

Gathering in Jesus Name

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of unity and God's word in determining the approval of a church, and warns against gathering around a false Jesus.

Duration: 56:58

Topics: "Church Purity", "Spiritual Discernment"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of discernment in recognizing true churches from those influenced by worldly principles or led astray by false teachings. It highlights the need for churches to prioritize love for Jesus, love for one another, and purity over numbers, eloquence, or material prosperity. The sermon draws parallels from the churches in Revelation, showcasing reasons why God may have to raise up new churches to maintain a pure testimony for His name amidst spiritual decline and compromise.

Transcript

Praise the Lord. We were looking last Sunday, the subject of why another church? That's a question that many non-Christians ask. Why do you have so many churches among Christians? And it's a question that new believers ask and very often they don't know the answer.

Are Christians people who just split and divide constantly or is there a reason behind it? You remember last Sunday, we looked at this verse in 1 Corinthians 11, first of all, which said that in verse 18, in the first place when you come together as a church, I hear there are divisions that exist among you. So, this is not a 20th, 21st century phenomenon. It was there in the very first century.

And in part, I believe it. And then he goes on to say this amazing word. There have to be these groups or factions or separations and divisions so that those who are approved will become evident.

So, there you have the answer. The reason why God has allowed many, many groups and there are thousands of them today is so that those who are approved by God will become evident. Now, I suppose every single group thinks they are approved by God.

Everybody holds the Bible and says, most of them anyway, that we are the true church. Many of them say that. So, how do we know who is approved? There is only one standard that we can go by, and that is God's word.

If it's not according to God's word, God cannot approve it. And so, those who don't know the word of God, they will, of course, never discover who are approved of God or not. And if you are not a serious student of God's word, which is given you in your own language, then you will think every church is the same.

And the reason is because you don't know God's standard. In the Old Testament, the Lord told Moses to build a tabernacle. But you'd never know whether the tabernacle was according to the pattern unless you read what God told Moses in Exodus.

And if you read what God's written in Exodus, and then you can look at the tabernacle, you can know whether it's according to the pattern or not. But someone who just looks at the tabernacle can give his own opinion. Well, I think, you know, this curtain shouldn't be this color or the pole should be a little high or something like that.

It's human opinion. And very often, Christians look at churches, Christians who have not deeply studied God's word, and they have their opinions. They are fit for the garbage can, the trash can.

It's only one who knows God's word who can see is this approved by God or not. And if it isn't, he'll be able to say, here is something in God's word that's not found here. How could this be approved by God? So that's the meaning of that.

Those who are approved will become evident. And we always want to be among those who are approved. You know, if we can say that among Christians, the vast majority only seek God's blessing.

Their main prayer is, Lord, bless me, bless me, bless me. I mean, how many Christians are there who say, Lord, do you approve of my life? Do you approve of my family life? Do you approve of the way I'm living with my wife or husband? You who see the secret things which other believers don't see, do you approve of it? Do you approve of the way I've brought up my children? Do you approve of the way I handle my finances? Do you approve of my thought life? Do you approve of what I'm watching on the internet every day? Do you approve of it? It's not just a question of whether it's clean. Do you approve of it? Do you approve the amount of time I spent on the internet or the amount of time I spend doing other things or watching television or whatever it is? I think there are very, very few believers who ask that question.

Do you approve of this, Lord? Do you approve? And when we don't ask that, it's almost as though we couldn't care less whether God approves of us or not. And people who don't ask that question concerning their personal life and their family life, every area and aspect of their financial matters and other things, how in the world do you think they will ask God, do you approve of the church? I'm going to, Lord. I mean, that's the last thing they're interested in.

The first thing you should be interested in is your personal life and then your family life. And if you're not seriously asking God whether he approves of those different aspects of your personal life, your thoughts, your words, do you approve, Lord, the way I speak to people? Do you approve of the way I live at home? Such people will never be interested in finding out whether God approves of a church. And that's why you find the vast majority of Christians, they are, in a sense, spiritually blind as to what is God's pattern for his church.

