

Preserving Reverence For God In The Church

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of fervently loving and preserving a deep relationship with Jesus Christ. It warns against the dangers of losing one's first love for Christ, the need to love much when forgiven much, and the significance of maintaining a humble and truthful heart before God. The speaker highlights the decline in love for Christ in the last days, urging believers to avoid deception, love the truth, and seek to please God above all else.

Scripture: Luke 7:47, 2 Timothy 3:1, 1 John 4:19, Revelation 2:4, Matthew 24:11, 1 Peter 4:11, John 14:30

Topics: "Fervent Love for Christ", "Maintaining a Humble Heart"

Description

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Transcript

Dear brothers and sisters, thank you so much for taking the trouble to come here. For many of you, a long distance and a lot of expense. And I pray that for all that you have, the price you have paid, God will more than reward you from heaven through giving you something that will lift up your spirit and draw you closer to him.

For myself, I see speaking the word of God as a very serious responsibility. And even though I've been preaching now for at least 56 years, I have to say that I fear God when I get into the pulpit, lest I say something which is just my own bright ideas, or lest I say something that God doesn't want me to say. And I want to share that with all of you who preach God's word.

It's very easy after some time to think, oh, I can do that, I've got experience. That's when you're in danger, when that sense of fear and trembling in the presence of God disappears. And when that disappears in the pulpit, when that disappears from the preacher, then the church begins to go down, the church that he's leading.

The way to preserve the word of God and its power is by those who preach the word, preaching in fear and trembling. Let me show you a verse in 1 Peter. I don't know how many preachers take this word

seriously.

I have taken it seriously for many, many years, and I have to say that the more I read it, the more the fear of God comes upon me. 1 Peter 4. All those who, even if you preach for five minutes in your church, even if you're not a regular preacher, you're not an elder, but you share for five minutes, maybe in a midweek meeting, anywhere. Please ask yourself whether this verse means anything to you.

1 Peter 4, verse 11. Whoever speaks, maybe an elder, maybe someone who got converted last week, he wants to share God's word. Good.

Jesus said, all of you must be my witnesses. All are not called to be apostles or prophets or teachers, but every Christian must be a witness for Christ. And to be a witness for Christ, you must be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Very, very important. The tragedy, even in CFC churches, is many people are preaching today who are not filled with the Holy Spirit. They dare to preach without being filled with the Holy Spirit.

And if they were filled with the Spirit once, they are not filled with the Spirit today. That's why there's a decline in the lives of so many people. Whoever speaks must speak as if he's speaking the utterances of God.

That means it has to be as if God himself is in the pulpit speaking. If you meditate on that verse, even for a few days, it'll put such a fear of God into you that you will never again get into a pulpit and say whatever you like. And like so many elders do, hit somebody over there or hit somebody over there in their message.

Zero fear of God. Or air their views and try to show off and preach for one hour. Then they've got only a five-minute message and they carry on preaching for one hour.

I've seen that in CFC churches. I'm fed up of hearing it. Where shall we have the fear of God, my brothers and sisters, in the pulpit? Many of you, brothers and sisters, are very sincere.

The problem is with many preachers in the pulpit. Many elders. That's where the problem lies in many CFC churches today.

Not all, but in many. And I have to be frank. And the reason is the fear of God is disappearing.

This trembling when you get into the pulpit is not there. Whoever speaks must speak as if it is the very utterance of God Almighty speaking. Otherwise, I should not stand up to preach.

I might just sit and say, I've got nothing to say. I cannot speak like the way God speaks. Let me give you the example of one of the greatest preachers in Christendom.

You know what his name is? The Apostle Paul. I'm not talking about modern, well-known, great preachers. Some of them are good, but I don't respect any of them as much as I respect the Apostle Paul.

He's been my example for years and years and years. Especially his attitude towards money. Exceptional.

It's almost impossible to find a preacher like Paul in that area nowadays. See how he preached. 1 Corinthians chapter 2. 1 Corinthians 2. This is the greatest preacher in Christendom, I believe.

Greater than all these famous preachers you hear nowadays. He says, brethren, when I came to you. And who is he coming to? He's not coming to great scholars.

He's coming to Corinthian people who were ignorant. They knew nothing. Sometimes when we speak to people who know much less of the Bible than us, we can speak as if we've got great authority.

And Paul could have spoken like that. These are ignorant Corinthian people just accepted the Lord last week. No, he had a fear of God.

And he says, when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with some superiority of speech or of wisdom as if I'm some great expert proclaiming to you the testimony of God. He could have. He knew a hundred times more than those people.

