

The Church and Satan

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of building the church according to God's principles, focusing on the need for repentance and faith to be preached together, the significance of living a humble and sacrificial life like the apostles, and the warning against seeking personal gain or honor within the church. It highlights the role of men as leaders in God's work, the power of revelation from heaven, and the necessity of guarding against wolves and divisions within the church.

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Scripture: Acts 20:28, Acts 20:21, John 3:14, Revelation 2:4, Matthew 16:18, John 3:30, 1 Corinthians 12:30, Acts 5:39

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Description

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Transcript

We read about Satan only about three or four times. One is right at the beginning in Genesis 3, even though Satan is not mentioned. He came through a serpent and spoke to Eve, separated her from God, separated her from her husband, and then through Eve tempted Adam.

He tempted Eve through a serpent, but he tempted Adam through Eve and separated him from God and separated him from his wife. So what we see in the beginning, Satan is a great master at breaking relationships between God and man and between man and man, man and woman in a marriage or in a church. So whenever you see a separation coming, you can be absolutely sure that's the devil.

God is in the work of uniting. You know, for example, a human body, the moment it dies, it starts separating, and after a number of months, it's just dust. It's there will not be that type of breaking up.

So whenever a church is breaking up into pieces, you know, the divine life was not there. I mean, a few people leaving here and there is perfectly okay, but if a church itself breaks up, something is seriously wrong. And I don't mean just people leaving a church, but when the life in a church is gone, you know, the Holy Spirit is left.

Jesus said in Matthew 16, after Peter had answered the question, Jesus first asked the question, who do people say that I am? And they said, well, John 16, Matthew 16, 14, some say John the Baptist. Then he asked this question, who do you say that I am? They're trying to think here in these sessions, the importance of men being the leaders in God's work in building the church. As I said, he never chose a woman to be an apostle.

And in the New Testament, there is no woman prophetess. And in the Old Testament too, it's because men were failures that God used a woman, and that's true. Where men fail, God will use a woman because he has to fulfill his purposes.

And if a man doesn't go out to reach some place for Christ, God will send a woman there, definitely. So through the years, he's used some amazing women as missionaries who've done a great work, where men were too lazy to go, or where men were afraid to go. So God has taken weak women and done an amazing work.

I mean, if you read the story of how the Christian work is developed in different countries, it's amazing work God has done. But God's first choice is a man. In Matthew 16, he asked them, who do you say that I am? And Simon Peter said, you are the Christ, the son of the living God.

Now, Simon Peter didn't learn that in some Bible school. The people who went to a Bible school all believed this was Satan, Beelzebul. The people who called Jesus Beelzebul or Satan were Bible school graduates who had got their certificates.

And it's even the same today. It's almost impossible to find a person who's gone to a Bible school who's a humble, godly man with the anointing of the Holy Spirit. I don't say that lightly.

There may be a few odd ones here and there, but I've not seen them. I would say the people who have blessed me the most in my own life as I've grown up were all people who never went to a Bible school. So I don't want to mention their names, but you know about them.

Some of them are well known. Or some who, in spite of going through Bible school, they overcame that, got in touch with God. And Simon Peter, whereas others were calling him Beelzebul, the Bible school scholars, Simon Peter was just a fisherman.

He said, you're the Christ, the son of the living God. Where did he get that from? And Jesus said, you're blessed. Why was he blessed? Because he said, it's not flesh and blood.

It's not some clever Bible scholar who explained to you that Jesus is the son of the living God. My father gave you revelation. This is a great New Testament word.

Revealed. My father revealed this to you. There's a lot of difference between understanding the truth by revelation and by study.

The Bible schools emphasize study. Jesus emphasized revelation from heaven. It's by revelation that we suddenly discover the truth of God.

And it's not by a lot of study. We need to study the scriptures. But I remember for many, many years, I studied the scriptures.

But I remember once I got revelation on how the new covenant was superior to the old covenant. And I still remember that. It was way back in some time, about 18 years after I was converted, where I still remember the chair I was sitting in, in my house, where from 2 Corinthians chapter 3, I suddenly understood, hey, this is what the new covenant is all about.