And so many people sit there and say, some people say, well, I go to this church because there's good singing. There are various reasons. Some people say, I go to this church because there's a good children's program there.

I mean, I've heard even such ridiculous reasons, like in the United States, I go to this church because there's a big parking lot, I don't have to look for parking for my car. And there are all types of reasons why people go to church, choose a particular church. Or one is, it happens to be nearby, and that's why I go there.

So many people, I mean, you ask yourself, what is the reason why you decide to be a part of a particular church? Is it because you've compared it with God's word, with different aspects of God's word, and says, this seems to be, it's not perfect, there's no church in the world that's perfect, but this seems to be the closest, as I understand God's word. And if your understanding of God's word increases in a few years, and you discover things that are wrong in the church you're attending, and then you find another church, maybe a little distance away, a little more inconvenient to go there, or you find that's closer to God's word, if I were you, I'd go there. I would never choose a church by it being close to me, therefore I go there.

Is it according to God's word? I wouldn't even choose a church according to other people are very friendly. I mean, that's a club. I believe people in the church should be friendly.

And if we are not friendly, we should be ashamed of ourselves. But that's not the reason with which I would choose a church. I mean, you could go to some cults that are very friendly.

Well, I wouldn't choose that because it's not according to God's word. So it's very important to know God's word if you want to know whether God approves of a church. Personally, I couldn't care less whether man approves of our church or not.

It's worth nothing because the church is something that Jesus is building. He said in Matthew 16, verse 18, I will build my church, and the mark of the church that Jesus builds. The same verse, he said, the gates of Hades, the powers of spiritual depth will not be able to overpower it.

So when the powers of spiritual depth are able to overpower something that calls itself a church, we can be pretty sure that's not a church that Jesus built. I wouldn't want to be a part of it. Who is more powerful, Christ or Satan? We know that.

It's Christ. He defeated Satan on the cross. And if Satan is getting more and more power in a church and he's able to infiltrate that church with his spirit, the spirit of the world, and the elders of that church are not able to do anything against it or restrain it because they're afraid they'll offend somebody or because they're afraid some of their members will leave, we can say that those elders are being influenced by the devil.

I mean, Jesus Christ has got certain standards. The powers of spiritual depth, the forces of darkness are always seeking to destroy the church of Jesus Christ. But the real church of Jesus Christ will stand triumphant until he comes.

Now, the thing I want you to see is that when sometimes a church that calls itself a church does not stand true over a period of time, and usually the failure begins with the leaders. If the leaders fail, the church fails. The book of Revelation, for example, makes that very, very clear.

It's when the leaders were good. The church was good in the seven churches, two of them. The leaders were good.

And five of the churches, the leaders had backslidden. And so the church had backslidden. The quality of a church is not determined by the people who sit there.

It's by the leaders. It's like in a home. There may be 10 children in a home, but it's the father and mother who determine what happens in that home.

If they are real godly parents, they don't allow the children to determine how their home is to be run. And if there are godly elders, they don't allow the people in the church to determine how their church should be run, because the church is like a family. It's not a democracy where everybody has a vote.

Some people think it is, but it isn't. The church is not a country. It's a family.

It's not an organization. It's not a board where people have votes. It's a family where God appoints authority, and just like in an earthly family.

So it's the leaders that determine which way the church goes. In the Old Testament, we see that when the prophets spoke to Israel, they always said the problem is with you leaders, the princes, the false prophets, the priests, because they went astray, the people go astray. Now, the reason I mention that is that when you look at a church, don't see if there are any hypocrites there, because I'll tell you something in advance.

Every single church, including ours, has got hypocrites. You'll never find a church in the world without hypocrites. So if you're looking for a church without hypocrites, you'll go nowhere.

You'll just sit at home all by yourself. That's not the way to gauge a church. The way to gauge a church is not whether some two or three worldly people come there, or 10 worldly people come there.

