

Our Love Must Grow in Discernment

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of being led by the Holy Spirit and growing in discernment. It highlights the need to move beyond legalism and focus on being disciples led by the Spirit of Christ. The speaker shares insights on handling situations with wisdom, not judging others, and seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit in all aspects of life.

Scripture: Matthew 11:28, Psalm 139:23, Mark 9:24, John 14:26, Romans 8:14, Proverbs 26:4, Luke 12:48, Galatians 4:1

Topics: "Being Led by the Holy Spirit", "Discernment in Discipleship"

Description

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Transcript

I was thinking as I was singing that song, as we sang that first line and went to the second line, I said to myself, hey, you're not singing that to Jesus, you're just singing the song. And I said, Lord, I want to be aware that I'm talking to you and saying, Jesus, you're not worthy. I remember in the olden days when I could go through a whole song and not even realize that I didn't sing it to the Lord at all.

And sometimes I wake up after the song is over, I remember in the olden days when we had songbooks, while people sang the next song, I turned back to the old song and I said, Lord, I didn't mean that. Let me read that slowly to you, mean it. That has helped me through the years.

You know, there was a man, a Roman Catholic monk who wrote a little book called *The Practice of the Presence of God*. And some of these, I mean, there are a few, very few, probably 0.001% of Catholics were really God-fearing, who knew the Lord and who knew the presence of God, and they wrote some amazing things. It's something which I want to encourage you.

Like the first words of Jesus in his ministry after his baptism was his reply to Satan. He said, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. And I've always linked that with Genesis 1, where every day it says, and God said, and that is the first day, and the next day, and God said, and that is the second day, and the next day, and God said.

Right through, and every time when God said something, something happened, only because the earth and the heavens submitted. Yes, God, whatever you say, happened. Let the earth separate from the sea, happened.

Let the trees come forth, happened. Let the fish come in the sea, happened. Why doesn't it happen with us? God says something, either I'm not receiving it like the earth and heaven did, or I'm reading a printed word, but not hearing the word of God.

Man shall live not by bread alone, and I would say not even by the printed book, but by every word that proceeds, present tense, proceeds from the mouth of God. So that is why I often tell people, read the Bible slowly. It doesn't matter if you don't finish it in a year.

If you've heard God every day of that year, that's more important than finishing the Bible in a year. What I used to do in the early days was have two sessions for my Bible reading. One is to hear God and the other is to just read large sections so that I know the Bible.

That also is important. And I was single, I could do that and I encourage all people who are single, if you don't study the Bible when you're young, I tell you, you won't be studied when you get married. Go and ask any married man with children whether he has time to study the scriptures.

My time suddenly dropped, and that's why I encourage my children to study the Bible when they were young. If you've got children, teach your children to study the Bible when they are young, however small they are. Today, I encourage my grandchildren to read the Bible and study it.

We must do that because they don't realize that very soon they're grown up, they go to college, they've got so many other things to study. If they're not grounded in scripture, it's terrible. And even at that young age, it says Samuel could hear the voice of God.

Eli told him, speak and say, speak Lord, your servant is hearing. I say that sometimes when I wake up in the middle of the night, I say, speak Lord, I'm hearing, your servant is hearing. Why not tell our children about Samuel's story and tell them at a very early age when they can understand? If God can speak to Samuel in the Old Testament, why can't he speak to you today? Man shall not live by morning breakfast and lunch, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, which means God is always speaking.

Every day God is speaking, that is the message in Genesis chapter one. There's not a single day he does not speak, Genesis chapter one. And you go to Revelation chapter one, the last book of the Bible, and John says, I heard the voice of the Lord like a trumpet.

We have multitudes of Christians who say, I can't hear God. Well, if you're deaf, you can't hear God. But he heard it like a trumpet and he's 95 years old.

He kept his conscience clear. So that's how we hear God. And that's the first word that came out of Jesus mouth.

Anyway, I want to speak more about that tomorrow. But I want to share something from 1 John 1 7, this connection. 1 John 1 7. If we walk in the light, as God is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.

That is with us and God. And also between us and others who are walking in the light. It doesn't disturb me that I cannot have fellowship with everybody in a church because I can sense whether somebody is

walking in the light over a period of time and then fellowship can only be built with those who are walking in the light.

Why did Jesus spend more time with Peter, James and John and with 11, not with the 70 whom he sent out? You know, he sent out 70. You read in Luke chapter 10, two by two, they cast out demons. They did so many things.

But they were not in that inner circle of 11. You can serve the Lord and go and cast out demons even and rejoice. Hey, the demons are subject to us in your name.

But more blessed are those 11 who were with him. It says he chose them to be with him. That is the primary thing he chose them for.

And then to go out and serve him. You read that in Mark chapter three, he chose them to be with him and go out. So, it's because Jesus saw that in these people, there was a greater hunger and among those also, there was a still smaller number of three.

There was no partiality with Jesus, absolutely zero. So, if he chose some out of a crowd, there must have been something he saw in them that made him select those 70 out of a bigger crowd from the 70, 11 and from the 11, three. It's like that in a church also.

You can have 70 people in a church and then in that there's a smaller circle of 11 and there's a smaller circle of three. And an elder who's walking with God, though he's a shepherd for all 70, he may not have fellowship with all 70. He may have a closer fellowship with 11 and a still closer fellowship with three.

I found that in Bangalore, where we have sometimes five, 600 people on Sunday morning, sometimes I wonder whether they are even believers, all of them, because I publicly said there, I said, I feel that some of you sitting here are not born again. You come here because it's a nice church, we don't take an offering, it's a good people, good to fellowship with, we have free lunch and the children are a nice, good place for your children to grow up in. What are the reasons why you come to a place? Like I've heard some people select a church because they've got a better parking lot where you don't have to wait to find a place to park your car.

What are the ridiculous reasons people choose a church? But that's not any more ridiculous than choosing something like this. Is it because I hear the word of God and I'm challenged to walk closer with the Lord or some other factor? These are nice people. Nice people will not help me to walk with God.

So to have fellowship with God, I must walk in the light. And then walking in the light is very simple. It means not a complicated thing.

