

(The New Covenant Servant) 7. Building the Church

by Zac Poonen

The ultimate purpose of God in the new covenant is to produce 'ONE NEW MAN' - one Body in Christ, and this is achieved through the presence of God, the gift of prophecy, and spiritual authority.

Scripture: Matthew 7:29, Matthew 18:18, John 17:10, John 17:17, 1 Corinthians 14:24, Ephesians 2:15, Philipians 3:7, 1 Timothy 3:15, 2 Peter 1:19

Topics: "Church Unity", "Spiritual Authority"

Description

Zac Poonen preaches on the ultimate purpose of God in the new covenant, emphasizing the importance of unity in the Body of Christ. Under the new covenant, God desires a unified Body, not just individual godly persons. The presence of God is crucial in a new-covenant church, where Divine life should be evident, convicting hearts and manifesting God's glory. The church should be a place where the truth sets people free, guided by the Spirit of truth. Spiritual authority is essential for building the Body of Christ, requiring sacrificial living and a willingness to give all to God.

Transcript

The ultimate purpose of God in the new covenant is not to produce a number of Christ-like individuals, but to produce "ONE NEW MAN" - one Body in Christ (Ephesians 2:15, 16).

Under the old covenant, God raised up a Moses, an Elijah and a John the Baptist. They were all lone men who stood for God as witnesses in their generation. But the church was a mystery hidden from them all. Israel could become only a congregation of individuals, and not a body. In a body, all the members are inter-related, with each having a personal and inward connection with the head.

When Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant came, He sent out His disciples two by two. They were no longer to be lone witnesses unto Him. He also told them that His presence would be powerfully manifest wherever at least two of His disciples were united in His Name (Matthew 18:18-20) - because where two are united in Jesus' Name, there is a representation of the Body of Christ.

As servants of the new covenant, we must never rest satisfied with individual brothers and sisters becoming godly. The local assembly itself must be a representation of the Body of Christ. Otherwise we have failed to fulfil God's highest purpose.

The Presence of God

What is the primary mark of a new-covenant church? Many think that it is having a particular pattern of church government and a particular form of meeting. But it is neither of these. The important thing about the church is that it should have Divine life .

When a baby is being formed in its mother's womb, in its early weeks it does not even have the shape (pattern) of a human being. It only has life. The shape (pattern) comes later. It is the same when a new church is being established anywhere. It will take time for the proper pattern to emerge. But meanwhile there must be life.

The primary mark of a new-covenant church is that God is present in its midst. When the church comes together, and everyone prophesies under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, those who come to the meeting should be convicted of their sins and acknowledge that God is present in the meeting (1 Corinthians 14:24, 25). That, and that alone proves that such a church has the right pattern.

If the presence of God is absent, we must confess that we have come short of God's perfect plan - and we must repent.

Consider the tabernacle that the Israelites made in the wilderness. Its pattern was written down clearly in the book of Exodus. The Philistines could easily have made a similar tabernacle.

But there was one thing that they could never have reproduced - and that was God's presence in the Most Holy Place, manifested as a fiery flame lighting up the tabernacle. That was the most important part of the tabernacle. It is the same with the church.

You may see a powerful church somewhere, and imagine that its secret is the pattern it follows in its meetings, or the doctrines it preaches!! And so you imitate that pattern, and preach the same doctrines, and imagine that you have a new-covenant church. But you are deceiving yourself. Without the glory of God being powerfully present in your midst, there is no new-covenant church there at all.

When God is powerfully present in our midst as a church, His light will continually show us what is pleasing to Him and what isn't. That light will warn us of dangers that lie ahead. It will not only drive away the darkness, but the prince of darkness as well. The powers of Hell will never be able to prevail against such a church.

It is no use having only our doctrines right in the church. What we need more than anything else is the presence of God.

The Spirit of Prophecy

When God is present in our midst, we will hear Him speaking to us powerfully in the meetings. That is the meaning of prophecy.

In old covenant times, prophecy was meant for foretelling the future and for guiding people as to what they should do. But now, in the new covenant, prophecy is for exhortation (challenging, rebuking and correcting people), consolation (comforting and encouraging people) and edification (building up the church) (1 Corinthians 14:3).

Prophecy is the main gift of the Spirit by which the church is built. The prophetic word is "a lamp shining in a dark place" (2 Peter 1:19). Without this light constantly burning in the church, it will be impossible to escape the wiles of the prince of darkness. The church itself will sink into darkness. The main reason why many Christian groups that started out well degenerated over a period of time was because the gift of prophecy gradually disappeared.

Whenever God's presence departed from Israel in Old Testament times, one mark of His forsaking them was that "there was no longer any prophet" among them (Psalm 74:1, 9).

