

Things Unshakable 3 . an Unshakable Church

by Zac Poonen

An unshakable church is built on obedience to Jesus' commands, characterized by purity and holiness, and is led by leaders who are willing to sacrifice for the church.

Duration: 52:35

Scripture: Numbers 14:22-23, Numbers 20:8, Matthew 16:18, Luke 14:26-33, Ephesians 4:3

Topics: "Church Leadership", "Discipleship"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of having an unshakable church, distinct from an unshakable life or home. It highlights the need for Christians to move beyond personal growth to building a church connected by Christ, demonstrating God's wisdom to the world. The sermon stresses the significance of discipleship, fellowship, and leadership within the church, focusing on the responsibilities and qualities of leaders as loving fathers who preserve unity and avoid corruption. It concludes with a call to follow God's commands faithfully to experience His presence and power in the church.

Transcript

So this is the last in the series that I started last month on things unshakable. In a world where God has promised to shake everything, we thank God that we can have some things that are unshakable. And we considered, first of all, an unshakable life, and then an unshakable home.

And today, we want to consider an unshakable church. Many Christians are happy with an unshakable life. It's a very selfish way to live.

I just think of my own life, and I'm OK, and I don't worry about anybody else. I'm walking with the Lord, and I'm having a deeper life with the Lord. But that's not all there is to Christianity.

Some people go one step higher and say, I want a godly home. But even that can be self-centered, where I think of just my family. But God's purpose is ultimately to build a church where I'm connected to people who I'm not even related to physically.

And thus, he demonstrates to the demons, to angels, and to the world around his amazing wisdom. So if you want God's highest purpose, his highest, you must not stop with a godly life and a godly home. You have to move on to God's ultimate purpose, and that is the church.

And when we speak of church, we're talking about born-again believers who are brought together by Christ to be a family. Jesus used the word church for the first time in Matthew and chapter 16. Matthew 16, he used the word church for the first time.

In verse 18, Matthew 16 and verse 18, and I say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church. And the gates of hell, or Hades, will not prevail against you. The gates of Hades speak of the powers of spiritual darkness.

The rock was the confession that Peter had just made, the Christ, the son of the living God. And on that rock, Jesus said he would build his church. So we see here that it is Jesus who builds his church.

Through the years, many men have built their own churches. And churches are, many people think of buildings and denominations, but the church that Jesus is building is people. And we need to understand what type of church Jesus is building, because the church which he builds, the powers of darkness will never be able to overpower it.

So when we see so many churches today that have, over which Satan has prevailed, they've lost their faith in the Bible, they've lost their faith in Christ, they've compromised on sin and allowed the world to come right in. These are the ways in which the devil has overpowered many churches. Sin has become rampant.

We can say that all those churches, even they call themselves churches, were not the church that Jesus built. Because Jesus said, the church that I build, the gates of hell, the powers of darkness will never be able to overpower it. And that type of church is what we need to see.

Jesus building in many parts of the world, and even right here. We must have a longing. If you're a part of a church, if you're a member of a church, your longing must be part of your prayer.

Lord, I want you to make this a church that you built, which the gates of hell, the powers of darkness, never have any power over. That's one mark of your loyalty to a church, that you want Jesus to be the builder of that church according to the principles he has laid down in his word. So that's what we want to look at.

We looked at Matthew chapter 7 when we considered the unshakable life and unshakable home. And I want to look at that again. In Matthew chapter 7, verse 24, he speaks about this man who built a house that could not be shaken.

We looked at that house, first of all, as a picture of our life, which we are building, and the home that we're building. And now we want to look at that as a picture of the church we're building. That house is a picture of our life, and our home, and our church.

And how is this church built? He hears these words of mine and does them. He builds his house on the rock. And then, verse 25, we could look at the rain descending.

That's the powers of spiritual darkness now coming and attacking this church. And it says it burst against this house, but it didn't fall. Because in this church, they preached obedience to everything that Jesus commanded in Matthew 5, 6, and 7. So that's the secret.

These words of mine. Go to verse 26. The foolish man, Matthew 7, 26.

And everyone who hears these words of mine, who are the ones who hears the words of Jesus? These are not the non-Christians. These are not even those who never go to church, never read the Bible. They don't hear his words.

These are people who go to church services, read the Bible. They hear these words of mine. The only thing is they don't do them.

They don't act upon them. They are not taught in the church obedience. And the result is the powers of spiritual darkness, the gates of hell prevail against it, and the house collapses.