The way to gauge a church is by what is the standard of the elders? What do they preach, and how do they live? That's the test, because that's, it's like the driver of a bus. I mean, I don't care if there are a few quarrelsome people sitting in the bus. If the driver of the bus is driving the bus in the right direction, I'll get to my destination.

So I'm interested in which direction the driver is driving the bus. That's more important to me. So keep that in mind as a little guideline, and let me proceed now and tell you Jesus' definition of a church.

In Matthew 19, 18, sorry, in Matthew 18, is the second time Jesus spoke about the church. He spoke about the church only twice. One is Matthew 16, 18, when he spoke about the warfare of the church, and the church will not be, will not go under when Satan attacks it.

Matthew 16 and verse 18. And that's how our church should be, that we can expect to encounter attacks from Satan. And you know, Satan doesn't come with horns and hooves.

He comes through human beings. He comes through agents. Jude, in his letter, speaks about certain people who have crept into your church without anybody being aware of it.

You know, if an elder brother is not a good watchman, a good doorkeeper, all types of people can creep into the church and create problems and corrupt the church. And if the elder brother is not having discernment, he can give some of those people who appear to be very zealous, but who are not spiritual, he can give them some responsibility, and then the church is doomed. So there's a great need for discernment.

Satan comes sometimes with open attacks of persecution against the church, but he's never succeeded so much with that. He comes with deception. The Bible speaks of Satan coming as a roaring lion and as a serpent.

And you know, in Eden, he did not come frightening Adam as a roaring lion. He would accomplish nothing. Adam would have run away from that tree of knowledge of good and evil.

He came as a very beautiful, subtle serpent. And that's how he deceives man even today. Persecution has never destroyed the church in any generation in any country, but deception has.

So we gotta be careful that when Satan comes as a deceiver, the church can overcome it. The gates of hell will never prevail against the church. That's Matthew 16, 18.

The second place where the church is mentioned is in Matthew 18, where it speaks about discipline in the church, and that's also needed, where sometimes a brother sins, Matthew 18, 15, and you need to, even a brother can sin. We know that. And he needs to be told immediately and needs to be set right, and if he just keeps on sinning, then it says in verse 17, you gotta tell it to the church.

If a person keeps on sinning and refuses to be free from sin, I mean, if he leaves the church and goes and joins some other club, that's fine, but if he wants to continue in the church and to keep on sinning, the whole church has to be told, this fellow is sinning and we gotta discipline him. And that's the second place where Jesus speaks about the church. And then he speaks about, again, about the authority of the church to bind on earth, and then that'll be bound in heaven.

Bound in heaven means where Satan has got his headquarters in the heavenlies. There, something will be bound if he bind his authority here on earth. And we can lose people in the same way here on earth, and they'll be loosed.

And then he defines the church in verse 19 and 20. And it's not 200 or 300, it's not 20,000 or 30,000, it's two or three. The church is basically, starts with two or three.

It's like a little baby being born in a mother's womb. It's a small, wee little thing, two individual units come together, dissimilar units come together and become one in a mother's womb. And the moment they become one, that's the beginning of a body.

I mean, you know those, in the birth of a baby, I mean, there are so many dissimilar units. Floating around in a mother's womb, that accomplishes nothing. A lot of churches are like that.

A lot of units floating around. But when two become one, they join together, then it's the beginning of a body inside the mother's womb, then it grows. So it begins with two, never can begin with one.

In the Old Testament, God sent his prophets, they were all alone. But in the New Covenant, Jesus sent his people two by two. And he says here, two have to agree.

And then they can ask, and the father will grant it. And because, the reason he says is because when two are agreed, or even better, if three are agreed, verse 20, there I am in the midst. Who is in the midst? Jesus is in the midst when two or three are gathered together by the Holy Spirit.

Now, Matthew 18, 20 is probably the most common verse quoted by churches and Christians every time they gather together themselves. They may not be agreed with each other, there may be tensions there,

there may be all types of problems of relationships there, but they quote this verse. Oh Lord, we are gathered together in your name, and you are here in our midst.

