

(The Church and Satans Wiles) 3 - No Condemnation

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing Satan's schemes, particularly discouragement and self-condensation, and encourages believers to accept weaker believers and focus on growth in the Christian life.

Duration: 1:07:56

Scripture: Matthew 16:18, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Spiritual Adornment", "Gods Forgiveness"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses a parable from Matthew chapter 22 about a man who attends a wedding feast without wearing the required robe. The man's dress is not acceptable to the king, and he is thrown out. The speaker uses this story to emphasize the importance of having the right attire, both physically and spiritually. He shares a personal example of his conviction not to wear jewelry, explaining that it is unnecessary for him and his wife. The sermon also touches on the idea of God as a father and the story of the prodigal son, highlighting the father's unconditional love and forgiveness.

Transcript

We've been thinking about Matthew 16, 18, basically, how to build, how to allow the Lord to build the church against which the gates of hell will not prevail. And it's important for us to know something of Satan's schemes. I said yesterday that the Bible is a description of the numerous ways in which Satan tried to trip up God's people.

He appears in the Bible in Genesis three and we are finished with him only in revelation 20. There are only four chapters in the Bible without the devil. It's all the way through.

He's one way or the other. And if you read God's word, you will not be ignorant of Satan schemes because basically he tries the same old tricks on people through the years. He studied humanity and he knows what works.

And one of the first and most important ways in which he seeks to get power over even believers is through the spirit of accusation in revelation chapter 12. We read of him being called the accuser of the brethren, the world. He's called the deceiver of the world, but the accuser of the brethren, he's a deceiver

and an accuser.

And his accusations are especially directed at God's people. Of course, he seeks to deceive everyone, the whole world, believers and unbelievers. He's called in revelation 12, nine the one who deceives the whole world and everyone who's living in the world.

He seeks to deceive in scripture. Satan appears as a lion, a roaring lion, Peter says, seeking whom he can devour or a dragon here in chapter 12 verse nine and as a serpent. It's a picture of two ways in which he has sought to oppress believers.

One is by persecution. That's the dragon lion picture, you know, frightened, put fear, persecute. And the other is the more wily, clever, crafty way.

And that's as a serpent. And if you read church history, and you see what's happening in the world today, there's both persecution and deception going on in Christendom today throughout the world. And if you read about what's happening in Christendom throughout the world and in church history, you will discover, and Satan already knows that, that he succeeds more when he comes with deception than with persecution.

Persecution somehow has never succeeded in killing the church. It reduces the numbers, but it purifies the church. It's been true throughout history, wherever there's persecution, numbers may be reduced, but the church gets purified.

And that's why people say some of the finest Christians in the world today are in China, where there's a maximum persecution. Because it costs them to be a Christian. They don't have much money.

They have to fear even when they come to meet together in a house, they had to come one by one and sing softly, et cetera, et cetera. And so following Jesus means a lot more to them. And then in other places where there's no persecution, he succeeds more with deception, with a lot of counterfeit.

Jesus spoke about tremendous amount of counterfeit that would be prevalent all over the world in the last days, particularly in the realm of signs and wonders and miracles. Jesus said that the people would come and do signs, wonders, and miracles and deceive people. The apostle Paul says in relation to the Antichrist that his deception would be accompanied with false signs, wonders, and miracles.

Now we live in a Christendom where many, many born again Christians are gullible gullible means they're just seem to swallow anything. They feel that anything supernatural is from God. And that's the easiest way to be deceived.

If you think that anything supernatural is from God and some people are a little better and they say, well, uh, everything supernatural is not from God because the devil has power and heathen religions also have some supernatural things in it. But if it is supernatural in the name of Jesus, then it is from God. Well, these are also people who haven't read the Bible because Jesus said in the last days, he said in Matthew seven verse 20 onwards, there would be many, not one or two.

Many will come to me and say to me, Lord, we prophesied in your name. We did miracles in your name. We cast out demons in your name.

You're familiar with that passage, Matthew seven, 22 and 23. And Jesus said, I will say to them, I never knew you. Have you ever thought about that? When you come to a verse like that, you must stop and meditate on it.

Is it possible that people who, to whom Jesus says, I never knew you, I mean you and I didn't have a personal relationship. Depart from me. You who work iniquity, there's sin in your life.

It's not only that Jesus didn't know them. There was sin in their life. They were called workers of iniquity.

Those are not just people who just slip up into sin once or twice. Workers of iniquity. And yet they could do miracles in Jesus name.

They could prophesy in Jesus name. Prophecy means preach God's word in a way that would bless people. They could cast out demons in Jesus name.

I wondered how many believers today would look at a person who preaches powerfully in Jesus name, does miracles in Jesus name, cast out demons in Jesus name and sit there and say, well, that still doesn't prove to me that he's a man of God. I think there are very few believers who have that discernment who would say, well, I'd like to know how he lives. We have many preachers coming from rich countries into a country like India.

And the main reason is because it's very easy to get a crowd to listen to you in India. Particularly you go into the villages and a lot of people come together to listen. And some of these preachers from Western countries who probably only 20, 30 people will listen to them in their hometown.

They're delighted to come here and imagine that they have suddenly become men of God because a thousand people come to listen to them. Well, that's because that's what happens in poor countries. And if you have money and you come there, you can round up people and you've got an agent there who organizes these things and you come on this brief visits.

I see a lot of this and I'm speaking from the other end and I'm not fooled by all these people who come because I know what happens after all these meetings are over. This is back to the same old, everybody's back to square one. But these folks who come think they've started up a great revival.