And that became the burden of my ministry. And it was not through a lot of academic study. There was a background of a lot of study of the scriptures.

But suddenly that revelation came from heaven. I want to say, dear brother, sister, seek for revelation. My father has revealed this to you.

Flesh and blood. That means human beings cannot reveal this to you. They can give you a lot of arguments and explaining, compare scripture with scripture, and all this theological study and all that.

But revelation comes only from heaven. How do we know the difference between revelation and academic understanding of a truth? Academic understanding of a truth will not change your life, will not change your family life. Revelation will change everything.

If there's no change by a truth that has come into your life, it's just that you got one more truth up in your head, which you can preach now in somewhere. That's not revelation. Revelation humbles you.

We read in the book of Revelation that when Jesus spoke to John the Baptist, he was flat on the ground. And that's what happens to us spiritually. When we get revelation, we feel like we are nobody, we are nothing.

We can't lift up our head. Revelation will make you aware that you're a nobody. If you think you're somebody, you haven't got revelation.

That's pretty clear. And Simon was revealed, came from heaven. And then, listen to this.

Here's where the Roman Catholics get it wrong. Jesus said to Simon, you are Peter. And upon this rock, I will build my church.

The gates of hell will not overpower it. The question is, what is this rock? The Roman Catholics say Peter was the rock. But he was a pretty unstable rock because five verses later, God calls him Satan.

Was he a rock and Satan at the same time? Verse 23, get behind me, Satan. No, the rock was not Peter. And in the original Greek, in which the New Testament is written, it's written in the margin of my NASB, you are Petros, a small stone.

But on this Petra, a large rock, I will build my church. In fact, he was contrasting. The word Petros means a small stone.

And he was contrasting there between, I mean, the Greek contrast is clear. On this rock, Petra, I will build my church. And that rock is revelation from heaven.

That's the thing I want you to see. Simon Peter, you got a revelation from heaven. On that rock, I will build my church.

So it's only by revelation from heaven, that's the rock on which you can build the church. The revelation from heaven concerning Jesus Christ, who he is, a revelation from heaven concerning the church, what the church is. Most people in the world don't understand what the church is, it's the body of Christ and how it is to function.

It has to come by revelation from heaven. And I know in my life, any amount of study on what is the church and explanation, you won't get it, brother. If you want to build it, it has to be built on the rock of revelation, on this rock.

I will build my church. The second thing I want you to notice is, you cannot build it. Only Christ can build the church.

He may use you like a hand or a tongue, but you cannot build the church. Any of you who think that, I've got some theories here, I've heard some wonderful truths at this men's conference, I'm going to go back and build a church. Well, I hope you'll fail.

I hope you'll fail miserably till you come to the place where you say, Lord, I can't do it. That's when you begin to seek God for revelation, the true church will be built. Because a lot of people, I've seen people who come for conferences like this, I say, I got some truth here.

And they go home and try to preach their truth and nothing happens. There's more conflict, there's more strife. The other thing I want you to notice is that Jesus said, I will build my church.

That's what I've discovered. I, Zach Poonen, can never build a church. Neither can you.

And the day you realize that, it'll be your salvation. Because I've seen, as I said, people come to conferences like this, and now I know what I'm going to do when I go back. I hope you will make a mess.

Then you will learn a lesson. To seek God is built by revelation, and it is only built by Jesus Christ. And Jesus uses those who have come to an end of themselves.

Men who have come to an end of themselves, uses such people to build a church. And Peter had a long way to go to that place, to reach that place where he came to an end of himself. He wasn't at the end of himself here.

He felt he was pretty strong. And then the Lord said, the church that I built, here's another proof of the church that Jesus builds, all the powers of darkness, the gates of hell means all the powers of spiritual darkness will not be able to overpower that church. If you have built any type of church which the gates of hell have overcome, brother, you can be pretty sure that that's not the church of Jesus Christ.

I don't mean whether your church is crumbled or not. That's not the point. The Roman Catholic Church is the biggest Christian institution in the world.

