

The Hindrance Of Traditions

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the distinction between being religious and being godly, highlighting the dangers of being trapped in religious traditions that hinder true spiritual growth. It warns against the Pharisaical mindset of focusing on external holiness over inner transformation, and the importance of genuine love, humility, and forgiveness as true marks of discipleship. The speaker urges parents to prioritize raising children in godly ways rather than conforming to societal or religious expectations, emphasizing the need to cleanse the heart from sin and tradition to be prepared for Christ's return.

Scripture: Matthew 23:27, Mark 7:8, Luke 6:46, John 13:35, Hebrews 12:1, James 1:27, 1 John 4:20, Matthew 5:23, 1 Corinthians 13:1, Galatians 5:6

Topics: "True Discipleship", "Inner Transformation"

Description

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Transcript

If we read the Old Testament and the Gospels, we get an idea of the type of things that religious people were engaged in. God was not happy with that. As human beings, we have many desires in our flesh.

And many of those desires are very similar to the desires in animals. It's just like, I mean, we get angry just like a dog gets angry. And dogs and animals have a lot of sexual desire and human beings also.

The animals will steal for food and human beings will also steal. And one of the desires we have in our flesh, which animals don't have, and that is the desire to be religious. Now to be religious is different from being godly.

We can say the Pharisees were religious and Jesus was godly. And sometimes it is very difficult to distinguish between the two. But we have to distinguish between the two because otherwise we'll go on the wrong path.

You know, it's possible. Many of you sitting here today could be religious and not godly. If you are religious, you can keep on increasing in being religious and not at all be ready for the coming of Christ.

To be ready for the coming of Christ, we have to give up being religious and become godly. Now many of us think we just have to give up sin. That's good.

But in addition to that, we have to give up religious tradition. See, the Pharisees killed Jesus, not because he preached against sin. You read the gospels carefully sometimes.

What did the Pharisees criticize Jesus and his disciples for? Did the Pharisees criticize Jesus saying, you're loving everybody too much? Did the Pharisees criticize Jesus because he was helping poor people? Did they criticize him for feeding the 5000? Did they ever criticize him for raising the dead? You read the gospels. They criticized him for breaking their Sabbath law or the disciples for not washing their hands properly. They were particular about these small small things.

See, to wash your hands has got nothing to do with godliness. And all those small rules they had about what you can do on the Sabbath day, what you can't do on the Sabbath day was religion. And if one poor woman came and poured ointment at Jesus' feet, they would say she's a sinful woman, she cannot come.

And one mark of religious people is they are very hard on sinners. Without realizing that they themselves are the biggest sinners. Religious people are very quick to criticize others.

Some of these things which I just mentioned, if you find that in yourself, you are a religious person. Religious people are more interested in the outer holiness than inner holiness. This is one of the most important things.

Now I want to repeat what I said yesterday. Remember the wise virgins and the foolish virgins, all their external life was good. Both foolish and wise virgins.

Their external life was good. Their lamps were burning. The foolish were those who didn't have an inner vessel of oil.

They didn't have an inner life. Their inner life was hollow, empty, nothing there. So if all your Christianity consists of what other people can see, if all your Christianity consists of what other people can see, Good denominations.

There were three groups. Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians. And Jesus said, beware of the eleven of the Pharisees.

Beware of the eleven of the Sadducees. And beware of the eleven of the Herodians. In Christianity today, these three elevens are there.

The Herodians are the worldly Christians. They like to listen to good messages. See Mark chapter 6. Their leader was Herod.

He was a political leader. And there are many Christian churches who have big political leaders in their congregation. And when you have a political leader supporting you, you can have a lot of influence in society.

You know, you can get a lot of influence with political leaders in your church. And a lot of Christians who look for that. We've got political leaders supporting us.

That's great. We are a wonderful church. God is not there.

Political leader is there. Those are the Herodians. Their leader was Herod, who was a big ruler there.

Jesus said, beware of that. And we read here in Mark 6, that Herod, verse 20, last part, used to enjoy listening to John the Baptist. No, Herod was not interested in listening to the Pharisees.

Because they were all boring. But John the Baptist was a fiery preacher. Herod liked to listen to him, it says here.

Now, sometimes you think that because you like to listen to some fiery preacher, you're also spiritual. There are many people who come to me in different parts of the world. Brother Zach, we really enjoy listening to your CD.

I say, okay. But in my mind, I think, Herod also used to enjoy listening to John the Baptist. So, I'm not excited when somebody says, he likes listening to my CD.