So we can say there are two types of churches. Those that seek to emphasize obedience to the commands of Jesus, who build on an unshakable foundation. And those who emphasize knowledge, teaching, information, without obedience.

And that is the house that collapses. When we turn to the end of scripture in Revelation chapter 18, and verse two. Revelation 18, verse two.

This house that collapses is called Babylon. The house that fell, the church that is built on a shaky foundation, towards the end of scripture is called Babylon. Babylon is not a particular denomination.

It's popular in some circles to relate it to some particular church and say, you come out of that church, you come out of Babylon. It's not that easy. If you come out of disobedience, you come out of Babylon.

But you can sit in the best church in the world, and if you just hear and don't obey, you're building on Babylon still. And one day it'll collapse. It's very clear.

Jesus said it so clearly. You can hear, and hear, and hear, and hear, and accumulate information in your head, and you don't obey it, one day this house will collapse. Whether it's a life, or a home, or a church.

Babylon has fallen. Babylon is called in chapter 17, verse five, Babylon the Great, mother of harlots. Harlot, because it claimed to be the bride of Christ, but fooled around with the world.

But Babylon is called the great a number of times in Revelation. It's a great church. It's a big church.

It's a mega church. Whereas Jerusalem, which is the house that stood, is described in Revelation 21, verse two. It's very interesting.

The Bible starts with two trees, tree of knowledge of evil, of good and evil, and the tree of life. And its end, and its ultimate end of these two trees is two systems. One is Babylon, the other is Jerusalem.

And Jerusalem is described in chapter 21, verse two, as a holy city. Notice the difference. Babylon is a great city, and Jerusalem is a holy city.

Now, there are many, many people who have been converted, many millions. The point is not numbers. The point is quality is emphasized in Jerusalem, whereas in Babylon, it's numbers and size that is emphasized.

Whenever a church or its members or its leaders get excited that more people are joining us, and that's the thing that excites them, you're on the road to building Babylon. But when we're excited that the numbers that are joining us are growing in holiness, and the ones who are here are growing in holiness,

then you're building Jerusalem. It's not that God is against numbers.

The Bible says God wants everybody on earth to repent. Second Peter three. God so loved the whole world, he gave his son to die for the whole world, and that's seven billion people.

And Second Timothy two says God wants every one of these seven billion people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. So it's God couldn't possibly be against numbers. But if the standard is reduced so that it's no longer holiness and obedience to Christ that's emphasized, then God's not interested in numbers.

When Noah gathered people together, it says for 120 years he preached and he had only eight people. If he had lowered the standard, he could have got 8,000 or 80,000, but they'd have all perished. He's called a preacher of righteousness, and because he was a preacher of righteousness, his church was pretty small.

Jesus said at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, these amazing words. Matthew chapter seven and verse 14. I don't know how many Christians really believe this.

Matthew chapter seven, verse 14. The gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it. Do you really believe that? That very few find the way to life? There is a gate and there is a way.

He said that also at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. The gate is forgiveness, but then there's a way that leads to life. That way is called the way of salvation, of being free from sin, being free from disobedience to God's word which characterizes the race of Adam, which characterizes the world, and it's very few who find this way.

Many people hear about it, but very few find it. So I don't expect great numbers to be walking along this narrow way. Jerusalem is not gonna be as big as Babylon, I'll tell you that.

Babylon is gonna be much bigger. The church that Jesus builds will be characterized not by size, but by purity and holiness. That's how it was in the early days.

And the other thing I wanna mention is concerning Babylon and Jerusalem. It's not just greatness and holiness. What is it that makes Babylon great? It's compromise.

In Revelation 17, we read of Babylon the harlot pictured as a woman, and joining hands with the political system in the world, symbolized by a beast. And wherever the church gets involved in the political system and seeks to be, seeks greatness through political systems and glories in its attachment to political leaders, it's gonna be Babylon. Whereas church seeks to speak from its pulpit only that which is politically correct and acceptable, it's gonna be Babylon.

Whereas Jerusalem speaks the whole counsel of God. The other thing you see about Babylon in Revelation 18 is its close connection with the business world. When money is a big factor in any church or mission organization or anything, it's gonna end up in Babylon.

We need money for God's work, but money must be a servant, not a master. When money becomes more important than the power of the Holy Spirit, like in many, many, many Christian groups, that's the road to Babylon. In Revelation 18, we read that about the merchants of the earth weeping.

