

The Importance of Godly Leadership in Church

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living a New Covenant life, focusing on inner life, personal relationship with God, and godly living, and warns against Pharisaism and judging others.

Duration: 34:20

Scripture: Malachi 1:11, Matthew 23:8, John 14:6, John 17:9, Hebrews 11:6, Revelation 17:5

Topics: "Spiritual Leadership", "Inner Transformation"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the shift from an external righteousness based on the Old Covenant mentality to an inward righteousness of the New Covenant. It highlights the importance of seeking purity, inner transformation, and a wholehearted pursuit of God's kingdom. The speaker challenges the focus on external appearances, titles, and traditions, urging believers to prioritize their inner life, motives, and consistency in following Jesus.

Transcript

and an external righteousness. The Ten Commandments produce an external righteousness. And wherever Christians are occupied with the external, well that means more to them than the internal.

They're really, it's an old covenant mentality, where Christian leaders have to be dressed in a particular dress like the Old Testament high priest. It's a lot of rubbish. You're going back to the old covenant.

Jesus didn't wear a special type of dress. It's not a cross or any such thing. No.

He's just like ordinary human beings. But in the old covenant, the priest was a little different. You know, the Levites were special.

And you find throughout Christendom, a group of people have tried to be special. They would call themselves, Jesus said, don't ever call yourself father, rabbi, or today you would say reverend, or titles. Because the moment you use a title, you're saying, listen, I'm not like your ordinary brothers.

I'm a little above you. Jesus said, you're all brothers. That's new covenant.

That's in... He gave us only two titles to use, and you're welcome to use either of them. Matthew 23. You are all brothers, verse Matthew 23, 8. Don't call yourself rabbi and father and all that.

And the other title he gave us, he said, you are all servants, verse 11. So I have an option. I can call myself a brother or a servant.

The best is to use both. Nothing else. What am I? I'm a brother.

What am I? I'm a servant. This is new covenant. We're all kings.

We're all priests. There's no special tribe of Levites to whom we have to pay our tithes and all. You know the number of churches that live under the old covenant, and they try to be a new covenant church.

It is impossible. You can't take a patch of this new garment and stitch it onto the old one. It doesn't work.

You've got to discard the old garment completely. Jesus said that. You've got to throw away the old wineskin, because the old wineskin is stretched enough and you pour wine into it, it'll burst.

Jesus said that. It's not enough to have the new wine. The new wine is the life of Jesus.

The new wineskin is the new covenant church. I find lots and lots of Christians are very interested in the new wine, but it's when it comes to the new wineskin that the conflict begins. It's just like in Jesus' time.

They didn't kill him because he washed people's feet. Nobody killed Jesus for washing people's feet. They didn't even kill him because he said he must not lust after women.

I think the Pharisees would have agreed with that. They killed him because he pointed out their traditions were wrong. What are you guys occupied with? Picking grain on the Sabbath day and not carrying a bed on the Sabbath day? Is this what God is all about? They got furious with him, because these are the things that meant so much to them.

And you find that they killed him because he rocked the boat of their traditions. Not because he preached holiness. And I'll tell you something today.

You can go and preach holiness even in the Roman Catholic Church. They'll let you preach again. But try and shake their traditions.

Leave alone Catholic. You can go to a Pentecostal church or anything in between. Preach holiness.

Every church will accept you. But go and preach against their traditions. They get all disturbed, especially the leaders, especially those in authority.

And Jesus was always disturbing the people in authority. The common people heard him gladly, the Bible says, but the leaders were upset. They're the ones who instigated people to crucify him.

And so, if you don't understand that the Old Covenant is external, the New Covenant is inward. The sacrifices were external in the Old Covenant. In the New Covenant, sacrifices are inward, hidden.

Nobody must know the sacrifices you made. And your inner life is more important than your external life. That's the Sermon on the Mount is basically saying that.

Your inner life, your inner attitude, your motives, are far more important. Not what you do, but why did you do it. Not what you look like on the outside, but what you look like on the inside.