It just means being honest. You know, like walking in darkness means I want to hide something. All people who commit sin do it in darkness.

Murder, adultery is all done in darkness. Walking in the light means I don't want to, I'm not saying that I'm perfect. I'm saying I don't want to hide anything.

And the proof of that is when I walk in the light, see what it says there, I still need the blood of Jesus to cleanse me from the sin which I saw in the light. And the rest of that verse. So that proves that walking in the light, I'm not free from sin.

But if I walk in the light, the blood of Jesus cleanses me. And if I don't walk in the light, the blood of Jesus does not cleanse me. So what does that mean? That means even I come into the light, I still have sin, which I need to be cleansed from, perhaps unconscious sin, maybe not conscious.

And I need to be cleansed every day. Because Jesus taught us to pray, our father who art in heaven, give us this hour, this day, our daily bread, and the next is forgive us our sins, again, daily. The meaning is the same.

And just like I pray for daily bread, I need to pray for daily forgiveness. It's not that I'm committing adultery every day. Maybe I didn't sin consciously the whole of yesterday.

That means I'm not aware of anything that I spoke or did just consciously wrong. Yet I have to pray, forgive my sins, because the only person, the only time we can stop praying that is when I'm sure I'm completely like Christ. Christ never had to pray, forgive my sins.

And one day when I become like Jesus, I never have to pray that prayer. Until that day, I have to pray it. Lord, there are things in my life which I maybe, I behaved in an un-Christlike way towards someone, and he was gracious enough to keep quiet and not tell me about it.

And must be there. I'm always conscious that there must be, maybe there's some way I hurt my wife today, which I don't even realize. I mean, she was gracious enough to overlook it.

But I don't want to continue like that. I want to get light on myself. Maybe I should have encouraged somebody today, because it says encourage one another daily.

There's somebody, I'm not saying I condemn myself that I didn't do it, but was there some opportunity for me to say an encouraging word to somebody and I missed it? I remember reading a poem. It says, I was, I cheated somebody today. What is this poem about? Oh, I cheated someone.

Something which belonged to him, I stole. And it ends with saying, I was supposed to give him a word of encouragement. Which I didn't give.

I stole it. I said, wow, what a sensitivity to sin that I've stolen something when the Bible says encourage one another daily and I should have. Not that I condemn myself that everybody, but sometimes you feel, hey, there was an occasion I spent time talking with that person for so long and I did not give that one word of encouragement.

I just left it at that and went. Not in every conversation, but sometimes when you're convicted about it, we don't go into self-condemnation because I've seen that the devil, when he can't make your conscience insensitive, he makes it oversensitive, but you condemn yourself for unnecessary things. So be careful there.

But walking in the light means I don't live in constant condemnation. No, I refuse to listen to the devil who is the accuser of the brethren. He accuses people to God.

He accuses me to myself and I'm not going to listen to him. A lot of people live under depression because they are listening to the devil accusing them. You didn't do this.

You didn't do that. You didn't do that. You didn't.

Well, there are 101 things I didn't do, but I'm not going to live under the condemnation of Satan because God is merciful and he knows how much I can do and he does not ask us to do beyond our ability. But walking in the light means where I say, Lord, there's something there I didn't do it right. I didn't or I should have done this year or I should have said a word here or I said something extra over there which I shouldn't have spoken about or I was too hard on someone.

I've had occasions where I've had to go to people in our church who are younger than my youngest son and apologize and say, listen, I'm sorry, brother, I corrected you, which is necessary, but I think I corrected you too hard. I'm sorry. Please forgive me.

But the Lord convicted me that that was not right to the right to correct him, but not with such strong words. And I found through the years, this is walking in the light, it's very easy, then we have fellowship with God and it's only when we're in fellowship with God that we can hear him speaking to us. You heard me quote this many times and I never get tired of it.

In John chapter three, sometimes we have to repeat something a number of times. I remember what Charles Finney, the great evangelist in America in the 19th century, said. He said, I've discovered that you had to preach a truth ten times to somebody before he understands it.

I said, OK, I'll follow that rule, preach a message ten times, let people think Brother Zack has got nothing new to preach is the same old stuff. I've heard it eight, nine times. The person who says like that will never grow, but the person who says, hey.

I needed to hear that again because I didn't hear it properly the last time. That's the person who gets it. And then, you know, it's like in Genesis chapter one, every day something happens, something happens, something happens.

And what is the ultimate goal? On the sixth day, man is in the image of God. That's the final goal, even with us. And on the last day that God speaks to us, we will become like Christ.

So that's the goal towards which the whole world didn't know that. That's the goal towards which God is working. First day, second day, third day.

The ultimate goal is a man who's in the image of God and the work God is doing with us. The ultimate goal is ultimately men and women who are in the image of Jesus Christ so that we can be his younger brothers and sisters. And that's dependent from Genesis chapter one to listen to him every day.

And that's to walk in the light. So Genesis, sorry, John chapter three. We read the contrast, which you've heard me say before, I'll repeat it again.

Verse 20, everyone who does evil hates the light. And the opposite of that should be everyone who does good comes to the light. But that's not what Jesus said.

Verse 21, everyone who does the truth comes to the light. But the opposite of evil in Jesus light and in Jesus language and coming to the light is truth, not good. Nobody's good.

Jesus said, why do you call me good? There's no one good but God. So if Jesus said that he practices what is good comes to the light, I say there's no hope for me. But when Jesus said the opposite of practicing evil is practicing the truth, which means being honest, I'm a prostitute, I'm a thief or I did this

wrong.

Oh, that's easy. The worst sinner in the world. Look at the thief on the cross.

He just said, I'm guilty. I don't blame anybody. And it's as if the Lord saying, really, you don't blame your parents for bringing up wrong.

No, no. Do you bring your bad company? You got no. You blame the judge who accused you falsely? No, me, Lord, 100 percent.

Oh, you're fit for paradise. Come with me to paradise today. And I've taken it like that, that I can be the worst criminal on earth, like that man was.