Go back home with all their photographs and their videotapes to show those 30 people back home. You people didn't think I was a man of God, but here I am and I'll show you that how they appreciated me in India. It's all a deception that goes on and um, they can think there are signs and wonders and all that happening.

But the test is this, what is their attitude to iniquity? So whenever people seek to want to speak in any of our churches, I tell our elders, don't just be impressed by the fact that he can preach or he's animated in his preaching, running up and down with a microphone in his hand or um, does something like a magic show which he calls miracles in Jesus name. Don't be fooled by all that. Find out whether he's interested in holiness.

What is his attitude to money? He may not want to collect money from you, but is he is his power is his influence over you because of money because he has a lot of money. Jesus who made Abraham rich made job one of the richest people in the East. Godly men made David a very rich man made Solomon a very rich man.

The same Jesus sent out Peter and Paul with no silver and gold. Why is that? Don't you need money to do God's work? Jesus didn't think so. He sent out his apostles as the poorest people of all and what a work they did.

And I've seen the wisdom of that. I worked for years, 30 years now in the villages of India with poor people and we were offered them no money and we've seen God work and I can prove it's no longer theory for me. I say money is one of the greatest hindrances to God's work in many countries because people depend on that.

You know why Jonah could travel to Tarshish on a ship because he had money to buy a ticket. He'd have been blessed if he didn't have money when he went to Joppa. A lot of people in Western countries, they've got money to buy a ticket to come to India or Africa or South America.

They're not being led by God, but the trouble is 95% of Christians don't have that discernment, but I've sought to give that discernment to the elders in our church and I say, see whether the man's interested in holiness. See what is his attitude to money. Then you'll see whether he's Christlike and then find out what his family is like.

Is he living with his first wife or divorced three, four times or even once? Is he married? Has he got a proper marriage? Then if his children are grown up, see whether his children are walking with the Lord. I want to know that because a man can fool the whole world, but he can't fool his children. They've seen how he, how he lives at home and your children are the testimony of what you, the way you've lived at home.

And I say, that's important for me. And then third, first his life and his home. And third, I said, I'd like to find out what type of church he's built back home.

Is it a church which is a body? How does, what type of coworkers does he have? I'd like to see some of his coworkers because they're also a pretty good indication of what a man is like and I never allow anyone to come and minister in our churches without having checked up these three things because we're not fooled by signs and wonders and money to have television programs and all that. And that's how we have protected our churches from deception all these 30 years. Now I would recommend that to you.

We are living in a day of tremendous deception. People are impressed by film star like personalities and all that type of stuff. The devil is a master of deception, but that's just in passing.

I want to speak about the other thing mentioned here and that is accusation. He deceives the whole world. Verse nine, he deceived even, he deceives the whole world.

But when it comes to God's people, in addition to deception, he's an accuser. Verse 10, he accuses the brethren. His title is accuser of the brethren and he accuses them to God.

Day and night. And if he, if he is bold enough to accuse us to God, you can be pretty sure that he'll accuse you to yourself. And this is a very powerful way in which the devil saps our spiritual energy, drains us and makes us discouraged.

And when we are discouraged, it's very easy for him to knock us down. Now I never knew that in my early Christian life. If I slipped up somewhere, I'd be so discouraged because I didn't want to slip up.

I wanted to live a holy life and I slipped up. It could be in thoughts, it could be in some action, could be in a word or something you slipped up and you feel so bad. And as long as you remain discouraged, you're weak.

And that's exactly the condition the devil wants you in. Then he can knock you down. And I found when I look back now that he would first discourage me in order to make me sin again.

And that's why, um, we have to recognize discouragement as a weapon of Satan. A Christian should never be discouraged. You should never be depressed.

Uh, but he, and the other thing the devil seeks to bring is condemnation, condemnation, condemnation, make you condemn yourself. This has become so clear to me that I keep telling people that discouragement and self-condemnation are like no, no entry roads. There's a big sign there saying no entry.

God has put, uh, no entry. You can come out of there, but you can't go in. Discouragement and self-condemnation.

So if you find yourself at any time discouraged or tempted to be discouraged or tempted to condemn yourself, remember God's traffic rule says no entry. God doesn't want you to go into that. If you go into that, it's the devil inviting you in and then you got yourself to blame.

If you have a lot of problems thereafter, there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Very often we expect from ourselves a perfection that even almighty God does not expect. Let me say that again.

You can expect from yourself a perfection that even almighty God doesn't expect from you. You may be in the first grade and the devil will show you some 10th grade stuff and say, you're not able to do that. Well, obviously you're not able to do that because you're not in the 10th grade.

Now a child in the first grade doesn't get discouraged because it can't do 10th grade stuff. But believers are, they don't realize that the Christian life is a, is a growth. And we were only expected to live according to the light we have, not according to the light somebody else has.

This is one of the big mistakes that Christians make, that we think that we're all in the same grade. We're not. The Christian life is an education.

When you are born again, you have just joined school. That's a kindergarten. And we progress from there and it doesn't happen overnight.

Little by little by little by little. And so when you look at another man who has gone far ahead of you, he's a good example to follow, but don't look at his life and expect to reach that overnight. I mean, that would be like, you're looking at somebody who is doing a PhD in science or something and you're discouraged when you're six years old that you still haven't got your PhD.

I mean, that's crazy. You don't find six year olds. The six year olds, I'll tell you I've got a lot more sense than many believers when it comes to that.

They realize that it'll take a few years to get their PhD or even to be a graduate or even finish high school. But very often believers look at someone else and say, boy, look at the way that guy lives. Now you can't

live like that.