The gates of hell overpowered that ages ago. Most people don't see it. With all the wrong teachings and Martin Luther saw that 500 years ago and got away from it.

The devil overpowers not by destroying something. So many structures have come up, you know, which we think it is of God. There's a statement of in Acts of the Apostles.

Let me just turn to it briefly for a moment. In Acts of the Apostles, they were discussing, some of the leaders were discussing what to do with this new Christian movement that has come up. And there was a man who gave some good advice.

He said, if this is of God, you won't be able to destroy it. That's in Acts chapter 5. A man called Gamaliel, who was actually the professor of Saul, Saul's professor in Bible college. He said, listen, be careful what you do with these men.

Because he said, verse 39, if it is of God, you won't be able to overthrow him. You'll be found fighting against God. So he said, some of these other cases like Judas, verse 36 and verse 37, and they tried to start something and it did not flourish.

So his understanding was wrong. That's what I'm trying to say. So he was saying, if it of God, it'll flourish.

Roman Catholicism has flourished. Islam has flourished tremendously. Hinduism has flourished in India for 3,000 years.

Gamaliel was wrong. When Jesus speaks about the gates of hell will not prevail, will not be able to destroy the church, he's talking about a spiritual destruction. There are many earthly kingdoms.

Coca-Cola has flourished like anything. And many, many other kingdoms of the earth. You don't need God's power for all that.

Just good organization, a lot of money. But spiritually, for something to survive with life, living and powerful, it has to come by revelation with the power of the Holy Spirit and God himself. Jesus has to build it.

And all the powers of darkness will not be able to destroy it. The powers of darkness are not trying to destroy Hinduism or Islam. No.

I don't believe they're trying to destroy Roman Catholicism, either. And I don't think they're trying to destroy a lot of Protestant or Pentecostal Christianity. But wherever he sees a fellowship, however small it may be, that's seeking to exalt Christ and deliver people from the love of money, and deliver people from demonic deception, and trying to unite husband and wife together, build families, and where people are learning to love one another and forgive one another and lay down their life for one another, maybe a small fellowship, the gates of hell have not succeeded there.

That's the only type of church that I want to build. I don't want to waste my time building anything else. How do I know whether when I come to the end of my life and I stand before the Lord, whether I have fulfilled God's will or not? How do you know? There must be a longing in your life.

I've had this longing tremendously. I said, Father, you said about Jesus, this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased at his baptism. I said, Father, can you say that about me? This is my beloved son, I'm also a son of God, in whom I am well pleased.

You must have a passion for that. That every day of my life, the way I live at home as a husband, the way I brought up my children as a father, the way I've served the church as a leader, as a servant leader, the Father in heaven must be able to say, this is my beloved son in whom I'm well pleased. That should be what you long to hear when Christ comes back.

And you should ask the Lord whether he's able to say that about you now, every day of your life. Then you're going the right way. The gates of hell will not be able to overpower it because you will have authority over them to bind and loose them.

We see here that there is a church that Jesus wants to build. He stands against the gates of hell. I want you to see the example of the Apostle Paul who built a wonderful church in Ephesus.

He's turned to Acts of the Apostles. Ephesus was the place where Paul stayed for the longest time. Acts of the Apostles is not a book of doctrine, it's a book of history.

And as a Bible teacher, I will tell you a simple principle of Bible study. Please listen carefully. Never get a doctrine from a historical event described in the Bible.

Get a doctrine from the teaching sections of the Bible. Acts of the Apostles is history. A lot of false doctrines have come by getting doctrine out of a historical event.

There are sections of the Gospels which are history and there are sections of the Gospel which are teaching. Get your doctrine from the teaching sections of Jesus, not from the historical. I'll give you an example.

Many times it says Jesus healed everybody. 100 percent were healed of sickness. People have got a doctrine out of that.

Jesus heals everybody even today. It's not true. And they have deceived people into not taking medicines, who have died not taking medicines, trusting Jesus to heal them and they never got healed.

They got a doctrine from a historical section. That's not meant for... it's a history. Jesus did heal everybody.