But he did not come with that arrogant spirit. He was a humble man. And because he was a humble man until the end of his life, the grace of God was upon him.

That is the most important thing. More important than what other people think of you as a preacher. More important than what other people think of you as an elder.

More important than how many people you think you're blessed. Ask yourself what God thinks about you. I did not come with superiority of speech, great temptation to impress people with words, fantastic words, with this scripture, that scripture, the other scripture, shouting, yelling, not Paul.

He did not come with superiority of wisdom, you know, giving the impression, I know more than you fellows, you foolish fellows. I've heard some CFC elders who call others fools. There's a word in Tamil called Motal.

Imagine calling people in the church by such names. They should be ashamed of themselves. They should never get into a pulpit.

Superiority of speech and wisdom, not Paul. He proclaimed the testimony of God and the reason was, he says, I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.

Is that the way to speak? In weakness and fear and in much trembling. What is he trembling about? Was he afraid these people won't appreciate his message? No. He was not bothered about the opinions of men.

Why was Paul trembling? Some people tremble in the pulpit because they are nervous the first time they are speaking. Or they tremble because they're wondering what people will think about their message. That's all stupid.

Why was he trembling? Because he knew he had to speak as the utterance of God. That's what made him tremble and I wish every brother who gets up to preach in a CFC church will tremble with that fear of God. Am I speaking as the utterance of God? It's very easy after some years to lose that.

To lose that sense of dependence upon God and say, Lord, I do not have what it takes to help these people. All my years of experience are worth nothing. I want to be in fear and trembling and in weakness.

A constant recognition of weakness. Before he was converted, Paul was a great leader in the Jewish leadership. But it was different when he got filled with the Holy Spirit.

He was always aware of his weakness. And he was tempted to become proud, like all of us are tempted to become proud. Then God loved him so much he gave him a sickness, which Paul called a thorn in the flesh.

And he pleaded with God to take it away, take it away. God said no. Paul, I love you too much.

You are very precious to me. I don't have many servants of God on earth like you. And I don't want to lose you in pride.

So I will not take away this sickness from you. This sickness will make you weak all the time, will make you call out to me all the time, and that way you'll be dependent on me. And my grace will be able to take care of everything.

That's how Paul finished his course triumphantly. Dear brothers and sisters, if you want to finish your Christian race triumphantly, victoriously, remain, even if you're not a preacher, you're just an ordinary brother or sister, remain in fear and trembling before God till the end of your life. Not trembling at the fear of man, no.

Zero fear of man. Zero fear of man. Zero desire for the approval of men, for our spirituality or any such thing.

I'm talking to all of you brothers and sisters, even if you don't preach the same principle, but live with a fervent desire to please God. And he says in verse four, my message and my preaching were not in the persuasive words of man's wisdom. He was, I'm not trying to argue with logically and say it's like this, it's like this, and like this, so don't you believe it.

No, he was a hundred percent dependent on the Holy Spirit in demonstration of the Spirit and power. And I'll tell you something, the fullness of the Spirit is not a once for all experience. There are many people in the world today who say they were baptized in the Holy Spirit.

I don't see any evidence of the Holy Spirit in their life now. I don't see the fear of God, I don't see the power of God. What's you saying so many years ago? It's like saying I was healthy 35 years ago.

You were healthy 35 years ago, great, but you're sick like anything today. I was baptized in the Spirit so many years ago means nothing. We have to be filled with the Spirit every day.

Yeah, that's very, very important because I feel that that is the only way we can prevent our churches from declining. I remember when we had our first building. For six years CFC used to meet in my house and we were about 60 people, that's all, after six years.

And we were very happy, but then God gave us a place there in our first building that could seat 150 people. And I said, wow, now we got a place till Jesus comes because with our message we will never get 150 people. No, such a strong message of taking up the cross, where will 150 people come? This building will be enough for us for the rest of our life.

But it soon got filled up and I'll tell you something, I was not excited. A lot of preachers are excited when they see numbers, they are excited when they see the congregation increasing. And this is the picture the

Lord gave me, that I could count the chairs in a hall and say we have so many people.

But from heaven, God will ask the angels to count among these how many people are disciples. How many are disciples of Jesus who love Jesus more than anything on this earth, who love Jesus more than their property, their job, their position, their money, their bank account, love Jesus more than their wife, their children, love Jesus more than their fellow believers and everybody else, for whom Jesus is the fervent desire of their heart, number one in their affection. How many of these people sitting here, God tells the angels to count, how many of them are taking up the cross every single day of their life in their home life, in their relationship with their wife and children, overcoming anger, bitterness, lust and all those things, and taking up the cross and dying to self at every opportunity.