What is the principle of business? Give, let me spend as little as I possibly can and gain for myself as much as I possibly can. That's the principle on which every business in the world operates. And when people come to church and say, let me spend as little as I can of my energy and my resources and my money and let me gain as much as I can of this world and personal benefits, that is the road to Babylon.

It's the principle of business. Let me give as little to God as possible and get as much from God as possible. That's the road to Babylon.

And there are many Christians walking that way. They come to church to give as little as possible, and I'm not just talking about money, and to get as much from God as possible. That's not the way Jesus taught.

Jerusalem, on the other hand, is the city of sacrifice. Babylon is the city of business. Jerusalem is the city of sacrifice.

If you went to Jerusalem and walked into the temple, the first thing you would see inside the temple is blood, animals being slain every day, blood, blood, blood every day. It's sacrifice, sacrifice, sacrifice. And the Lord was teaching his people that in a sin-cursed world, that's the only way by which we can live if we want to follow the Lord.

He demonstrated that on Calvary's Hill when Jesus died. God runs this world on the principle of sacrifice. And a Christian who wants to follow Jesus will have to go the way of sacrifice.

And the way of sacrifice is the opposite of the business world. Let me give all that I can to God, even if I get nothing in return. I believe that Christians sitting in every church, and even in this church, could be divided into these two categories.

You come to church to give as little as you can of your time, energy, money, anything, to gain as much as you can. You're gonna be part of Babylon, no matter how much theological information you get, no matter how much accurate theological information you get. On the other hand, there could be those who come here and say, Lord, you've already given everything for me on the cross.

I'm not asking for you for anything. I've come to give myself to you. First of all, God wants your body, not your money, your body, first of all.

Present your bodies, a living sacrifice to God. And Lord, I'm not coming to you to get any gain for myself, certainly not material gain. I'm coming here to give myself to you.

And it doesn't matter if I don't get anything in return. That's the principle of sacrifice. And those are the ones who will build Jerusalem.

Now, if you get a church full of people like that, boy, I'll tell you, the gates of hell will never prevail against that church. The gates of hell, see, the devil's a businessman and the gates of hell will prevail against anyone who's got his principle of business, which is give as little as possible to God and gain as much as you can. Dear brothers and sisters, if you want to get out of the devil's clutches, get rid of that attitude and say, Lord, I want to give as much as I can for you.

And it doesn't matter if I don't get anything in return. He'll do a lot for you. So that's the way to go.

So in relation to the church that's gonna be unshakeable, I want to speak on three things. First of all, discipleship, the type of people who constitute this church. And secondly, fellowship, the relationship

between people who constitute this church.

And third, leadership, the type of leaders who can build such a church. So those are the three things I want to share. Now I want you to turn, first of all, to Mark 16 and verse 15, Mark 16, verse 15, where Jesus gave what is known as the Great Commission.

Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation or to all people. That's what we commonly call evangelism. Where, and I praise God for all those who have gone throughout through the years as missionaries, as evangelists, sometimes a tremendous sacrifice and all the means that have been employed.

People have spent millions of dollars to spread the gospel through literature, radio, to reach out to the poor, to many different countries, to those who have never heard about Jesus. This is called evangelism. And it's a very, very important ministry.

But what are we supposed to do once we have preached the gospel to every creature? The next thing we are told in Matthew 28 is, see this is the other side of the Great Commission, and verse 19, go and make disciples in every nation, Matthew 28, verse 19. So we are to preach the gospel and then we are to make them disciples. Now that's a lot more than just asking them to sign a decision card or asking them to come to the front or raise their hand or pray the sinner's prayer, it's a lot more than that.

When Jesus said go and make disciples, they understood what that meant. A disciple is a learner and a follower. Make people who will learn from me and follow me, follow my example, that's what Jesus meant.

And also he laid down the conditions of discipleship in Luke 14, very clearly in verses 26 to 33. First of all in Luke 14, 26, the three conditions of discipleship that Jesus laid down so that he spelt it out before his apostles so that they knew what they were supposed to do when they went to every nation on the face of the earth. Whichever nation you're in, I live in India and God called me to make disciples there.

And if I am to know what a disciple is, I'm gonna look at Luke 14 in verse 26 to 33. First of all, to love Jesus in a nutshell, what this verse means is to love Jesus more than everybody else on earth. That's the meaning.

Our love for Jesus must be so great that love for others is like a drop in the bucket, almost like hatred. In other words, if it's Jesus and my parents, I'm gonna do what Jesus tells me. If it's Jesus and my wife or children, I'm gonna do what Jesus tells me.