It says that many times. But that's a history, not a doctrine. When it comes to the teaching sections in the Epistles, you find Paul was not healed.

He prayed three times and God said, no, I'm not going to heal you. Timothy, 1 Timothy 5.20. He had stomach problems. I cannot imagine how many times Paul would have laid hands on Timothy to pray for him.

He was not healed. And Paul tells him to take some type of medicine, some type of wine that would take care of his stomach infirmities. And I don't know whether he still got healed.

He would have to probably keep on taking that medicine to relieve himself. Why God allows that? One reason I know, that he wanted Paul to be humble. He told him that.

You're getting... not you're getting, you're in danger of getting proud, Paul, because I've used you to do so many miracles and you've been taken up to the third heaven. So to protect you from pride, I've allowed you to have a physical ailment. I believe it was some problem with his eyes, because he mentions that in Galatians 4. That I was sick in your midst and you would have given your eyes to replace mine.

It must have been a very... something that was troubling him, some type of pus or infection that he never seemed to get healed from. Lord, heal me, heal my eyes. It looks so pathetic when people see me preaching and they see my... wipe my eyes all the time.

And he says to the Galatians, you did not despise me. You know, it's very difficult to see a person whose eyes are overflowing with pus and he's always wiping it and you keep listening to him. And Paul realized that and it was very humbling.

God said you need it. So that's the danger of getting a doctrine from a historical section. They all spoke in tongues.

That's history. It's not a doctrine. Do you know the number of people who've gone astray by taking that doctrine? The men in the church, you must know these truths to be able to correct wrong teachings, which is never get a doctrine from a historical section.

So whenever you find a support for some teaching in the scripture or somebody's using it, ask yourself, is that history or is it teaching? Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. You can take every sentence in that. But other things what Jesus did, maybe that was only for him.

So distinguish between these. When you go to the epistles, it's all teaching. You can take all of it.

So that's a simple principle in Bible study that we must not forget, otherwise we will go astray. Because for example, many people who... I remember once I was in the midst of a group of... a group of Christians, a particular what I call a cult here in the United States, a particular group that believed in living with a common purse. That means they'd all work together and they're not allowed to keep their own bank account or keep their own money.

Everything that's earned would go to the head of the group. The Hutterites are a group like that. And they have... the means are all taken together in one place, but they all live in separate homes and they have their families.

But the purse is common because it says in Acts that they had everything in common. You know that there's a verse which says in Acts 2 verse 44, all those who believed were together and had all things in common. That's the verse that many Hutterite groups take, and it is scripture.

The mistake they made was, this is not doctrine, this is history. And they took a teaching in history and made it a doctrine. So I was once speaking in the midst of these people some years ago, and one of their leaders, you know, tried to question me.

But there's a lot of people sitting there listening. So brother Zach, why don't you preach Acts 2 verse 44? That those who believe must have all things in common. I said, okay.

I say, why don't you preach Acts 2 verse 44? That they all speak in tongues because Hutterites don't believe in speaking in tongues. End of discussion. Nothing further.

What can we say to that? And then I continued saying, I'm not trying to humble you brothers. I don't believe that everybody should speak in tongues. I speak in tongues myself, but I don't believe everybody should.

I don't believe that we should have all things in common. I believe these are teaching sections of scripture. But when I go to the, these are historical sections of scripture.

When I go to the teaching section of scripture in 1 Corinthians 12, it says here in verse 1230, all do not speak with tongues. Do they? That's teaching. Corinthians, all do not speak with tongues.

So I go to the teaching sections of scripture to get doctrine. Historical sections, I'm just reading what they did. All shaved his head.

You know where that is? It's not in the Ephesians or Colossians. It's an Acts of the Apostles. He went to a temple and shaved his head.

What doctrine do you get from there? I could show you some ridiculous things like that, that if you're, be consistent. If you're going to take something from the Acts of the Apostles, take everything. Not pick and choose what you like.

That is hypocrisy. That is deception. I'll tell you what I do.