How many of these people are detached from attachment to earthly things? And it won't be 150. The Lord said there may be 10. 10.

Your big church with 150 chairs have got 10 disciples. That's what I count. That's what the Lord showed me nearly 40 years ago.

So I'm not excited when I see a lot of people. I'm thankful so many people come to hear the Word of God. But I'm not fooled that everybody is here sitting here as a disciple.

I'm not deceived. I've been a Christian long enough to know that a lot of people like to listen to Zach Poonen are not disciples. They love to hear a man, but they are not disciples of my Savior.

And that's what makes me sad. Lord, these people like to hear me, but they don't want to follow you. Please help me that I will open their eyes to see it's worthless just listening and admiring me if you don't follow Jesus.

And the Lord warned us, it's the verse we have on top, Matthew 24. Matthew chapter 24. He's speaking about the last days the disciples came to Jesus and asked Him, when will this happen, Lord? Verse 3. The last part of verse 3. What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age? Matthew 24 verse 3. What will be the indication that you're coming soon and the end of the age? I believe we are approaching the end of the age when Christ will come soon.

And then the first thing Jesus said was, make sure nobody deceives you. That's the first thing. Beware of deception.

And He repeated it again and again. Beware of deception. He said further on a number of times false prophets, verse 11, will arise.

Verse 24. False prophets will arise showing miracles. Do you see all these signs and wonders on Christian television? These signs and wonders being done in great healing crusades with famous names.

You all know the names of these famous healers. You're deceived. I'm not deceived.

I've already read scripture. They will show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even God's children. A lot of God's children will be deceived because they don't have the fear of God.

And He says, I've told you in advance. So the main sign that Jesus gave about the last days is deception. That's why we keep on warning against deception in this, in our church.

And in that connection, I want to show you a verse which is very important in Matthew, sorry, 2 Thessalonians in chapter 2, which I've taught in this church for 40 years as the way to be protected from deception. If you want to be protected from all deception, please listen to just this one verse and I guarantee you'll be protected. 2 Thessalonians in chapter 2 and verse 10 and 11.

Speaking about the deception that will be there in the last days, may Satan's activity, verse 9, will come with deceiving power, signs, miracles and all that. And all types of deception, verse 10. But why do these people get led astray by this? Two reasons written in verse 10.

Please remember these two reasons. If you can escape these two dangers, you'll be protected from deception. They did not receive the love of the truth.

They did not love the truth. What does that mean? That means if I see something which God shows me as the truth, for example, I read scripture and I see something there and I say, that's different from what I believed for so many years. If I love the truth, I'll change my view and accept what God's word says.

When I got converted, I had been baptized as a baby by my parents many years earlier. And I thought that was good enough. I was born again and there were many other born again people who had taken only infant baptism.

So I did not take baptism. I said, I'm saved. Christ has forgiven me.

But I studied the scriptures and I saw in the scripture clearly there was not even a single child baptized in the New Testament. There's always adult believers. But I know people told me, your church will throw you out.

And those are the people who you need to witness to, to bring them to Christ. Why go to a church where they're already believers? They're already born again. Stay here where they're all unconverted nominal Christians and bring them to Christ.

I said, yeah, that's a good idea. And what God showed me in his word, I disobeyed for the first one and a half years after I was born again. And in all those one and a half years, I never grew spiritually because I did not receive the love of the truth.

Finally, when I was kneeling down before God in prayer, God said, if you're not listening to me, why should I listen to you? I said, Lord, I don't care which church throws me out. I'm going to obey you. And I took baptism.

And from that moment, I began to grow spiritually. And I love the truth. I know from my experience.

So the other way, the other area where we need to love the truth is in some situation, God shows you that you were wrong, but you don't love the truth. You will not acknowledge that you are wrong. You will not apologize.

You want to defend yourself. You will be deceived because you don't receive the love of the truth in yourself. So it is either that you don't love the truth, which God shows you from scripture, or you don't love the truth, which God shows you in your own life.

That was wrong, God says. There you were lusting after that woman. Be honest.

Don't cover it up. That statement you signed in your office was wrong. It was a lie.

And you say, no, no, no, everybody does it. Okay. You will ultimately go where everybody else goes, to hell.

