

The Church Must Guard Her Connection to Christ

by Zac Poonen

The church must guard her connection to Christ by having faith in God's promises, obeying His word, and having a strong relationship with Him through the Holy Spirit.

Duration: 55:25

Scripture: Matthew 11:25, John 6:60, John 16:32, Acts 24:16, Ephesians 1:18

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Church Unity"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of maintaining a strong vertical relationship with God, prioritizing loving Him with all our heart above all else. It highlights the significance of keeping our conscience clear before God and men, seeking revelation from the Holy Spirit, and understanding the deeper sufferings of Christ beyond just His physical pain. The goal is to build a church where fellowship is rooted in a deep connection with God, leading to effective unity and functioning as the body of Christ.

Transcript

Godly man's life is exciting and there are New Testament verses that speak about rejoicing in the Lord always, being anxious for nothing and the Holy Spirit changes us from one degree of glory to another or another verse in Proverbs Proverbs 4.18 which says, the path of the righteous and we understand in the New Testament that the righteous is the one who is justified by faith. When we receive Christ as our Lord, not only that our past sins are forgiven but we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ who is justified by faith. But that righteous person who is now justified by faith walks along a path and that path is in God's perfect will, it's something that's meant to shine brighter and brighter and brighter from just like the sun from dawn to noon day position gets brighter and brighter and brighter.

Why is it that most Christians don't experience that? The sun never backslides, never goes back, it's continuously, it's not moving very fast. In fact, you look at the sun you can hardly see it move but over a period of time there is a movement in the sky and that's how our life must be and we must never be satisfied with anything less than what the Bible promises us as Christians. I believe that's the reason why many Christians never come to the type of life God wants them to have because they're satisfied with something substandard and they look around and see that most Christians are also at that level so they say well I suppose this is the best we can do in this world and even in terms of fellowship they're satisfied with a substandard quality of fellowship they say well it'll never get any better.

Well as long as you say that according to your faith be it unto you it will not get better but if we say Lord if you promise something in your word then it doesn't matter whether I've experienced it yet or not I believe it's meant for me and I'm going to get it. We have examples of that in the Old Testament in Abraham who was promised a son and even though year after year after year after year Sarah never got pregnant he never gave up hope. I mean they made the mistake of trying to get it some other way but that didn't work.

God said that's not what I meant. I want to give you a son the way I plan to do it supernaturally and he got it. The same way with the Israelites.

God had given a promise to Abraham that after 400 years his descendants would be freed and those who knew about it would have trusted and even after they came out of Egypt they took a number of years to get into the land of Canaan but there were two people Joshua and Caleb who continued to trust God and said we're going to we're going to get into the land we're going to overcome the Giants. So these are the examples we have in the Old Testament of people who held on in faith and believed that what God had promised he would do and I found in my Christian journey very few Christians who hold on to God by like that in faith and say I believe it's possible to come to the type of life described in the New Testament where sin will not rule over me where I know I will never face a trial which is too much for me to bear. It's a promise in the New Testament God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted beyond your ability.

So that means for a true Christian who's walking in the footsteps of Christ there is never a time or a situation where he has to say oh this is becoming too much for me. That's impossible. Imagine being able to look forward to a future like that where God is going to be in control to make sure that I never face a trial which is going to be too much for me.

According to the strength of the trial will be the proportion of grace God gives and when people like that who have that type of faith and a God who is on their side who is a loving father who keeps his word and who believe that by the Bible is God's Word and every promise in it can be experienced and every commandment can be obeyed. When even a few people come together who got that type of faith come together they can encourage one another when somebody's slipping up the other can help them to stand and that is what becomes a New Testament Church. So it's a New Testament Church is not just a nice little club where we care for one another there are a lot of clubs like that I think the the Freemasons do a pretty good job of caring for one another better than a lot of Christians sometimes but that's a club whereas a church is never meant to be like a club.

The caring for one another is not the primary thing in the church. The primary thing is that each member in that church has a living fellowship with God. It's not how much they do for each other that's primary.