Well, he took a few years to get there. Don't forget that he didn't get there overnight either. So we must never allow ourselves to be condemned by the devil, by the devil showing you somebody else and say you're not like him.

And also we must not be fooled by the devil to judge other people by our standard. This has been one of the greatest helps to me in my life to discover that not all of us have equal light on sin. It's quite an amazing thing that two people can commit this, do the same thing.

Now, do you believe that? Do you understand the scripture that two people can do the same thing and it is sin for one person and it's not sin for the other person? Scripture says that. I mean, if a one year old child needs diapers or dirties the floor when it doesn't have diapers, it's not a serious thing. But if a 10 year old needs diapers and dirties the floor without diapers, that's pretty serious.

Well, both are doing the same thing. They're both are dirtying the floor, but why is it serious in one, not serious in the other? Why is it if a five year old does not know how, does not know his multiplication table, it's not serious. But if 15 year old doesn't know the same multiplication table, it is serious.

Why is that? You need to understand this, that some things are not sin for one, but are sin for another. Now I'll show you a scripture to prove that. In Romans chapter 14, Romans chapter 14 is one of the great chapters that teaches us to accept other believers who don't, who are not as strong as we are.

Now, if you ask me one of the greatest problems in Christian churches is that strong believers do not know how to accept weaker believers who don't have the same convictions on non essential peripheral subjects. You know, there are certain central things in the Christian life and there are certain other things which are not central but peripheral. There are certain things which are so central that if you don't believe them, you'll never get into God's kingdom.

You'll never have a relationship with Jesus Christ or with the father. But there are certain other things, even if you are totally wrong, you can still have a glorious entrance into God's kingdom. You know that? Do we all have to have the same view on the Iraq war to decide whether to get to heaven or not? No, it's not important.

There are Democrats and Republicans in heaven, whatever your conviction is, whether you like it or not, you'll see them there because it's got nothing to do with your political views and you may think you're right and the other guy thinks he's right. I say it doesn't bother me. There are people who celebrate Christmas and Easter who will be in heaven.

There'll be people who think the whole thing is heathenism to celebrate Christmas and Easter will also be in heaven. So in God, there are certain things that are central, but if a person doesn't repent of his sin, he's never going to be in God's kingdom no matter which church he belongs to and what he built, whatever he believes. Repentance and faith are fundamental.

So I'm just trying to say there are certain things that are central to the Christian life and certain other things that are not sent and not so central. You know, like there are sicknesses that can kill us and there are other things which are not so serious. Cancer is serious, but if you lose your hair like me, that's not serious.

You can live a long life without hair. So we need to distinguish between what is something in a believer which is like cancer and what is something in a believer which is not serious. There are some people with six fingers.

I have no hesitation shaking hands with them. I mean I don't check up the person's fingers before I shake hands with him. Even if he has got four fingers, I shake hands with him because it's not essential to life.

We need to understand that in the Christian life too. And very often we can close our heart to somebody who doesn't agree with me on some silly little thing. It's like telling a person, I won't shake hands with you because you've got only four fingers.

You have one finger was chopped off in some accident. Sorry. I shake hands only with people who've got five fingers.

That's crazy. But that's exactly how many Christians behave. And you know who's the loser? Not the other person.

You. The Bible says in Ephesians three towards the end of that chapter, listen to this. It's only along with all the saints that you can know the love of God fully.

Now I realize that I cannot work with all the saints because first of all there are so many millions of them. It's obvious I can't work with all of them. And secondly, working together involves a lot more agreement in many, many areas.

But I can fellowship with a lot of people with whom I cannot work. I can open my heart to them and receive from them something of Christ from them. Now in Romans 14 it says, verse one, accept someone who's weak in faith but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.

Because he goes on to say, if God has accepted him, I mean, who are you to reject him? It says here in verse four to his own, verse three, sorry. God, the last part, God has accepted him. Verse three.

I'll never forget. I'll give you a practical example. My wife and I have never worn any jewelry at any time, not even a wedding ring.

We have a conviction on that and we feel it's unnecessary and we don't. I realize in certain places it may be necessary for someone to wear a wedding ring to show that they're married so that they don't have people chasing after them. I mean, we don't have that serious a problem in India.

I suppose nowadays things are so bad that even if you have a wedding ring, they'll still chase after you. And things have got so bad anyway. But we've have conviction on that from as Christians.

And so for many, many years, I would never baptize a person in our church if they wore any type of jewelry. But I remember some years ago when sister was really born again, came to me and asked for baptism and she was wearing jewelry. And I said, sister, I'm a servant of the Lord.

I have to be faithful to you and I have to tell you to read 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Peter 3 yourself. Go home and read 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Peter 3 and see what God says to you. And we're going to have baptism next week.

Come back and we'll baptize you. So she came back a week later and she still had the jewelry. So I said, did you read those chapters? And she said, yes.

I said, what did God say to you? She said, I still need some more time. I said, fine. And the Lord asked me a question and she was standing there before me.

Have I accepted her? I said, Lord, as far as I know, she's repented of her sin, believed in Christ and you have accepted her. And there's only one question after that. How can you reject someone whom I've accepted? Are you holier than me? I was floored.

I baptized her. I didn't change my conviction, but I recognize that not all of us are in the same grade. And if I'm in the 10th grade, I must not look at someone in the first grade and look down on them.

No, I must allow a person to grow at his own pace. Some people can grasp something very quickly. Some people take a little more time and very often, you know, we have sometimes Christian leaders who expect people in a church to understand everything immediately.

The mark of a, that's the difference between a father and a teacher. I work with about 70 elders, wonderful brothers who are in leadership in our 40 or so churches in India. And we have frequent meetings for elders.