Love the truth about yourself. Whenever God shows you, sometimes you're sitting in a meeting like this, and God speaks to your heart, and you know, God starts convicting you about something. Don't shut down that voice.

Listen to it. Love the truth. Then you'll be saved.

The second thing is, you've got to love the truth, and then you must have a desire to be saved. So there are two things here. I must love the truth, and I must want to be saved, verse 10.

Want to be saved from sin. So if you don't have a desire to be saved from sin, desperately in your life, I don't have a desire to be saved from anger at any cost. Think of how much you're willing to pay a hospital if you were diagnosed with cancer, and the doctor says, it's going to be expensive, the treatment, otherwise you'll die, or your child will die.

Oh, you'd be even willing to borrow money to get treated, because you want to be freed from cancer. I do not find believers who are as eager to be free from anger like they are desiring to be free from cancer. Are you free from anger in your home? That's the place to test it.

In your office? Cancer. It's a cancer. If you're not eager to be free from it, you don't have a desire to be saved.

What about all that lusting that goes on in your mind? Sexual lust. Are you desperately eager to be free from it, like to be free from cancer, not willing to pay any price? If not, I want to tell you, my brother, you may not be widely deceived, you'll be deceived a little bit, because you don't have a passionate desire to be saved from all sin. So those are the two conditions.

You must love the truth, verse 10. You must want to be saved from all sin, and if you're not having either of these two, it says, here is what will happen to you, verse 11. God himself will send a deceiving influence on you.

This is not the devil who is called the deceiver of the whole world. Our lusts are called deceitful lusts. No, this is not our lusts.

This is not the devil. This is Almighty God sending. It's not the devil sending.

It is not even, you can read, God permits the devil to send. That's not what the Bible says. Read carefully.

God himself will send a deluding influence so that you will believe, listen to this, this is the scary part. I've often said this is the scariest verse in the Bible, that you will believe what is false. You will believe that you're spiritual when you're not spiritual.

You'll believe that you're saved when you're not saved. It's very dangerous. If God makes me believe what is false, what hope is there for me? But it says God will do that.

Whom does he do it to? Those who don't love the truth when God shows it to them and who have no desire to be saved from sin or who take it casually or who have become so senior in the church that now they relax. I've seen that. People who in the early days when they came to the church were so gripped by the message of the cross and the message of dying to self and following Jesus.

But now they've become senior brothers, senior sisters. Now they can relax and be careless in their attitude to sin in their thoughts and their words. And God allows them to believe that they are spiritual just because they've been believers for 20-30 years.

That's one of the great deceptions. I've been a believer 30 years, I'm a senior brother. Who said that? You're a senior brother if you overcome sin.

You're a senior sister if you've overcome sin. Not because you sat in the church for 40 years. No.

That young brother who's 25 years old may be more senior to you because he's overcome sin. Seniority in the church comes through overcoming sin. Please remember this, dear brothers and sisters.

So turn back to Matthew 24. Jesus is speaking about the last days, how we can be deceived. And here's how we can be deceived.

Not only by the false prophets and the false preachers, God himself allowing us to be deceived because we don't love the truth about ourselves. God speaks forcefully to you in a meeting and you don't face up to it. Or you see something in the Word of God in your private reading and you don't face up to it.

You're always thinking of, maybe some of you anyway, are thinking, ah there's a good message I can preach to others. Never preach a message to others that has not cut you first. The Word of God is like a two-edged sword.

One edge must cut me, then I can use it on another. I must never preach something that has not first convicted me and delivered me. Or at least I'm longing to be delivered from it.

Very, very important to avoid deception. And then let's read on in Matthew 24 verse 11. Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many.

And because so much of lawlessness in the world in the last days, listen what will happen. It does not say many believers' love will grow cold. I think most people, and it's referring to believers, because unbelievers don't love the Lord.

Most believers' love for the Lord will become cold. And when I read most, I have to ask myself, does that include me? Is my love going to become cold because of the tremendous amount of sin there is in the world? Lawlessness is sin. And it says here, because of the sin in the world, it's very easy for that to influence me in such a way that my fervent love for Jesus becomes, cools off.

And I'm not so fervent in my love for Christ as I was in the early days. In the early days, maybe you were very particular in money matters, that you don't do anything unrighteous, even for 10 rupees or something like that. Maybe you're watching movies now in your home, which you would not have watched when you were first converted.

I know there are clean movies, there are children's movies, there's nothing wrong with those. But I'm talking about other movies which pollute your mind. There are Christians watching that on television.