Everybody having a bad opinion about him, but he came into the light before Jesus Christ and he entered paradise the same day. And I believe my walk on earth can be a walk in paradise if I'm honest like that thief, like I've often said before you kneel at the foot of the cross of Jesus, sit at the foot of the cross of this thief and learn something from him, then go to the cross of Jesus. Now, what do I learn from the thief first? Total honesty, not to blame anybody else like Adam did get rid of that Adamic habit.

That's why he lost paradise. The thief got paradise because he did what the opposite of Adam did. Yeah, Lord, it's me.

Not my wife, not. Anybody else, it's me, it's me. Even when you think 90 percent or 99 percent of the fault is with somebody else.

There is no situation where there's a conflict where you can say zero fault is with me. Even in any husband wife conflict or not a single situation where zero is with you. I remember one situation in our church years ago.

Where somebody. He was a fairly good person, but there was probably a hidden pride in him and he dropped out of our church. But I didn't want to judge his pride.

I say I didn't see that at the beginning. Later on, it became evident. But when he fell away, I said, Lord.

Why did that happen? I've never rebuked him or corrected him. I've never said anything to hurt him. And the Lord said to me, that's true, but you never said anything to encourage him either.

I missed out there. I want to be more careful. Who is there? Who doesn't need encouragement? What if a person has lived with the pigs and wasted all the goodness of God throughout his life? Wasted it.

Filthy smelling spiritually. And he comes back. And you say, this guy is coming only for food, I know.

The father welcomes him. When I give him food, he'll repent. I'm not saying that's always true, but you need discernment.

Because everybody who comes for food does not necessarily come with a repentant heart. But this chap had a repentant heart. So we need to discern.

Those are coming only for some. Physical, financial help, and those who are really repentant. Otherwise, I find in a country like India, it's one of the greatest needs.

In the early days of the church, we got thoroughly fooled. We didn't have discernment. We don't blame ourselves.

We were young in the Lord. We tried to do good to everybody, help people financially, give them food, and people would come and stay in our homes, and they exploited us like anything. But we learned within one or two years.

And we decided, okay, we've made foolish mistakes, but you've learned something. If you learn something through your mistakes, it's worth it. And we decided, we're going to be a church that makes disciples.

So we're going to concentrate on making disciples. You know, Jesus, for example, there were so many blind men that he healed, but he never started any home for the blind or home for orphans. He never did that.

Because if he had got taken up with all that, he wouldn't have made disciples. I find Paul also didn't go around making a home for orphans and blind people. It's all very good.

People who do that, I say, if that's your calling, do it, brother. But Paul realized even a thing like slavery, which is such an evil thing, to employ a person as a slave, that you don't pay him anything. You just bought him in the market, and would any of you do it today? Keep a slave in your house, you don't pay him anything, and you can treat him like you treat furniture, and he's got no rights.

And imagine that Paul, when he's writing, inspired by the Holy Spirit, he never says, masters, let your slaves go free. No, nowhere. He says, just treat them kindly.

Why was that? See, sometimes we can be, try to be more spiritual than Jesus himself, more spiritual than the Holy Spirit. I've seen a lot of Christians like that, who use their human understanding. The Bible says, trust in the Lord, and don't depend on your understanding.

Someone with understanding in those days would have said, hey, we should liberate the slaves. That's Christianity. Paul would have said, if you want to do that, I'll do it.

I'm not going to do it. Because Paul knew, if he gets into that type of campaign, liberating the slaves, he'll never be able to make disciples. And I've seen that in India.

India is one of the poorest countries in the world, with millions, I'm not exaggerating, millions of beggars, who don't have enough to eat, don't have, many of them, sleep out in the cold and die. Now, if you have a calling like William Booth in the Salvation Army, go ahead and do it. But if a person doesn't have that calling, he can waste his life.

Trying to do it. And I realized, I said, I told the Lord, I said, I'm so challenged by William Booth's testimony, that I've often said it publicly, too, that if I was living in the late 1800s in Britain, I would have definitely joined the Salvation Army. Because it was bringing people to Christ, it was delivering the little young girls taken to prostitution, and small children made to work long hours in factories, and helping so many people.

And delivering people from drunkenness, so that the wine shops closed down. I said, boy, what a ministry. But, I said, Lord, I'm willing to do it, but I don't have the calling of William Booth.

I'm sorry. And I will not attempt something, you know, I can get a name. Oh, Brother Zach cares for the prostitutes, and the drunkards, and thieves, and does that, or like David Wilkerson, the drug addicts.

I said, Lord, I don't have that calling, I'm sorry. And I don't want to pretend I have it, and I don't want to try and do that to get a name for myself. Far from it.

I will never be able to do the will of God, if I don't see what God has called me to do, and rejoice in what Mother Teresa does, what William Booth does, what David Wilkerson does, and say, praise God, they are members of the body, but another part of the body. I have to do my part, and I'm not jealous of them. I'm delighted that they do something I can't do.

A hand can do something which the tongue cannot do. So, to recognize our calling, and say, I'm here to make disciples. So we learned it early in our beginning as a church, and we decided that we will not help people financially, until they've been in our church for at least two years, and proved that they're interested in discipleship, and not just in a free lunch, and a nice place to bring up our children.

We want to see, are you interested in discipleship? Welcome. Then, and when we really proved that somebody's interested in discipleship, we have literally spent millions of rupees helping people who need medical help, or educate their children, school, college, they're too poor to send their children, and then children do well in their studies. So, it's a question of priority.

So, in all these things, I find that we have to constantly be hearing the voice of God if we want to grow in discernment. And I believe that discernment is the greatest need, even in NCCF. If you all don't have discernment, you'll be fooled.

I want you to turn with me to a verse in Philippians, in chapter one. It's a very important verse, I feel. Because I feel that a lot of people, even in CFC Bangalore and here, I don't think you all have discernment.

And if you don't have discernment, you'll be easily fooled by people who appear to be right. See, it says here, Philippians one, and verse nine, and this I pray. You know, the Philippians are wonderful Christians, because they're the one people from whom Paul received money.

As far as we know, it's the only church Paul did not receive from the Corinthians, he did not receive from the Ephesians, he did not receive from the Thessalonians. We read that in scripture. He said, I will not take it.