And I keep telling them, I said, we don't want any teachers. We want fathers. We want people who are gifted as teachers, but not with the spirit of a teacher, but the spirit of a father.

There's a difference between a father teaching and a teacher teaching. And the difference is this, to take an example, supposing there's a boy who is not very good at math and he never seems to grasp what all the other students in the class are getting very quickly. And he always seems to get it wrong, whether it's multiplication or division or whatever it is.

And the teacher finally gets fed up with him and says, listen, you're a big nuisance to me in the class. Get out of the school, go and join some other school. Or I want to see you again.

I've tried to teach you that 25 times and you still haven't got it. And the poor boy is only about seven or eight years old and he goes home crying and he goes home and his dad asked him, what happened, son? He says, dad, I just can't understand this multiplication. I try so hard, but I always seem to get it wrong.

And I don't blame the teacher. He's tried a lot with me, but I've just failed. And the dad says, nevermind son, I'll teach you.

And he sits with him and tries to explain to him how to multiply, how to multiply so many numbers with so many numbers. And he gets it wrong. He tries many times.

He says, dad, I'll never make it. No, son, you'll make it. He says, let's go to bed.

Tomorrow's another day. We'll try again. And he tries again the next day.

He still hasn't got it. Dad, I told you, I'm not going to learn this. He said, no, son, I'm not going to give up on you.

He'll learn it. And one day he learns because the father is one who never gives up. A teacher gives up.

We have very, Paul said once in one Corinthians four, for every 10,000 teachers, you'll probably find one father. That's about the proportion. And I've seen that.

And I've said to our elders, we don't want any teachers in our churches. People are the gift of teaching, but the spirit of a father. And if you don't have a spirit of a father, I said, you're not fit to be an elder.

Now we'd rather close down a church than have people with the spirit of a teacher producing a legalistic church with a whole lot of condemnation. And I'll tell you this. There are churches in India that I have closed down.

I say I have nothing more to do with this. I'm sorry. I'm not going to take responsibility for this.

I encourage all of you to go to some other, I know that other churches are all pretty dead, but I'm not going to produce one more dead church here. Forget it. Why? Because I haven't found any one of you who's got the spirit of a father.

I'm sorry. I will not take responsibility. We're not building educational institutions.

We're building families. The church is a family. It's not a school.

It's not a classroom. It's not an organization. It's a family.

And teachers cannot build families. Only fathers can build families. So I say I've sought to be a father in the church I'm in.

And I only want to work with those who want to be fathers. And I'll tell you this. Fathers can't make money out of their children.

That's one mark of a father. Teachers can make a lot of money, but fathers know they spend and spend. And the other thing is fathers will be, we'll have to go through a tremendous amount of inconvenience for the sake of their children.

So one who is strong in the faith, what's the mark of a person who's strong in the faith? He can accept someone who is weak. He can work with someone who takes time to understand something. Doesn't just reject him outright.

So this can also has also an application in husband wife relationships. Very often a husband can think, well, I see that as sin. Why doesn't my wife see it as sin? That's crazy.

It's because you've got different understandings. You've got different levels of understanding. I mean, an older boy who was studying in the eighth grade won't go to his younger brother who was in the third grade and say, Hey, I understand geometry.

Why in the world can't you understand it? I tell you those eighth grade students have got more wisdom than many husbands and wives who are much older. They recognize that someone in another grade may not have studied all that I've studied, may not understand all that I understand. So if we recognize this, there are certain things that are sin to me, which may not be sin to the other person.

So when my wife does it, it is not sin. But if I do it, it's sin. Romans chapter 14, let me show you what scripture says.

Verse 22, the faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. That means you have a certain level of faith. Great.

Keep it as your conviction before God. Happy is the one who does not condemn himself in what he approves. He says such a person is blessed.

He does something and he doesn't, his conscience does not condemn him and what he's doing. It's not sin, but he who doubts he's doing something and his conscience bothers him and he eats, he's eating. He's talking about eating food offered to idols is not from faith and whatever is not from faith is sin.

So if you understand that, you know, the subject there, he's talking about food offered to idols. Some people say, what's an idol? Now it was just block of wood. They put that meat in front of that block of wood.

Doesn't mean a thing to me. I pray over it in the name of Jesus. I can eat it.

But another fellow whose faith is weaker, he says, Ooh, that's praise in front of the idol. There may be something dangerous there. There may be demons behind it and all that.

I better not eat that meat. I'll be a vegetarian all my life because all the meat offered in those days was first offered to the idols and these two people were both believers and one was judging the other. But here the point is if your conscience convicts you, it's sin.

If your conscience doesn't convict you, it's not sin. There are many, many applications of this. There are certain people who feel that, um, you got to keep your house absolutely clean and tidy.

I remember hearing the story of a brother who, um, visited, um, a sister's home and, um, a single sister. And she was, she kept her home absolutely spick and span and said, you know, brother, I like to keep my home absolutely tidy. These are usually people with no children, by the way.

Uh, you know, and everything is spick and span. He said, I just wiped everything in the morning and the afternoon I decided to wipe it all again. And you know, people got nothing to do, got plenty of time to keep the house clean.

So this brother said, you're absolutely right, sister. We got to keep our house clean. Then a little later, he visited another home where a mother struggling with her children in the house was a mess.

And she said, you know, to me, the main thing is that we live in love in the home. It's not that everything must be in the proper place. That's all very often just to seek honor from visitors who come to the home.

And this brother said, sister, you're absolutely right. It doesn't matter the condition of your home. He said two opposite things to these two people.