I say, I take everything from the teachings of sections of scripture as doctrine. And I take nothing from the historical sections as doctrine. I read it.

I'm edified by it. And I praise God that it is like that. And that may happen like that today, but it may not happen also.

Some people are healed. Some people are not healed. But when it comes to the teaching sections, every verse will be exactly as it is taught.

There is no error in scripture. You say, is there any error in Acts of the Apostles? No. It's an accurate record of what happened.

But it's not teaching for us to follow. Did Jesus heal everybody? Absolutely true. But it's not teaching for us to follow.

It's a very simple principle that we need to follow. So Satan prevails against the church when people are careless with scripture or the men in the church don't study scripture carefully in order to correct wrong doctrines. And we must be bold.

It's very, very important to be bold to correct. You know how bold Paul was? Let me give you one example. We know that Paul is a great example in building the church.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 5, we read of an immorality in the church, in the church in Corinth, where Paul had been for one and a half years. There were two churches where Paul lived a long time. One was Ephesus.

I'll come to that in a moment. The other was Corinth. In Ephesus, he spent three years.

In Corinth, one and a half years. We read that in Acts of the Apostles. And here, after Paul left 1 Corinthians 5, he says, it's reported there is immorality among you, such as a kind that even the unbelievers don't have.

Something happening in the church which was worse than what the heathen do. And a man slept with his father's obviously second wife. His mother had died.

The father remarried again. And he goes and sleeps with her, has sexual relations with her. And he says, okay, that can happen.

Gross sins can happen in any church. But what does the church do about it? You have become proud. You have not mourned.

Instead of mourning, you're proud. And you have not put that man out of the church. Paul was strict.

Such people must be put out of the church. The purity of the church is very, very important. And we discipline those who live in sin.

And not only that, he says, I was absent, but I was present in my spirit with you. And I have already judged. He was an apostle.

He had the authority for that. And then the name of Jesus was for when you're all assembled. And I'm with you in spirit.

I'm not there physically. But I'm with you in spirit, Paul says. And I'm going to, in the power of the Lord Jesus, to hand over that person to Satan.

Amazing power God gives an apostle. To hand over that person to Satan. Not to send him to hell.

No, no, no, no, no. So that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. I want him to go to heaven.

But he can't go to heaven in his present condition. He has to be broken so thoroughly that he repents. So Paul loved him.

And out of great love for him to save his soul eternally, he says, I'm going to hand him over Satan. In Jesus' name, I'm handing over this backslidden believer to you. Do what you like with him.

You won't kill him, just like God did not allow Satan to kill Job. So that the destruction of his flesh means so that he suffers in some way in his body. Satan, like you made Job suffer in his body, made this guy suffer in his body so that he repents.

And so that his spirit can be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Well, it's wonderful to have an apostle around who can correct the church sternly, who doesn't have any false love or superficial kind words, but who cares for the purity of the church so that the gates of hell can never prevail against it. Now in Acts chapter 20, you read about the church in Ephesus where Paul had been for three years.

Now I'm saying all this because I told you how God wants men to be the leaders in the church. He's not called women to leadership. He never gave apostleship to any woman.

There's no prophetess even in the new covenant. Men are to be the leaders, and you are the men. That's why you have men's meetings.

Acts chapter 20, Paul had finished his three years in Ephesus, and he calls the elders today because he's not going to see them again. This is the last time he was going to see them. So he called the elders, Acts chapter 20 verse 17.

He was in some other place and he sent to Ephesus, called all the elders and said, I want to speak to you. I don't know how many there were. There's probably a big church, maybe five or six elders.

And he called all of them together and he says, listen, do you know how many sermons he preached there? 2000. How do I get that? Verse 31, be on the alert. Remember that night and day, he had morning meetings, evening meetings.

John Wesley used to have that. Early morning, six o'clock meetings before people go to work. They'd come to his meeting and then go to work.

Late in the evening after they came back from work. Paul had that too. Early morning meetings, late in the evening meetings.

Every day for a period of three years, three years is over 1000 days. 1000 into morning and evening is 2000 sermons. I did not cease to admonish you with tears.