If that's the main thing one looks forward to in a church well this is a good place to belong to because we care for one another. I find a nice little security here well you're not going to have a very satisfying experience and I find many people leave big churches and come to small fellowships because there they have a sense of recognition which they don't have in a big church where they get lost in the crowd and it's that insecurity in them which wants to be accepted that draws them to a small fellowship. It's not because they really want to see a church built like the body of Christ so we got to make sure that our motives are cleansed because all types of wrong things can come up in our heart and so we must remember that fellowship is in two directions.

The first commandment is not you shall love one another. No that's the second commandment.

The first one is you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength and mind and then he said Jesus said the second is like that shall love your neighbor as yourself or has he modified it for us saying love one another as I've loved you like the two arms of the cross and you know in every cross the vertical arm is much longer than the horizontal arm in every cross and if I ever make the horizontal arm long and the vertical arm small or non-existent it's not going to be a cross and that's the problem with a lot of groups that start out trying to build a new covenant church and never end up becoming a new covenant church because the individuals in it are not seeking to maintain that vertical relationship with God to love God with all their heart and where that

becomes much more important than the horizontal arm of fellowship and when people have problems in fellowship with others I can almost certainly say it's because the vertical arm is either missing or very short or non-existent their relationship with God is wrong that's why when I cannot bear with the infirmities and weaknesses of my fellow believers because I my relationship with God is not right if my relationship with God were right and I was walking in the light with him God would give me grace to bear with anything I believe that this is the way God wants his children to live and God created Adam one of the first things he told him was I want you to rule R U L E that's there right in the very first word that the Lord spoke let's have a look at that if you're not familiar with that

verse Genesis 1 when God created man the two things he said to him one is I want you to be fruitful and the other is I want you to subdue everything underneath you and rule over everything that's what when he before he made man he said verse 26 let us make man in our image so that they can rule over everything man was created to be a ruler not to be a slave and because Adam sinned man became a slave to the devil and if Christ has really delivered us and we have opened our life completely to be filled with his Holy Spirit it's impossible otherwise I think a lot of Christians they come to Jesus for that their sins forgiven and the reason they lived continuously defeated lives after that is because they have not opened themselves up to be filled with the Holy Spirit they're exactly like

Abraham trying to produce a son in his own strength and they failed and he failed and God was trying to teach him you can't produce a son in your own strength you can't do it and God waited till Abraham recognized I can't do it and he had to depend on God and then he got a son and through whom Jesus came so I see that I believe this is the reason most Christians if they're absolutely honest will admit that they don't seem to experience the type of life the New Testament speaks about I know it was like that in my own experience there was a standard of life I saw that the Apostles spoke about Paul particularly and Paul said follow me as I follow Christ and there was a spirit of triumph in him nothing could he couldn't just couldn't push him down it's like trying to push a piece of wood into

the water you just can't do it no matter how long you keep your hand on it the moment you release it it comes up that's how Paul was you couldn't sort of crush him he was always triumphant you could beat him you could whip him you could imprison him you could do whatever you liked but he was always triumphant he says and all these things we're more than conquerors that's a true Christian but there are very few you find like that you find people who have occasional spurts of experience like that but to be consistently like that every day in our home in our office that is the Christian life and I'm not saying you can attain that in a day but if you ever lower that goal and say well that's impossible then according to your faith be it unto you you will never ever come to the life God wants

you to live and that'll be a great tragedy if I one day stand before the Lord and I discover that God wanted me to live at a much higher level on earth as his witness and I let him down not because I didn't have the

strength but I wouldn't believe his word that's the only reason he said I'll do it for you and say I'm not so sure when you say that to God then of course it will not happen he James one says if a person doesn't believe he will receive nothing from the Lord and likewise I feel that I believe God's also disappointed that he sees so few churches fellowships I don't think God's ever disturbed that a church is not large in size that doesn't disturb him one bit because I find when I read the Gospels so many people left Jesus and he's never disturbed him he wasn't disturbed because

