

# Three Dangerous Leavens

by Zac Poonen

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*The sermon highlights the dangers of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod, which can infiltrate the church and destroy its witness and testimony.*

**Duration:** 59:45

**Scripture:** Matthew 23:27

**Topics:** "Worldly Influence", "Legalism"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the dangers of worldliness, unbelief, and legalism within the church. It warns against the leaven of the Pharisees, which includes hypocrisy and legalism, highlighting the importance of humility, grace, and faith in God's wisdom, power, and love. The message urges listeners to avoid self-righteousness, judgmental attitudes, and the trap of legalism, emphasizing the need for genuine faith and a heart surrendered to God.

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## Transcript

The church is a place where we must have praise, prayer, and prophecy. If God's house has praise and prayer and prophecy in the Holy Spirit, then we are really balanced. And when we have a time of praise like we had just now, it's a good thing for us to ask ourselves, did we have a good time or did our Father in heaven have a good time? There's a lot of difference between praise and praise to God.

In a lot of churches what happens is praise. And particularly when we sing songs we're very familiar with, we don't think too much about the words and we're not conscious of Jesus in our midst. You can sing, thou art worthy and not be conscious of God.

Like in one of those songs we sing, when everything becomes like a shadow in the light of you, it's then that we really praise God. I thought of that, you know, even this morning. I said, Lord, I want everything around me to be like a shadow.

Not the shadow of people because you can be conscious of them. Maybe the shadow of trees or walls and things that can't hear what we're saying in our heart to God. Then our praise goes to God.

I believe there's very little of real praise and thanksgiving on Sundays around the world that really ascends to God. Part of the reason is people have got sin in their lives and God doesn't listen to them. And the other reason is that we are more conscious of whether we are having a good time.

Whether there's a nice beat to it and we can shake our heads or hips and clap our hands and things have not become shadows because we're not conscious of God. When we pray, we must be conscious of God. And even when I stand here and preach, I've sought to speak through the years, increasingly conscious of the fact that Jesus is here listening to every word I say.

And I want to be sure that I'm saying what he wants me to say. So I was thinking this morning of, see, prophecy is something that's meant to warn us about the danger that we face as a church. That's why the most important gift in any church is the gift of prophecy, not foretelling the future, but something like that Old Testament example where, you know, the king of Syria, Aram, would come to, would plan a battle against Israel in the days of Elisha.

And he'd be discussing in confidence with all his generals out there in Syria and out here, hundreds of miles away in Elisha's room, God would show him what that king was planning. That king's a picture of the devil. Where is he going to attack God's people? And Elisha would send a message to the king of Israel saying, be careful, enemy's coming here.

And like that, the king protected the nation. And then the king of Syria would plan some other point and again Elisha would know. That is prophecy, where we can warn God's people about dangers, about places where the devil is seeking to attack them, and where they can take heed.

Those who have ears to hear, not everybody will take heed because some are too proud to listen to the voice of prophecy, where we can ignore them. But those who are humble enough to hear a word from God, they can be protected. Now we've seen that happen for so many years here in different situations and we praise the Lord.

So if I were to ask you, what do you think is the greatest danger facing the church in India today, or perhaps around the world, it's pretty much the same, or in our church? We know there's been a lot of persecution in India over the last couple of years, more than I've ever seen in my whole life. People being killed for preaching the gospel. But is persecution the greatest danger? If you read the history of the church, the devil has come in two ways.

The Bible says the devil comes like a lion and he comes like a serpent. And in the Garden of Eden, the lion was there, the serpent was there, and the devil, cleverest of all created beings, chose the serpent, not the lion. He didn't come to scare Eve, she had to run away.

He came with subtlety. The Bible speaks about a devil coming as a roaring lion, that's persecution. The Bible also speaks of him as a serpent.

Paul says in 1 Peter 5, he speaks about him as a lion. In 2 Corinthians 11, he speaks of him as a serpent who can take us away from simple devotion to Christ. And I believe the great danger is not persecution.

If you read the history of the church, in no time in history has persecution killed the church. And the purest churches in the world today are in countries where there's persecution. And the most worldly churches in the world today are the countries where there's the maximum amount of wealth and no persecution.

So persecution has never succeeded in killing the church. But deception has. Let me turn you to a verse in Matthew chapter 13.