And they say, oh, it's only a little bit. It's like saying this cup of milk has only got one drop of poison, not too much, only one drop of poison. That's how it is.

Nobody puts a full cup of poison into, no, the devil's not a fool. One drop is enough. And they say, yeah, there's a little bit in that movie that is dirty and bad.

Okay. Where do you think such believers are going to be, finally, who spend more time with television than with the word of God, who are ignorant of scripture, but have plenty of time to watch all these things for entertainment. This is how decline comes very slowly into churches.

And fervent love for Jesus becomes cold. And that initial love that you had is gone. Has that happened to you? And it is in that context that we have this verse on top.

But the one who, verse 13, who endures to the end will be saved. That means the one who keeps battling this downward drift and say, I'm going to preserve the fire of God, love for Jesus in my heart at any cost. I'm going to preserve that fire.

I'm going to keep it burning where everybody around is cooling off. Let them cool off. I'm going to keep that fire burning.

And if a few people want to come and light a fire from my heart, they can come and light it from my heart. But I'm going to keep it burning. My brothers and sisters, I urge you, be a brother and a sister like that in these last days.

Be a flame for God with fervent love for Christ. Endure to the end in a love for Christ that will be willing to pay any price in order to please him. That's how Jesus lived throughout his life.

And he's our example. You know, towards the end of his life, he said in John's gospel, why did Jesus die on the cross? We know the well-known verse, John 14, by the way, John 14, verse 30 and 31. God so loved the world that he gave his son, Jesus died on the cross because he loved us.

That is the number two reason. That is the second reason why he died on the cross, because he loved us sufficiently to save us from our sin. The first reason is he loved the Father.

See what he says? So that John 14, verse 31, so that the world may know that I love the Father, I will do exactly as the Father commanded me to go. Let us go from here to where? To read the rest of the chapters to the cross. He was saying, I want to do what my Father has told me because I love him.

So let's go to the cross. That is why Jesus died on the cross. So when I see Jesus hanging on the cross, I don't just say, oh, how much he loved me.

I say, oh, how much he loved the Father. Have you ever seen it like that? How much he loved the Father to be willing to go all that way to please the Father. He's my example.

I must love Jesus like that. And from there came his love for people. His love for us did not come first.

No, the first commandment is not to love your neighbor as yourself. No, the first commandment is love God with all your heart. And then from there, we love others.

That's how Jesus loved. He loved the Father and he went to the cross because the Father told him, go and die for the world. He didn't do it out of love for us first.

He did it because the Father told him and he wanted to please the Father. And also he loved us. But very often we have thought so much about his love for us, which is important.

But he's an example for me in the fact that he loved the Father. And if I love him, I will go that way till the end of my life. And that is where we find it as we admire the love of Jesus for us, that we find our own love for him also can increase.

We read in 1 John chapter 4, the most valuable people in the church are those who love Jesus with all their hearts. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, that you love one another. That's fine for the world to know that.

But I want the Father to know that I love him and Jesus first. And from there the world will know that because I love the others. 1 John 4, you read here, verse 19, we love because he first loved us.

And when I see how much Jesus loved me by willing to go to the cross, that's what makes me love him. That is the basis of all our Christian life. Beware if that fervent love for Christ decreases in your life and it becomes cold.

Because the world is going in that direction. It is very easy for that to happen to any of us. We have to watch our hearts with all diligence.

And through the years the thing that has helped me is to meditate much on Jesus' love for me, especially his love for me on the cross. And as I've often said this many times, when in my younger days I thought more of the physical suffering of Jesus on the cross, how he was whipped and beaten and crucified. But as I've gone to know the Lord more, the thing that challenges me is how Jesus was willing to suffer hell on the cross to save me.

In other words, the pain of eternal hell which I could have got, he took on the cross. It was actual hell for three hours being forsaken by the Father. The reason was that he could save me.

Meditate on that a little bit. And that is how my love for Jesus began to increase and that's what's preserved me all these 60 years that I've been a Christian. I want to encourage you more than anything else, dear brothers and sisters, preserve your fervent love for Christ.

Don't let your love for your parents come there between you and Christ. Don't let your love for your wife or your children or your job or money or any of these things come there. Because if you allow it to come, I guarantee you will be deceived and you won't know it.

The thing about deception is that you think everything is all right. If somebody gives you a counterfeit 500 rupee note, it's going to look like the real thing. But it's not real.

It's a counterfeit. You imagine that you have some money when you don't have it. That is deception, where you imagine that you love Jesus and you don't.