I love him more than everyone else. A lot of Christians have problems in their life because they do not obey the first commandment. And you have a lot of problems in your life.

It's something like a child trying to study science and geography and history without learning the ABC. Now, when the child goes to kindergarten, the first thing they're taught is ABC, to learn how to read. Because everything else in education is dependent on being able to read.

And let me tell you, the first commandment, the kindergarten lesson in the Christian life is what Jesus said. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your strength and all your soul and all your mind. If you get your ABC right, you'll be able to understand all the other things in the Christian life.

The trouble with a lot of Christians, why they have difficulty in their Christian life is they jumped up to grade four or five without studying ABC. Love Jesus with all your heart. This is not a sort of a torture that God gives us.

This is the way of health. To love Jesus with our whole being is like being healthy throughout my body. Is anybody scared of that? Being healthy throughout the body? To love Jesus with all my heart so that he's more important to me and my devotion to him is more than to anybody in this world.

I wanna please him more than I wanna please anybody in this world. That's number one condition. I've got to go and make people love Jesus more than anyone else in the world.

Every person who comes forward in an evangelistic meeting or assigns a decision card or wants to be a member in my church, I have to teach him how to love Jesus more than every other human being. Now, if I don't do that, I'm not fulfilling the Great Commission. And then I'm gonna build a shaky church.

It's gonna have problems all the time. The second condition of discipleship is verse 27. If he doesn't carry his own cross, not the cross of Jesus, I don't have to carry his cross.

He took his cross and died on it. I've got to carry my cross. You've got to carry yours.

If he doesn't carry his own cross and come after me, he cannot be my disciple. The cross is the cross on Jesus. The cross which Jesus took, he died.

And the cross I take, I have to die. That's a very simple meaning. That means I get out of the way and let Jesus rule my life.

Self is crucified. In other words, I've got to love Jesus more than I love myself. If I love Jesus more than I love myself, I won't get offended with people.

I won't get upset. I won't have my own ambitions anymore. I'll have what Jesus wants me to do.

I will not love my reputation. My prayer will be, hallowed be thy name, Lord, not hallowed be my name. I couldn't care less what people say about my name.

A lot of things happen when we love Jesus more than ourselves, you know that. All these petty fights that husband and wife have with each other is all because they don't love Jesus more than themselves. It's because we love ourselves that we get hurt when somebody says something or does something or doesn't do something.

If we love Jesus supremely and say self is crucified, many problems are solved. And now, think of this. Everywhere I go, when a person responds to the call of Christ, I have to teach them now, you've got to love Jesus more than yourself.

Every married couple, I've got to teach them when they're conducting their marriage. You've got to love Jesus more than each other, more than yourself. How much is this being done? No wonder we have so many shaky churches.

No wonder we have so many churches over which the devil is prevailing. We're not doing what Jesus told us to do. We're trying to build churches with third-rate material.

No wonder the whole building collapses. The third condition, Luke 14, verse 33. In all these conditions, you see he cannot, he cannot be my disciple.

I mean, there's no such thing as a second-class disciple. There's only a disciple or no disciple. Notice that in all these conditions.

Luke 14, 33. So none of you can be my disciple who doesn't give up all his possessions. And the important word there is possessions.

Possessions are things that possess us. Things that we grab on to, hold on to, say, that's mine. I'm not going to let anybody take it.

It's not that God doesn't want us to have things. We can have them, but not possess them. Jesus had an inner robe that was so expensive that the soldiers didn't even want to tear it at the cross.

But he never possessed anything. He had things, but he never possessed them. And that's the way a Christian is to live.

Say, Lord, everything I have is yours. I hold them. Yeah, they're mine, my house, my car, whatever it is, but I hold them in an open palm.

As recognize they're yours, I have them, but I don't possess them. In other words, I love Jesus more than anything material on this earth. So basically, these are the three conditions of discipleship.

And this person whom I bring to Christ, I have to teach him now to love Jesus more than his job, more than his money, more than his bank account, more than his stocks and shares and everything else, and say, Lord, I love you. Everything else is unimportant for me. If the share market goes down and you go down with it, well, you don't love Jesus, really.

I mean, if Jesus is more important than everything else, I say, Lord, you take care of everything for me. I will trust you. And I tell you something, people like that, they overcome so many problems in their life.

Many financial difficulties people have are because they have pursued the road of covetousness and possession and more and more and more, always not satisfied with what they have. Then you reap what you sow. But if you love Jesus more than everything, many, many problems are solved.

David said in Psalm 37, verse 25. Psalm 37 and verse 25. He said, I was a young man and now I'm an old man.

