or the powers of spiritual death. I will not be able to overpower it.

The gates of Hades, you know, Hades is the Greek word for where people go when they die. So we could paraphrase it as the powers of spiritual death will not be able to overcome this church, because these are people who have already died. You heard that story I mentioned before of this missionary in the 19th century.

I think his name was James Calvert, who went from England in the days when the Fiji Islands were occupied by cannibals. He was a young man, 25, 25 years old or something, had a burden to go as a missionary to preach the gospel to these cannibals in the Fiji Islands. And he got into one of those steamships of those days, or sailing ships, I don't know.

They went all the way around to Fiji. Fiji. And just before he went ashore there, the captain of the ship asked him, are you going to go and live here? These cannibals? You'll die.

He and his wife. And James Calvert said, we died before we got onto the ship. I've never forgotten that.

We died before we boarded the ship. So we're not going to die now, we already died. These are the men who knew the Lord.

Maybe James Calvert couldn't explain the New Covenant doctrine like we can, but he understood what it is to die to himself and his own ambitions and desires. Who would go into the midst of cannibals to tell about Jesus? He's going to make money? What's he going to get? In those days, there was not even publicity to get fame. There was no media reporting, hey, there's a great missionary sacrificing himself.

You'd get nothing, except the joy of having brought somebody to Christ. These people, you know, I remember as a young Christian, stories like this that challenged me. It wasn't doctrine that challenged me as a young Christian.

It was stories of lives of men who really did something for the Lord before they left this earth. I don't think James Calvert was probably a great preacher. I think many of us can preach better than him.

But the man lived a life and these are great examples. So I will build my church, Jesus said, and the powers of death will not be able to destroy it because these people have already died. Like James Calvert said, I've already died.

I'm not afraid of powers of spiritual death now coming to attack me. Impossible. He overcome the gates of hell.

The Bible speaks about Satan having the power of death. Hebrews 2.14, he who had the power of death. Jesus overcame him who had the power of death.

But he can't have power over me because I've already died. Like James Calvert says, I've already died. How can you kill me? I've already died.

I'm not looking for reputation, honor, position, fame, money, nothing. It's a dead man's not looking for these things. A dead man can't be offended.

A dead man is not expecting respect. It's a wonderful thing to die with Christ. So this is the first time that he spoke about the cross and in connection with this, notice this, verse 21.

See the connection. From that time, from which time? From the time that Jesus began to speak about the church and how it would overcome the gates of spiritual death. Jesus Christ told them how he himself must suffer many things and be killed and be raised up the third day.

That's the first time he spoke about the cross. The first time he spoke about the church, he spoke about the but he was going to die. And immediately Peter says, no, Lord.

Look at the love Peter has for his master. I will never let anybody catch you like that and kill you. God forbid it.

And to this loving action of words of Peter, see how Jesus replies, get behind me, Satan. Only twice Jesus ever said that. Once was to Satan himself when Satan offered him all the glory of the world.

He said, get behind me, Satan. The second time was to Peter. Would you say like that to someone who's trying to save your life? That's all that Peter was trying to do, save Jesus' life from being killed.

Just get behind me, Satan. You see, God's way is not our way. We wouldn't think of praising a Roman military man like Jesus did, a centurion saying, oh, I've never seen faith like this in all of Israel.

We'd say, no, no, no. I'd like to be a little sober in what I say about him because he may get buffed up. Jesus is so different from us, you know.

When we get to his way of thinking, we'll find it very different. And then he turns around to Peter and says, get behind me, Satan. And to Judas Iscariot who comes to betray him in the Garden of Gethsemane, he

puts his arm around and says, friend, have you come to betray the Son of Man? Jesus was so different.

And when we become like Christ, I tell you, we'll say, get behind me, Satan, to Peter, and we'll say, friend, to Judas Iscariot. That's what Jesus said. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you Jesus.

God says, my ways are not your ways. My way of thinking is completely different from your way of thinking. You're just becoming a refined human being.

What we need is to become God-like, Christ-like, partake of his nature. And human beings may not understand us sometimes. They didn't understand him when he whipped people out of the temple, turned the tables of money.

He didn't say, gentlemen, will you please remove these coins from here? He never spoke like that. That would be more Christ-like, right? Imagine going up to Jesus Christ and saying, you should be more Christ-like. That's how crazy a lot of Christians are.

Because their understanding of Christ-like is formed in their own imagination, not from the Scriptures. There's only one book in the world that tells me how Jesus was like. That's the Bible.

And why does he turn to Peter like that? Because he says, your mind, verse 23, is set on man's interests, not God's interests. You're trying to avoid the cross. From that time, verse 24, Jesus said, it's not only me who's got to go to the cross.

If you want to follow me, you got to go to the cross as well. Then I will build a church through which the gates of hell will not prevail. So see that whole verse 18 in the context of verse 21 to 24.

And you see the close connection between building the church and going the way of death to self. And how man's interest, what the Lord told Peter, it's man's interest to avoid the cross. God's interest is to go the way of the cross.

And the voice that tells you to avoid the way of the cross is the voice of Satan, even if it comes through your best friend, Peter, or if it comes from the greatest preacher in the world. Get behind me, Satan. I listen to now and then to messages here and there by different preachers.

And I have to say that, that's not for me. That is man's interests. Jesus will make you rich.

Jesus will make you healthy. I say, get behind me, Satan. Your mind is set on man's interests, not on God's interests.

How many of you are able to recognize a preacher who's getting you to have your mind set on man's interests, your own interests, not God's interests, as the voice of Satan? You don't have to go up to him and say, get away, Satan. But inwardly, you have to reject it. When I hear a preacher teaching me to seek my own interests and not God's, I inwardly say, get behind me, Satan.

I don't want to listen to that. I hope he will say that at least from now. This is the way of life.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to all the churches. There's a lot that God has planned for you in bringing you to this church, I want to tell you. Don't miss it.

And if you take it seriously, allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you and fill you I guarantee, at least from now on, you'll have no regret about the way you live the rest of your life. I mean, we may have a lot of regret about the past, but at least from now, we'll have no regret about how we live the rest of our days, because we've seen the way of the cross. Let's bow before God.

Heavenly Father, as we bow before you, we pray that you alone who can show us what is light and what is darkness, you who way back in the beginning separated the light from the darkness. I pray in Jesus' name that you will separate the light from the darkness in our mind and in our hearts and in our lives, so that we understand what it is to walk in the light and what it is to walk in darkness and that we will not walk along a path which is a mixture of light and darkness, but that there will be a clear separation in our life between the two, a light which is the life of Jesus and everything else which is darkness. Help us, we pray.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

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