The important thing is, do you obey what you hear? If you just enjoy listening to some powerful message, you're like Herod. And the devil will fool you, you're a spiritual man. See, you like to enjoy, you enjoy these good messages, not those boring messages.

That is one of the great deceptions going on in Christendom today. I mean, who likes to enjoy, who enjoys listening to boring sermons? Nobody enjoys that. So, if you enjoy listening to a good sermon, it does not mean you're spiritual.

So, Herod used to keep on listening to John the Baptist. He used to call him, come, I'd like to listen to your preach. But then, we read here, two verses later, in verse 22, He married a second wife, whose name was Herodias.

And her daughter Salome came and danced in front of all, in a party there. And in these parties and all, when these young girls dance, they don't dress properly. They dress with very few clothes.

Half naked, they'll dance there. And Herod enjoyed that also. That is a mark of Herodians.

They enjoy listening to John the Baptist, they enjoy watching the Salome dance also. That is exactly how many Christians are today. Sunday morning, they like to listen to some CD or some powerful message.

In the evening, they'll be watching some movie or some filthy woman on the screen. What is the difference between such people and Herod? You know, later on, when Jesus stood before Herod, Herod asked him many questions and Jesus would not reply to him. That's why you don't hear the Lord speaking to you also.

He's not going to speak to people who enjoy listening to powerful messages and then enjoy watching filthy movies. That's, they are religious people. See, the atheists and all, they don't like to listen to good messages.

But you're not like that. You like to listen to good messages. But you enjoy movies also.

You are a Herodian of today. And then there's another group called the Sadducees. It says about them, they didn't believe in angels and resurrection and all that.

They don't believe in anything miraculous. They don't believe that God can heal anybody. They believe doctors can do that, but God cannot do that.

So, they don't pray for such things. They'll never pray for a miracle. They don't believe that God can do miracles.

They're the Sadducees. But they study the Bible a lot. They have got a lot of knowledge.

But they have no faith that God is almighty. They don't believe in the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit. There are a lot of Christians like that today.

They are very religious. They read the Bible. But their religion is all in their head.

They don't have a living faith. When they face a difficult situation, they look to see which man can help them. They never think that almighty God can solve that problem.

So, if you're a person, when you face a difficult situation, you don't first think about God. You first think of some man who can help you. But you have a lot of Bible knowledge.

You don't watch movies. But your faith is in man, not in God. And any problem you face, you think only man can solve it, not God.

It doesn't mean that you don't pray. You pray a lot. You fast and pray.

But with zero faith. You can pray for six hours with zero faith. You get nothing.

Without faith, it's like no electricity. Then that is like having no faith. All these lights will go off.

All the fans will go off. You can have 20 fans and 40 lights, nothing will work if there's no electricity. So, faith is lacking.

Many Christians are like that. Always they are worried and anxious about something or the other. They're afraid of the devil.

They're afraid somebody has done witchcraft on them. Because the devil is so powerful. Their verse is this.

The verse which they quote is this. Listen carefully. Greater is he who is in the world than he who is in you.

Have you read that verse? It's not in the Bible. The Bible says greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world. But I've seen so many Christians who are afraid of the devil.

Afraid of witchcraft. They believe with all their heart the devil is almighty. And Jesus is sort of a weak little thing.

That is a sadist. They don't have any faith in miracles or supernatural or anything like that. If I did not believe in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, I would not be standing here to preach.

If I depended on my own ability to serve God, I would have given up long ago. The third group is the Pharisees. They believe in the resurrection and all those things.

But they are so full of rules. They're always judging other people according to do you follow this rule which I follow? And always they are very very critical of everybody. They're very critical of Jesus also.

Their doctrines are all correct. But they were more interested in tradition than God's word. That's another type of Christian we find today.

And Jesus said beware of all these three heavens. These are all marks of religious people. Jesus was different.

For him, tradition was not as important as God's word. See Mark chapter 7. The disciples, the Pharisees came to Jesus once. It says in verse 2, they saw some of Jesus' disciples were eating bread without washing their hands.

Mark 7 verse 2. Because the Pharisees, they don't eat unless they carefully wash their hands in the traditions of the elders. Verse 3. See we wash our hands when we eat to remove all any dirt or anything there. That's good.

So, I'm sure Jesus also did it. The disciples did it too. But this was different.

The Pharisees had a tradition. That when you wash, you must wash from the elbow downwards both sides nicely, then only you must eat. But the disciples didn't do that.

And the Pharisees have got very sharp eyes. Do you have sharp eyes? Not to look at yourself, but to look at other people. Everybody you see, you're always checking up.