Jesus spoke about a woman who, Matthew 13 verse 33, leaven is always a picture of something evil in scripture. It's never a picture of anything good. And it says here about a woman, that woman is Babylon, which is corrupt Christendom.

And the parables Jesus spoke here when he speaks about the kingdom of heaven, he's not speaking about the kingdom as it is in heaven, but that outward expression of the kingdom of heaven on earth, what we know as Christianity in the church. And that's why you read about good fish and bad fish and tares and wheat and it's always a mixture. Or about good soil and bad soil.

It's always like that. And here it's pictured as a woman who took and hid a leaven, which she took and hid in three packs of flour until the whole thing was leavened. So it's a very subtle way, you know, you put leaven into dough, into wheat that's been made into dough.

You can't see it. You look at it, it looks just like unleavened wheat. But wait till it's put in the oven and you find it's leaven.

It becomes bread, a lot of hollow stuff inside. And it's hidden. And that's the work of the devil.

Leaven. Put very subtly into the church, everybody looks very holy on Sunday morning. But there's a leaven that slowly can be working.

Paul said, we're not ignorant of Satan's schemes. And the spirit of prophecy is to throw light on Satan's tactics by which he seeks to corrupt the church, dilute its witness and adulterate it, and ultimately make it into a harlot and not the bride of Christ. So I want you to look at three leavens that Jesus spoke about.

Three leavens. Mark chapter 8 is the first one. And I believe these are the greatest dangers facing our church, any church today, that can corrupt its witness and destroy its testimony.

Mark chapter 8 verse 15. And Jesus gave orders to them, to his disciples, saying, watch out. When Jesus says watch out, we better watch out.

Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. He spoke about two leavens there. We look at the leaven of the Pharisees later.

But the leaven of Herod. Now you may have heard of the leaven of the Pharisees, but what about the leaven of Herod? What is the leaven of Herod? Let me show you. He had a group of people who followed him called the Herodians.

I want to show you an example from Mark chapter 6. There's two chapters earlier. You'll see what the leaven of Herod is. The leaven of Herod does not infiltrate people who have no interest in coming to listen to God's word in the church.

No. It's not talking about out there, unconverted worldly people. In Mark chapter 6, it says here in verse 20, after Herod had imprisoned John the Baptist, it says Herod was afraid of John because he was a righteous and holy man and he kept him safe.

And when he heard him, he was perplexed, but he used to really enjoy listening to him. Isn't that interesting that Herod enjoyed listening to a fiery prophet of God? Do you enjoy listening to a fiery prophet of God? You may be no better than Herod. Sometimes we can think when we love to listen to fiery messages on the internet or in a church, we say, boy, I like to listen to that.

And we imagine we're spiritual. This verse should bring us all down to earth. Herod loved to listen to one of the greatest preachers of all time, John the Baptist.

I mean, Herod was fed up of all the boring sermons of the Pharisees. He had no interest in them. Just because we have no interest in listening to boring sermons, it doesn't mean we're spiritual.

Just because we love to listen to a prophet of God, a genuine prophet of God, doesn't mean we're spiritual. Because, it says two verses later, after he finished listening to John the Baptist, he went into his palace and he was watching Salome, the daughter of Herodias, dancing. That was his stepdaughter.

And I'm sure she was very skimpily dressed and in modest clothes. And he liked to watch that too. He would go straight from listening to the prophet of God to watching an immodestly dressed woman dancing.

The leaven of Herod is worldliness, where a person can go Sunday morning and listen to a powerful message and during the week watch R-rated movies. That's Herod. And enjoy both of them just as much.

And probably spend more hours in a week watching R-rated movies than the one hour they spend in a week listening to a sermon. But the imagined is spiritual. Herod imagined that he was okay.

So there we see the leaven of Herod. Jesus said, watch out. I want to watch out.

I hope you do. That the leaven of Herod, an external form of godliness, which covers up a heart that is worldly, that I don't deceive myself. Satan's aim is not to kill Christians.

Because he knows that many more will be converted. I mean, he's seen that through the centuries. He still does it in a few places.

But most places he corrupts the church of worldliness. Because it becomes ineffective. Like he came to eat in the garden.

And when we talk of worldliness, it's something in the mind. Worldliness is not external. It is not seen in the type of car you drive, or whether you have a car at all, or the size of your house, or the amount of your income, or salary, or wealth.

It's none of these things. It's not in your clothes. It's in the mind.