He probably wrote that when he was 68 or 69. I have never seen a righteous man forsaken till today. I've never seen his descendants, that means your children and your grandchildren begging for bread.

What's the way to that life? Be righteous. Put Jesus above everything else in your life. God says, those who honor me, I will honor.

And if you honored God and he doesn't honor you, you'll be the first person in man's history whom God didn't honor. It won't happen. So that's the way of discipleship.

And that's the type of church that Jesus wants us to build. Now we go to the second point. These disciples, when you come bring them together, you first taught them to love Jesus with all their heart.

But even then, they can be a selfishness in their life if they're not taught to work together and live together with others. I never knew what a selfish man I was till I got married. Because when we're single, you know, we have a difficulty with somebody, we can retreat from them and retreat into our room.

But when you get married and you retreat into your room, there's somebody else there in that room who's living with you, whom you can't retreat from. And then you discover what a selfish person you are. Now I'm very thankful, I'd recommend all single people get married, if God leads you that way.

But if God doesn't lead you to marriage, you can find out your selfishness even with living with other people in the church or fellowshiping with them. You discover how you want your way. You get offended when you don't have your way.

It's in relationship with others that we discover that. If I live all by myself in a desert, I won't discover how selfish I am. God puts us together with others in a church.

And there, it says, iron sharpens iron. That's how it is in the church. You know, it's like two rough stones that rub together and both become smooth.

That's how God puts us together with difficult people. And it's imperfect people. Everybody in the church is imperfect.

God puts imperfect people together, but as they work together and live together and bear with one another, they both become perfect. God has put us in fellowship with one another. He's not building holy individuals.

Jesus didn't come into the world to save souls or to win souls, like it's commonly said. He came to build a church. The Apostle Paul didn't go around saving souls.

He brought people to Christ and put them together in a local church. That's what he did in every place. God doesn't want you to be just a saved soul wandering around.

He wants you to be part of a local church. He wants your family to be part of a local church, a fellowship of people. And the reason why we're hesitant to be that is because it will expose our selfishness.

And yet, Jesus said, I will build a church. He's not building individuals. He's not even building homes.

All this ultimately is to lead to build a church, a group of people who are different from one another, just like these two hands are different from each other. Not only different, complete opposites. Here my thumb is on the right side and here my thumb is on the left side.

Have you ever seen two complete opposites like this? And yet God put them together in one body. And they work together, not because they're always hanging around with each other, but because they're all connected to the head. Have you seen a person playing the piano or an organ? How nimbly those fingers move and how fast.

It's because each of these are connected to the head. And that's how their fellowship is perfect. But if their fellowship with the head is broken, like in a paralyzed hand, well, that can't cooperate with the other hand anymore.

That's what happened to Adam and Eve. Their connection with God was gone and their connection with each other is gone. Remember, whenever there's conflict between you and your wife or you and your husband or you and another brother, always the problem is first vertical.

Your connection with God is gone. That's why this other problem. Other people may trouble you, but it won't disturb your relationship with God if you keep that vertical relationship right.

So if there is a proper connection with the head between two believers in the body, they will work together. There will be, I mean, they may have to bear with one another, of course, because we're imperfect, but God wants us to become one. This is one of the great mysteries of the new covenant.

It was not possible in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, God could not make two people one. This is something even Jesus could not do during his entire earthly life.

On the last day, the last supper, those 11 people who had been with him for so many years, heard the world's greatest preacher for three and a half years walked with the world's holiest man for three and a half years could not become one with each other. They were fighting for leadership. And Jesus told them, I've got to go.

It's better for you that I go. Because when I go, the Holy Spirit will come. And then you will do something which even I was not able to do.

You will do something greater than what I've done. John 14, 12. You will become one with each other.

And that is one of the great blessings of Pentecost, where it says by one spirit, we were baptized or immersed into the Holy Spirit. We were baptized into one body. Have you recognized that? Many who claim to be filled with the Holy Spirit are still sort of living individualistic lives.

That's not God's will. Baptized into one body. The Holy Spirit, if you say you're filled with the Holy Spirit, he must have united you with other members of the body whom also he filled with the Spirit.

You cannot live an individualistic life if you're filled with the Holy Spirit. It's a deception. That's why there's a lot of counterfeit in this realm of the Spirit's fullness.

Wherever there's a genuine fullness of the Spirit, it'll bring you in fellowship with other believers who are as imperfect as you are, but who are also filled with the Spirit. And you work together with them. You fellowship with them.