To find something to criticize. Some people, whenever they see a sister, the first thing they check is, is she wearing some ornaments? Some group of Christians like that. They've got very sharp eyes.

What type of saree is she wearing? Or the young people, you know, now they have so many special type of shoes. What type of shoes? What is the make of that car he is driving? This is the Pharisees. They're always looking, nothing to do with spirituality, something to criticize.

They go to somebody's house and they are checking, is there some luxurious item in this house which is unnecessary? Why are you bothered he didn't take money from you to build his house? But you know, there are many Christians like that. They're always, they've got very sharp eyes. So the Pharisees are looking to see these disciples, how they're washing their hands.

And it says here in verse 4, they have many other rules like this. So many rules and they're always checking, do you follow these rules? And then they came to Jesus. And question verse 5, why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders? He doesn't know, they're not interested whether you keep God's word or not.

Our elders have given us a certain tradition. And many Christians are like this. And Jesus said, you people are all hypocrites, verse 6. Verse 8, you neglect the commandment of God to keep your tradition.

First you neglect God's commandment to keep your tradition. And second step, verse 9, you set aside God's commandment to keep your tradition. You first neglect it, verse 8, then verse 9 you set it aside.

And then last step, verse 13, you cancel it out completely to keep your tradition. So you see three steps to rejecting God's word. This is the great danger of tradition.

Traditions that you got from your church elders. And you blindly follow it, because you don't read the word of God. Many Christians, they're not sinning, but they are such slaves to traditions.

And they think they are spiritual. They are not spiritual, they are religious. They neglect first the word of God.

They set it aside, verse 9. And then they cancel it completely, verse 13. So the conflict here is tradition versus God's word. See in three verses, Jesus kept these two on two sides.

See like in a cricket match, this team versus this team. They are each competing with the other. One side is Australia, one side is India.

They are fighting with each other. It's exactly like that, tradition and God's word. Each is trying to make the other one out.

Like in a test match, finally somebody will win. Or it will be a draw, nobody will win. It's a match between tradition and God's word.

Sin is also like that. Many Christians know that sin and God's word are opposite. Many Christians know that sin and God's word are opposite.

But some of you may be hearing for the first time today, that tradition is also against God's word. And tradition is like a chain that will prevent you from growing spiritually. Or at least like a weight.

Chapter two. Let me show you Hebrews chapter 12. Have you noticed what it says here, how we must run this race? The Christian life is like a race.

When you are born again, you come to the starting line. You see these people in the Olympic games, they come to a starting line to start the race. That itself is a good thing.

I mean, you and I can't even reach the starting line in the Olympics. Nobody from India came to the starting line in the Olympic races. To come to the starting line itself is a great thing.

To be born again. But do you know, in the Olympics, there is no prize for those who come to the starting line. Who gets the prize? Who gets the gold medal? The person who finishes first.

So, being born again is not enough. You have to come first to the finishing line when Jesus returns. When we talk about being ready for Christ's return, that is like the same as saying, coming first to the finishing line.

So, what I've been telling you yesterday and today will be, how to come first to the finishing line. Many of you may have come to the starting line. But it's a race.

Some Christians are in the starting line forever. The gun is fired, the race has started. They are still tying their shoelaces and sitting down there.

And you see them a few years later, they are still sitting there. That's not Christianity. Have you ever seen that in an Olympic Games? People sitting at the starting line, tying their shoelaces.

I've seen a lot of Christians like that. You see them 10 years after they are born again. There is no development in their life at all.

They are defeated by the same sins in home and work and in their life. This long marathon race, they have not even run anything. This long marathon race, they have not even run anything.

Here, the Christian life is like a race. And here it says, if you want to run the race, there are two things you must get rid of. Verse 1, you must get rid of the sin which so easily entangles us.

That's number one. That's like a man who comes to the starting line with some chain tied to his leg and tied to a pole there. Or a big rope that's going round and round and round his legs, entangling him.

Sin is like that. Every time you sin, it's like one rope going around your leg. If you confess it, forsake it, then you remove the rope.

If you don't confess it, you don't forsake it, and you sin again, one more it goes around your leg. Then you sin another time in some other way. And this is how many Christians are.

How can you run the race with so many times a rope going around your leg? So, it says here that we've got to get rid of this entanglement of sin, number one. The other thing mentioned here is we must lay aside every weight. That's the other thing.

What does it mean to have a weight? So, you picture this man who has come to the starting line of the Olympic Games and he's come in a suit and a tie and with a lot of rocks inside his pocket. How can he ever win the race? He can come like that if he wants. But even in the school games, have you ever seen anybody come in a suit and a tie to run a race? That's a weight.