He's not in their midst, because they are not in unity. They're not in symphony like that word says. There's discord there.

Some people who don't get along with each other, somebody who doesn't talk to someone. There's no unity there, and the Lord's not there. They can imagine that he's there, but he isn't.

It's a Christian club. I personally believe a lot of Christian churches are Christian clubs, because the Lord is not there, because they don't emphasize the importance of being one with each other, the importance of unity, and numbers are not important. That's the thing we see here when Jesus speaks about the church.

Numbers are not important. I'd look for a church that's more interested in unity than numbers. That's one of the first things I'd look for.

Let me see a church which is not seeking to increase its numbers, but seeking to grow. You know, it's like a baby in the mother's womb. That body, as long as it's united, it's growing.

But sometimes, this is what we call a miscarriage. Something breaks apart, and then the body disintegrates. And still be floating around its mother's womb, but it's not a body anymore, it's dead.

So unity is the main thing. Even the shape of an embryo in a mother's womb doesn't look like a human being in the beginning. It doesn't matter.

You know, a lot of people are concerned about pattern. Pattern. I say, brother, pattern is secondary.

Unity is primary. The shape of that baby in a mother's womb is not primary. That's secondary.

If it's united and it's got life, by the time it comes out in nine months, the shape will be perfect. So a church, as it grows, the pattern will be okay if there's unity and there's life, that Jesus is in the midst, and that's the important thing. Now, the Bible speaks of another Jesus.

So we need to ask ourselves, which Jesus is in our midst? 2 Corinthians 11 says, to the Paul tells the Corinthians, when all the wrong things going on in that church, he says, I'm afraid for you. I'm afraid that you guys will start following another Jesus, and that when you come together and everybody's screaming away in tongues and you're allowing that fellow who's living in adultery to just live there, and you dishonor the Lord's table the way you come around it, and you take each other to court, all types of things happening in Corinthian church, but they gather in the name of Jesus. And Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11, he says, which Jesus is it? Is it the Jesus I worship? Is it the Jesus who came to earth from heaven? We need to know.

Let's turn to Matthew chapter one. This is the first time in the New Testament, the first time in the Bible, the word Jesus comes in Matthew chapter one, where it speaks in the very first verse about the genealogy of Jesus. And the real Jesus, here it is.

This is the meaning of that name. He will save his people from their sins. Now, forgiveness of sins was there in the Old Testament for years, 1,000 years before Christ came.

David says in Psalm 103, bless the Lord, O my soul, who forgives all your sins. So that's not new. Forgiveness of sins was not new.

Psalm 32, blessed is the man whose sins are forgiven. But here, he's talking about something way beyond forgiveness. All the people whose sins were forgiven were still defeated by sin.

And now a new message was coming. Jesus is coming to save people from their sin. He's called Savior.

He's come to save those who are forgiven of their anger. He'll save them from their anger. Those who are forgiven of their lust, he'll save them from their lust.

Those who are forgiven of their cheating and lying, he'll save them from those things. He will save them from their sins. So, when it says, I will be in their midst, I wanna make sure that a church is gathering around this Jesus, who has come to save people from sin.

I wanna be in such a church. And I believe that's the only church where Jesus is, the real Jesus. This is from scripture.

He shall call his name Jesus, because he shall save his people from their sins. There are many Jesuses in the world. You know, there are many Spanish people whose names are Jesus.

Many Mexicans whose names are Jesus. Which Jesus is it? Is it this Jesus who saves people from their sins? Or is it another Jesus like it says in 2 Corinthians 11 through you? And that you can find out by, if you attend a church even for a few weeks, you will know whether they're talking about being saved from sin. Or whether they're talking about how they can collect your money.

Or whether they're talking about healing. Healing is very important. The Lord does 101 things for us, but the number one thing mentioned is he saves us from our sin.

Because other things, so many other people can give. Speaking in tongues, there are people of other religions who speak in tongues. But it's only this Jesus who can save us from sin.