Israel always degenerated whenever they did not have a prophet, as in the days of Eli (See 1 Samuel 3:1). But Israel rose into a place of eminence when they had a prophet, as in the days of Samuel (1 Samuel 3:20). It was through Samuel that David was anointed as the king of Israel. And that began a glorious new era in Israel's history.

When Samuel prophesied, "the Lord did not allow any of his words to fall to the ground" (1 Samuel 3:19 - KJV).

We too must pray earnestly for such a powerful ministry of prophecy in the church that every word we speak goes straight home to people's hearts like an arrow to its mark.

Through the gift of prophecy, "the secrets of people's hearts are disclosed" (1 Corinthians 14:25). Thus everyone in the church will get light on the deceitfulness of sin.

We are commanded to "exhort one another daily (in the church), lest we be hardened through the DECEITFULNESS of sin" (Hebrews 3:13). There are sins that are obvious and there are sins that are subtle and hidden. But the spirit of prophecy will expose both the deceitfulness of sin as well as the schemes of Satan, so that we are protected.

We see an illustration of this in the Old Testament. When the king of Aram was warring against Israel, every time he and his generals planned in secret to attack Israel at a certain point, his plans were revealed to the king of Israel by Elisha, through prophecy (2 Kings 6:8-12). Thus the king of Israel knew exactly where to place his army to defend the country, and saved his nation again and again.

That is how the Lord, through prophecy in the church-meetings, warns us in advance of the areas where Satan is going to attack us in the coming days. So we can be on our guard in those areas.

Paul exhorted Timothy to fight the good fight (against Satan) by paying attention to the prophecies made concerning him (1 Timothy 1:18).

Again and again, we have found in the church in Bangalore, that the spirit of prophecy in our meetings has warned many brothers and sisters in advance of the points at which they were going to face the enemy's attacks in the days that followed. Through the prophetic word, God has given wisdom to everyone of us in the church - wisdom for our personal life, for our family life, and for our church-life.

Proverbs 24:3, 4 says, "By WISDOM a house is built, and by KNOWLEDGE the rooms are filled with pleasant and precious riches".

There is a place for knowledge in the church - God's Word taught by anointed teachers. But knowledge is like the furniture, with which a house is furnished after it has been built by WISDOM.

So if we only have Bible-knowledge in our churches, we will be like a family living on an empty plot of ground with a lot of expensive furniture around us, but with no house - no walls, no roof and not even a floor!! That's why we are exhorted in the New Testament to pursue after WISDOM first of all."If anyone lacks wisdom let him ask God who gives liberally to all" (James 1:4).

It is through wisdom that the church is built. And God's wisdom comes to the church through the gift of prophecy.

That is why we must "earnestly seek to prophesy" (1 Corinthians 14:1, 5), in every meeting of the church. Meetings for Bible-study and evangelism are good. But if we are to build the church as a pure testimony for Christ, then the gift of prophecy must be given the FIRST place.

The Pillar and Support of the Truth

In 1 Timothy 3:15, the church is called the pillar and support of the truth. God desires all men to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). What is this truth that God wants all men to know? In John 8:32, Jesus said, "You shall know the truth and the truth will make you free." Truth is that which sets people free from sin (John 8:34).

All bondage of every sort arises because we don't know the truth. Cultists hold their followers in bondage by keeping them ignorant of the truth. The more we know of the truth, the more free we will become. The Spirit of the Lord brings liberty (2 Corinthians 3:17).

In John 16:13, Jesus told His disciples, "When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth." The Holy Spirit is called "the Spirit of truth", because He seeks to lead us into all the truth.

Truth is a vast land like the land of Canaan. And even as God led the Israelites to possess Canaan little by little, the Holy Spirit also desires to lead us to possess all of the truth. The more we know of the truth, the more we will be set free - from sin, from people's opinions and from unScriptural religious traditions etc.

So when the Church is called "the pillar and support of the truth", it means that the church must be a place where people come to hear the truth and are set more and more free. If people are not being liberated in our churches, we are failing in our ministry.

To set people free, we need the word of truth (God's Word) and the Spirit of truth (the Holy Spirit). Jesus prayed to the Father saying, "Sanctify them in the truth. Thy word is truth" (John 17:17). God's Word is the truth that sanctifies people. We cannot build the church if we don't have God's Word expounded regularly in the church in the power of the Holy Spirit. To be true servants of God and of the new covenant, we must become men of the Word and men of the Spirit.

For the church itself to be the pillar and support of the truth, there must be anointed brothers and sisters in the church who have become pillars themselves. In Revelation 3:12, the Lord tells us that if we overcome, He will make us pillars in His church. No-one other than Jesus Himself can make us pillars in the church. We can't make ourselves pillars, nor can any servant of God appoint us as pillars.