If you've got heavy things in your pocket, that will slow you down. That's why all these people who run in the races, they have very light clothing. So, we have to lay aside the ropes and lay aside all the heavy clothing.

So, we've got to get rid of sin and we've got to get rid of traditions. Here, traditions are called weights. Jesus also spoke against sin and he spoke against tradition.

Now, there are very few preachers in India who preach on holiness. And even those who preach on holiness may preach against sin. Most of them preach only against external sin.

You know, don't cheat, don't tell lies, don't see dirty movies. Then there are a few who are better than that who preach against inward sin also. Like I said yesterday about dirty thoughts and wrong motives.

But then, I've almost never heard anybody preach about tradition. Of course, most people talk about the ropes but don't talk about the heavy weights. But I think many of you don't realize that your occupation with traditions can hinder you just like the Pharisees.

How is it when Jesus was born some illiterate shepherds knew about it but not the Pharisees who study the Bible so much? It's the same thing is going to happen when he comes again. All these people who go to Bible school like the Pharisees, they won't be ready for his coming. But some simple people like those shepherds they'll find him.

So it's very important for us to be ready for Christ's coming. We can find out how important tradition is for us like this. What are you looking for in a church or when you meet other Christians? You know, when I travel to different places people ask me about my church.

And from their questions I can know what type of people they are. Are they Herodians? Are they Sadducees? Are they Pharisees? If they ask me a question like this Do your people speak in tongues? Unknown tongues. Then I know.

These are Pentecostals. I don't have to ask I automatically know. Or if they ask me Do you break bread every Sunday morning? This must be either Brethren or Hebron one of the two.

Then somebody else will ask me not so much in India but in other countries Do you wash your feet on a Sunday morning? To wash each other's feet. That is another type of group we don't have so many in India. Then some people ask me Do you have faith that God can make us rich? Then I know this is one of those modern prosperity gospels.

Then some people will ask Do your sisters all cover their heads? So many questions like this. Do your young people wear pants? So many questions people have asked me. The one question nobody has asked me till today You know what that is? Do your disciples love one another? Nobody is interested in that.

Do you know what Jesus said? All men will know you are my disciples. When? When you carry your Bible When you take a photograph with the Bible there Is that how you know you are a Christian? Or you babble something in some language nobody can understand? Or you break bread every Sunday? No Jesus said they will know you are my disciples when you love one another. It's easier to break bread every Sunday than to love one another.

It's easier to cover your head than to love one another. It's easier to remove your ornaments than to love one another. It's easier to speak in tongues than to love one another.

It's easier to carry your Bible around than to love one another. It's easier to sit in a five hour meeting on Sunday morning than to love one another. You know, some people think long meeting means spiritual meeting.

This is all tradition. Do you know how much a slave to tradition you are? When I was young, I used to go to an assembly. There was an elder there.

That's an assembly, they used to break bread every Sunday. There was an elder there and another person, a good member of that church. For fifteen, twenty years, they had a fight with each other.

They wouldn't talk to each other with some property dispute. But they would come like holy people on Sunday and break bread. What was that breaking of bread? For them, it was like eating some prasadam in some temple.

It was like getting a ladoo and eating it from the temple. That is what breaking of bread has become in many churches. How can you fight with a brother and break bread with that brother? If you have not forgiven one person in the world, you are not fit to break bread.

That's what I preach in my church. So, it's very easy for us to think we are spiritual because we follow a tradition. There are some pastors who think they are spiritual because they wear white jiba and like that.

Or put a cross around the neck. Even the devil will put a cross around his neck to deceive you. Don't be deceived by all this.

What does the Bible teach? Jesus taught us to love him with all our hearts. Not to love money. To forgive everybody.

To love people in our denomination and people in other denominations. Not to look sharply at people to criticize them. Walk in humility.

Never boast about yourself. This is true Christianity. It's not just coming to meetings every Sunday.

And we have to teach our children also like that. How will we get our children ready for Christ coming? Many of us take our children regularly to Sunday school. That's not enough.

We have to teach them to be Christians in their daily life. If you make your children proud, God will become their enemy. Because God is the enemy of the proud.

I remember when my children were studying in school. They got good marks or they got prizes. I would tell them, you must never show anybody your report card.

You must never make another person feel small because you got better marks. And don't ever think that because you came first in the class, you're going to get some prize in heaven. Some other boy in your school who came 50th in the class, he may get a prize in heaven.