And that's why God allows some situation to come into your life to show you that you don't love Jesus. That you love your parents more than you love Christ. Or you in some situation you love your wife or husband more than you love Christ.

Or you did something because you loved your children more than you love Christ. And you're willing to compromise for this to please your children. Displease Christ, that's okay.

Take the matter of marriage for example. How many people displease the Lord when it comes to the way they choose a marriage partner for themselves or for their children? Those are the situations where they discover they don't really love Christ at all. Christianity was a convenience for them.

They thought they were fervent Christians and all the years they were in CFC until the time came for marriage or for getting their children married. And then they discover something of the world is more important than Jesus Christ. So God allows such situations to show us and if we love the truth about ourselves we'll be saved.

If I don't face up to that truth and sort of cover it up and say it's okay, it's okay, it's okay, okay. God will allow you to be deceived. And you can still sit in the church and have a good testimony.

You can even be an elder in a church and have lost your love for the Lord and not know about it. That's why it's very important to fervently meditate on the love of Jesus for us all the time and ensure that no one comes between us in our fervent love for him. See in Revelation chapter 2 how an elder brother in a church lost his love for the Lord.

But he was doing so many other things. But his love for the Lord had gone. Revelation chapter 2 we read the Lord says to this elder in Ephesus, I know your deeds, verse 2. Your toil, that means your hard work.

Are you a hard-working elder brother? Perseverance, you don't give up. You don't tolerate evil people in your church. Wonderful.

And if somebody comes to your church claiming to be an apostle, you expose him as a false apostle. In other words, you're pure in doctrine and you're exposing evil people. And somebody calls himself an apostle and you say you're a false apostle.

And on top of that, verse 3, you persevere. That means you keep on doing this. You don't give up after 5 or 10 years.

You've been doing it for 20 years, faithful and exposing false apostles and having your meetings and your prayer meetings and all that activity. And you've even suffered for the name of Jesus. Maybe you lost your property because your parents did not give you your inheritance.

You've endured for my name's sake and you did not get tired. You'd say what a wonderful elder brother that is. No.

He was a backslider. You say with all these things he was a backslider? Yes, with all these things he was a backslider. Because there was one thing he lacked.

He did not love Jesus fervently. See what he says, you have left, verse 4, your first love. In other words, the love Jesus said you had for me when you were first converted, when nothing in the world was important for you, you didn't care for anything, you only loved me.

That is gone. Now you have become an elder brother involved in activity and arrangements and checking up on false apostles and preaching and this that and the other and that simple devotion that you had for me is gone. Is this a serious error, Lord? It is so serious that the Lord says, verse 5, remember from where

you have fallen.

You were up there, maybe in those days you never had so much activity but you loved me fervently. Now you've got a lot of activity but you've fallen right down here because your love is gone. What shall you do? Repent.

Do you have to repent of losing your first love? I thought we had to repent of serious sins. This is the most serious sin. Repent, verse 5, and come back to what you did at first.

I'm not interested in all your activities if you don't love me. Otherwise, I will remove the lampstand from its place. The lampstand is the indication of Christ being present in a church.

He says, I will move out of your church. You will still have your meetings, you'll still have your conferences and you'll still have your singing and even your prayer meetings but Jesus, I will not be there. There are many churches which have right doctrine, evangelical churches.

Christ is not there. In 1 Corinthians 14, we read of a church where people come in and they feel, oh God is here. It says there, they'll fall on their face and say, God is in your midst.

That's the mark of a New Testament church. For many years I was seeking after what is the New Testament church pattern and I thought the pattern was we don't have pastors, we must have elders and we don't take offerings, we just ask people to voluntarily give money. That's a New Testament pattern and we give freedom to other people also to share, not just one person doing all the preaching.

I thought this was New Testament pattern. Everybody can be free to pray but when I read that verse in 1 Corinthians 14 which says, the person comes into your midst and says, falls on his face and says, God is here. I understood that day, the mark of a New Testament church is that when somebody comes into your meeting, he goes away saying, I heard Jesus today.

I met with Jesus today. If that is not happening in your meeting, I want to say to you, it is not a New Covenant church. Doctrine is all right like it says here.

You don't tolerate evil people and you expose false apostles and you got all the right doctrine and you persevere and you've got your prayer meetings and your conferences and you endure so much for my name's sake, but a love for Christ is gone. If a person loves Christ fervently, you know it's like these people who fall in love with somebody and young couples always falling, they fall in love with somebody, they're always talking about that person whom they love. Because they're so taken up with that person and if you love Jesus fervently, there'll be such a mark of his presence with you that people who come in touch with you or hear you will have come in touch with Jesus, who will come into your church.