The Bible says that in Romans 12 too. Be renewed in your mind and don't be conformed to the world in your mind. So conformity to the world is in our mind.

And it's in our attitude to the things that the world values. When I value the same things that people in the world value, I'm worldly. However spiritual I may appear to be.

And I can conceal that, my value system, with a lot of religious language. And fool people. Except a really godly man who will not be fooled.

That we're spiritual. So we need to ask ourselves, I mean in contrast to all this we see Jesus. So if you want to avoid worldliness, you need to ask yourself, what is it the world values? And this is in the mind.

And what is it that Jesus values? And then examine myself and see whether my value system is according to the world or according to Jesus. That's how I know whether I'm free from the leaven of Herod. One of the main things that's valued by all worldly people from beggars to millionaires is money.

I've never met a beggar who doesn't value money. And there's no millionaire who doesn't value money. It's got nothing to do with your income.

It's got to do with whether you were born of Adam. And if I place the same value on money that the world places on it, I'm worldly. It doesn't mean we shouldn't earn.

Jesus earned. He worked as a carpenter. He had eight members in his home to support with his work.

Bigger than family than most of us. And he saved money as well. I mean that's why he had a treasurer.

Whether you keep it in a bag or a bank, it's a saving. So there's nothing wrong in earning. There's nothing wrong in saving.

And he used money for his necessities. But what value did he place on it? That's the point. There's nothing wrong, as I said, in earning, saving, using.

But what value do you place on it determines whether the leaven of Herod, this thing which is so important in the world, that it has no power over us. And the way you can find out is whether money is your servant or your master. You know, I see that in gold being under our feet in heaven on the streets.

Means you'll learn to put it under your feet. Then you're the master over it. Heaven is made for such people.

And it's like fire, you know. Fire is a very good thing, a very good servant, but a terrible master. You keep fire in its proper place.

It's very good for cooking, warming the house when it's cold. But if it burns up the house, it's a master. It's destroyed your house.

And it's something like that where money, we say, you know, I'm gonna keep you in this proper place. You're gonna be my servant. You're not gonna run my life.

You're not gonna tell me, go here, go there, go there, because you can get money. There are preachers who do that. The reason why so many Christians today love money is because their leaders love money.

Their preachers love money. It's a sad thing. It's true in every country.

Very rare person you find in Christendom who is a preacher who doesn't love money. Very rare. And if the leaders are like that, it's like a school that's got all bad teachers.

What type of students are gonna come out of that school? That's how it is. So I don't blame the students. I blame their teachers.

But the students have got the Bible with them. So they don't have to listen to the teachers and be influenced by them. They can see that the devil's controlling everything in the world with money.

And you see in India how education, which has become, which is such a good thing, has become a money thing now. People build colleges and schools to make money. And only the rich can get a good education.

Medicine, medical treatment, which God intended to help the poor, has become a money-making racket in India and everywhere. People want to be doctors to make money, not to help the poor. You see how the

devil's infiltrated.

I'm talking about Christians. I'm not talking about the non-Christians. How this has become the controlling factor.

And they don't even realize they're worldly. They're not committing sin. They're not telling lies and cheating and stealing.

But money is their master. It's the thing that determines, makes what decisions they take. I want to tell you, if God does not determine the decisions you take, but money determines the decisions you take, you know who's your master.

And Jesus said you cannot serve two masters. It was Jehovah and Baal in the days of Elijah. It's Christ and Mammon today.

You've got to make your choice. That's the leaven of inheritance. Worldliness.

You see how it can come in so subtly. I'll tell you from my own experience. If you don't battle it all the time, you'll gradually get enslaved to it.

I've seen believers who are very faithful to it in their early days. They were first born again. And they really, they had very little those days.

And it was easy to be free from the love of money then. But the devil said, I've got to destroy this guy's usefulness. And in most cases, he destroys their usefulness by giving them more and they don't know how to handle it.

And they don't put God first anymore. And money has begun to determine their decisions. Look at the number of pastors who choose a church because they feel they'll get a good income there.

Or even Christians who are not in Christian work. But we need enough to earn our living. And I'm not saying there's anything wrong in earning a better salary.

I always say, try and get the highest salary you can. But is God first in your life? Would you compromise in your work situation to make a little money? That's the leaven of inheritance. The other thing which is very powerful in the world, which is universally true like money, is sex.