That's why, as I said in the Old Testament, there were these great individual prophets who did a fantastic thing. Like Elijah, Jeremiah, Isaiah. Nobody can question their ministry.

John the Baptist, the greatest of all men who was ever born. And then Jesus came, and he started something completely new. He always sent his disciples two by two.

And even the great missionary movement that started in Acts 13. The Holy Spirit said, separate me Saul and Barnabas. Not all one person alone, just two people.

And if you look at the lives of Saul and Barnabas, they were so completely dissimilar to each other. And God brought them together for a ministry. I found this in many places as we've established churches in different parts of India.

God brings into leadership people who are dissimilar so they can be a balance, just like the left hand and the right hand. Opposites, but be able to work together. Paul and Barnabas.

Jesus said with two, I gather together in my name. I'm in the midst. He's not in the midst where there's only one.

There's no midst there. For a midst, there must be at least two. How do you get Jesus in the midst if you're all by yourself? You know, I mentioned that when we studied the home.

That's why the devil tries to divide husband and wife. It's when they're one that Jesus is in the midst. It's when you're one with another brother that you're in the midst.

If you can bear with that person. Romans 14 speaks about permitting people to have different views on a whole lot of peripheral doctrines. If you are united to Christ, we don't all have to agree on different, different issues, whether we hold the same view or not.

We are united in our loyalty to Christ. Where two or three are gathered together like that, Jesus said, if two are agreed, Matthew 18, 19, and then where two or three are gathered together like that, one in spirit, even though in their mind, they may not be completely agreed. One in their spirit.

I want to show you Ephesians. There are two verses in Ephesians, which when you put together, you understand this. In Ephesians four, it says in verse three, Ephesians four, three, we must be diligent to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

Be diligent, that means work very hard to preserve the unity of the spirit. There's a unity of the spirit. Now you combine that with Ephesians four and verse 13, where it says, until we attain to the unity of the faith.

What do you get when you put these two verses together? Preserve the unity of the spirit until we attain to the unity of the faith and the full knowledge of the son of God, to a mature man, to the fullness of Christ. That's when Christ comes. Our minds are gonna agree with each other 100% when Christ comes.

But until then, we've got to preserve the unity of the spirit, the unity that the Holy Spirit brings us because we are devoted to Jesus Christ. It doesn't mean that you and I have to hold the same view on everything. You know, in the early church, people had different views on the Sabbath.

The Jewish people had been celebrating the Sabbath every week for 30 years, and all of a sudden, they get converted. It's very difficult for such people to get rid of their Sabbath habits. And Paul said, okay, keep it, but don't force these Gentiles to do it.

And he told the Gentiles, don't compel the Jews to give up their Sabbath. If they don't wanna keep it, that's fine. It's up to them.

Let there be a little amount of give and take in this because this is not fundamental to our faith in Christ. Or some person does not eat meat offered to idols. The Gentiles were always eating meat, that all the meat was offered to idols, and when they became Christians, they said, oh, we won't touch that.

But some others said, hey, what's an idol? It's just a block of wood. We just pray and we eat it. And so Paul said, listen, the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking.

Make allowance for each other. So often, Christians get divided on silly issues of small little petty points. That's where we need to hear that word.

Preserve the unity of the spirit and until we reach the unity of the faith. Is this such a big issue that we have to allow the devil to come and divide us on it? No. Preserve the unity of the spirit until we attain the unity of the faith because we're supposed to be a body, the body of Christ.

And just like our human body has different functions, some are more prominent. Think of this tongue, which is speaking, speaking, speaking, speaking. It could, say, symbolize one who's got a ministry of teaching or preaching, who's in the pulpit.

But the tongue cannot fulfill that ministry if there is not a hidden part of the body called the heart that's always pumping the blood. You know what the heart is in the Christian life? Those who pray, who are never seen, who've got a special gift from God. I really believe God gives some people who have no gift of speaking a tremendous ability to pray in secret and who support the tongue speaking.

I've often felt standing in a pulpit that I'm the tongue speaking and everybody sees me and they think it's me. It's not me. There's someone else behind me, a lot of people who are pumping the blood, praying, praying, praying.

I keep on asking people to pray for me, just like Paul. You know, Paul said, pray for me, that I'll preach the word of God boldly. And we would think, Paul, does he need boldness? Do I need to pray for him? Yes, he needs prayer support.

He needs the heart pumping. And I really appreciate those who pray for me. I've often told people, listen, if God ever reminds you of my name, will you take 15 seconds just to pray that God will give me a right word and challenge people to follow Jesus wherever in the world I happen to be at that time? That's all you gotta do.