I'm sad to say there are many so-called New Testament pattern churches. The only thing they have is correct doctrine or they say, we agree with brother Zach. What's the use of that? You can go to hell agreeing with brother Zach.

Oh, we have the same teaching as CFC Bangalore. So what? You can be a useless, good-for-nothing church, even if you have the doctrines we have. What you need is the presence of Jesus Christ in your meeting.

One in a hundred meetings? No. In every single meeting people must come there and say, we met with the Lord. That's my passion.

I tell you that's been my passion for years. I say, Lord, when people listen to me, they must feel they're met with the Lord, not with me. Beyond me, they must meet with Christ.

It doesn't matter if they think about me. It doesn't matter. I pray that our churches will be like that.

Otherwise, I'll tell you the fear I have. When you look at church history, Martin Luther started the Lutheran Church. John Wesley started the Methodist Church.

William Booth started the Salvation Army. Pentecostal groups started the Pentecostal Church. The Brethren Assemblies started John Darby and Jane Darby and George Muller and all started the Brethren Assemblies.

The doctrines are the same even today in all these churches. But do you meet people like John Wesley in the Methodist Church today? Do you meet people like George Muller in the Brethren Assembly? No. It's a doctrine.

And the glory in the fact we got the doctrine. Is Christ there? Is Jesus there? Do people come to your church to meet with Jesus Christ or just to sing songs and to hear another message? Maybe it's the message of denying myself. Oh, one more message I heard about denying myself.

I heard it for 30 years. Deny myself, deny myself, deny myself, deny myself. And I'm not meeting with Jesus.

It can happen. There are non-Christians who preach self-denial. Hindu yogis preach self-denial.

It doesn't mean a thing. Christianity is to meet with Jesus Christ. You have left your first love and the Lord says, I'm going to remove my presence from your midst.

And I say, Lord, I don't want to sit in a church that is just preaching all the right doctrines and about taking up the cross. If your presence is not there, I'm wasting my time sitting there. Turn with me to another example.

In Luke's Gospel chapter 7, how we can preserve ourselves in the love for Christ. How can we endure in love until the end when other people are falling away? I told you first, by seeing how much Jesus loved us. And the other is by seeing how much he forgave us.

Luke 7 37, there was a woman in the city who was a sinner. Who is a sinner? Everybody is a sinner. Why does it say there was a woman in the city who was a sinner? Were the others not sinners? All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Why is this particular woman called a sinner? She was a prostitute. And one day when she heard that Jesus was in a Pharisee's house, she quietly came behind him with a vial of perfume. You know how much perfume costs? I've never bought one in my life, but it's very, very expensive.

I've seen labels of small bottles that cost thousands of rupees. I said, this little thing cost thousands of rupees. Imagine bringing a bottle full of that perfume.

Where did she get that money from? From her years of prostitution. She saved so much money. One day she heard Jesus Christ on the streets and she was forgiven.

And she was so grateful that men rejected her as a useless prostitute. But the Son of God came and forgave her. He said, how can I show my love for him? I will spend all my life savings and buy a bottle of perfume.

Somehow get to the feet of Jesus and pour it there. And she came there weeping, verse 38. And wet his feet with her tears of gratitude and kept on wiping with her hair and anointing them, poured out all that perfume there.

And there was the Pharisee, Simon the Pharisee, who was sitting there who invited Jesus, the rich man. He said, if this man were a prophet, he should know that the book of Deuteronomy says, a prostitute is not allowed to bring her earnings to the house of God. A prostitute cannot give her earnings in the offering box.

That's a law in the book of Deuteronomy. If he's a prophet, Jesus should know that. This is a prostitute.

And Jesus said, Jesus could read the thoughts of people and said, Simon, let me ask you something. He said, the money lender had two debtors. One owed him 500 denarii and the other owed him 50.

He forgave both of them. Who will love more? He said, the one who forgave more. So that's right.

This woman, you know why she's spent so much on me? Why she's weeping? Because she has been forgiven much. Verse 47, those who are forgiven much, love much. Those who are forgiven little, love little.

He said, I came here, you did not. Even, you know, in every house, they used to have a slave to wash their feet. He said, you did not come and anoint my feet with perfume or even my head with oil.

But she's been anointing my feet with perfume. The reason is this, verse 47. Her sins are many, but they've been forgiven.