Illegitimate sex. And that's legitimate sex. That's only in marriage.

Never outside. I'm talking about illegitimate sex. It's a tremendous force.

Not only among young people, not only among unmarried people, among married people outside their marriage. It's a tremendous force. And if that's something which I've not made my servant, it's the leaven of worldliness again.

It's a very powerful force. And I said, as I said once before, I asked the Lord once, Lord, why did you allow this desire to come up in a young boy when he's 12 or 13 years old when he can't get married for another 10 or 12 years? Why didn't you allow this desire to sort of rise up when he's 25? And that up to the age of 25, he's just like these innocent two-year-old boys and girls. We're not like that.

And the Lord said to me, it's because I want them to conquer that desire before they get married. I want to say to all of you young people, fight it. Conquer it before you get married.

Otherwise you may be enslaved to it even after you get married. That's why we have so many divorces. That's why you hear pastors running off with their secretaries or something like that.

And the amount of adultery and immorality there is among Christian leaders worldwide. It's absolutely shocking. It's such a tremendous force.

And if you don't make it your servant, there again, like with money, it's a constant battle. And there's only one way to avoid immorality. The Bible says, flee immorality.

It's not by facing up to and say, hey, I can conquer you. It's by running away. You come into a situation where you feel your temptation, about turn and run.

That's the only way. If you don't do it that way, I can prophesy without being a prophet that you'll fall. If you don't have that attitude, the world has got a hold of you.

And you've got to fight it, my brothers, young men especially, and married men too. And that's so widespread now. You know, the number of people who write to me, believers, young people who say, Brother Zak, I'm a slave to pornography.

In the days in India, you had to go find some place where they would sell pornographic books. You don't need that now. You've got the internet.

And it's become rampant among Christian workers, married people. Is it your slave? Does your computer mouse control you as to what you click on? Or do you as a child of God say, no, I'm the master here? I'm not going to let that computer mouse determine where I click and go on the computer. It's a very powerful force in the world.

You've got to face up to it. And for sisters, in the case of sisters, this area is mostly, it's not so much in their desire to, you know, I don't know if sisters except abnormal ones go to pornographic sites. In their case, it's more to dress in a way that will attract men.

And you think that's only worldly girls who do it? No. Christian girls, married women who want to wear these tight-fitting clothes to heighten the features of their body. I'm shocked when I see married women do that.

What sort of stupid, foolish example is what they're giving to young girls. And when they want to lower parts of that dress so that more of their body is exposed. It's absolutely shameful when a child of God is like that with, you know, different parts.

Look at the dresses of women nowadays. They say it's hot. So I have to have no sleeves.

Have you ever seen a man coming to church without sleeves? And they say, I've got to lower this more because it's hot. Have you ever seen a man with a shirt open like this? They're going to have a big open blouse at the back. Have you ever seen a man with a shirt cut out like that at the back? Or they say it's hot.

We must have our midriff exposed. Have you ever seen a man coming with a shirt up to here? Don't they feel hot? It's a lie of the devil. It's because you want to expose your body.

The leaven of Herod has got into you. You can call yourself a Christian and sing all so sweetly. The leaven of Herod.

It's just a matter of time before it grows. And I would say to young men, don't marry such a girl. She'll ruin you.

She'll spend all your money on our useless dresses. People are afraid to speak about it. I was listening to the message of a pastor the other day, an American pastor.

We've got some copies of it, which you can get when you leave. I would encourage every father of girls and every young girl who wants to have some sense to get a copy of that and read it. It's not written by some crazy conservative person from some jungle.

It's written by an American pastor from a modern city. Sex. The third thing in the world which people want is power over others.

It's basically money, sex, and power. Politicians want it. Businessmen want it.

They want to crush out small businesses. Elders in churches want to have authority over others. Pastors want to have it.

All over the world, people want to control others. Husbands want to control their wives. Wives want to control their husbands.

Power. People want power in the world, power in the church. It's worldliness.

Jesus never sought it. He never wanted to control anybody. He never pushed people.

He said, follow me. He went ahead, never behind saying, come on, move. He went ahead and said, follow me if you have ears to hear here.

If you don't want to follow, it's up to you. I'm always amazed by the number of people who he would invite to follow him, and one fellow would say, I've got to do this, or I love my money too much, and the Lord said, okay, go. He'd never go after them because he never wanted to push anybody.