He didn't judge this one for her conviction. He didn't judge that one for her conviction and yet both were completely opposite. And he said in that article, he said, I tell you both these sisters and I will have a glorious entry into God's kingdom.

But all the people who sit and judge one or the others, they won't be anywhere there. And I've never forgotten that. You know, these things are not the things that are going to determine whether we go into God's kingdom or not.

Don't let the devil condemn you about something that somebody else can do, but you're not able to do. I've discovered that some sisters have a tremendous ability, even if they have a number of children, they're so organized and so capable that they can keep their house tidy and some can't. Both can be equally spiritual.

It's like some women can cook first class meals and some are not too good at cooking. You think that God's bothered about all that when coming into God's kingdom and yet people can feel condemned. I'll tell you this.

I've seen this in India. Some brothers and sisters have got a tremendous ability to be hospitable. They can just be hospitable to innumerable people.

Anybody lands up in their home anytime they can take care of them. And it's amazing. I myself am amazed.

And then there are others who find it so difficult even to have one or two extra people come to the home and that person can feel condemned looking at that other family and say, boy, how hospitable they are and I can't manage it. And if this poor sister has got a stupid husband who condemns her even more by saying, Hey, look at that family. Why can't you be like her? Boy, that makes it even worse.

There is no condemnation to those untrusted. I want to set all of you people free before you go away home from this conference. Are you disobeying the Lord deliberately? Then you need to feel convicted and condemned.

But if there's something you're not capable of doing because you're not, you don't have that gift. Don't let the devil condemn you. He's the accuser of the brethren.

He always keeps telling you, you're not good enough. I'll tell you this. Even if you improve and become 10 times better than what you are now, you will still hear the devil say, you're not good enough yet.

And I'll tell you about a little dream I had many years ago, which delivered me many, many years ago when I used to live under this, hearing this voice, which I thought God was saying to me all the time, you're not good enough. You're not good enough. You're not holy enough.

And I thought that was always the Holy Spirit. And in this dream, I saw myself coming back from a tent meeting somewhere and I was walking home to the place, walking to the room in which I was staying. And I had poured out my heart in that meeting and done the best I could as I always seek to do when I preach.

And I heard a voice behind me saying that wasn't good enough. You could have done better. And in the dream, I was discouraged.

And I said, Lord, why is it that so often when it's almost as though you're speaking face to face with me, I'm encouraged. But I, whenever you speak from behind my, behind me, it's always not good enough. And in the dream, the Lord said to me, turn around and see who's speaking to you.

And I turned around and there was a dark face that suddenly ran away. It was the devil himself. I learned something that day.

I've never forgotten that when you hear a voice which says you're not good enough, you think it is the Holy Spirit because you say the devil can't possibly be telling me you're not good enough. He can't be

interested in that. I should improve.

He's not interested in your improving at all. He's interested in condemning you. He'll say that to you no matter how much you improve.

And it's not only the devil, his agents as well. Supposing your child, you keep telling your child, not good enough, you're going to raise a rebel. I've often thought, supposing, you know, my children, when they were small, would write a birthday greeting for me.

They couldn't afford to go and buy a card. We didn't have the money. We never gave them pocket money or any such thing.

We didn't have money to give them pocket money. They would pick up some old paper somewhere and write, dear daddy, happy birthday on a piece of paper or some old card where one page was torn out. And it wasn't perfect.

The spelling wasn't perfect. The picture they drew didn't look like anything. But I never called them and said, hey, that's not perfect.

This spelling is not right. It would move my heart to tears that that five-year-old or six-year-old would think of my birthday and write that and greet me. I think any of you would do that.

And the question that comes to me is, is God a better father than me? When I go to him with some little thing I try to do to please him, but it wasn't perfect. What does he say to me? Not good enough? That's the way the devil would like to think you to think about God. He not only accuses you to God, listen carefully, he accuses God to you and tells you, gives you a wrong picture of God.

And that's how we get discouraged. Now I want to tell you in Jesus name, the Lord will never say to you, not good enough. He'll encourage you.

See, that's great. It's wonderful. I'm so touched that you thought of me on my birthday.

That's how I would, I say to my, I don't care if the E is turned around the other way and the P is twisted this way. It doesn't matter. The spelling doesn't make any difference to me.

It's his heart. What do you think God looks at? He looks at the heart. He's not looking at perfection in these little, little things.

If I slip up and say, Lord, I'm sorry. You see, here's another thing that used to condemn me for many years. And that was the devil too.

You know, I, maybe I did something wrong and I would years later, I would be reminded of some stupid thing I did and I'd go and confess that to God again. And, uh, there are some sins. I'll tell you honestly, I must have confessed to God a hundred times.

And if I confessed it to God a hundred times, I confessed it. I confessed it 99 times too much because I needed to confess it only once. I wish somebody had told me that, you know, that verse which says if we confess our sins to the Lord a hundred times, he will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Have you read it? I'll show it to you. Turn to Revelation chapter 23, Revelation chapter 23. Turn your Bibles.

I'll show you that verse right now. It's one of the first verses there. Do you find it? Revelation chapter 23 is one of the biggest chapters that legalists have written through the years.

And one of the verses in it is if we confess our sins a hundred times, the verse in one John one nine is if we confess our sins, he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins, cleanse us from all unrighteousness because that's how a father is. Supposing my child did not something accidental, but something deliberate. Most of the time I'll tell you, you and I, we slip up when you get angry.

You're not planning and scheming to get angry. You just slip up and lose your temper. When we lust with our eyes, it's not planning and scheming.