Can you spend 15 seconds? Whenever God puts my name in your head, whenever he does that, it makes a tremendous difference. I know standing in many pulpits, in many, many places, I know the difference it makes when people are praying for me. It's a world of difference.

So don't think that because your ministry is hidden, you're not a part of the body. You're a very important part of the body, but preserve the unity of the spirit. Don't try to be like somebody else.

If you have the heart, don't try to speak. That's not your calling, but pump the blood. Keep pumping it.

One day you'll get your reward. You'll probably get a greater reward than the tongue gets. So be faithful.

You're a part of the body. If you've given your life to Christ and you're a disciple, you are a part of the body and you have a ministry. You just gotta discover it.

It may not be prominent. It's a sad thing that Christians are always looking for a prominent ministry. Do you know that the most important parts of your body are inside your body, not even visible? And you wouldn't be able to survive.

You can survive without some of these visible parts, but inside there are many, many important parts. Of course, if you don't do your function, I'm not saying that God's, the body of Christ will die. God will just give that ministry to somebody else and you'll miss the opportunity.

Jesus called Judas Iscariot to fulfill a certain function. He failed and he called Paul. That's my understanding.

He called Paul to do that ministry. So if you fail, no one is indispensable. I mean, Judas Iscariot was probably the cleverest of the disciples and he must have thought, boy, I'm so important here.

Nobody's important. Nobody is indispensable in the body of Christ. I remember years ago reading a little poem, which I wrote down and read very frequently.

It said, if ever you think you're indispensable to the body of Christ, get a bucket of water, put your hand right inside, and when you pull it out, the hole that's left behind is how much you'll be missed when you're gone. I said, great, Lord, I wanna remember that. I put my hand in the bucket of water and pull it out, and the hole that's there is all that's gonna be how much I'm missed.

God's work went on in this world for thousands of years before you and I arrived on the scene. And it'll continue long after you and I are gone. Nobody is indispensable to God's work.

And let no one ever think so. If one man fails, God will use another. That's all.

If one woman fails, God will use another. If Judas Iscariot fails, God has a Paul. If Paul fails, then God will choose somebody else.

It's always like that. But God wants us to do our part. Then the third thing I wanna say is concerning leadership.

Just like in society, God is appointed, it says in Romans 13, those in authority. And in a family, God has placed father and mother to be in authority in a family. The church, by the way, is not a schoolroom, classroom.

It's not a school, it's a family. In a school, in a classroom, the important person is the teacher. He teaches, and he may be a scholar, he may be a great teacher, but he doesn't have a personal relationship with those students like a father has.

A good father, I'm talking about. A good father and mother. A schoolteacher teaches and the students go away.

He collects his salary and goes home. But a father and mother, they work entirely differently. And many churches are like classrooms with a great teacher up there and everybody getting instructed and then they go home.

The teacher collects his salary and goes away. But that's not the church that's gonna remain. That's such a church that'll collapse.

It's the church that's built as a family. Now I say that because that's what we've tried to do in India for 35 years now. 35 years ago, some of us got a bit sick and tired of the dead Christendom that we were in.

And four families, we got together in my home and started meeting together as a house church. And that's how we started. And we said, we're gonna preach discipleship.

I wanna preach the Sermon on the Mount because Jesus said, those who do what I said in the Sermon on the Mount, that is, forgive everybody, love your enemies, and do things as unto God and not unto men. Be merciful, be pure in heart. Don't lust with your eyes and overcome anger.

And all these things listed there, speak the truth always. We kept on preaching that and the conditions of discipleship. And we said, it doesn't matter if we don't grow much in size.

We wanna be disciples. And we grew as a family, committed to one another. And like that, God multiplied us and now we have 40, 50 churches planted around different places.

But we never were interested in numbers. Never, not today, not then. We said, we wanna grow as a family.

And I work with 70, 80 elders who are leaders in all these churches. And I tell them, dear brothers, you must be a father to your congregation. You must look at those people as your children whom you care for, a real loving father.

Don't ever exploit them. The Apostle Paul said to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians chapter seven and verse two. Look at this wonderful verse.

2 Corinthians seven, verse two. This is the mark of a true leader. He can say to his congregation, we have wronged nobody.

We have corrupted nobody. We took advantage of nobody. That's the mark of a godly man, a godly leader.

We took a wronged nobody. We corrupted nobody. We took advantage of nobody.