He was always voluntary. He never wanted to control people. I want to say to you, husbands, wives, you want to control your spouse, it's the leaven of Herod.

It's worldliness, the desire to control others. You say, well, how can I be the head of my home as a husband? Show me where Jesus tried to push people and control others. He was ahead in such a dignified way with such an outstanding example.

I'll tell you, I've been a Christian 51 years. Jesus never pushed me once in all these 51 years to do one single thing. I know times when I disobeyed Him.

He just waited for me to respond, get rid of my stupidity. That's the type of leadership He gave me. That's why I'm devoted to Him today, and that's the type of husband I want to be, and that's the type of husband you should be.

Listen to this, the desire to control others. I've seen elders who want to dominate others, and I say, Lord, I never in my life want to be like that. I want to yield.

I want to work with people, and if they disagree with me, I say, go ahead, do it your way as soon as possible. Dear brothers and sisters, that's the way Jesus. Otherwise, it's the leaven of Herod.

There's so much of it in the world, so much of it in Christendom. The leaven is spreading. Beware of it, the desire for power.

We're to live on earth earning our living, but not allowing the spirit of worldliness to come into us. I want to turn to the second leaven now, the leaven of the Sadducees. It's in Matthew chapter 16 and verse 6. Jesus said, watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

Now, to understand the leaven of the Sadducees, you know that passage where it says that the Sadducees came to Jesus and said to Him, you know, a man had, you know the story, I don't need to turn to it, a man had a number of brothers and he died and then the second brother married his wife according to the Jewish law. Then he died and the third one married and so on. And then it goes on to say the Sadducees were trying to tempt Jesus because they didn't believe in the resurrection.

They didn't believe in angels or spirits or any such thing. And that's the leaven of the Sadducees, unbelief. Unbelief in the clear teachings of scripture.

And you see a lot of it in Christendom, in the church. That's the leaven of the Sadducees. They couldn't believe in the supernatural.

They believed in God, but they couldn't believe in the resurrection or miracles or things like that. And you know, it's possible, dear brothers and sisters, for you to be so theologically accurate in everything. You know, I believe this, this is true, Jesus died for the sins of the world and Jesus is the son of God and I believe all that, but I don't believe He can ever do a miracle.

I mean all those things like if there's a mountain in your way, tell it to move and if you have faith it will move. No, no, no, those things don't work today. Have you ever seen a mountain move which stood in the way of your doing the will of God? I've seen it numerous times.

And if I didn't have faith, I would be sitting behind those mountains today. I believe a lot of believers are sitting behind mountains that should be getting out of their way. God can do amazing things.

Unbelief in the mighty power of God. All anxiety and fear comes because of unbelief in the almighty power of God. You have a problem? Who in the world doesn't have problems? You say mine is a big one, bigger than almighty God? This is the mistake the Israelites made when they came to Canaan.

The giants were so tall and their God was so small. It's not only like they, they said we're like grasshoppers, their God was like a grasshopper too. And that's why God was angry with them.

Say you treat me like a grasshopper before these giants, you will never enter the land all 600,000 of you. But two people, Joshua and Caleb, they looked at those giants and they looked at God and those giants became like grasshoppers. God said, you folks honored me, you'll get into the land.

It's like that today. Two out of 600,000 believers are free from anxiety and fear. How many believers have you seen who can testify that by the grace of God, he's freed me from anxiety and fear? And isn't there a

word which says be anxious for? Nothing.

Shall I tell you what nothing means? Nothing. That's exactly what it means. Be anxious for nothing.

Philippians 4.6. Is it possible in the difficult world in which we live? I think of our little children growing up. Today, I see my little grandchildren and I say, boy, their parents are going to have a tougher time than I had when I brought up my children 40, 30, 40 years ago. And I see many of you with little children.

The way the world is going, don't you have some concerns? I love that song which says this child can face uncertain days because he lives. Because he lives, I can face tomorrow. Because the one who has tomorrow in his hands is almighty.

The Sadducees had unbelief. There's a lot of unbelief in the church where you make your problems bigger than God. But your doctrines are all right.

And you praise okay on Sunday morning. But you don't believe in the almighty power of God. The picture the Lord's given me many times and I like to remind myself of it.