Usually that is with like that with unbelievers, but with most of us is a slip up in a moment of weakness or a moment of discouragement. What do you think God, how do you think God looks at us? Think of, think of it like you and your son. I mean, when he slips up, we're so merciful to him.

He tried to do something right, but he messed it up. Okay. Or he tried to help you in some way and bungled up the whole thing.

But think of a son who deliberately did something wrong against you, but he's sorrowful. And he comes to you and says, dad, I realized I'm, I did something wrong. I disobeyed you.

It wasn't accidental. It was deliberate. And I'm really sorry for what I did.

Tell me which father is there whose heart will not be moved to hear those words from your son or daughter? I mean, I would hug my son or daughter and say, forget it. It's forgiven. Let's not talk about it anymore.

Supposing he comes back to me one week later, says, dad, you remember what I did last week? I'm really sorry. I'd say, okay, son, I told you last week. It's forgiven.

Forget it. And he goes away. He comes back next week and says, dad, you remember what I did two weeks ago? How will I feel? I feel my son doesn't trust me.

That's exactly how God feels about you. When you go back to him and keep on confessing because you think the more you confess or the more hope of your being forgiven, where did you get that doctrine? That's what I mean by revelation 23. You have learned a lot of verses from legalists and from the devil which are not in scripture.

You don't have to confess to him more than once. Does my son, do I torture my son by making him confess to me even twice? Never. I have never, I have had four sons.

I never expected them to come and tell me a second time, ask forgiveness for something which they confessed once. Not even a second time. And I tell you God is a million times better father than me and than any of you.

So think of God as a father. I believe that the fundamental problem with a lot of us Christians is we don't know God as a father. We think of him as a teacher, a policeman who's coming with his flashing lights

behind us.

We wonder what's he coming after me for now. I'll tell you what's God's coming after you. He's coming after you to bless you, not to give you a ticket to bless you.

So once our whole understanding of God is clear, Jesus tried so much to convince his disciples that God was a father. Okay. Have you bungled up something very seriously in your life? Many times, not just once.

Again, think of a son who bungled up something many times was rebellious. Think of the prodigal son. How long do you think the prodigal son was away from the father's house? You think it was a couple of days? I've thought about that.

And I've tried to see from the story itself, how long was he away? And I try, I get some hints from the story. One of the hints I get is from the fact that his father had many servants. Now, what type of person has many servants? A multimillionaire.

How many servants do you have in your home? Think of a person who's got many hired servants. He was a multimillionaire who had two sons and his son came and asked for his share of the property. 50%.

Do you know what he got? It wasn't just 50 or a hundred dollars. It was half his father's wealth and you get a few millions. Even if you're the biggest wastrel in the world, you can't spend that in a few weeks.

It takes time. I believe he was away from the father for many years, wasted all his money, ruined his father's good name. Everybody would ask him, whose son are you? Oh, you're so-and-so son, is it? Uh-huh.

Okay. Ruined his father's name, wasted his father's property, money. And then one day he comes back.

It's the only place in the Bible where God is pictured as running. Have you noticed that? The only place in the Bible where you see God running. For whom? For someone who's ruined his name, spoiled all that wasted all that God gave him through many years.

But he's come back and God sees that he's genuinely repentant. He welcomes him and says, I don't want a confession of all your sins. Some people have asked me this.

Do I have to confess all my sins to God? I said, that's impossible. You can't even remember all the things that he did. I said, what did the prodigal son say? I have sinned.

Come home. I'll tell you, God is far better than you think he was. I told you yesterday is the most wonderful person.

The most understanding person in the whole universe is really a joy to be with him. I want to remove from your mind, this false pictures of God that the devil has put in your mind and brainwashed you through so many years. And with all the legalistic preaching that you have heard from preachers that has, you know, portrait God like that, to deliver you from it.

You think that's going to make you sin more? I'll tell you, it didn't do that to me. When the prodigal son came back and he was welcomed by the father like that, what do you think he did? Do you think he thought, ah, now I can take advantage of my father more. I don't believe he ever did that.

He'd be so hesitant thereafter to ask his father for even one cent because he said, I've dishonored him so much. He loved him even more. That's what happened to me.

He was forgiven much, loves much, Jesus said. And so that's how it is. That's how God is.

We didn't need never feel condemned. And it's amazing that the father, you know, put a new robe on him and set up a feast for him, et cetera, even though it messed up his life. And so I want to say to any of you who messed up your life in some way, you don't have to feel condemned.

God loves you just as you are. And you can come and feel welcome. There's no condemnation.

There's no need for discouragement. You confess your sin. You wasted time.

That I agree that even almighty God cannot give you. For example, if you wasted the year 2007, even almighty God can't give that back to you. That I agree.

And, um, but you don't have to feel condemned. You know, you can make up for it in 2008. I know the mistakes I made in my life because I never had a spiritual father.

It's one of the things I tell people in my own church back home. I say, you guys are so lucky. You have elders who are spiritual fathers to you.

I sought for one in my younger days, but I never found one. And so I learned things through trial and error bungled up. I never knew how good God was to me.

I never understood my position in Christ. How many of you know the difference between being forgiven and being justified? You know, I've discovered through the years that lots of Christians, if you were to ask them, what's the difference between being forgiven and being justified. If God has forgiven all your sin, isn't that enough that you can be accepted by God? Why does the Bible speak so much about being justified? What is justification? Is it just one of those complicated theological words that you've got to go? To a Bible school or seminary to understand? No.

I tell you, most people who've gone through Bible school and seminary don't understand it. Their professors don't understand it, but I'll tell you in the next five minutes what forgiveness and justification mean. And you will know more than any Bible school seminary or professor can ever teach you.