In fact, with all the bad things that Jesus said about the Pharisees, you know there were two good things that he said about them? What are the two good things? One, your doctrine is absolutely right. Isn't it good to get a certificate from Jesus that our doctrine is absolutely right? Matthew 23, here it is. He told his disciples, the Pharisees are sitting in the chair of Moses, Matthew 23, to everything they tell you to do, do.

Do you think Jesus would say that about the Buddhists, or any other non-Christian religion, or liberal Christianity? All that they tell you to do, do. He wouldn't say that about the Sadducees. The Sadducees were liberal.

They didn't believe in the resurrection of angels or spirits. He wouldn't say, all that the Sadducees tell you to do, do. But he said to his disciples, every single thing that the Pharisees tell you to do, you can do.

Which means, I give a certificate that their doctrine is right. The second thing Jesus said about the Pharisees, which is good, Matthew 23, in verse 25, you clean the outside of the cup and the dish. In other words, your external life is righteous.

So what have we learned from these two verses? Dear brothers and sisters, let's take it seriously. When your doctrine is absolutely right, certified by Jesus Christ, when your external life is absolutely righteous, you could be a Pharisee. Have you understood that? You're under the Old Covenant.

And yet, many, many Christians are glorying in what? My external testimony is absolutely upright. My doctrine is absolutely fundamental and right. Brother, you could be the biggest Pharisee in town.

And unless you face up to it, you'll never enter the New Covenant. The New Covenant is inward. Clean the inside of the cup, he said.

And any person who does not concentrate entirely on his inner life will never enter the New Covenant. He will look before the face of men like Pharisees, glorying in the fact that his doctrine is right, his external testimony is good, he'll never build the New Covenant Church. First of all, he doesn't even have the new wine.

Where is he going to go into the new wine scheme? This is the fundamental problem. A lot of Christians don't even have the new wine. It's inward, inward, inward.

The inner life, that inner walk with God. When Jesus comes, what is he going to expose? The Bible tells us. It's like if you're a student in school or college, and you're going to have an examination tomorrow in biology.

You're not going to study history today. The examination is in biology, you're going to study biology. And if I know that in the final examination, which is when Christ comes back, he's going to examine a particular subject, I better concentrate on that particular subject all my life.

Here it is. The examination, the question paper has already been given to you before the examination. Isn't it wonderful to go for an examination and you've got the question paper years in advance? You've got absolutely no excuse if you don't get 100%.

Here it is, 1 Corinthians 4, and verse 5. Don't judge others. Good word. Before the time, all those who got an itch to judge other people, God says, just hang on, I'll give you the opportunity.

Just wait until the Lord comes. Because when he comes, he's going to reveal two things. Not your external life.

The things hidden in darkness. All the areas of your life that no other person knew anything about. Maybe your wife didn't know it either.

Your private life, your thought life, your secret financial dealings which nobody knew anything about, which you carefully concealed from everybody. Everything that is hidden in darkness. It says here, when the Lord comes, that is the number one thing he is going to reveal.

And secondly, he's going to reveal all the hidden motives of people's hearts. Not what they did, but why they did it. Not how well they preached, but why they preached.

Why did they serve God? Was it for money? Was it for honor? It's going to be exposed. God's not going to value our sermons and say, were people impressed by it? Forget it. I want to know why you preached.

I want to know why you served me. Was money a factor in it? Was honor a factor in it? Then you're in darkness. Inner life.

Inner life. That's the thing. That's why it says don't judge other people because you don't know their inner life.

And 90% depends on the inner life. All you see is their temper and external, and you judge them. It's like a teacher who evaluates a person's answer paper by just marking the first question.

What about the other nine questions? You haven't even checked them. And you pass a judgment, you give marks. You deserve to be sacked from that school.

You can't judge a person on the basis of one question out of ten. They may have got the other nine right. So 90% of our life is hidden from others.

We meet each other in church meeting, and actually we know only about 2% of another person's life. Not even 10%. Maybe his wife knows 10%, you know only about 2%.

Your husband knows 10% of your life, others know only 2%. How in the world can we judge a person knowing 2% of his life? That's the folly of judgment. That's why it says judge yourself, because you know 100% of your life.

You know the things hidden in darkness in your life. You know the motives with which you are doing things. Inward, that's the first word of the New Covenant.