And I've shared it with you perhaps more than once. It's of a little ant, these small little ants you see in the house, carrying a grain of rice to their little hole wherever they live. And if that ant could speak to me and say, Brother Zach, can you help me? This load of rice, this one grain of rice is pretty heavy.

I say, there's no problem for me. Oh, it's heavy. You don't know what I'm asking you for.

I can take a bag of rice. Leave alone a grain of rice. But it's a long distance.

It's about 30 meters. 30 meters? What are you talking? I can take it one kilometer for you. Even though I'm 71.

This is heavy. That's the picture the Lord's given me. Me taking my wee teeny weeny problem to almighty God saying, God, can you handle this? This guy is trying to trouble me.

I have this problem in the office. I have this problem with my landlord or my in-laws or my sickness or some other thing. It's a little grain of rice.

I'm like an ant saying, Almighty God, can you handle it? He who runs the universe, keeps the stars in place and makes the planets rotate in their orbits for thousands of years. I'm asking him whether he can solve this. And unbelief, just like the Sadducees in the almighty power of God, unbelief is also unbelief in the perfect love of God.

You know, when God doesn't answer some prayer and you become a little upset or bitter, and God, the devil comes and says, well, God doesn't have time for you. He's got a million things to take care of. Who are you? I say, I'm very important to God because I am his child.

He's my father. He's my dad. Do you know God as your dad? Can you sit on his lap and say, Daddy, I'm secure because you take care of all the problems I may face in the future.

You love me. And even when I bungle up, supposing your child breaks something in the house, even if it's deliberately, you know, children can get angry and break something. He never has a fear that my dad will kick me out of the house, send me out into the streets.

But I see so many believers living under condemnation. Oh, I slipped up. I did it again.

I don't know whether God has any time for me. I'm a hopeless case. Well, it's a good thing you discovered you're a hopeless case.

You are, I agree with you. But God still loves you. God still loves you.

He came for hopeless cases, like me, number one example. And he changed me because he loved me. That's the thing that changed me from an insecure young man to one who found security in the love of God, in recognizing that he loved me as much as he loved Jesus.

That's faith. You remember what the Lord told Peter, you're going to deny me three times, but I'm not going to pray you won't deny me. I'm going to pray that after you deny me, that's needed for you, Peter.

You're too proud. You need to be broken. And I think only when you deny me three times, you'll be broken permanently because you think too much of yourself right now.

So I'm not going to pray you won't be, you won't deny me. I'll tell you a lot of things the Lord will not pray that doesn't happen to you. It should happen to you because there's pride and he wants to break it.

And that's what prepared Peter for the day of Pentecost. You know that on the day of Pentecost, when he did that fantastic work of bringing 3,000 Jews to Christ in one day, I don't know anybody in the history of humanity has brought 3,000 Jews to Christ in one day. It was a fantastic thing.

And they were filled with the Holy Spirit in one day. Boy, he could have thought and people patted him on his back and said, Peter, you're a great guy. He would always remember how he denied Jesus three times.

That break him, breaking solved his pride problem forever. He needed it. So Jesus never prayed that he would not deny.

It was his preparation for Pentecost. But he said, after you deny me and you hit rock bottom, when you get there, remember one thing. I still love you.

God still loves you. That's the meaning of don't lose your faith. I pray for you that your faith should not fail.

It doesn't matter even if you deny me, but don't lose your faith. When you hit the bottom, trust God that he still loves you. He made a mess of your life, but he still loves you.

If you lost faith, you've lost everything. If you made a mess of your life, that's okay. There's still hope for you.

But if after making mess of your life, you lose faith, that's 11 of the Sadducees. And the devil's just waiting at that time to fill you with 11 of the Sadducees unbelief. God doesn't love you.

He didn't answer that prayer. He allowed your child to die when he could have easily healed it. Well, maybe God took away your child because he felt that child would grow up to live for the devil.

And you'll thank God in eternity for taking away that child before he ever lived for the devil. God's ways are mysterious, but I know they're always in love. And the third thing is coupled to what I just said, you know, unbelief in God's wisdom, God's power, God's love, and unbelief in God's wisdom.

In other words, I think I can plan my life better than God. That's unbelief in God's wisdom. I think that if I surrender completely to God, say, Lord, I only want your will in my life.

He'll mess up my life. A lot of believers feel like that. I ask people, are you willing to choose the profession God chooses for you? And they're a bit scared.