Let me explain to you. Forgiveness comes when we confess our sins to God. And the only sins that you need to confess are the things you're aware of.

I mean, if there's some particular sin that's bothering me, I confess that. Otherwise I put it all under one general category. I've sinned, Lord.

I don't even remember all the things I did, but I know I've sinned a lot in thought, word, deed, attitude, motive. So many ways I sinned, forgive me. But if there's some particular thing that I've done, which is wrong, I confess it.

And I go to the person whom I have hurt. If it is another person, if it is only in my thoughts, it's just me and God. But if it is another person I hurt with words or in some other way or cheated, I go and set it right.

I say, here, brother, I'm sorry I cheated you. Or I hurt you by my words. I'm sorry.

Please forgive me, my wife or anyone else. My sins are forgiven immediately. It's cleansed.

My heart is clean. And if I've confessed every known sin to God, my heart is cleansed of all sin. Can I stand before God now? No.

Do you know that forgiveness of sins is not enough for you to stand before God? Even if you, even if you could actually confess every single one of the millions of sins you committed and they were all forgiven and cleansed in the blood of Christ, you don't have to. The Bible only says, come into the light, the blood of Jesus cleanses you. You still cannot be accepted by God because forgiveness of sins is not enough.

And I'll tell you why. Because even after all your past sins are forgiven, you have a nature that's sinful. That doesn't go when you're born again.

That doesn't even go when you're filled with the Holy Spirit. The Bible calls it the flesh. It's there and you know it's there.

You know that in your flesh dwells nothing good. How can you stand before God with such a corrupt nature, even if all your sins are forgiven? That's why you need to be justified. To be justified means that now that all my sins are forgiven and I come and stand before God, God can, I cannot stand before him because I've got a sinful nature.

I've got to run away. God is so holy that even the seraphims who've never sinned have to cover their faces and feet when they fly. That's how holy God is.

So what does God do for me? He justifies me. That means justification is a word related to righteousness. He puts the righteousness of Christ like a dress over me.

That's the word when it says the righteousness of Christ is imputed to you. Imputed means think of a robe that covers my dirty rags. And now God sees me as he sees Jesus Christ.

It's unbelievable, but it's true. When my sins were forgiven, he couldn't see me as he saw Jesus Christ. He could see me as a sinner who was forgiven.

But when I'm not only forgiven but justified, it's the righteousness of Christ that clothes me and he looks at me and do you know how holy I look before God now? Believe it or not, as holy as Jesus Christ himself. I tell you, it's revolutionary this teaching of justification and it's all in the Bible. You read Romans chapter four, the whole chapter is dealing with it and all the blessings of it are in Romans chapter five, clothed with the righteousness of Christ.

This is the meaning of that parable with Jesus spoke about the man who ordained a wedding, organized a wedding feast for his son, the king, and he invited a lot of big people in town to come for the wedding and all of them were busy and said they can't come. That is a picture of the Jewish nation whom Jesus invited first and they said, no, we don't want to be busy with this, that and the other. And so the king was angry with that entire Jewish nation saying, okay, you're rejected.

And Jesus said, the king said go into the highways and byways and pick up all these people from the gutters and the wayside, all the beggars and everything and bring them in. And you see, they're coming for the king's wedding feast. Remember, and you don't see beggars and I see a lot of them in India and they are in rags, torn clothes because they are so poor.

How can you come and sit in a king's wedding feast with these torn clothes? That'll be an insult to the king. And so at the gate, the king decides to give every one of these beggars a robe and the beggars are delighted because their rags are covered in this beautiful white robe and nobody refuses it. Why should I refuse it? When I covers my dirty rags and I sit there and I look at the other fellow, his rags were a little cleaner than mine, but once under the robe, we look just the same.

It's wonderful how justification equalizes us. But then along comes one fellow who is not such a beggar. He's a little more decent type of person.

He comes with a suit and a tie and to the gate and he's offered the robe. I says, no, I don't need a robe. I'm not a beggar.

My dress is pretty good. So he walks in and he's sitting there all the other beggars are there that tattered clothes covered with a white robe and here's this fellow with his neat suit and tie and the king comes and looks over the group of people. This is all in Matthew chapter 22.

You can read it. And um, Hey, he says, I see one fellow here without the robe. How in the world did he get in here? And the guards tell the king, I'm just expanding the story.

It's true. It's exactly like this. Well, he, he felt his dress was good enough.

Oh, he did. Did he bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness? You know what the moral of that story is? What the point of that parable was that you try to come into heaven with your own righteousness, which you think is good enough for the King's feast. Because you never lived in such gross sin like that prostitute and like Mary Magdalene and like the thief on the cross and the whole lot of others.

And you thought you could come because you were brought up in such a godly way and you never committed those gross sins that other people committed. You're such a holy person. Jesus said, the thieves and prostitutes will get into God's kingdom before you people.

He told the Pharisees that was the point of the story. So in justification, even if you got a suit and a tie and you got rags, you're put in the same category. I remember once I was taken to speak to a dying lady with dying of cancer, nominal Christian lady in Bangalore some years ago, and I'd never known her before.

Somebody took me to a person who was a total stranger, asked me to, took me to pray for her and give her the gospel. So I was giving her the gospel and I told her, see the sister, the first thing you need to understand is there is absolutely no difference between you and the worst prostitute in Bangalore. You got to shock people a bit before you give them the gospel.

And she was shocked. She says, what do you mean? I've gone to church regularly and I'm no prostitute. I said, I'm sorry, but in God's eyes, you're no better than the worst prostitute in Bangalore.

She says, I can't accept that. I said, well, then I can't offer you salvation. I can't tell you how to be saved.