That is the identifying mark. I mean, he may give us tongues, and he may give us healing, he may bless us in 1001 ways, but the primary mark is he saves us from our sins. That's the way we identify.

If you're gathered together in my name. What did we read? If two or three have gathered together in my name, Matthew 18, 20. That's important.

They didn't just gather together. They gathered together in the name of Jesus. And so we go to the first time the name Jesus is spoken on earth and say, with Jesus, in the name of one who has come to save us from our sins.

I want to gather in a church where people gather in the name of one who has come to save us from all our sins. If that's the real Jesus, then I can be absolutely certain that's the real Jesus. A lot of people come together to sing songs.

They come together for entertainment. They come together because they like the music. They come together because they want a handout or some financial help or something like that.

There's so many reasons why people go to church. But the real church is that which is gathered in the name of Jesus, where they come together to be saved from their sins, first of all. And we invite people to be saved from their sins.

There are many reasons, as I said, why people can be attracted to a church. And there are Christian leaders who are so blind as to say, we want to make a church that is friendly, seeker-friendly, where they want to find out what they're interested in, and we'll present that. Well, I'll tell you, the world is interested in a lot of things.

If you're going to present that, you're not going to gather around the real Jesus. If you try to attract people with music, they're not coming to be saved from their sin. They're coming because they like music.

They'll be at a rock concert one day and in your church the other day. Or they're coming because they like the building or something else like that. So it's very important.

So what happens when a church drifts away from this calling? Is God going to leave himself on earth without a witness? He's going to forsake that church and he's going to start again with a few people who will gather in the name of Jesus. And that is to be saved from their sin. And that's always happened throughout the centuries, right from the beginning.

If you turn to Revelation, you'll see that. Let's see an example of that, Revelation chapter two. In the early days, it was pretty simple.

There was only one church in every town. There was only one church in Corinth. There was only one church in Ephesus.

There was only one church in different places. And if you're a Christian, you just went to that one church. But it's so different today.

And you can see the origin of it in Revelation two and three. In the Acts of the Apostles, we see the beginnings of churches being planted by the apostles and elders being appointed. And we never read of any split anywhere.

But 30 years later, this is about 80, 95, means about 65 years after the day of Pentecost. Before the end of the first century, things have already become pretty bad. And then we need to know what happened.

In Revelation chapter two, the Lord says to the messenger, the word angel is really a word which means messenger, like in the Greek and in the Indian translations, the other word messenger. God has not appointed any angel in heaven over a church. Angels are ministering spirits to the church.

They are not over any church. The word is messenger. The messenger means among the elders.

Every church has elders, plural, so that there's no one man leadership. There's a balance in a true Christian church. The apostles appointed elders, we read in Acts 14 and Titus chapter one.

But among the elders, one may be gifted with the word more than the others. And he's usually called the messenger, the one who brings the message most of the time to the church. To that messenger, the Lord says, here is a message I have for you.

Now, these seven churches are fairly close by, maybe 40, 50 kilometers from each other, not very far, but they were not one denomination. If they were one denomination and they had some bishop over them, then the Lord would have told John, send a letter to the bishop and he'll circulate it among the seven churches. No, there was no bishop.

Each church was independent with its own elders and one of them was a messenger. So the Lord has to say, send a separate message to each church. Even if it's 40 kilometers away, it's another church with its own elders.

That's the New Testament pattern. It's not like in the Jewish system, they have what they call a seven branched candlestick or lampstand. But here, it is not a seven branched lampstand, one denomination with seven branches.

In chapter one, verse 20, it speaks seven separate lampstands. Very different. It's seven separate lampstands.

Each is a separate church by itself. Those are seven churches. They've got their own elders.

Now, the advantage of this is, if they were all one denomination, then if one got corrupt, all would get corrupt. They say, if you have one rotten apple in a basket, all the other six good apples will be spoiled in no time. And that's why the Lord doesn't establish denominations, because if one gets corrupt, the whole thing gets corrupt.