The second word of the New Covenant is always. Not rejoice on Sundays. Not rejoice for three hours when we are having what we call praise and worship.

Always. There's no word in the scripture which says rejoice on Sundays or whenever you come together. It's only rejoice always.

Pray, Luke 18.1, pray always. You know I used to read these books about people who prayed 4 hours a day and 2 hours a day and they only depressed me. I'm encouraged by scripture which says pray always.

So when people ask me how long do you pray, I say always. Rejoice, Philippians 4.4, always. Giving thanks, always.

Ephesians 5.20, 1 Thessalonians 5.18. This is the will of God. Always give thanks for everything. What about taking up the cross, 2 Corinthians 4.10. Always bearing in our body the dying of Jesus.

Always. Take a concordance and look at the word always in the New Testament. It's a very interesting study.

There are at least 7 places where it says the things you have to do. Always, always. Rejoice, pray.

Bear the dying of Jesus. Always. This was not possible in the Old Covenant.

You'll never find an Old Covenant verse. You'll never find a verse in the first 39 books of the Bible which says you must rejoice always or give thanks always or pray always. It was not possible.

They were never asked not to lust after women. There was no question of an inner life in the Old Covenant. There was no question of doing something always.

What were they supposed to do in the Old Covenant? Come three times a year to Jerusalem for their conferences. Come once a week to the synagogue or temple and praise the Lord. Any Christian who does that is like a Jew underneath the Old Covenant.

Once a week come and shout and praise and raise your hands and clap and bang the cymbals and the drums and everything and rejoice. And the rest of the week, it doesn't matter if you fight with your wife and yell and scream and do all types of wrong things, make sure you come again on Sunday to praise the Lord and lift up your hand and look very happy. And the MC in front, the Master of Ceremony says, Smile everybody.

We're supposed to smile. We're supposed to rejoice. Come on, clap everybody.

For how long? It's in the time of temptation that we're supposed to give thanks and rejoice. It's not possible under the Old Covenant. I'm just trying to tell you that the vast majority of Christians I've met in my life are living under the Old Covenant.

How in the world can we build a New Covenant Church with Old Covenant people? With Old Covenant bricks, how can we build a New Covenant building? And the fault is with the leaders. God has to find a man. If Paul lived under the Old Covenant, he would never have built a New Covenant Church anywhere.

God is looking for men. Like I said yesterday, that quote from E.M. Bounds, Men are looking for better methods. God is looking for better men.

Men are God's method. And I want to say to you, my dear brothers, especially because God gives the leadership to men, God is looking for men. And if He can find one man in the beginning, He'll add another to him and start a New Covenant Church.

But you've got to seek to live a New Covenant life. And God does not force us into it. The amazing thing is He doesn't even force people to go to Heaven.

I could be wrong, but my guess is only 5% of humanity is ever going to make it into God's Kingdom and Heaven. 95% are going to Hell. And God doesn't force them.

He doesn't catch them by the neck and say, Come on, you've got to go to Heaven. He's not going to force us to live a godly life. It's entirely up to you.

I think of that Old Testament story, you read it sometime in 2 Kings 2, where Elisha is aware that Elijah is going to be taken up today to rapture up to Heaven. And Elijah keeps testing him. Okay, we've come to Gilgal now.

You've got to stay here, Elijah. Elisha, the Lord sent me onwards. I've got to go to Bethel.

Elisha says, Sorry, I'm going to follow you. Imagine a prophet telling you to stay somewhere and says, I'm not going to listen to you. I'm going to come with you.

They go up to Bethel and Elijah, the prophet, says, Elisha, stay here. I have to go to Jericho. Elisha says, Nothing doing.

I'm coming. They go to Jericho. Stay here.

The Lord sent me to... I've got to go beyond Jordan. I'm going to follow. He follows, follows, follows.

Despite being tried, Elijah tried to stop him, stop him, stop him. He was testing him. How far do you want to go? Are you happy with Gilgal? Your sins all forgiven? Are you happy with Bethel, the house of God? You found a fellowship, you found a good church to go to.

Are you happy with that? He says, you go to Jericho, the mighty part of God. You experience something. Are you happy with that? Go to Jordan, the river.

You've understood something about the cross, brokenness. You're a red watchman knee. Oh, great.