I believe God needs many leaders like that. And when a church grows to a large size like this, you can't depend on one or two leaders. You need many leaders at different levels who will never take advantage of others, never corrupt others, and never wrong others who are fathers, real loving fathers who are not teachers working for any personal gain or benefit or honor.

So this is what I share with my fellow elders. Be one of those who can have this testimony when you have ended your ministry, that you can stand before your church. I mean, I can today stand before my church in Bangalore for 35 years and say to them, dear brothers, I have wronged none of you.

I've never corrupted you. I've never taken advantage of you. And I believe it's possible for many, many people sitting here to grow up to be godly men and women like that.

God wants such people who have the spirit of a father who are not seeking to get something for themselves, just like you want your children to grow up to maturity, who want people in the church to grow up to maturity. And like a father would be a strict doorkeeper, not to allow corrupt influences to come into his home that would ruin his children, a true spiritual leader would be very careful not to let corrupt influences come in and destroy the church. He will not seek for popularity, but for purity.

So this is what I share with our own leaders. And then I also tell them, you have to be careful because when you're a leader, it's a tremendous privilege, a tremendous honor to be a leader of God's people. But it's a tremendous and awesome responsibility because to whom more is given, more will be required.

It says in James chapter three and verse one, teachers, James chapter three, verse one, teachers will be judged with a stricter judgment. I know that, I have no doubt in my mind that I will be judged by a much higher standard by God than all the people I've preached to, much more than even my fellow elders, because they look up to me. It's an awesome responsibility to be an elder or leader, but we must always live in fear.

And we have an example of this in the Old Testament, in the book of Numbers in chapter 14, this is a very interesting passage that's always brought a healthy fear of God in my own life. In Numbers 14 and verse 22, Numbers 14, 22, we read of the children of Israel, the Lord telling them, these 10 times, the last part of that verse, you have not listened to my voice. And so, verse 23, you will not enter the land of Canaan.

He gave them nine chances, they were rebelled, he forgave, they rebelled, he forgave, they rebelled, he forgave. The 10th time, he said, that's it. You're not gonna enter the land, 600,000 of you will all perish in the wilderness, except the two who trusted me.

Now, I want you to see another example in Numbers chapter 20. This was a man who had been faithful for 40 years, Moses. One day, God told Moses in verse eight, Numbers 20, verse eight, when the people were asking for water, go and take your rod and speak to the rock.

You remember, Moses, last time, 40 years ago, I asked you to hit the rock. This time, you don't hit it, just speak to it, because Christ is crucified only once. He's not to be crucified a second time.

But Moses got so upset, in verse 11, Moses, verse 11, he says he took the rod and struck the rock twice, verse 11. And of course, the water flowed, proving that even when a servant of God disobeys, God still blesses. Two million people got water, two million people got blessed, and Moses could have thought, well, I disobeyed God, but God's still blessing two million people.

That doesn't mean God was happy with you. It just means God loves those two million people. That's all it proved, nothing else.

In the next verse, you read, the Lord said to Moses, because you didn't believe me, because you didn't obey me, you will not enter the land. Did he give him nine chances? No. Did he give him even one chance? No.

Zero chances. You failed once, you're out, Moses. Can you think of the disappointment that came to him, he who had looked forward to entering the promised land for 40 years? God is a very loving father, but he's a strict God.

It's an awesome responsibility to be a leader. We have to live in fear and trembling before him, but it's a tremendous privilege, and I believe that God wants such people. Let me say one last thing.

In the Old Testament, there was a tabernacle that was built exactly according to the pattern God gave Moses, but the most important thing in that tabernacle was not the pattern. It was the fire on the altar, the presence of God, and if we want the presence of God, we read in Exodus chapter 39 and 40, about 18 times it comes, Moses did exactly as the Lord commanded, and the pillar of cloud and fire came there, and I wanna say to you, that is a picture of the church. If we do exactly as the Bible has taught, we will have the presence of Jesus in our midst in every single service.

We'll have the power of the Holy Spirit in our church, and I believe even in this church, it can be so. If we will say, Lord, I want you to build this church on a rock that will not shake, so that the powers of darkness will never be able to prevail against this church, may it be so. Let us pray.

As our heads are bowed in prayer, my dear brothers and sisters, I want you to think of your responsibility. Forget the responsibility of others. Your responsibility before God as a member of this body, say, Lord, help me to do my part faithfully.

Heavenly Father, help us each one. We pray in Jesus' name, amen. Thank you.

Amen. Praise God.

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