You got to accept the fact that you're no better than any other sinner. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. She wouldn't accept it.

I said, I'm sorry, I'm not going to fool you and tell you that you can be saved just by making you repeat some words. Lord Jesus come into my heart, mean nothing to you. So I left her.

Was that a cruel thing to do? I didn't want to give her a fake counterfeit salvation, which meant nothing and fool her that she was saved when she'd be rejected by God in the final day. I don't know what happened to her. She never didn't want to see me again.

And I left it. I hope she repented. But if she didn't, and if she went to hell, there's only one reason she went to hell.

She wouldn't acknowledge that there was no difference between her and the other prostitute. She'd have been saved immediately. What was the difference between that thief on the cross and the thief on the other side of the cross? Both are equal criminals.

But one said, I deserve this. I'm guilty. You know, it makes a lot of difference when you acknowledge that you need the righteousness of Christ to justify you, to make you acceptable before God.

It doesn't matter how holy way, thank God if you didn't fall into all the terrible sins that other people fell into, you know, by God's grace, I grew up in a God fearing family. And so I didn't fall into, I never got drunk and such things I never did, but it doesn't make a difference that God in God's eyes, I was just the same as any criminal. I have no hesitation in standing and saying to God, Lord, I'm no better than Hitler.

I'm no better than Osama bin Laden. I'm no better than any suicide bomber. I am a sinner.

They all came from the race of Adam and I'm just the same. I'm no better than any prostitute. I'm no better than any murderer or rapist or what? Think of the worst possible thing.

Lord, I am from the same tree. I don't believe that I'm any better than them. I need my sins forgiven and because, and I need justification just like them.

I need the righteousness of Christ. You know, the, what the result of that has been in my life. It's made me merciful to all sinners.

It's made me merciful to backsliders in Christendom. God is my witness that I cannot look down on another human being, no matter how deep they are in sin. Why is it we find so many people in Christendom today who look down their noses at other Christians who probably lived a pretty bad life.

They haven't understood justification. They're like the people who come in with their suit and tie and think that they can stand before God and be accepted as they are. And that's why they miss out on so many of God's blessings.

I remember some years ago when I asked the Lord for some practical, some little thing for my family, it was a physical thing. I don't even, I don't even remember what it was, but I said, Lord, can't you do this for me, for my family? Because I've served you for so many years faithfully. And the Lord said, no, I can't do it.

Imagine serving the Lord for so many years. The Lord won't do a little thing for you. And the Lord said, you're coming in your own name.

You'll get nothing from me. Then I realized, Lord, I'm asking you for the same thing because Jesus died for me and rose again. Oh, I said, I'll do it straight away.

You know why you don't get some answers to prayer because you think I've been so good. Wouldn't the Lord do that for me? Sorry. He won't do it for you.

Sorry. Come in Jesus name. Come in his merit and you'll get an answer pretty quickly.

You look down your nose at that other person who's not as holy as you are. That's why you don't get so many answers to prayer. I, I, I believe that 80% of sicknesses in the world are because we live in a world which is under the curse.

It's got nothing to do with sin. It's got nothing to do with anything. We live in a world and thorns poke us and the snakes can come into our compound and we can get the flu.

It's got nothing to do with sin. And there are many other sicknesses like that. People can get infirmities, children born with AIDS and all.

It's got nothing to do with sin. It's got to do with the fact we're in a sin cursed earth. That's why death comes to everybody.

But I believe there are at least about 20% of sicknesses which are due to other factors like a bitterness you hold against somebody. You look down your nose at someone as being more righteous than them. Those things you can be healed from.

So I don't have an answer for 80% of sickness in the world, but I do have an answer for 20% of them. And that is where you are self-righteous, look down on others. You live with sicknesses that you need not live with.

I tell you, God's blessed me with a remarkably good health because I decided years ago that I was no better than any other sinner in the world. I needed to be justified by Christ and I can be accepted before God only on one ground. Jesus died for me and even if I press on to perfection, serve God faithfully for 50 years and live a holy life and I stand before God, I'll be damned except for one thing.

Jesus died for me. That's how we stand before God and I'm justified in Jesus name. Implode with his righteousness, no better than anybody else, but as acceptable as the apostle Paul or as the thief on the cross.

Hallelujah. Let's pray. There needs to be certain attitudes that you need to settle with God right now and finish with before you get up from your seat.

First of all, you need to be absolutely honest. Ask yourself, is there somebody you despise or look down upon who's not as spiritual as you are? Maybe your wife, maybe your husband. You've sort of have a condescending attitude towards that person.

Ah, that person is not as spiritual as me. Well, that's the cause of all your problems. You can be delivered.

That's the cause of some of your sicknesses. Say, Lord, today I understand what it means to be justified in Christ. I'm accepted in Christ just as much as the worst sinner in the world, cleansed in the blood of Christ, clothed with the righteousness of Christ.

I'm accepted and Lord, give me grace to remember this, to know this all my days so that from this moment onwards, I'll never again despise another human being as being inferior to me in any way. Not my wife, not

my husband, nobody. I will not look down on other people's children.

I will not judge others saying, why are they bringing up their children like that? Lord, I have no right to judge anyone except myself and I refuse to accept condemnation from Satan anymore. I refuse to accept discouragement. You rejoice in me, Father, and I accept that.

You've accepted me in Christ. Thank you. Heavenly Father, I pray that every single person sitting here will be liberated today in a way they've never been experienced liberation before.

That'll be a new day in their lives from now on. A new day of acceptance of themselves in Christ and acceptance of others. Thank you.

In Jesus name.

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