Are you happy now? You stay there. And... Elijah says, no. Finally, Elijah asked him, What do you want? What do you think I've been following you for all this time? I'm not asking you to make me the next director or the next pastor after you resign.

I couldn't care less for all that. Give me a double portion of your spirit. He had to be tested.

And what did Elijah say? You asked for a hard thing. It's all in 2 Kings 2. Read it sometime. If you went to one of today's charismatic pastors, he'd say, oh, there's no problem.

Come right here. I'll lay hands on you and you get it. And he lays his empty hand on your empty head.

You get nothing. Elijah said, you asked for a hard thing. You think it's an easy thing to live an anointed life? If you see me as I go up, he says, you'll receive it.

If you don't see me, sorry. Elijah there is a picture of Jesus Christ. And Elisha is a picture of us.

Jesus went up to heaven. Elisha was to carry on that ministry like we are to. But he tests us to see how far do you want to go.

And I believe all of us have been tested in the past and are being tested now. You've come so far with God. Are you happy? Some people say, that's fine, Lord.

I found a good church to sort of settle down and I'm okay. That's just fine. Stay there.

But there are a few Elishas who move on. And will never be satisfied until they've got God's best. All of your new wine.

All of the new wineskin. The Lord says, haven't you got the new wine now, the life of Christ? You've got a good testimony. You've got an inner life.

Are you happy with that? Yes, Lord. It's wonderful. Stay there.

But there are others who say, no, I'm not happy. I will never be happy until I see a new covenant church planted where I am. How many of you have that burden? You think God has placed you in some place just for you to wander around and get a good testimony as a godly brother? You've got a reputation as a godly sister.

You're seeking your own honor. Jesus taught us to pray, hallowed be thy name. That should be the number one desire in my heart.

Should not be that I should have a testimony as a godly brother. I can encourage other people to come to a godly life. We're seeking our own honor.

God's looking for those who will pray, Lord, if you look deep down in my heart, I've eliminated all other desires. I had all types of other desires when I was an unconverted person, worldly desires. Then I became a religious person.

And I had religious desires, but still seeking my own honor. But I got rid of that. Now I want to be spiritual.

Where my primary, deepest longing of my life is, hallowed be your name. Let the name of Jesus be glorified. And there's one way for the name of Jesus to be glorified.

It's when his kingdom is established in that place. And his will is done. And his kingdom is in the church.

When the Lord can plant a testimony. It doesn't have to be a big one, but it's got to be a pure one. Let me show you that from the Old Testament.

In the book of Malachi, Malachi was the last of the prophets. That was the last message God was giving to Israel. That had backslidden so terribly.

And he said to them through Malachi, I'm finished with you guys. Finished. The last days of Israel are like the last days of Christendom today.

We need to see what the Lord is saying. The message of Malachi has got a great message for our time today. And he says, you no longer sacrifice the best of what you have.

Malachi, that's all in Malachi, chapter 1, verse 6-9. You sacrifice the cheap. You say you have to give a lamb.

Okay, let's pick out some blind lamb. It's a bit of a nuisance. In any case, I'll sacrifice it to the Lord.

Give the dregs to the Lord. Give the best I have for the world. And give what's left over to God.

Left over of my time. Left over of my energy, money. Left over.

I'll give a little bit to God. That's exactly Christendom today. That's how it was in Malachi.

Have I got a sort of a lame bullock lets me offer that to God. I wouldn't give my best. The best of my time, the best of my energy must be for sport and television and enjoying myself.

I'd keep a little bit of time for God. That's Malachi days. And that's Christendom today.

And the Lord says, I wish there were some leaders here, verse 10, who would shut the gates. And say, we don't want any of this. We don't want people here who are just going to give the dregs to God.

We want people in our church who want to give God the very best of their life. Totally. For whom Jesus means more than anything on this earth.

More than their father, mother, wife, children, brother, sister, job, house, everything. We want such people. But brother, you'll get very few people in your church.

That's fine. We'll have only a few. That's enough.

But we don't want a big crowd of half-hearted people just to show that we're a great church. Not interested. Let Babylon have the multitudes.