You know, they gave him, he wouldn't take it. But when the Philippians sent him, he would take it. Which means he had a respect for the Philippians.

And we read in 2 Corinthians 8, they were not very rich. They were richer than Paul. But Paul was very poor.

I don't believe we should ever take money from people poorer than us. But Paul took it from the Philippians, which shows me that there was something about these people. And he says some amazing spiritual things to them.

But one of the things he says in Philippians 1, 9 is, I pray that your love may abound more and more in real knowledge and discernment. That love, when it grows, should grow into discerning love. Otherwise it can be a foolish love.

Our heart must be filled with love. The Bible says the Holy Spirit fills our heart, Romans 5, 5, with the love of God. So I say it's like driving a car.

The gas tank must be filled with petrol. Or gas as you call it here, gasoline. But love must not be in the driver's seat.

Because you can do a lot of foolish things. Wisdom must be in the driver's seat. Love is the driving force.

The petrol and the gas in the tank. Without it you can't move forward. But wisdom decides which direction to take the car.

So we must love everybody, it's true. But we must grow in discernment. I find that a lot of Christians almost haven't even seen that verse.

By this shall all men know that you love one another. What type of love? Jesus' love was so discerning. I'm always amazed, I was even thinking of that yesterday when I read something.

That so many people ask Jesus questions. Even a fictitious question like somebody saying a man had seven brothers and he died and the next brother married his wife, next brother married his wife, next brother... I'm sure it never happened. But it's a fictitious question.

Jesus answered it. Okay, in the resurrection there's no marriage. But there was some other question once the Pharisees asked him.

He said, I'll ask you a question. Was John the Baptist's message from heaven or from himself? And they thought, hey, if he says it's from heaven, why didn't you believe it? If he said it was not from heaven, the people would rebel against us. So very diplomatically they said, we don't know.

He said, then I'm not going to answer your question either. I read that and I said, Lord, that's the type of discernment I need. Because I get hundreds of emails from the Internet.

I don't answer all of them because I don't have time, but a number of my elders answer them. But I see all the questions and I see all the replies they send also. And I always say I need to guide my fellow elders in discernment.

Where should, what type of reply should we give this person? Like some people I say, don't waste your time replying to that. Forget it. Like I got an email just a couple of days ago saying, Brother Zach, we're listening to you.

We're so blessed by your message. We want to teach you something. The Holy Spirit has told me to tell you.

You must, you're calling him Jesus. His name is not Jesus. His name is Yeshua.

I've heard that for years. You must call him Yeshua. That's his name.

My reply, I didn't reply to that. Actually, I don't waste my time because it'll carry on, such correspondence. But sometimes when people ask me face to face, I tell them, I say, listen, I've cast out many demons in the name of Jesus.

And every demon has recognized that name and left. I know it's true. And I've prayed many prayers in the name of Jesus.

I've never prayed in the name of Yeshua. And I've got prayers answered. So God also recognized it.

If God and demons recognize it, I say, what more do I want? I don't care whether you recognize it or not. It's not important. It's something like this, you know.

If somebody loves you very much, but he doesn't pronounce your name right. Are you going to get offended with him? Are you going to spend all your life educating him how to call your name right? Like some Indian names, almost nobody here can get it right. The way they say it, even after many years.

But I say, I know what they mean. So I say, this is all crazy, being occupied with. I'm sure these people who ask such questions are defeated by sin.

Absolutely sure. And the devils made them concentrate on something like this. And they wake up in eternity and discover they're not even saved.

So I'm just mentioning how we need discernment. Love without discernment, you'll waste your life. So discernment comes by hearing the voice of God.

Don't lean on your own understanding, but trust in the Lord. That requires humility to say, Lord, I don't know what to do in this situation. My understanding says this.

But let me check with you if that's right. I'm not saying common sense is wrong. I'll tell you honestly, I live by faith in God plus common sense.

I don't throw away my common sense. To me, common sense is a very important part of life. Like one brother in our church years ago, in one of the churches in India, wrote to me, Brother Zach, I believe God has numbered the hairs on my head.

And I don't believe in any type of family planning. I want to have children like the hairs on my head. I said, hang on, please ask your wife.

She also believes that before you do all that. Fortunately, he listened to me and listened to his wife. And he stopped it after.

He already had three or four and one more. What I mean is, don't think common sense is against... Who gave you common sense? It was not the devil. Like, you know, Philip was taken up by the Holy Spirit and transported from the desert to some other place.

And if I want to travel somewhere, I don't quote that verse and say, Lord, you're going to lift me up. No. I mean, if there is other forms of transport available or the distance I can walk, why should I ask the Holy Spirit to lift me up? I'm just saying common sense.

Many things like that. Common sense is not against the scriptures. For example, though there are many verses in the Old Testament about having many children, there's not even a single verse in the New Testament about the number of children you have.

Has anyone noticed that? God leaves it to the individual. And I saw, no, certainly in a place like India, I see the number of poor people in the slums who have many children and neglect them. And many of them are run over by cars and they don't get an education.

They grow up begging, eating food out of the trash cans. What should I teach in a country like India? So, I say God is realistic. So, discernment.

In this particular situation, am I supposed to wait for a word from God or just use my common sense? Which shirt shall I wear this morning? How long are you going to wait for God to speak to you? If it's dirty, throw it in the in the basket to be washed. But if it's clean, you can wear it. There is no particular rule on what color, you know, a lot of Christians have questions about the color of dress you must wear.

Actually, do you know the Bible tells us specifically what color of shirt we can wear? Do you know that? When Jesus spoke about dress, he said, look at the flowers in the field. If God can clothe them like that, can't he clothe you? What are the colors of the flowers? You can have shirts of all those colors. Don't worry whether other people think you are showing off with that color.

A multicolored, like the Hawaiians have. Doesn't disturb me. I have a few shirts like that just to test people whether they No, it's very important that we get recognize what is important in the Christian life and what is not.

I tell you this, the devil is always seeking to take us off on a tangent on some crazy little thing which has got absolutely no importance in eternity. You think that, okay, you feel you should only wear white, go ahead and wear it. Nobody is stopping you.