the rich young ruler said I'm sorry I can't pay this price you're asking she said okay goodbye and somebody else wouldn't accept eating his flesh and drinking his blood maybe because they didn't understand it but whatever the reason they got offended and left and he just let them go I never find Jesus or hanging on to people saying hey I hope you won't leave me it was quite the opposite in John chapter 6 we read when a lot of people left him because he said you've got to eat my flesh and drink my blood and that was very offensive it was like cannibalism they didn't understand it and he didn't even bother to explain it to them and when they all left he turned around turns around to the twelve who are left and say well you can go too if you like imagine that was dignity about Jesus as a

servant of God his relationship was primarily with the father and it didn't matter to him one bit if everybody left let me just show you those two passages one is in John chapter 6 because it's the reason why I emphasize that is the only way you can have a strong relationship with each other in the church is if you have this strong relationship with the father that Jesus has John chapter 6 is a great chapter that begins in verse 2 with a great multitude following Christ and by the time you come to the end of the chapter there were only 12 left in verse 67 so here's a chapter that begins with a great multitude and ends with 12 out of which the Lord says one of you is a devil verse 17 it ends with 11 so if you want to know how to reduce the multitude to 11 you read John chapter 6 that's the

way you know to reduce a huge church of half-hearted compromising worldly Christians who are seeking their own into a group of people who are really wholehearted radical wanting to live for Jesus Christ alone John chapter 6 that's it and what he spoke there which offended them he's I mean when as long as he was doing the miracles and feeding the multitude in the first part of the chapter they stuck with him a lot of people stick with Jesus as long as doing miracles and providing you with plenty of money and everything is okay and things are smooth but it's that's not a great thing that people stick with Jesus then that's why the prosperity and health wealth gospel is so popular they wanted Jesus like that but what they're preaching is not the Jesus of Scripture Paul once said at

Corinthians he says I'm afraid that you people will follow another Jesus in 2nd Corinthians 11 is there another Jesus there is and most of what is being preached today is another Jesus but very few people have the discernment to see that because this other Jesus is offering them what they want but they don't realize that they're compromising in order to get it do you know that even the devil offered prosperity to Jesus he said I'll give you all the glory of this world if you just bow down and worship me I'll give it to you because I give it to whomever I want he said he's the one who gives it to whomever he wants a lot of people think when they get all that stuff God is blessing them they're getting something from the devil because somewhere along the way they have bowed the knee to Satan

compromising something it's not compromising necessarily by telling lies or committing adultery I'll tell you the way in which a lot of people compromise by not proclaiming the whole counsel of God for example if a preacher never speaks about take up your cross every day and follow me I believe he's bowed down to the devil by keeping quiet on that matter the devil says keep quiet don't speak about that because you lose

people and they bow down and say okay I won't talk about that because that's offensive fine you get a lot of things they bowed down the knee to the devil and once you bow the knee to the devil you do get a lot of things on the earth you won't get anything in heaven but you get a lot of things on the earth but Jesus wasn't like that he spoke the truth and he said in John 6

and verse 53 unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you have no life in yourself if you eat my flesh and drink my blood you have eternal life and I'll raise you up on the last day my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink verse 55 he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him look at the number of verses where he's talking about my flesh and my blood and my flesh and my blood and this is the bread which came from heaven and many verse 60 now if the Pharisees got offended with that we can understand but these were disciples of Jesus they were people who are following him a disciple is one who's accepted the Messiah many of his disciples said this is a difficult statement who can listen to it when you hear a message in a church to which

your natural temperament and your human personality says this is a difficult statement who can hear it you can be pretty sure you're hearing the truth because that's what the response people had when Jesus spoke this is a difficult statement who can hear it and the Lord said does this cause you to stumble verse 61 he says it's the Holy Spirit verse 63 who gives life you know the answer to everything is there in the Holy Spirit nothing is a difficult statement if you turn to the Holy Spirit for power to obey it it's the Spirit who gives life he says and the flesh profits nothing if you try to live by your human understanding and strength you'll never get anywhere but the words I spoke to you are spirit and life like I've often said I believe that devil has succeeded in cheating Christians