But the Lord makes all overcomers - brothers and sisters - pillars in His church. Even a sister can be a pillar, if she is an overcomer.

We mustn't forget however, that pillars are built to support a building's weight. So when the Lord makes us pillars in His church, it will be to bear the burdens of others. Those who are selfish and unwilling to bear such burdens do not qualify to become pillars.

There are many brothers who not elders, but who are still pillars in the churches. If we are overcomers in our daily life, we can be pillars, even if we do not hold any position of leadership. It is God alone Who appoints and attests people as pillars in His church.

Spiritual Authority

A servant of God must be one who speaks with spiritual authority. We read that Jesus taught with spiritual authority, unlike the scribes (Matthew 7:29). We cannot build the church if we don't have spiritual authority. The scribes knew the doctrine, but they did not have spiritual authority in their ministry.

We can assert our authority over others by our age, our education, our Bible knowledge or our soul-power. But none of these are the basis for spiritual authority. We must be attested by God.

If we have spiritual authority, we won't force our views on others. People will have confidence in us, because they recognize the authority of God in us. If we impose our authority on others just because we are in a position of leadership, then we have not understood spiritual authority at all. Our attitude towards others should be like that of Elihu who said, "No fear of me should terrify you, nor should my pressure weigh heavily on you." (Job 33:7).

Do others feel any pressure from you in any area? Or do you give them perfect freedom to act according to their conscience?

When people recognise that we have Divine authority, they will come to us themselves, for advice. If they don't consult us, it proves that they don't have any confidence in us.

Consider an example: When our children are small, it is easy for us as fathers to impose our will on them and to compel them to consult us in their every decision. But when they grow up and set up their own homes, then we discover whether they really have confidence in us or not. If they do, they will consult us voluntarily.

That is how we know in the church also, whether others have confidence in us or not. Do they consult us voluntarily?

If they feel more free to go to a younger brother for advice, that would indicate that they have more confidence in him. There is no need to be jealous of such a brother. We should rejoice that God has a spiritual man in the church whom people can go to for help.

In Matthew 18:18, Jesus told His disciples of the authority that the church has to bind evil Satanic forces, and to set bound people free. This authority, He said, could never be exercised by one person, but only by a minimum of two people - and these two must be in total agreement in their spirits, for only then would the Lord be mightily present in their midst to give them His authority (Matthew 18:19, 20).

"Where two or three have gathered together in My Name, there I am in their midst" (Matthew 18:20) is one of the most misunderstood verses in the New Testament. That verse is not referring to any two or three people gathering together as Christians. No. It is referring to the authority of the church (see verses

15-18), exercised by two or three who have been gathered by the Holy Spirit, and who are united in spirit, for the glory of the Name of Jesus. Such a Body will have tremendous authority to bind Satan's activities and to free God's people from the grip of Satan. This is the authority that the elders of every church should be exercising constantly.

We cannot bind Satan or his demons themselves - as some ignorant believers seek to do - for God will do that only when Jesus returns (Revelation 20:1, 2; See Matthew 8:29 also). But we can bind (restrain) the activities of Satan and his demons (2 Thessalonians 2:7).

Satan knows about this authority that two or three leaders acting in perfect unison have. And so he will do his best to prevent the leaders in every church from coming to unity. If there is no unity at the leadership level, the Body of Christ can never be built.

It is not serious if two or three members in a church are not united. That is sad, but not as serious as the leaders not being one. Every church must have a core of two or three leaders who are totally one. The Lord is not looking for 200 or 300 who are united - but for just two or three in the leadership who are really one. There His authority will be powerfully present.

Warnings - Men Who Sought their Own

If God sees that we are building our own kingdom, or running a one-man show, He will just leave us alone. There are plenty of such one-man shows in Christendom today. They say they are doing "Christian work". But it is done for personal profit - either to gain money or to gain honour. And so they are all building Babylon.

God cannot be fooled. He will never attest such preachers, even if they gather many followers. They may build old-covenant congregations, but they will not be able to build the new-covenant church.

In Acts 5:36, we read of a Theudas who gathered 400 people to follow him. A church having 400 members can look quite impressive. But "it came to nothing". We also read of a Judas who drew many people after him. "He too perished" (Acts 5:37).

There have always been people like that in the history of Christendom. But to build the Body of Christ is quite a different matter. We may gather 400 people in our city. Yet we will be no better than Theudas, if we are seeking our own. God will never back us up. Spiritual authority is so tremendously valuable that God won't give it to anyone and everyone.