It says here, I finished with you, Israel, but don't think I finished with my purpose for the world. That's the thing. I remember when we started meeting as a church, way back in 36 years ago in our home.

This is the verse the Lord spoke to us. Malachi 1, verse 11. From the rising of the sun, that is from the east, all the way to the west.

In other words, in the whole world. You know, Israel was thinking, we're the only people God's going to use. God says, rubbish.

I finished with you guys. Now something's going to happen from the east to the west, all across the earth. In every part of the world.

It would still take another 300 or 400 years before it happened after Malachi, but he was predicting something that was going to happen in the future. My name is going to be great among all the nations of the world. My name is going to be hallowed.

This prayer that we pray, our father, hallowed be thy name. How is it going to be hallowed? Here it is. How shall this prayer, hallowed be your name, be fulfilled in every place from east to west, whichever country, whichever nation you're in, here is the answer.

In every place, there's going to be an offering that is pure. That's the word, pure. That's the thing that stood out to me.

An offering that is pure, and thus my name will be great and hallowed among the nations. So what the Lord is looking for in every place is not an offering that's large, with 10,000 people, maybe 10. That's pure.

Do you know that's what the Lord's looking for? While Christendom is looking for what is large, God's looking for what is pure, from the east to the west. And yet, everywhere you find Christian leaders rejoicing in largeness. What was our offering last month? Who cares? That's Babylon.

How many members are in our church? Who cares? It's Babylon. Is it pure, brother? That's what God's looking for. Where do we find men who are seeking to establish a pure testimony for the glory of God? If God can find one man like that, He'll do something.

And if He hasn't done anything through you, till now in your locality, you ask yourself whether you've understood God's standard of purity, what the new covenant is all about. Are you seeking yourself, first of all, to come to this inner life, to come to this life where your life is consistent, where Monday is no different from Sunday, where you praise the Lord on Monday evening, or when everything goes wrong, as much as you do on Sunday morning in some service that you go to. I remember it was not true in my life for 16 years after I was born again.

I didn't have an inner life, and what I had was not always. But I saw that in scripture, and I said, Lord, like Elisha, I said, Lord, I'm not going to stop anywhere along the way. I want to go all the way till I have the double portion of your spirit.

Everything that the apostles had on the day of Pentecost, I want to have. I didn't know anything about the Holy Spirit in those early days, and people told me I had to go to the Pentecostal church to get it. And I went there, and I'll tell you honestly, I'm not criticizing anybody, but I was thoroughly disappointed.

There was just a lot of noise and emotion, and a whole lot of leaders who loved money, and I said, I don't want this. I came back to my room, and I said, Lord, I don't want what they have. I want what Peter, James, and John got on the day of Pentecost, the real thing.

And if it takes me 10 years to get that, I'll wait. But I don't want any cheap counterfeit just to boast that I've joined the club, or that I got something. I want the real power that you gave the apostles on the day of Pentecost that transformed that timid, fearful Peter who couldn't witness to a servant woman who made him a bold person who could point, look at the chief priests and say, You crucified the Lord of glory.

I said, I want that power. Are you seeking for that? Power to live a godly life. I was defeated inwardly.

As a blind young Christian, my inner life, I was defeated. But I said, Lord, it's true. I'm defeated.

I want to overcome. If you're passionate, I'll tell you something. I'll tell you a little secret about God.

It's not a secret, really. He's a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. There is no partiality with God.

These are just two verses in Scripture. He's a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Hebrews 11, 6. And Romans 2. There's no partiality with God.

What He's done for others, He will do for you. What He did for Elisha, He'll do for you. If you seek Him.

There are laws. He gives grace to the humble. He rewards those who diligently seek Him.

And if someone else got more than you, it's because he sought more diligently. Maybe he was willing to fall to the ground and die, and that's why there was fruit. Yeah? That's our calling.

If we are eager to pursue after God, we will find Him. There is no partiality with God. Now, I believe that God wants to establish a pure testimony in every place.

And He's looking for a man first. In Babylon. You know, today's Christendom is just like Babylon.

Revelation 17. Preoccupied with money. Babylon has got two things about Babylon.

Revelation 17, getting involved with politics and political leaders. And Revelation 18, getting involved with money. Wherever you see a Christendom, Christendom leaders, who are, you know, hanging around with political leaders and involved with money.