of their inheritance left right and center robbing them robbing them and without even their knowing it it's like a confidence a con man who cheats you and you don't even know you've been cheated that's how I see a lot of Christians sitting in many churches they don't know that there's a life God wants them to live on earth the life of triumph and victory and they don't have it and they think well this is all that we're supposed to have you've been cheated and if you turn to the Holy Spirit he'll give you light on that and Jesus never you know I would have thought what a wonderful opportunity to explain to people hey listen what I mean is not cannibalism eat my flesh and drink my blood I'm talking about something spiritual what I mean is as inward participation in my death to my self-life

he didn't explain it why didn't he explain it a lot of us think you know the reason why people don't come to the truth is they have not it's not been explained clearly to them I used to think that when I was young but the more I've come to know the Lord it's a lot of rubbish people who live in the intellectual level and want everything explained clearly they'll never become spiritual it spirituality is a matter of the heart you don't have to get it all explained you don't need to understand your digestive system for it to work properly no a lot of things in your body that function without your being able to understand how they work I mean to have a healthy lifestyle does not mean you're going to understand everything that is going on in your body I find the same the Christian life you

don't have to be able to explain everything if your heart is right you love God with all your heart things become clear in your spirit like Jesus told Simon Peter if I were to paraphrase his words blessed are you Simon bar Jonah son of Jonah because you didn't understand that I am the Messiah with your human cleverness and somebody explaining it to you and showing you all the prophecies in the Old Testament fulfilled no it was a revelation you got from heaven my father just opened your blind eyes of your heart and you saw something that's why Jesus said these truths are hidden from the clever and the intelligent and

they are revealed to babes Matthew 11 25 so what shall we do if we have the handicap of being clever and intelligent we shall humble ourselves and say Lord my cleverness and

intelligence is for the things in the world when I come to scripture I want to come with the humility of a babe that acknowledges I can't understand this but if your Holy Spirit will give me a revelation I will understand it it's not by frequent reading it's not even by meditation it's by revelation see revelation is not a word found in the Old Covenant we speak a lot of difference the difference between the Old Covenant and New Covenant and one of the big differences is this in the Old Covenant you understood scripture by meditation blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly or stand in the way of sinners but he meditates in someone and the law of the Lord day and night you couldn't go beyond meditation in the Old Testament because they didn't have the Holy Spirit

you just had to use your brain and I'm just trying to understand and that's why that's how people became great scholars in the Old Testament scribes and Pharisees but with all that clever understanding they couldn't recognize Jesus they thought he was Beelzebul the prince of devils that's how blind a clever person can be when it comes to spiritual things it's very important for us to understand this you know there are two things the Bible says Christ is made to us 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and Protestant Christianity has emphasized only one of those two things Christ has made unto us righteousness I think every evangelical Christian understands that that my righteousness is like filthy rags I cannot stand before God with my righteousness I come to God even if I'm the holiest man on earth I

cannot get to heaven with that I need the righteousness of Christ evangelical Christianity has emphasized that and everyone understands it but there's another thing which Christ has made unto us which is not understood turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 1 it says Christ is made to us 1 Corinthians 1 30 by God's doing that means this is God's work and not your work you're in Christ Jesus who has become to us wisdom from God and righteousness sanctification and redemption Christ has become to us righteousness but Christ has also become to us wisdom from God so just like my righteousness can never fit me for God's kingdom my cleverness will never help me to understand the things of God Christ has to become not only my righteousness but like it says here Christ has to become my wisdom and I find a

lot of Christians haven't understood that that's why they have so many questions why is it like this and why is it like that they're using the cleverer they are the more questions they have and the more they go astray because these things are hidden from the clever and the intelligent you have to come like a babe you have to come with humility and say Lord I want you to give me revelation God gives that revelation to the humble the secret of the Lord is with those who fear him those who reverence him understand a lot of things in scripture that clever people never understand when Paul was writing to the Ephesians he tells them turn to Ephesians chapter 1 you know in Ephesians he later on goes on to speak about the mystery of the church as the body of Christ and many wonderful things about