Paul sometimes preached with tears. It wasn't always pumping the table and shouting. He had compassion.

I want these people to be built in holiness. And he says, I never desired, verse 33, anyone's money or clothes or I didn't want you to come and give me gifts of clothes. I didn't want anybody's silver or gold or anything.

I worked with my own hands. Verse 34, I earned my own living. And I showed you by hard work, how I could fulfill what Jesus taught, it is more blessed to give than to receive.

And he says, when God gathers them together, listen to this. He does not say, from the first 15, see what he reminds them of. He doesn't say, do you remember that sermon I preached the other day on humility? No.

Or remember the other sermon I preached one day on holiness? No. Or I told you remember that sermon I preached on how you must love one another? No mention of that. You saw how I lived among you.

That's what he says. That is the strength of his message. Three years from the day I set foot in You saw how I lived among you with all humility.

Where are the apostles and preachers today who can say to people, not the wonderful sermons I preached, but did you see the humble way I, the apostle of Jesus Christ, lived among you as an ordinary brother, just like one among you, not seeking my position. I didn't have any title called reverend or right reverend or wrong reverend or any such thing. Just an ordinary brother serving the Lord with all humility, with tears.

Imagine Paul. I'm really humbled. He wept sometimes when he preached.

People are ashamed to be seen weeping. Paul was not. He had such love for people that sometimes he wept when he thought of some way to convey something to people who were a bit stubborn and I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable for you.

Even if it hurt you, I would tell you the truth. Dear brothers, God gives you the grace to preach anywhere and I hope you give that grace to many of you. He may not be an apostle or a teacher or evangelist or any of those outstanding positions in the church, but one who briefly shares the word.

I hope you'll be able to preach with compassion and purity like Paul. From your heart and seeking to proclaim the full purpose of God and mainly, verse 21, proclaiming repentance and faith. Paul never separated these two and I want to say to all of you dear brothers who preach God's word anywhere, this is a man's job.

Don't preach faith without repentance and don't preach repentance without faith. What does the Bible say? What God has joined together, let no man put asunder. God has joined repentance and faith together.

When people asked Peter on the day of Pentecost, what shall I do? Repent and believe. It's what every apostle taught. And if a person's already repented, like the Philippian jailer when he saw the earthquake, he realized his sins, he said, oh, I'm a sinner, what shall I do? Okay, you repented, believe.

Repentance and faith must never be separated and I want to tell you what I have seen in most of Christian preaching in my lifetime. It is only faith that is preached. Believe, brother, believe, believe, believe, believe.

You're not getting anything from God because you don't believe. You know that song, that vilest offender, a vilest offender who truly believes that moment from Jesus a pardon receives. It's a very famous song.

The vilest offender who truly believes that moment from Jesus a pardon receives. It's not true. So when we sing it in our church, we've changed it.

The vilest offender who repents and believes that moment from Jesus a pardon receives. But most of the public, great so-called public meetings, evangelistic meetings, it's believe. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Believe, believe, believe. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll be saved was spoken to a repentant jailer who had just seen an earthquake in a prison and saw the power of God when they had imprisoned Saul and Silas. But you can't say that to a bunch of comfortably loving people sitting in a church.

Believe. I say you guys got to repent. I believe repentance is the missing message in today's Christianity.

Faith is preached everywhere. The Pentecostal preach, believe, believe, brother, that's why you're not healed. That's why you're not.

I'll tell you why many things are not done because they haven't repented. You remember what Jesus said to a man who he healed in John. Have you noticed this? John chapter five.

There was a man sitting by the pool waiting for the stirring of the water and he says, I can't seem to be able to jump in. And the first person who jumps in is healed and I always miss it. But Jesus came and healed him and he asked him in John five and verse six, by the pool of Bethesda, do you want to get well? He said, sure, I don't have anybody to pick me up.

Jesus said, verse eight, pick up your pallet and walk right now. And immediately this man who had been sick for 38 years, verse five, 38 years, he'd been living, lying there. He got up and he walked.