Judas Iscariot must have got quite a reputation by being part of Jesus' team! People respected Jesus so highly. And Judas must have got a share of that honour too. But it did not change his self-centred nature. He still perished.

In the same way, Demas was a co-worker of the apostle Paul. It must have been a great honour to be on Paul's team. Many believers respected Paul highly, and Demas also got a share of that honour by being associated with Paul. But inside his heart he did not have Paul's self-denying, sacrificial spirit. Demas mingled closely with godly, selfless brothers like Timothy. But he did not imbibe their spirit.

That happened in Jesus' time and in Paul's time. And it is happening even today. There are brothers who have got a reputation for themselves, not through their own life or ministry, but just by their being associated with some other godly brother whom God has mightily attested to.

If we are like that, our end can also be like that of Judas Iscariot and Demas. We cannot have Divine authority merely by being associated with some godly brother. It is when we have cleansed ourselves from seeking our own gain, our own name, our own comfort, our own convenience, and everything that is ours, that God will back us up. Then alone will we have spiritual authority to build the Body of Christ.

Do we seek to build God's kingdom or our own kingdom? God sees our hearts. Paul once said that he did not have a single co-worker with him like Timothy. All were seeking their own, and not the things of Christ. Timothy alone was genuinely concerned about building the Body of Christ (Philippians 2:19-21).

Sacrificing Everything

We would all like to have the authority that a man like Paul had. But to have that, we have to give up everything like he did, and consider it all as worthless rubbish (Philippians 3:7-9).

Jesus said to the Father, "All that is mine is Thine." And so He could also add, "All that is Thine is Mine" (John 17:10). When all that is ours is freely given to God, then all that God has will also be freely given to us. In the measure that we give to Him, He gives to us. This is why many Christian leaders are so poverty-stricken when it comes to spiritual authority: They have not given their all to God.

In John 2:23-25, we read that even though many believed in Jesus, yet He did not commit Himself to them. We may also be among those to whom the Lord doesn't commit Himself because He sees what is in us, and what our motives are.

If it comes to a choice between our profession and building the Body of Christ, which will we choose? Are we willing to give up advancement in our earthly occupation in order to have more time to build the church? If not, why should God commit Himself to us?

Are we willing to open our homes for the Lord's people? Or are our convenience and our privacy more important to us? If we seek our own in any area, we won't get spiritual authority from God, even if we fast and pray for it. God cannot be fooled.

Everything - yes everything - in our life must take second place to the kingdom of God, if we want to build the Body of Christ. There is no partiality with God. All of us are the same to Him. What He has done for others he will do for us. Jesus and Paul were mightily attested by God in their ministries, because they paid a price. God will do the same for us, if we are willing to pay the same price.

Even our money and our savings must belong to God if we are to build the church. When God told Noah to build the ark, Noah did not ask God as to who was going to pay for the expenses involved in building such a huge ship. If he had asked that question, God would have told him, "You have to pay for it yourself, Noah. Who else will pay for it?" But Noah did not need to ask, for he knew that already.

The question is whether we know it. Noah probably had to sell some of his own property in order to build the ark. But how many servants of God do we find who are willing to sell their personal property in order to finance God's work? Those who do not give their all to God will discover that God does not give His all to them either.

With most servants of God, their attitude is that if it is the Lord's work, the money for it must come from somewhere else, and not from their own pockets. They are lavish in spending the money that comes in through the offering-box. But they are not lavish in giving their own money for the work of God. A servant

of God who is not freed from the grip of money in his life can never have spiritual authority.

Have we ever said to the Lord, "Lord, Your work is my work. And my savings are Yours. I won't make a distinction between my money and Your money"? If we haven't said that to the Lord (and meant it), then we are still under the old covenant, where they considered 10% of their money as belonging to God and 90% as belonging to themselves. Once they had given their 10%, their obligation was over.

But Jesus did not come to give only 10% of His income to the Father. He came to establish a new covenant and to build a new-covenant church. And so He gave 100% to His Father. And now He says to us, "Follow Me." The only one who can have spiritual authority is the one who has given his ALL to God.

We must be willing to build the Body of Christ, whatever the cost to us - whether that cost be our money, our honour, our convenience, our physical energy, our reputation, our job, or anything else. There should be no limit to what we are willing to sacrifice for the Lord's sake. We are not to seek our own convenience or our own comfort in anything. Everything we do must be related to building the Body of Christ. Even our earthly occupation must only be a means of earning our living, so that we don't become a burden to others in the church for our financial support.

Let us then repent of our miserly attitude towards God.

May we be rich towards God in the coming days, so that we can have spiritual authority in our lives and build the Body of Christ in our land for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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