the church Ephesians is the great about the church but in the first part of that letter he tells him he says I'm praying verse 18 Ephesians 1 18 that the eyes of your heart will be enlightened now you see if somebody's teaching mathematics or physics he doesn't say I pray that the eyes of your heart will be enlightened he says if you haven't understood this just study it again I mean do those problems ten times and you'll understand how we work out this solution find a solution but here he says he doesn't say read my letter ten times and meditate on it and you'll get it no he says I'm praying the eyes of your heart will be enlightened I'm praying verse 17 that you'll get a spirit of revelation there's that New Testament word revelation in the knowledge of him the word Jesus used to Simon

Peter blessed are you because you got revelation from my father it's like understanding something which any amount of study will not help us to understand I believe all the great arguments that there are between theologians is because they are trying to argue on the intellectual level and God doesn't dwell in our minds he dwells in our spirits the Old Testament tabernacle had a very clear demonstration of that the Old Testament tabernacle you know had three parts by outer core which is visible to everybody and a tent which had two parts covered inside called holy place and most holy place the tabernacle is a picture of God's dwelling place God dwelt there in the Old Testament in a fire glory from heaven but the interesting thing is he the fire was not in the outer core the fire of God was

not even in the holy place it was always over the most holy place and God told him the mercy seat is there in the most holy place I will speak to you from there and the application for us in the New Testament is that our human personality is also three I mean we have three parts body soul and spirit body is the part everybody can see like the outer core and then there's a tent with two covered parts soul and spirit a lot of people don't even know that soul and spirit many people think of just body and soul but the tabernacle had three parts not two and God did not dwell in the soul in our mind he dwelt in something deeper than that the spirit and there was this veil between the soul and spirit which had to be rent before you could go and dwell in the most holy place that's what was rent

when Christ died on the cross and there's a deep meaning in it which most people haven't understood and there in the holy place you can get understanding in the most holy place you get revelation in your soul in your mind you can get understanding as you meditate study study like the scribes but when you get into the most holy place you get revelation that's why you know at the end of the when when you read the parables it's very interesting to see Matthew chapter 13 one of the wonderful things that happened to me when God filled me with the Holy Spirit and I thought to remain filled with the Holy Spirit I said Lord if this is a genuine experience because a lot of counterfeit experiences of being filled with the Spirit and I said to myself if this is a genuine experience the New Testament

will become a new book for me you know that's 16 years after studying the New Testament and it really did become a new book because the author began to show teach me what it meant from within see in Matthew 13 when he was speaking in parables the disciples said why are you speaking in parables Matthew 13 verse 10 why do you speak to people in parables now we would think that a parable is meant so that people can understand more clearly you know like an illustration but Jesus said is exactly the opposite I speak in parables so that they won't understand what I'm trying to say it's almost as though Jesus saying things in a way you know like a secret code language or something and nobody would understand and that's what the parables were and he says that later on he says the answer he says

to you it's been given verse 11 to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven for them it has not been granted what do you how do you understand verse 11 when Jesus tells his disciples and most of them are not scholars maybe Judas Iscariot was a scholar but none of the others were really and he says to you it has been given to understand the mysteries of the kingdom but to these clever scribes and Pharisees it has not been given what's the reason I mean it's like a mathematics professor saying listen you guys will understand but those guys won't understand that must be because they are dumb right and you guys are clever in any earthly thing is like that whether it's business or mathematics or science or anything but it's so different in God's kingdom he says you will understand but

they will not the reason they are too proud they depend on their cleverness and their cleverness pops up so many questions in their mind and they'll keep on seeking and they'll never find it that's what he says