And this is the part I want to point out to you. Much later, verse 14. Sometimes people miss that.

Jesus went to this man and saw him in the temple and said, you know why you sinned? Why you got this 38 years paralysis? Because you sinned. It was a sickness that came to you because of sin. Now, don't sin again.

Otherwise, something worse will happen to you. Have you ever read that in connection with that story? That never gets preached. It's only that first part that gets mostly preached.

Most people don't even know that Jesus said something like this to the man. Probably many of you sitting here are seeing it for the first time. He was sick for 38 years because of sin.

And Jesus healed him and said, don't sin again. Otherwise, something worse than your 38 years will happen to you. So obviously he was attending some synagogue where repentance was not preached.

That's exactly the condition in many churches today. And you brothers, when you go back to your homes, you know what you need to preach? Repentance. So Paul preached repentance and faith.

Acts 20 verse 21. And he preached it so strongly and he lived the life and never took any money from anyone. And I tell you, the devil was scared of the apostle Paul.

He really was. As he was scared of Jesus, he was scared of Paul. And I believe the devil should be afraid of us.

Many Christians are afraid of the devil. Oh, what will he do to me? I was for many years afraid of what the devil could do to me in my younger days, because I was not taught that on the cross of Calvary, not only did my sins get taken away, the devil's power was taken away as well. You know, Jesus said in John 3, the son of man will be lifted up like a serpent was lifted up in the wilderness by Moses.

Have you read that? John 3, 14, I think. You mean that serpent was a picture of Christ hanging on the cross? No. The serpent can never be a picture of Christ.

Genesis chapter 3, the serpent is a devil. Revelation chapter 11 and 12, the serpent is the devil. Throughout the Bible, the serpent is the devil.

What was that dead bronze serpent showing? The son of man lifted up on the cross. Satan would be powerless there on the cross. That's the message there.

Those live serpents were biting the Israelites there, biting them here, biting them, and that's what the devil is doing to so many people here and there, biting them here, biting them, just like those serpents bit the Israelites in the wilderness. And Moses said, look at this. Look at this dead one hanging here.

This bronze serpent will be healed immediately. And they were. That's the message that's not being preached in Christendom today, that Satan's power is gone.

He's a serpent, but he's a dead one, or I would say a paralyzed one. He's not been destroyed, paralyzed. He's got no power over me.

You know that? That not only your sins were taken on the cross, but all the devil's power was taken away from them over believers. If your life is surrendered to Christ, the devil has got no power over you. And yet, I'll tell you honestly, I was frightened that the devil would do this, that, and the other for me, against me in different times in my life, till I remember very clearly the Lord spoke to me from Scripture.

As you were frightened of the devil for so many years, from now on, the devil will be frightened of you. I live today in the reality of that, that Satan is afraid of me because I'm a younger brother of Jesus Christ, because I have been crucified with Christ. And nevertheless, I live, but no longer I, no longer Zach

Poonen.

Christ lives in me. There was a time in my life when I lived for Zach Poonen. I lived for his honor, his money, his fame, his will.

It's gone. Now I live for Christ's honor, Christ's will, and for Christ to be glorified. My money is Christ's.

My life is Christ's. It's no longer I, but Christ. And the devil's afraid of me.

My dear brothers, pay any price to come there. Why? Because Jesus said, I will build my church, and the powers available will not prevail against it. But he will prevail against it if you are afraid of the devil and you're sitting there trying to build Christ's church.

So anyway, Paul said to these Ephesians, please be on guard for yourselves. Verse 28. Some of you are hoping to go back and build little fellowships.

Take this part seriously. And he says in verse 29, I know what's going to happen after I leave. Savage wolves will come in among you and not spare the flock.

Three years, he said, I stayed here. Not one wolf could come through the door. That's the mark of a spiritual leader.

When he's leading a church, not one wolf can come through the door. But the moment that man leaves, why couldn't the wolves come in when Paul was there? They were scared of him. They were literally scared of the devil.