But don't stop somebody else. Faith plus common sense. I pray that your love will grow in discernment.

It's very important. And I found that through the years, because of that decision made by the blunders and mistakes we made, you know, we made a lot of mistakes in our churches. And we have learned through our mistakes.

Some things we are still learning. Even after 44 years, we are still learning. And we'll never stop learning.

Until we become like Christ, we want to keep on learning. But it's only a proud person who says, I've got nothing to lose. I've got something more to learn.

I've always got something more to learn every day. Until you come to the 6th day, when man has become completely in the image of God, until then, I have to keep on hearing God speaking. Not just the 6th day.

6,000th day or the 60,000th day, I have to keep listening till I reach that last day when I'm completely like Christ. Until that day, I have to keep on hearing. That's how I grow in discernment.

And that requires a certain amount of humility. Sometimes, how shall I distinguish? Is this an area where I have to use my common sense or I have to wait for God to speak? Yeah, if you're a humble person, God will show you even that. Don't worry about it.

And that requires, I find that it requires a tremendous freedom from the opinions of others. I find that very often we can't hear what God is saying because I'm so concerned what the other guys will think of me. What will he say if I do this? I have to tell you honestly, I couldn't care less what he says.

If he's going to stumble a person, Paul said, if my eating meat offered to idols. Somebody sees Paul going and buying meat offered in front of an idol. Paul says, I don't believe in that.

That's just a piece of brass. It's not an idol. You put that piece of meat in front of a wood, a wooden thing or a brass thing, it doesn't change the meat.

I can enjoy it. But this guy says, no, that's an idol. And he saw me buying it, so then I won't buy it.

For his sake. Because I don't want to stumble him. People have asked me this question.

Brother Zach, is it all right to drink a little bit of wine? I said, I will not go against scripture. Paul told Timothy, take a little wine for your stomach's infirmities. Some people seem to have constant stomach infirmities, so they keep on saying, I'm joking.

They find some excuse to drink wine. But the Bible doesn't say, don't drink it. It says, don't get drunk with wine.

And I said, I'll only say what the Bible says. We shouldn't get drunk. But yet, in my home, I don't have any wine.

I don't take it at all. And the way God has spoken to me is, if I take a little bit, somebody comes to my house and sees me take a little bit. I have not sinned.

And if I offer him a little bit, he has not sinned either. But, if he's a young believer, I think of what Paul said, if meat will cause my brother to stumble, I'll never eat meat. What's wrong with eating meat? All of us eat meat.

Why does Paul say, I won't eat meat if it's offered to idols? I don't believe in meat offered to idols. It defiles the meat in any way. Why should my freedom be stopped by his conviction? That's what Paul says.

He says, but then you're not acting like a Christian. Read Romans 14. And, so I thought, if this guy sees Brother Zach drinks a little wine, he doesn't know that I may stop with just that much.

That's it. One small little cup and finish. I don't take any more.

He thinks, this guy, Zach must be drinking it all the time. And he starts on that road and becomes a drunkard one day. And he was a fine Christian till then.

And he ruins his family and he goes to hell. Who sent him to hell? Who helped him to get on that first step to hell? I said, no Lord. I would rather deny myself that little pleasure or what the doctors say, a little bit is good.

I mean, you take cough syrup. There's a little alcohol in it, whether you know it or not. So, I'm not saying we shouldn't take it for medicinal reasons.

I remember when I was a little boy, my mom used to give me a teaspoon of brandy for something that could help or something, throat problem or something like that. So, I'm not against medicinal use of it. But we have to be very careful.

Because where does it stop? Because in some states now, even marijuana is legal. And they say for medicinal reasons, take a little. Where does it stop? So, I just want to be careful.

I'll never make a law for other people. Paul lived by certain principles which he never imposed on others. He said, this is for me.

He never said that all of you apostles must not take any money from others. Like me. No.

He said, Peter, John, go ahead. You can't stitch tents like I can stitch and you can't carry your fishing boat around everywhere. So, by all means, receive gifts and support yourself like that.

There's nothing wrong with that. Jesus himself received gifts and supported himself. He never did any work.

So, Paul recognized the way I'm doing it because of the particular situation we are in in our day where so many preachers are making money out of their preaching that I want to be a little different. That's exactly the reason why we took that policy in CFC many years ago. We publicly said, and I've even said that in my book, *God's Work Done in God's Way*, there is nothing wrong in a servant of God receiving money as gifts regularly from people.

Jesus lived like that and you cannot go higher than Jesus. But in a particular situation, Paul felt there was a need to be a little different, to be a testimony in a corrupt situation. And I said, we found ourselves in a situation in India exactly like that, where every single church and every single Christian organization was always sending reports and getting money from all over and swindling people and poor people.

I mean, you see these television preachers, you see the people sitting in their congregations, poor people, and this guy takes money from them to buy a plane. He says, because I don't have time to stand in the line to check in the airports. Really? It's so urgent to get the gospel across that you can't even wait half an hour in a check-in line to go to that place? All these silly excuses which poor dumb people sitting there swallow it and give money and this chap exploits, I believe that judgment would be severe.

So in that situation, there was a need for us to take the stand. That's why we've taken the stand in all our CFC churches that none of our elders will ever receive any, we don't say they won't receive any gifts, even Paul received gifts from the Philippians, but that they will not be dependent financially on somebody supporting them month by month. And we've followed that for 44 years with 150 elders in all our churches and it's gone very well.

It's protected us from scoundrels and crooks. So in everything, we need discernment. Where shall I do it and where shall I not do it? I mean, Paul had said, no, Philippians, I will not take it.

You send some money to you, I'm going to send it back to you. That would have been crazy. It would have been an insult to the Philippians.

So he had discernment. If somebody said, hey, Paul, you lose your testimony that you received gifts from someone. I'm not bothered about it because I live before God's face that people say what they like.

Yeah, I did receive from the Philippians. But God knows the principle by which I live. I'm not dependent on anyone financially.

So in all these things, sometimes we can make rules for ourselves. And the purpose of it is to have a testimony before men. That means we are seeking honor from men.