You should say, sure, that's what I want. Do you say that? Or do you feel, oh, well, if I surrender completely, he'll tell me to get some third-rate useless job where I'll hardly be able to survive monetarily. Do you think so? Do you believe he's a father? I ask people, are you willing to marry anybody whom God chooses for you? Oh, I better not do that.

He'll pick up some ugly old girl from somewhere and ask me to marry her. Such wrong concepts of God. It's a lie of the devil.

And the spirit of prophecy shines a light upon these lies of the devil. God is a loving father whose wisdom is perfect. He will not give you Miss Universe to marry because she'll make a mess of your life.

And she'll probably run away with somebody after one year or so. So he doesn't want you to ruin your life. So he won't give you the prettiest girl in the world, thank God.

But he'll give you someone who's pretty inwardly, whose inward beauty never fades through many years. God is wise. His wisdom is perfect.

And you can have faith in that. You can know that you have faith in that when you, if you have surrendered completely to his will. Say, Lord, I'll do anything you tell me.

I'll marry the person you choose. I'll choose the profession you choose. I decided that when I was 21, 50 years ago.

And I'm so thankful that I did because he made a better job of planning my life than I could have done it. I planned it myself. The 11 of the Sadducees.

Trust him. Trust his power. Trust his love.

And trust his wisdom. And the third 11. Luke chapter 12 and verse 1. These are the things with which the devil's seeking to corrupt the church.

This woman, the bride of Satan, the Babylon, seeking to corrupt, putting these three measures of the 11 into these three measures of we. The third 11, Luke 12 verse 1, he speaks, beware of the 11 of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. Now, hypocrisy is just one of the marks of a Pharisee.

I mean, if you've seen that book of mine called 50 Marks of Pharisees, you'll see there are at least 50 marks of Pharisees. One of them is hypocrisy. But what I want to speak about is particularly one mark of a Pharisee, and that's legalism.

Worldliness can destroy a church. Unbelief can destroy a church. And legalism can destroy a church.

And these three things don't look very sinful. You can be worldly without ever committing adultery, without ever robbing a bank, without ever slapping people on the face. You can be unbelieving even though all your doctrines are correct.

And you can have legalism when your external life looks so good. Legalism and hypocrisy are pretty close to each other because legalists are always trying to show that they are better than they really are inside. The legalism and hypocrisy go together.

Legalists are those who, you know, are particular about little things. Jesus, you remember the time when Jesus, one mark of legalism is self-righteousness. You remember when Jesus went to the fig tree looking for fruit.

He didn't find it. He saw only leaves and cursed it. It's got more than one meaning.

One meaning is human righteousness. When Adam sinned, he immediately took fig leaves. Fig leaves are about the largest leaves you can find, and covered him with it.

I mean, he was a stupid person. You can't blame him because he didn't know he was the first human being, that if you pluck off a leaf from a tree, after some time, it would wither up. I mean, you know that, but Adam didn't know it.

Human righteousness, trying to cover up our sin with a good external appearance. Jesus cursed it. He curses it today.

Trying to cover ourselves with human righteousness and trying to impress people. Another life inside, another life outside. There's a lot of that.

And this is how the devil destroys a church. You can have wonderful people singing and praising God, but if the people sitting there have got a double life, pretending to be more spiritual than they really are, using language which is more spiritual than they really are, that's the leaven of the Pharisees. It's very closely attached to legalism.

The other thing is, legalists are very proud. And one of the stories is the one in Matthew chapter 20, where Jesus spoke about the laborers. You know the story, the folks who were hired at six o'clock in the morning in Matthew chapter 20, and they worked 12 hours.

And then there were others that came at different times of the day. Then there was a group that came at five o'clock in the evening and worked for one hour. And the difference between that group and all the others was, all the others came on a contract.

You pay us so much, we'll do this. The last group came with no contract. They came on the basis of grace.

The others came on the basis of law. You do this, I'll do this. People who do business with God, you know, I'll pay you a tithe, you bless my life and my business.

It's all business. Or I'll do this for you. They had a contract, but the last group had no contract.

And that's why they got their reward first. And they got the same amount as the people who worked for 12 hours. And now you see the legalists.

Matthew chapter 20, they come to the master and complain. I mean, they got their wages, which they agreed for, but they said in verse 12, you have made them equal to us. Legalists do not like other believers to be equal to them.

They always want to be a little above others. They say, this guy came to the church only a couple of years ago. I've been a senior member here for 25 years.