You know, one demon once said to somebody who tried to cast him out, Jesus I know and Paul I know, but who are you? He recognized Jesus and Paul. You read that in the Acts of the Apostles. But he says, who are you? What is the devil? Does the devil recognize you along with Jesus like he recognized Paul? He should.

Otherwise, brother, don't waste your time trying to build a fellowship in your place. You can gather together for sing-song sessions, sure. Have a sing-song session and have a Bible study.

Go through the Bible study. You won't build the church. The church that Jesus builds, the gates of hell will never prevail against it.

Satan is scared of it. And the wolves are waiting outside and they say, we can't go in here. This guy Paul is here, but he's not going to be here forever.

He'll have to leave. And the moment he leaves, we're going to get in. And Paul says that.

He was not threatening them. He was warning them. I know after my departure, the wolves will come in.

You say, Paul, you're pretty arrogant to think that only you can keep the wolves outside. But it was true. As soon as Paul left, the wolves came in.

Not only the wolves came in and destroyed the flock, but he says, from your own selves, some of you will start fighting with each other. And you start your group and he'll start his group and the elders will split apart. And how many churches have seen that? People seeking their own.

Anybody who's seeking his own should not defile the church of Christ by trying to be a leader there. Go and join some private club or something. Please don't defile the church of Christ if you're seeking your own.

If you've got the slightest desire to seek your own honor, or to seek your own financial gain, or to seek anything for yourself, brother, the church of Jesus Christ is not for you. Go and join politics. Do business.

Seek your own as much as you like. But not the church of Jesus Christ. Because you'll be severely judged by God one day.

Severely, I warn you. And sure enough, when Paul left, you see the condition of the church a few years later. Same church of Ephesus, where there was such a mighty revival that they burnt up thousands of dollars worth of magic books you read in the previous chapter.

Now you see the condition of that church 30 years after Paul died. 30 years after Paul died. Revelation chapter 2. The same church in Ephesus.

The Lord says to them, verse 5, to the church in Ephesus and its leader, chapter 2, verse 1. Revelation 2.1. Write this. Verse 4. You have left your first love. Remember the days when my servant Paul was here.

How you loved me and loved one another. And my servant Paul warned you. Remember from where you have fallen.

Where you were when my servant Paul spoke straight to your face, not seeking to please anybody, but seeking to lead you to a godly life. And you thought lightly of him. You did not value him when he was there.

Now you see the condition. You put all those third-rate elders up there to lead your church. Who would tickle your ears and say nice things to you and never spoke straight to you about your sin.

What is the result? The wolves have come in. You have divided up against each other. You have lost your first.

You did not say you lost it. Verse 4. You just left your first love. There is a difference between leaving something and losing it.

He left it all. He ignored it. That is not the main thing.

The main thing, brother, is activity. We must study the Bible together. We must have Bible studies and we must improve our singing.

Let us get the choir. Spend many hours. Do you know that many churches, they spend more hours training the choir than waiting on the Lord in prayer and seeking for his power.

Well, then you have a good music team, but a useless church. Remember from where you have fallen and repent. There is still hope for you if you repent and come back to the message that my servant Paul preached.

But I do not think they came back. But there are some among you who want that life. Those are called the overcomers.

And to them, I will give the tree of life. So these are warnings from Scripture. We got to make sure that we do not go that way ourselves.

Dear brothers, I want to tell you in Jesus' name, God wants you to build the church along with others in your locality. How do I know that? Because God wants a church in every place. And if you're in some place and God's kept you there and you've understood some of the truths you're hearing in this church, God wants you.

But you've got to be faithful. You don't have to be a great scholar, but you have to be faithful to the Lord and walk in humility. Ask God for revelation, and he will build the church even through you.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, what a tremendous honor it is to be able to do your work like these great apostles did. It's a tremendous honor, Lord.

We don't deserve it. We're not worthy of it. But you've called us.

Please help every brother here. I mean every brother here to realize however weak they are, however much they may have failed in the past, you've come today to call them to build the church of Jesus Christ in their locality, to humble themselves and work with others to build that church, not for their honor, but for your glory. We pray many will be gripped by this.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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