verse 14 you'll keep on hearing but you'll never understand I've seen that I've seen that with people who even come to visit our church in in India Bangalore they keep on hearing they never understand they keep on seeing but they will not perceive for their heart has become dull their mind is very clever but their heart is dull their heart is dull means they don't seek they don't take sin seriously they're not quick to confess sin as soon as their conscience tells them something is wrong you know like a nerve ending that's dull in your body that doesn't have any sensation anymore

the nerve ending has become dull so what happens when people get leprosy it's dull and you can poke them with a pin they don't feel it and there when it says their hearts have become dull they can do something wrong and not feel convicted about it and not feel that they must set it right they can hurt somebody and never feel that they must go and apologize and ask forgiveness from that person the heart has become dull and such people will keep on hearing they won't understand their problem is not cleverness they're very clever they'll talk about a lot of wonderful stuff from the Bible but they will never come to that glorious life that the Bible speaks about their their only understanding of Christianity will be activity we've got to reach out to others you must help them and help the

poor and feed the hungry and do some social work and go on short-term mission trips abroad to try and ease my conscience or all this type of stuff but they will not understand God's ways and they will never build a new covenant church because it's not by cleverness their heart is dull and their ears they scarcely hear they close their eyes lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and I should heal them verse 16 but blessed are your eyes because you see and your ears because they hear because I tell you many prophets and righteous men verse 17 desire to see these things and they couldn't see it because they didn't have the Holy Spirit that's the reason why even Isaiah couldn't understand some of the things we can understand and that's why the end of that chapter he

says after speaking a number of parables he says here verse 52 you know in verse 53 it says he's finished with the parables but just before he finishes the parables he says the scribe verse 52 must become a disciple that's the conclusion of the study of the parables the clever scribe has to become a humble disciple the clever scribe who tries to understand with his brain the Bible has to humble himself and seek for revelation from God see revelation is what equalizes us if the Bible could be understood by cleverness some of us have got a distinct advantage over others because we are clever others are not it's like physical work if someone is stronger he'll be able to do more than another a weaker person can't do it whereas in God's kingdom it's so different it's the weak who is strong

it's the one who comes at the 11th hour who gets his reward first it's the last who is first and it's the first who's last it's so different because and the only reason is pride why did Jesus say it's so difficult for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God's kingdom and that richness could be money it could be honor it could be in intellectual wealth it could be experience the wealth of experience it could be anything that makes us rich I'm an experienced person I'm a clever person I'm qualified I do well in academics I do well in my profession and you that type of ability that type of wealth can become a hindrance to God's kingdom because it makes me like a camel now the only way a camel can

go through the eye of a needle if by a miracle it can shrink to the size of an amoeba Wow you know the camel struggling to put even a little bit of his body through that needle's eye for an amoeba needle's eye is about 20 feet wide I can run through this up and down all the time it's size that's what Jesus is emphasizing when we are big because of our pride in our own ability and experience and intelligence and

knowledge of the Bible or a hundred and one other things like this that the devil makes us proud of we'll never get through the needle's eye but if you're willing to become small that things we'll understand that are hidden from the wise and the clever of the earth so that's that's God's way of leading us to this wonderful life of victory that God wants us to have and of building a

church where we come to a relationship with God where we're not dependent on whether other people are going to stick around with us or not I told you how when these disciples all left Jesus turned around and told these in twelve well are you gonna go away too he didn't say hey I hope you'll hang on I hope you'll stay with us stay with me and don't go away all these guys are going away and later on you see even the leaven left him you read that in John 16 it's interesting John 16 Jesus said in verse 32 John 16 32 an hour is coming and it has already come for you to be scattered each one to his own home and you will leave me alone you stuck with me in John 6 now it's going to be a bigger test and you won't pass the test you will leave me alone but this is the part I want you to notice I am

not alone because the father is with me the only thing that mattered to Jesus Christ was is the father with me or not this is why he struggled so much in Gethsemane with that cup the cup that he had to drink was the father would forsake me on the cross for three hours as I take the sins of the world boy I can't stand that I can stand anything else I can stand hundreds of disciples leaving me and even the leaven leaving me I don't bother about that but father are you gonna leave me do I have to pay that price that was what he struggled with isn't there any other way I mean he was willing to go through a thousand Calvary's for our sins any day but break of fellowship with the father so grieved him it was the thing that he valued most that's why we see his love for us that he was even