That's Babylon. Call it what you like. It's Babylon.

Right from ancient Rome to today. It's Babylon. It's not Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is occupied with God. Jesus wasn't hanging around with Herod and Pilate and Annas and Caiaphas all the time. He was hanging around with a few fishermen who were eager to follow God.

Where do we find such people today? Christian leaders want to hang around with political leaders and governors and they boast in that. And with religious bishops and things like that. Jesus didn't have time for all these people.

He was with ordinary simple men who were wholehearted, following the Lord. He didn't even pray for these other people. Do you know that? Do you know who Jesus prays for? Do you know that a lot of people Jesus doesn't even pray for? Let's turn to John 17.

A lot of people I don't waste my time praying for, I'll tell you honestly, because I want to follow Jesus. A lot of us say we want to follow Jesus, but we don't look carefully in Scripture to see what Jesus was like. Let me show you what He was like in John 17.

It's that classic chapter that tells us how Jesus prayed. And here it is. John 17.6 I manifested thy name to the men whom you gave me.

And that was only 11 people. Thine they were, and you gave them to me. And we know that He was speaking only about the 11 because you go to verse 12.

While I was with them, I kept them in thy name. And I guarded them, and none of them has perished except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. There we know He was talking about the 12.

Nobody else. One was lost. The Scripture might be fulfilled.

But the 11. He was only thinking about the 11 in this John 17. And He says, I'm praying that they will be one.

They are not of the world. Verse 16. As I'm not of the world.

I'm not asking you to take them out of the world. Verse 15. But keep them from evil.

And I pray, not only for them, but for those, verse 20, who one day will believe in me through their word. That comes down to 20 centuries to us. Who will take the words of the apostles.

And take it seriously. When John the apostle writes these things I write to you. 1 John 2 verse 1. That you may not sin.

Who will accept that word. That I should not sin. Who will accept the word of the apostle Peter.

Who says in 1 Peter 4.1. He who has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin. Those who accept my word which I will send through them. I want to pray for them also.

And verse 9. I'm not praying for the rest of the people in the world. Some people say you should pray for America. What about praying for Afghanistan? Doesn't God love people in Afghanistan? How many of you pray for Afghanistan? They'll be converted.

You think God loves America more than Afghanistan? I'm sorry to disappoint you. He doesn't. He loves all the people in the world.

God so loved the world. He's got no favorites. India is not his favorite.

America is not his favorite. He never asks America to repent. Or Canada to repent.

Or India to repent. He asks the church to repent. If you don't believe that.

Go to Revelation chapter 2 and chapter 3. And see who he asks to repent. In the Old Testament the prophets told the different nations and all to repent. But you never read that.

You don't find Peter getting up and telling Rome to repent. Or Jerusalem to repent. It's all crazy ideas.

And so many believers swallow this. You know why? Because they don't read the Bible. They listen to Christian television and preachers more than they read the Bible.

And what the Lord told me is that these people don't read the Bible. They deserve to be deceived. I've said that everywhere.

If you don't read the scriptures, you deserve to be deceived. Never in the New Testament do you find any prophet or apostle praying for a nation. It says God has called out of the nations the people under his name.

He's calling the church to repent. Christians are to repent. He says, I do not ask on behalf of the world, verse 9. I ask on behalf of these who are my wholehearted disciples.

And I'll tell you, my brothers, sisters, those are the only people I pray for. I don't ask for these worldly Christians. I ask for those who will take his word seriously.

Who want to be free from sin. Who want to be a pure testimony for his name. Because my prayer is not save the world.

My prayer is, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Lord, you said that the way to life is narrow and very few will find it. I want to pray for those few. There's got to be a testimony for your name on this earth.

That's what God's looking for. I'll tell you honestly, he's not trying to convert the world. If God wanted to convert the world, he could do that very easily by casting everybody by the neck and making them bow down to him.

He doesn't do that. He wants people voluntarily to choose the way of discipleship. He wants men who will proclaim discipleship.

Not just believe in Christ and you'll go to heaven. But love Jesus more than your father, mother, brother, sister, boyfriend, girlfriend.

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