Because he helped somebody, he was kind. I used to tell all my children, remember this, God is not going to ask you what rank did you get in your school. And I used to tell them like this.

I said, when Jesus went to school, who did he become friends with? Did he become friends with all the rich children? Or did he become friends with the poor children? Or did he become friends with the poor children? Somebody whose clothes were torn. If somebody in your class is not good at their studies, go and sit and help them with their studies. See, if you put these values into your children, you will prepare them also for the coming of Christ.

Because there are so many things in the world which is pushing them to become proud. And even in the church, we don't get much help to be humble. How many of you can say honestly that your children have never cheated in one examination in their school? So many children, Christian children cheat in their examination.

They get a promotion, they get good marks. You tell me, do you think if your children cheat in the examination, they are going to be taken to heaven by Jesus Christ? I don't care how good they are, how well they sing in your Sunday school. No one who cheats will ever enter God's kingdom.

I don't care what rank my children come in the school. I don't care if they sing well or not. They have to enter God's kingdom.

I told them when they left home and went to college, I said, I have trained you for 18 years to walk in God's way. When you grow up, if you don't walk in humility, if you don't walk in God's ways, I will not blame you, I

will blame myself. I did not bring you up properly.

Because the Bible says, bring up a child, train up a child in the way he should go. When he is old, he will not go away. And I told them, if I ever hear that any of you are going away from God's ways in college, I will pray that you will have a road accident and break your leg or something and be in hospital.

How many of you fathers will pray that your children should have road accidents and go to hospital? I would. Because I don't want them to go to hell. I don't want them to dishonor God for one day on this earth.

And I said, I will pray against you that God will resist you and break you and humble you, so that you can be saved. Maybe lose your job. Maybe lose your house.

Because I am not interested in these things. I want you to be godly children on this earth. If you pray like that for your children, I tell you, all your children will be godly.

The problem is with parents. They are happy if the tradition is right. Sometimes the children don't dress properly.

And the parents say, what will people in the church say if you dress like that? I say, I don't care what people in the church will say. I will tell my children, what will God think of you? What do you tell your children? What will other people say? What will other people say if you do this? What will other people say if you dress like this? You are training your children for hell. You are training your children to be Pharisees.

You are training your children to live before the face of men, not the face of God. And that's because you yourself live before the face of men. My brothers and sisters, I am not trying to hurt you.

Please listen to me. I am trying to save you. I remember once when I had to rebuke a brother in my own church because I loved him.

And he went to somebody and said, brother, Zack is so hard. So I heard about it. I was not offended or angry because I know I am very hard against sin.

And if somebody says that, that is a compliment to me, not a criticism. Jesus was very hard against sin. Jesus was very hard against sin.

So I called that brother. I said, brother, you may think I am very hard. And I tell you I don't care what you think about me.

I love you and I am concerned about your eternal destiny. These other preachers are only interested in your money and just want to say good things about you. I am going to tell you the truth.

But I will tell you one thing. In the day of judgment, you will turn around and thank me for what I told you. And that's enough for me.

But he understood even before the day of judgment. You know, religion can hinder us from following Jesus. Right at the beginning of the Bible, you know those two brothers who came and made an offering to God, Adam's two children.

One was Cain, one was Abel. God accepted Cain's offering, Abel's offering, but he didn't accept Cain's offering. Why? Was Cain worshipping some idol? No, he was offering to Jehovah.

Abel was offering to Jehovah. They were all worshipping the true God. God rejected one.

Because God saw something in Cain's heart that was not right. And when Christ comes again, there will be people like Cain who had something in their heart against their brother. They will not be ready.

Even though they made so many offerings to God. You remember what Jesus said? When you come to bring an offering to God, there you remember your brother has got something against you. Maybe you shouted at your wife.

Or you fought with somebody. Or you got angry with someone. Bible says, you leave that offering there.

Go and set that right. Then come back and give your offering. How many people do that? Do you go to the breaking of bread with something in your heart against somebody? You are not ready for the coming of Christ.

Dear brothers and sisters, we are close to the coming of the Lord. Let's set our hearts right before He comes. Let's bow our heads before Him.

Let's bow our heads and examine our hearts. For some of you, breaking a bread on Sunday morning is very important. I will tell you something more important.

That is to examine your heart and see if there is anything in your heart which is not right before God. That's the way to be prepared. To meet the Lord.

Heavenly Father, help us each one to be ready for your coming. To have our hearts cleansed from all sin. To be free from traditions.

To have a heart that loves you and loves everybody else. So that we don't end up like Cain, rejected by you.

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