I mean, this is usually true. You find a particular denomination, you take any one, and you'll find that all the churches with that name usually have certain characteristics, good or bad. But when churches are independent of each other, local churches, the corruption of one doesn't get to the other.

This rotten apple is in one basket and the good apple is in another basket. It doesn't touch this. That's why each church is to be independent.

They have fellowship with each other. Maybe one apostle planted all of them. I mean, Apostle Paul planted the church in Ephesus and the church in Corinth, but he didn't join them together and make them one denomination.

No. They were independent churches. He had authority over them because he had planted them.

And the elders were submitting to him. But there was no denomination. There was no central control.

There was no central, you know, person determining who should do this, that, and the other. The apostle was like a father, not an elected chairman like in many churches. So that's the first thing I want you to notice here.

So God protected, this way God protects one church from being corrupt by another church which is corrupt 30 kilometers away. So the church in Ephesus was one of those wonderful churches. I believe it was the best one in the days of Paul because he spent three years there more than anywhere else.

But before he left, he said, things are going to be different when I go. He told them in Acts 20, ravenous wolves will come inside. Those wolves were just waiting for Paul to leave.

They knew they couldn't get in because Paul was a very strict doorkeeper. He wouldn't let the world come in. He wouldn't let so many things come in.

He wasn't interested in numbers. But he looked at the four or five elders who were sitting with him one day in Acts 20 and said, things are not going to be the same once I go. I know what's going to happen.

All these wolves will come right in. And you fellows are going to draw disciples after yourself. Maybe I should show you that verse if you're not familiar with it.

It's in Acts 20. There are two things he said. First of all, the devil's going to come in through ravenous wolves in verse 29, Acts 20, 29.

He's speaking to the elders in Ephesus, verse 17. And he tells them in verse 29, after my departure, savage wolves will come in, not spare the flock. They're going to tear the flock apart with division, strife, deception, all types of things.

And secondly, I mean, if there were five elders sitting there in front of him, he said, from yourselves, some fellows will start drawing little groups of those who are attached to him and draw the disciples after them and they'll form little groups. And we see that happening. Some elders getting certain people who are their devotees and some other elder has certain other devotees and it becomes like a split in a political party.

That one political party becomes four or five and this is what happens. And so in Revelation chapter two, we can see the condition of that church 30 years later after Paul spoke to those elders and what he prophesied was fulfilled. Unfortunately, the wolves got in and he says, say to the messenger of the church in Ephesus, there's still only one church there.

There's a lot of good things there. Verse two, I know your deeds, your toil, your perseverance. You cannot tolerate evil men.

You put to test those who are called false apostles and they are not found to be false. Perseverance, you got endured for my name's sake. So many good things.

You've not grown weary, but I have one thing against you. You have left your first love and you have left the most important thing. See, the first commandment is not to go out and serve God.

The first commandment is love God with all your heart and all your soul, strength and mind. And the second commandment is also not to go out and serve God. The second commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself.

A new commandment I give you, Jesus said, that you love one another as I have loved you. You're willing to lay down your life for one another. So if we are not willing to love God and love one another, everything else we do becomes worthless.

Please remember that, brothers and sisters. When a church forgets to proclaim that love for God, to love Jesus with all our heart, soul, strength and mind is supreme. You gotta love him more than father, mother, brother, sister, wife, children, everything else.

That church has already started drifting. It's not preaching that. And if that church doesn't major on the fact that we gotta love one another, forgive one another, not hold any grudges against each other, but majors on activity, activity and music and things like that and forgets about love, it becomes like the church in

Ephesus.

So it says here, if you don't repent, and this is the point I want you to see, verse five. And if you don't see, if you don't recognize, remember, verse five, from where you have fallen. Where were you once? You have fallen.

Can you fall when you have so much activity and verse two, toil and perseverance and they still have their conferences, they still have their music, the numbers are increasing? Would you say that such a church has fallen? Jesus says such a church has fallen. See, many Christians don't have discernment to see when a church has fallen. They think, oh, numbers are increasing, more people are coming.