We know that. She loves much. So there we see the second reason why some people love Jesus more than others.

It's not that some people are forgiven more. We've all been forgiven plenty. Is there anybody here who can raise their hand and say, I've been forgiven very little? Even a 10 year old child cannot say that.

We've all been forgiven much. I've often said to the Lord myself, I say, Lord, I am not better than the worst terrorist in the world. I even mentioned the name.

Even that worst terrorist, I'm not better than him. He came from Adam. I came from Adam.

He has a flesh. I have a flesh. I was brought up in more God-fearing upbringing, so I did not go into terrorism.

He came up in some other religion with some other parents and he went into terrorism. But basically, there's no difference between his flesh and mine. In my flesh, like Paul said, nothing good dwells.

In that terrorist's flesh, nothing good dwells. There is absolutely no difference between him and me. Have you ever seen that? I've seen it.

In my flesh dwells no good thing. But Lord, you've been tremendously merciful to me. I may not have committed all those sins that man committed because I didn't have the opportunities.

But I was brought up with a little more fear of God. That's all. But basically, I'm just as evil as him.

So I will not look down on anybody. Do you look down on other people? You haven't seen the corruption of your own flesh. So say, Lord, how much you've forgiven me.

I want to love you much. I'm aware that I've been forgiven much. Are you aware that you've been forgiven much? If you are aware, you will love much automatically.

He who is forgiven much loves much. Why do you love Jesus so little? Why does the world have an attraction for you? Because you feel that you've been forgiven little. You haven't seen the corruption of your own flesh.

You compare yourself with other people and you think you're better than them. And so you love Jesus little. So please remember this, my brothers and sisters.

Take the warning of Jesus seriously. In the last days, the love of many, many Christians is going to become cold and I've already begun to see it. I've begun to see it in CFC churches.

I've begun to see it among the elders in CFC churches, some of them. And I praise God at the same time there are others who continue to love Jesus fervently. But there are many, I'm sorry to say, who are slipping up.

People who have begun to think that they are somebody, who glory in the fact that our doctrines are better than others or our churches are better than others and their fervent love for Jesus is gone. Exactly like Jesus predicted. Beware of those people who will prevent you from loving Jesus supremely.

Let me read this in closing, 2nd Timothy in chapter 3. 2nd Timothy chapter 3 we read same thing the Apostle Paul says. 2nd Timothy 3 verse 1. Realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. I sometimes read the Living Bible, not to get doctrine, because the Bible is not a translation, it's a paraphrase.

So I read it like a commentary. I read the Message Bible like a commentary. Not to get a doctrine, but to get some light on some words sometimes.

And the Living Bible reads it like this. In the last days it will be very difficult to be a true Christian. That's the meaning there.

Not persecution. It will be difficult to be a true Christian. Why? Because men will be lovers of self.

Verse 2. Men will be lovers of money. Men will be boastful, unholy, unloving, but along and lovers of pleasure. Verse 4. More than lovers of God, but along with all that they will still hold on to a form of godliness.

Verse 5. They'll be in the church every Sunday. They'll sing the songs. They won't go to a dead church.

They'll come to CFC. They want a good church, but they will sit in CFC and they will love themselves. They will love money.

They'll be boastful. They'll be arrogant. They'll be disobedient to parents.

There'll be, verse 3, gossips. CFC, brother, sister, gossips. Without self-control, who love pleasure.

Verse 4. More than they love God. Take these warnings. What does it say in verse 5? Don't fellowship with such people.

Avoid them. Don't fellowship with such people because you'll be like them. There's an old book of wisdom written a few hundred years before Christ.

It's not part of the Bible. It was written by a wise man, a wise Jewish man. His name was Joshua, the son of Sirach.

And he says, you cannot touch tar without soiling your hands. If you touch tar, it'll just stick to your hands so much, it'll be very difficult to take it off. And so if you fellowship with proud people, you'll be like that.

Some of that pride will rub onto you. It'll be very difficult to take it off. It says, fellowship with humble people.

Fellowship with simple, humble people who love Jesus fervently. That's what I say. Let us bow before God.

Dear brothers and sisters, love the truth about yourself so that you can be saved. I judge myself as I speak. I'm not judging any of you because I'm not your judge.

I'm here to proclaim the truth, the sword that cuts my own heart first before it cuts yours. Let us encourage one another in these evil days to love the Lord wholeheartedly and to preserve the church in purity. Thank you, Father.

Please help us each one. We need the help of the Holy Spirit desperately. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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