Paul did not remain financially independent in order to get honor from men. No, it was for the glory of Christ that he did it. And it's very important discernment.

We'll have discernment if I'm always concerned, Lord, what will glorify you in this situation? And sometimes it can look as if I'm very hard on someone. Somebody comes to borrow money from me and I say, I'm sorry, I can't give you. It sounds hard, no? It sounds as if I'm disobeying that verse which says, give to him that asks of you and one who borrows don't turn away.

He may quote that verse to me. I say, fine, you can keep quoting that verse to me. I still not lend you money.

But I live before God's face. I know this guy is not going to use it wisely or he wasted it the last time I gave him something. So, it's like you wouldn't give it to your children if they are wasting whatever you give them.

Don't you love your children? The same. So, I find in all these things, all good fathers, whether they realize it or not, their love for their children always has discernment. You never give your children whatever they ask for.

Is it because you don't love them? It's because you have discernment. We must have the same discernment in the church if we want to keep the church pure from people who seek to infiltrate it. The devil is not going to come and infiltrate it with some murderer coming and sitting here and saying, hey, we must fight for our rights and murder people who disobey.

No, no, no. Nobody will come like that. There are very subtle ways the devil seeks to corrupt the church.

And we've seen that through the years. And we have to stand against it. I remember in one situation, you see, we have taken a very strong stand against dowry.

Dowry is something very common in India. It's almost unheard of in the US. In Africa, the man gives a dowry to the girl's father, like a cow or something, to marry her.

In India, it's the opposite. The girl's father has to give a lot of money to the boy because the argument is the boy's father says, I've spent so much money educating him and now your daughter is going to enjoy all that by marrying my son. So you've got to pay up for it.

All the money I spent on educating him. And so the girl's father has to give money. Every single marriage in India is like this.

In every single Christian denomination, whether Catholic or Pentecostal, charismatic, whatever it is, when it comes to dowry, it's like Voltaire. The French atheist once said, after observing all these denominations, they all have different doctrines, but when it comes to money, they all have the same doctrine. I've seen that in India.

When it comes to dowry, they all have the same doctrine. The differences are on baptism and baptism of the Holy Spirit. On dowry, it's all the same doctrine.

Why is that? Because it involves money. And it's a tragic thing, but it is true. But we have stood against it from day one.

I refuse to conduct marriages. Where dowry is involved. In fact, I get a certificate from the boy and the girl before I conduct their marriage saying, neither I nor my parents have received anything from the other party.

And so that they don't escape from that, there's one more clause added. If this changes before the day of the wedding, I will inform you. So that they don't give that certificate and then take the money the next day.

We have to close every loophole. So, and people have got offended. The people who get offended are the unconverted parents of the boy.

They said, because of this Brother Zach, I can't get any money when my son gets married. So I've infuriated a lot of unconverted parents of men. I mean, the parents of girls are happy.

But if they join the church for that sake, they are not disciples. I tell them that also. I say, if you came here because you got all girls, there's a good church to join because I can get boys without paying dowry.

I say, that's the wrong reason to join this church. But what I say is, in all these areas, we must be strong in our conviction, but with discernment. And in this area of money especially, we have to be very, very careful that we stand for what is right.

But we live by the principles of the Lord, you know. For example, there are times when Jesus violated God's laws. Laws means the written, not the principles of God.

Let me give you one example. In John chapter 8, you know, the woman caught in adultery. The Pharisees said, Moses commanded us, John 8, 5, that such people should be stoned.

And that's a law. Leviticus 20, Deuteronomy 22. A law.

A woman who commits adultery must be stoned. Who gave that law to Moses? Jesus. From heaven.

Jesus gave that law to Moses from heaven. A woman who is caught in adultery must be stoned. To prevent people taking adultery lightly.

That was the reason. Then the same Jesus comes down to earth and he's confronted with the law. The Pharisees don't know that he's the one who gave that law.

Moses told us, okay, Jesus gives another law. Verse 7. He who is without sin, throw the first stone. And it says, verse 9. Everybody went away until only one person was left.

Who is without sin. Jesus. And according to what he just said.

He must throw the first stone. That's what he said himself. Practice what you preach.

He who is without sin, throw the first stone. He did not practice what he preached. Would you accuse him? He first of all went against what Moses said.

Then he went against what he himself said. Because he did not come to earth to stone people. He came to take the stones himself.

So that he could deliver people. He said, does no one condemn you? I don't condemn you. That doesn't mean, verse 11, that adultery is not serious.

Go and sin no more. I've often said, verse 11. In John 8, 11, we have the full gospel that CFC preaches.

In two sentences. This is the full gospel we preach. Number one.

Are you a sinner? Repented? Come to Christ? We don't condemn you. First sentence. Second sentence.

Don't sin again. That's the full gospel. Some people think we only preach the second one.

It's not true. We always begin with the first one. That's why we preach on the power of the blood of Christ.

And justification. And freedom from condemnation. Then we go to the second one.

And if some people preach the second one without the first one. They'll never get to that second one. The first one is the foundation.

I do not condemn you. Your sins and iniquities I'll remember no more. You are justified by my blood.

You've got that foundation right. Then go to the second sentence. Now don't sin again.

And that's where many people have failed. They don't even get that foundation right. Because they give them a foundation when they haven't even repented.

It's obvious this woman had repented. Otherwise Jesus wouldn't have said that. So that's one example.

The other example we see is in Luke chapter 7. Where there was this woman who was a prostitute. Who came to Jesus when he was in the Pharisees house. Verse 37.

Luke 7.37. When it says a woman who was a sinner. The meaning is my margin says an immoral woman. And she brought a very expensive vial of perfume.

You know how much perfume costs. I've never bought one. But I've seen in these airports the prices of these small little bottles.

And I'm amazed. This little bottle of perfume costs so much. So many dollars.

What is in it? And there are so many women who go and buy it. So a whole bottle of perfume. Can you imagine how much it costs? Where in the world did this poor prostitute get it from? From her earnings as a prostitute.

She took her entire life's earnings as a prostitute. And bought this vial of perfume. There's a law in Deuteronomy which says.