I'm not excited to tell you honestly when more people come to our church. That's not the test. I praise God for those who have a hunger to hear God's word, wonderful.

But the test is, is this church growing in fervent love for Jesus? Are there more and more people in this church who are worshipers, who love Jesus more? More than anything on this earth and who are not looking forward to heaven but looking forward to meet with Jesus and who are really judging themselves severely when they find anything unloving in their heart towards one person in this church. That's the type of church that Jesus is looking for, even if it doesn't have much activity. Activity is second.

When Jesus said, the Holy Spirit will come upon you and you shall have power and you shall be my witnesses, one of the most misunderstood words, verses. He did not say you shall bear witness unto me. Do you know the difference between bearing witness unto Jesus and being a witness of Jesus? World of difference.

Bearing witness means I can live an adultery sin and I just speak with my mouth and bear witness about Jesus, he died, he rose again. And that's what's happening in many pulpits today. You all of a sudden discover that the pastor has fallen into sin, he's in adultery.

Pastor is divorced or something like that. And I'm saying, I say how in the world did all these stupid Christians sit there for so long and not discern that this man is like that? Or he went after money or some scandal like that. How is it all these people didn't discern? Because they don't read their Bibles.

They like the music, they like the numbers. They thought God approves of this church because a club is popular and the numbers increase and there's a lot of entertainment in that club and many churches are clubs. But the mark of a true church is love.

You have left your first love means you have stopped loving me like you did in the beginning and you stopped loving one another like you loved in the beginning. You remember the early days the Lord says when you really loved one another? How you cared for one another, how you loved one another. You were not great in number those days, but you will love one another.

You didn't know so much of the Bible those days, but you loved me with all your heart. And he says, I wish you'd come back to that. You have fallen.

A man with discernment sees that a church has fallen, that a believer has fallen, that an elder has fallen. When love for Christ is not the supreme passion, the passion of his life, when he's not seeking with all his heart to love others and to encourage people to love one another so that everyone in the church knows you're a backslider if you don't love Jesus with all your heart. You're a backslider if you don't love your wife

as you love yourself, if you don't love your husband as you love yourself, if you don't love your fellow believers as you love yourself.

I mean, you would never, for example, spread a scandal about your daughter. Well, you spread a scandal about a fellow believer? What's the difference? You don't love him. Love covers a multitude of sins.

And if God wants to expose something, let him expose it. That's his business. But we're not in the business of criticizing, backbiting, and all that.

So these things can flourish in a church if the elders are not alert. I'm saying there'll always be some hypocrites in a church. We can't avoid that.

But the preaching must be so strong that the sinners tremble in Zion and the hypocrites are afraid. Let me show you a verse in Isaiah 33. Speaks about a true church there, in Isaiah 33.

The fire of God is so strong in such a church that we read in Isaiah 33 and verse 14, the sinners in Zion are terrified. Oh, I want to be in a church where sinners are terrified if they live in sin. They know that God loves them.

They turn from their sin, the terror of sin. The terror goes and they know God loves them and will forgive them. But if they play the hypocrite, it says the trembling has seized the hypocrites.

They tremble. I want to be in a church where hypocrites tremble every Sunday they come. They may not turn from their sin, that's up to them, but they'll tremble.

And they'll never have power in that church because love for Jesus and love for one another is supreme. Now, if that doesn't happen, it says there for Revelation 2.5, remember from where you've fallen and repent. You elder brother, turn and do what you did at first.

Otherwise, now this is the verse I want you to notice. Otherwise, I'm going to come and remove your lampstand out of its place. That means I will derecognize you as a church.

You will still call yourself the first church in Ephesus, but the Lord says, I will not recognize you. I will not be there in your midst at all. I will leave.

You will conduct your conferences and your singing and your numbers may still increase, but to him, verse seven, he who has a year to hear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the whole church and all the churches. It's not only for the elder. To him who overcomes, now this is an individual message.

Among all the people sitting in a church in Ephesus, there are some who want to be overcomers, who want to overcome sin, who want to overcome the world. Jesus said, be of good cheer. I have overcome the world.