willing to give that up to save us from our sins I'll never forget that when the Lord opened my eyes to that truth many many years after I was born again I literally wept actually I said Lord I never knew how much you loved me I've seen your love on Calvary and you know movies like Jesus and all you feel like weeping when he's whipped and beaten but when your eyes are open to see that that was nothing compared to the agony he experienced on the cross of being forsaken by the father for three hours you know when God gives you a revelation that will make you weep more than seeing him physically whipped and crucified and very few Christians see that they feel compassion oh he was whipped he was crucified there my heart is moved when they think of Jesus physical sufferings that shows that a

low level at which most Christians live the external sufferings of Jesus are what mean most to them because they are external Christians external Christians mean just the outward life is enough for me but when you become an inward Christian one who's seeking to live before God the inward sufferings of Christ become more meaning mean more to you than the outward sufferings and that's the switch that happened to me I discovered that the outward suffering was nothing I mean a lot of martyrs who suffered physically more than Jesus Christ you know that imagine being torn to pieces by a lion I presume that would be more difficult than being crucified or even physical suffering Jesus suffered only for six hours there are martyrs who suffered being tortured for years in the communist prisons so

it was not the external suffering was not the big thing at all I mean that's what we tell little children because little children can't understand the deeper things so we speak about Jesus dying and suffering see how much he suffered and all that it's true and then we got to start like that in the kindergarten but if you move on with God you see the real suffering Jesus had was the break of fellowship with the father that's the thing that was hell it's literally hell because that is what hell is hell is a place that completely forsaken by God and that's what he says I'm not alone because my father is with me and I mentioned that phrase to

share with you dear brothers and sisters when that becomes the most meaningful thing in your life you would have understood the secret of Christianity

and then you'll be an extremely useful member in this church because it's it's no longer a club for you the vertical arm of the cross has become much bigger than the horizontal arm your fellowship with God love for God has become the first commandment in your life not just living a good life or just having a good testimony as a Christian but unbroken fellowship with God our father that's that's what Jesus died for to bring me into unbroken fellowship with my heavenly father and that means anything any teeny-weeny thing that breaks my fellowship with the father I'm going to immediately set right just like you would not ignore even a small injury on your hand you know our skin is so full of germs that a small injury in our hand can get infected immediately the germs get in any little injury

germs get in there are people who get AIDS through just getting an injection into their through a needle this is can you imagine the size of a hole of a needle prick you get the AIDS virus through that that's how it is and to recognize that spiritually also it's like that I don't want to get anything that corrupts me inside the smallest teeny-weeny little thing I want to get it right I want to set it right and have a clear relationship with my heavenly father all the time such a person would be the most effective member of the body of Christ even if he cannot preach because he'll be able to build fellowship I've often said after years of planning churches that the most valuable person in a church is the one who can build fellowship between people not the greatest preacher and particularly

nowadays you don't need to come to a church to listen to good preaching you can listen to on the internet now what you hear on the internet maybe ten times better than what you hear on a Sunday morning service so we don't build the church with just good preaching you can sit at home and listen to good preaching every day but you won't build the church because the church is built by people who have understood how to build fellowship and we cannot build fellowship just by listening to messages on the internet we need to relate to other people who are different from us and our relationship with them becomes better and stronger if our vertical relationship is strong so that's what I mean I'm trying to emphasize in this message dear brothers and sisters make sure your vertical relationship

with Christ and with God is your father it's always to the best of your knowledge perfect the Apostle Paul said in Acts 24 very simple to do it's not really all that complicated he said in Acts 24 and verse 16 I do my best to keep my conscience clear with God and with men so many people in that church if you ask them what are you trying to do best in your ministry I'm trying to do my best improve my quality of preaching or improve the way I sing or improve the way I play an instrument all that is good brother but Paul said I do my best to keep my conscience clear all everything else is secondary I judge myself tell you honestly I judge myself every time I preach I've done that for years to see if there's anything which is dishonoring to God or anything I said which I should not have