You cannot bring the wages of a prostitute into the house of God. The wages of a harlot. That's somewhere in Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 20, 22 or something. You cannot bring the wages of a harlot into the house of God. This is the house of God.

Jesus is the house of God here. And she brings the wages of a prostitute and pours it out there. And Simon, who is a Pharisee, who knows Deuteronomy.

He says. If this man were a prophet, verse 39. He would know what sort of sinner this is.

This woman is touching him as a sinner. That means an immoral woman. Then Jesus says.

This woman. Has been forgiven much. So she loves much.

Verse 47. And he tells her your sins are forgiven. That's amazing that Jesus accepted.

What he himself told Moses. In Deuteronomy. You must not accept.

I'm just showing you these examples. Not for you to violate God's laws. But to say that Jesus never lived by the letter of the law.

I've seen Christians who live by the letter of the law and make life miserable for people. The law was given to teach us the principles of God's life. God's life is what he manifested in the law.

And that's what we need. And it's possible to build a church with so many exact rules and regulations. And I've seen churches like that.

Where people are under condemnation. And everybody's a legalist. And they end up like Pharisees.

And they keep all those laws and go to hell. Just like the Pharisees in the Bible. So you see.

I see that. That's a great need for this word. I keep coming back to that.

Matthew chapter 13. Study the scriptures. Be deeply rooted in them.

I spent years studying the scriptures. And even though I forget so many things as I get older. I believe the doctors say that a lot of your brain cells keep dying as you get older.

And it's true. Older people, their memory fails them. And I forget people's names very easily.

And so many things that. But I say Lord in this hard disk of mine up here. Please keep the scriptures.

I don't mind if other things are deleted. But scriptures. I never want to forget scriptures.

Have a passionate desire that. In your brain. In your hard disk.

The knowledge of scripture is there. But according to the spirit of Christ. Not according to the letter.

And it says here. Jesus said in verse. Matthew 13 verse 52.

The scribe must become a disciple. And then. He can bring out of his treasure.

Things from the Old Testament. And things from the New Testament. But he'll bring it out in the spirit of Christ.

If he has become a disciple. If he does not become a disciple. Then.

Bring out a lot of bunch of rules from the Old Testament. And a bunch of rules from the New Testament. And make.

People's lives miserable. So. The scribe is the one who studies, studies, studies, studies, studies.

You know. Somebody's calculated. There were 613 commandments.

That God gave to Moses. We know the 10 main commandments. But there were 613 altogether.

In Exodus and Leviticus and all. And these scribes. There were laws as to.

If you find a bird with its little ones in a nest. What should you do? There was a law concerning that. What you discover after marriage.

Your wife is not a virgin. What to do? There were scribes who studied the law. All these little, little things.

What to do if the person got a little spot on his hand. Which looks like leprosy. Or even on the house.

There were laws on this. And nobody could study all these laws. Because there were no Bibles available.

But there were scribes who studied, studied, studied, studied. And so if you wanted to know something. You go to the scribe.

And he says. Yeah, rule number 397 says this. Oh, okay.

And he says. The scribe must become a disciple. He doesn't neglect the scriptures.

But he used the scriptures to make him follow in Jesus' footsteps. And then you understand the spirit of the law. Otherwise, even the letter of the new covenant can kill.

See 2nd Corinthians chapter 3. 2nd Corinthians 3. It's a great chapter on the new covenant and the old covenant. And he says. God has made us adequate.

Verse 6. 2nd Corinthians 3. 6. Servants of a new covenant. And one mark of it. Not of the letter like the scribe.

But of the spirit who makes us a disciple. This is similar to that. The letter may make you a scribe.

Lid by the Holy Spirit you become a disciple. And the letter kills. You can preach the letter and kill people in a church.

I've heard people preach. The letter. In their preaching.

Good brothers. And it kills. When you preach, you have to preach in the spirit.

And you've got to study the life of Jesus to understand that. Not that the letter is unimportant. Like, you know, people say.

It doesn't matter whether a woman covers her head or not. Because the Bible says. The same chapter 1 Corinthians 11.

Her hair is given up for a covering. I say listen. You're accusing the Holy Spirit of stupidity.

If he wrote 16 verses just to say that the hair is covering. He doesn't take 16 verses to tell a woman the hair is your covering. Your hair itself must be covered.

Hair is the glory of a woman it says there. And the glory of a woman must be covered. And it says a woman is the glory of the man.

The glory of the man must be covered. So if you read 1 Corinthians chapter 11. A woman covering her head is showing the glory of man is covered.

And the glory of a woman which is a hair is also covered. But people who don't understand the spirit of it go by the letter. And that kills.

Or, you know, I remember I was with a group of people who come from the Mennonites community. And they teach their women. The Bible says pray always.

So you must cover your head always. Always. You're supposed to pray always.

You cover your head always. So I told the leader. Hey, listen, the Bible also says men must also pray always.

But they must not cover their head. So if you're out in the rain, you must not cover your head. If you're out in the snow, don't wear a hat.

And don't ever wear a cap. Because you should be always praying, right? When they are caught like that, they find some excuse to get out of that loophole. Because nobody has confronted them like that.

I used to have great delight in confronting people who are legalists. With these type of questions from scripture. Because, I tell you, there are a lot of legalists in Christendom.

Just like there are a lot of antinomians. Antinomians are those who say the law is not important. It's two extremes.

So to be led by the Spirit. Make it your passion. Lord, I want to be able to listen to the Holy Spirit.

Which will not make me a legalist sticking to the letter of the law. Making me a scribe. But which will make me a disciple.

And which will give me wisdom to know how to answer each person. How do you obey a scripture like this? Turn with me to Proverbs 26. How do you obey a scripture like this? Proverbs 26, verse 4 and 5. Don't answer a fool according to his folly, or you'll be like him.

Answer a fool as his folly deserves, so that he is not wise in his own eyes. How do you do it? You have to obey scripture. And you see a fool in front of you.