Well, he may be more spiritual than you are. Legalists live by this attitude. I'm better than that person.

That fellow came much later. See, seniority is in government service, not in the church. Another thing I want to show you about legalists, see Mark chapter three, verse two.

Legalists are people who examine others very carefully to find some fault in them. Some fault in the length of their hair or the color of their dress or the shape of their dress or some little thing in whether they're wearing some earrings or jewelry. They're always, they examine people very carefully.

They've got very sharp eyes and very sharp ears to listen to all the gossip going around. Mark chapter three, they were watching him very closely. They even watch Jesus very closely to see if they can find something to accuse him.

I want to ask you, my brother, sister, just be honest with yourself. Do you observe other people carefully not to help them, but to find something to talk about? So when you go back from the church meeting, you say, did you see this? You tell your wife, did you see this? You tell your husband, did you see this? That's a mark of those who've got the leaven of the parents, legalism. They're legalists.

They're not under grace. And it's very difficult to have fellowship with such people. Are you a legalist? Do you know that legalism is worse than adultery? And the clearest example of it is John chapter eight, where you see the woman caught in adultery one side and all these legalistic Pharisees who got the verse from Deuteronomy or Exodus or wherever they got it, that this woman should be stoned.

They got a scripture. Maybe they were watching her. How do you catch a woman in the act of adultery, unless you've been sort of snooping around and waiting and, ah, we got her.

Caught in the act of adultery. There's a verse in Jeremiah. I want to, it's a very interesting verse.

Jeremiah chapter five, it says in verse 26, there are wicked people found among my people. They watch like fowlers lying in wait. They set a trap.

You know, people want to catch birds. They don't make a noise. They kept that trap there and hide in the bushes.

But these people are trying to catch men and women. Legalists to find something wrong. That's why your life is so miserable, brother, sister.

That's why you're so defeated. You'll never get victory in a hundred years because victory comes to those who are under grace, not at those who are under law. You see the reason now.

So here was these, all these fellows with their stones and their verses of scripture. And here was this woman and Jesus is in the middle, the legalists and the adulterous. You want to know whose sin was worse? See the end of the story.

Whose side Jesus took? Who did Jesus drive away? And who did Jesus comfort? He drove away all those legalists. He didn't say don't stone her. Yeah, the word of God says stoner, but he was without sin, stoner.

And I tell you, if you and I were standing there, some of those Pharisees would have picked up a stone because we don't know all about their life, but this was Jesus. They knew that if anybody picked up a stone, Jesus would have said, hey, shall I tell everybody what you all did? Oh no, no, no, Lord, I'm going. And like that, it's the eldest went out first.

They all walked out and there was one man left who had not committed sin. Only one who was qualified to throw stones, Jesus. But Jesus doesn't carry stones in his pockets.

He doesn't pick up stones. He's not like believers watching, watching, watching. I've been in meetings where I've seen preachers flinging verses at somebody there and somebody there.

It's like stones, sometimes huge rocks, three, four verses to hit somebody on the head with. Jesus wasn't like that. Do you preach verses to your wife? Thus said the Lord, wives submit to your husbands.

It's a rock. You might as well take a rock and smash your head. Throw away your stones, brother, sister.

Jesus doesn't have any. Legalism is worse than adultery. She didn't hide her sins.

Has nobody condemned you? No, I don't condemn you. But your adultery is serious. Don't ever do it again.

He takes sin seriously. But she got forgiveness. Those legalists didn't.

And that can be the end of the story when Christ comes again. So watch out. Beware of the leaven of worldliness, the leaven of unbelief, and the leaven of legalism.

It's powerheads. Dear brothers and sisters, the Bible says today if you hear his voice, don't harden your heart because tomorrow the voice you hear so lovely in your heart today will not be so loud. It'll be fainter.

And by the time a week is over, you could easily forget it. Now is the day of salvation. Now is the time to respond and say, Lord, I really want to humble myself before you and respond to that specific area in my life or areas where you have spoken to me.

I don't want to sit here thinking I'm a senior person whom others cannot be equal to. Lord, deliver me from the deception into which the devils made me fall. Wake me up before I get leavened completely.

Bring me back to that first love I had, Lord, in the early days when I was not corrupted with these leavens. Heavenly Father, help us each one. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/emKmJC86tmc.mp4>

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