said or anything I did not say which I should have said I mean that's the way I judge myself in many other areas too but to me the more important than whether I can preach better or sing better these things don't bother me is is my conscience absolutely clear is my fellowship with the Father perfect all the time 24-7 I do my best to keep my conscience clear before God and men that means a person who's keeping that vertical relationship perfect that's the vertical arm of the cross I want to love God is there anything it's not just that I haven't hurt anybody or haven't lusted after a woman or committed some sin sins like has my love for the Lord decreased in fact you know that was a sin of the elder in Ephesus the Lord didn't tell the elder in Ephesus you're lusting after women all the

time or you're looking at pornographic pictures or stealing no your problem elder brother is that you lost your first love for me that's very serious sin so that vertical relationship with God Lord I want to keep my conscience absolutely clear that my relationship with you that I really to the best of my knowledge love you with all my heart that I don't love money more than you I don't love my job more than you I don't love anything on earth more than you all the time now that's a standard which most Christians don't even think about most Christians only think about have I hurt somebody have I stolen something have I done what is right that's a pretty low level of the Christian life I mean it's much better than a lot of others but that's not the level at which Paul lived have I have I

decreased in my love for God am I still loving God with all my heart all my soul all my strength that is the first commandment if I don't keep that whatever other commandment I keep like don't steal don't commit adultery don't hurt anybody those things are secondary first is I love God with all my heart and everything else must flow from that so that's the meaning of keeping my conscience absolutely clear before God and before men that if I've hurt somebody I said it right if I cheated somebody I repay it and said it right I don't know how many Christians take their take this seriously I find a lot of people take their work more seriously you know study in order to advance in their profession and whatever work you do so careful to keep up to date with current trends so that you don't lose

your job it's good what about our relationship with God is that really more important than my job I believe it is my relationship with Christ is is to be the most important thing in my life and every one of us if you really want to be an effective member of this church I want to say to you that that must be number one my life your relationship with Jesus Christ always that you love him with all your heart that there's nothing that means more to you than him then your relationship with him is clear then you know as as like the members of the body are connected perfectly with the head then they can function together the reason why a pianist can play so beautifully with ten fingers is because every one of those fingers is connected to the head and immediately obeys I mean it's almost

split-second obedience to the promptings of the head now hit that key and hit that over here and put put your foot on the pedal etc it's also split-second obedience that produces a beautiful piano recital and to me that's a picture of the body body of Christ I've often used this example that the reason why the ten fingers of a pianist plays so beautifully is not because they're always hanging around with each other no it's not because he's always holding hands that these ten fingers get along with each other that's not the way that's a club I mean how often do we go around holding hands like this hardly ever I say it's because each of those ten fingers have perfect connection with the brain that's the secret not because we spend half an hour every week together that we're gonna build

fellowship that's a club they may not have the opportunity we may not have the time when you when you have small children at home we have less and less time to spend time with each other but if our connection with the head is perfect the ten fingers will work perfectly even if they are not hanging around with each other it's if we walk in the light have we a fellowship with God and it says we have fellowship with one another too and that's it's almost a mystery that a lot of Christians don't seem to understand I discovered that in you know sometimes I'd see brothers once a year at a conference and I would immediately link up with them as if I've been walking meeting them every day because they were walking in the light and there was no artificiality about them they were not trying to

pretend to be zealous or they're not trying to impress me or any such thing they're walking in the light with God now I'm walking in the light with God and as soon as I meet up with them they don't have to act or

pretend or any such thing fellowship is immediate that is the way our fellowship must be there must be no acting there must be no trying to impress the other person hey I'm also zealous what's the use in impressing one another that's worthless if your fellowship with God is right you love him with all your heart that's the greatest thing you can do for the church and I believe God wants to build us together into a body so I thought I should emphasize that God bless you all

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