What do you do? You follow verse 4 or verse 5? The Holy Spirit will tell you, is this fool A or fool B? Only the Holy Spirit can tell you. Should you answer him, or should you keep quiet? I find that great need for it in all the letters I get from the internet. I have to decide, is this fool A or fool B? Should I answer this, or not answer it? So, you've got to sense, is this a genuine question? It says people sent people to Jesus to trap him.

To trap him, is something he would say. And Jesus could see through that. There's no law which says that, it says Holy Spirit.

That's why I say, the Christian life is not just obeying certain letters of New Covenant law. It's being led by the Holy Spirit. Romans chapter 8. And verse 14.

All who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the real sons of God. What about those who are led by the written scripture, who are sincere? They are children of God. They haven't yet become sons of God.

You know the difference between a child and a grown up son? Galatians says in the Old Testament God treated them like babies. Now he's treating us like sons. One of the contrasts of Old Covenant to the New Covenant is children versus sons.

As many as are led by the Holy Spirit, these are the sons of God. Not led by the letter of the law. But we begin with the letter of the law, sure.

Because in the beginning we are babies, we don't know, we don't have discernment. But as we grow up, we should be growing up to discern. What is the Holy Spirit telling me? And two brothers may do things differently in a matter which is not sinful.

There are many situations like that where two brothers with a clear conscience can do things completely differently. And I will not judge him. Because you know, the Bible says to whom more is given, more is required.

You know that verse in Luke 12. So, I use this example. A student in the 10th grade gets questions in his examination which a student in 2nd grade does not get.

And mathematics for example. A student in 2nd grade is not going to get questions on geometry and calculus and things like that. And so, God doesn't expect that 2nd grade student to know perhaps even long division, geometry and algebra, no.

But a person in a higher grade, the teacher expects that person to know. Hey, you're in the 8th grade, you should be knowing a little algebra and geometry. So I say, we must recognize as we grow, the Lord expects more from us.

To whom more is given, more will be required. This has helped me tremendously, not judging other people. So I see another brother and I say, he's doing something which I would never do.

But, you can't say it's sin, it's not like murder or stealing or anything. But something which, I wouldn't speak like that or I wouldn't do that. And then instead of judging him, I say, well, maybe he hasn't studied that subject yet.

He hasn't studied algebra and geometry yet. How can I judge him? That he's getting that algebra some wrong. That's really delivered me from judging so many people.

Even judging your wife. Maybe she hasn't come to that level. And which God's given me light on it, but hasn't given her light on it.

I don't want to judge her. That does not mean she's inferior to you. Because she may be higher than you in another subject.

Where she's got light, where you don't have light. That keeps us humble. Doesn't keep us thinking that my wife is perpetually inferior to me in every area.

So, the Holy Spirit will always keep us in the footsteps of Christ. He said, Lord, I want my love to grow in discernment. To condemn another person is always wrong.

To have a low opinion of another person is always wrong. To value everybody, but not to be fooled by everybody. And not to imagine that I can have equal fellowship with all the 70.

No, maybe only with 11. Fine. And not to be bothered what people say about the particular ones I fellowship with.

For example, I remember the first time, I think, when Santosh came to one of our conferences. And he had already been an elder here and preaching in different places. And I thought, boy, if I ask him to speak in a Bangalore conference, what will people think? That Brother Zach is asking one of his sons.

And I said, Lord, I want to do what you say. I don't care what people say. But it must be, in my heart, there's zero partiality.

They're just the same as anybody else. I think I look at it like that. And I've tried to be like that towards all my children.

They're all the same. But, if God anoints somebody with a gift, and I don't recognize it just because it happens to be my son, there's something wrong with me. So, I got an example from scripture.

That James and John were the first cousins of Jesus. His mother's sister's children. And he must have known them from childhood.

Mary's sister Salome had two sons called James and John. Jesus played around with them. They knew them from childhood.

And then, when they come in the midst of his disciples, first of all, the question, why did he select them? And then, secondly, why did he make them part of the inner three? People are going to say, this guy is just, what do they call it, nepotism. You know, making your family members part of the inner circle. Jesus was not bothered.

No explanation. In not telling his disciples, hey, by the way, I want to tell you why I selected James and John. You know, the Lord led me.

No explanation. Wonderful. And so, I said, I'm not bothered what people say.

But, you know, I always wait for a confirmation. Because it's two wires that make electricity come. One wire alone is not enough.

And while I was thinking like that, Ian Robson, my fellow elder, came to me and said, Isaac, I think you should get on Santosh to speak. Oh, I got my confirmation. Wonderful how when you're hesitant in some situations, something happens and God leads you.

But I'm just giving you an example how something which we think is a genuine desire, I don't want to appear as if I am partial, can hinder us from doing the will of God. God may want you to do something. You ought to do it, whatever people may say or think.

That requires boldness. Freedom from the opinion of men. For 25 years in my home, I had a little wooden plaque.

My sitting room that I saw every day. Which said, if I seek to please men, I cannot be the servant of Christ. I didn't need it after 25 years because it was written in my hand.

I had another verse also on a wooden plaque in my sitting room for years. You fear God, you need fear nothing else. I still have it.

Fear God, you need fear nothing else. Sometimes, some words are very, very important. They come home to our heart.

You know, in the Old Testament, the Lord said, Write the laws on the door posts and walls. And He wanted them to be, to remember them. So, if you are humble enough, I believe ultimately it's a question of humility, to say, Lord, I don't know what is right for me.

I'm like the plant, like the branch in the tree. I can produce nothing. Even if I have 50 years experience, I don't know how to produce fruit.

But if I stick in the vine, stick in the tree, and let the sap flow in, let the Holy Spirit direct me, it's very important. Not just the letter of the law. And I hope that all that I have said this morning would have helped you to be dependent on the Holy Spirit.

I mean, my message is not something you can put down in four or five points, but I hope something came home to you to depend on the Holy Spirit and make you dependent, not on a message you heard even, but on the Holy Spirit. Be filled with the Holy Spirit. Seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit all through your life.

It's the greatest secret in the Christian life. It's not taking up the cross. It's being filled with the Holy Spirit who will lead you along the way of the cross.

Amen.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/R3XjIde3IZl.mp4>

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