John 16, 33, 1 John 2, verse 15 to 17 says, the things in the world are the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life. You want to overcome that like Jesus overcame. There are people who desire to overcome.

I will grant you to eat of the tree of life. Now what happens, supposing the elders here in Ephesus read this letter from John and said, ah, I don't believe that. John's just being very critical of us.

We're okay. Look the way God's blessing us. Our music is getting better.

So many new people are coming to our church. John doesn't know what's happening. He's sitting there in Patmos.

He doesn't know what's happening in Ephesus. Okay. But it is a word from God, from an apostle.

They wouldn't listen. And God would wait a little time, and then Jesus would fulfill his promise. He derecognizes them as a church, and he leaves.

Jesus leaves that church, but they still carry on with their meetings and their singing. And their doctrine is still okay. Their doctrines are all fundamental.

It's their love for Jesus and love for one another that's gone. Now my question is, what would these few overcomers sitting there do? There are a few overcomers. What would they do? What does the bride do when the bridegroom leaves the wedding hall? Does she still hang around there? No.

She'll go with the bridegroom. She'll say, my bridegroom's gone. I don't want to be here.

And those overcomers will leave, maybe seven or eight of them, and they'll meet in a little house. That'll be nothing compared to this big first church of Ephesus with 1,000 people in their own building. Here are these seven or eight people meeting in a small house.

Mostly there may be some poor people. They gather together because they love Jesus, and they gather around the name of Jesus who came to save his people from their sins. Nobody in Ephesus recognizes that as a church.

They think this is the church. It's a big one. But the Lord from heaven recognizes that little group.

That's where I am. And those with discernment in Ephesus will go there, not here. Those who want honor and something other than holiness and purity will come to the big building called the church.

You wait another 50 years, and that small group has grown and become 300, 400, 500. It becomes the second church in Ephesus. And the elders, maybe they're dying or other people are taking over, and the same thing happens all over again.

Whenever a church becomes big and prosperous, it loses its vision. It forgets that love for Jesus, love for one another is primary. All men will know you're my disciples when you love one another, not when you sing well, not even when your doctrine is right.

And that church grows and it becomes backslidden. Christ says, I warn you, the same thing that happened 50 years ago to the other church is gonna happen to you. But there are a few overcomers, some young people here who are disturbed by the way that church is going.

And then the Lord says, I'll derecognize you as well. And the time comes, the elders say, no, we're okay. That gets derecognized.

And these seven or eight people get out and start meeting in a home. Now we have three, in the eyes of the world, three churches in Ephesus, in the eyes of the Lord, only one. That small little group meeting there.

It's very difficult for the average Christian to recognize that Jesus is not born in Herod's palace, but in a cow shed. Even the wise men were not wise at that point. They were pretty foolish.

The star led them to Jerusalem and they said, we don't need the star now. We know where the King of the Jews will be born, in a palace, of course. They go to the palace and the people in the palace don't have a clue.

And the priests say, yeah, yeah, he's gonna be born in Bethlehem, but they don't know he's already born. But these wise men humbled themselves. Okay, Lord, we're stupid to have used our own reason there.

Come on, they look at the star and it says they were glad when they saw the star and the star leads them to a small little house. If they had gone a little earlier, they'd have seen the cow shed, but they missed that. The shepherds got it because they obeyed immediately.

They went and saw Jesus born in a cow shed. You know, the first body of Christ was not in a palace. It was in a little cow shed.

And the body of Christ very often begins like that even today, in a small, despised place that people love Jesus. I'm not saying that if the building becomes big, the Lord is gone. That's not the point.

You can have a thousand people in a church. You can have a huge building. You can have good music.

If love for Christ is central, if love for one another is proclaimed, is central, if being saved from sin is being proclaimed as central, the Lord is there. That's the point. It's not numbers.

It's not any other thing. Now, I want you to notice the two churches in Revelation. So as I told you, this is how churches develop.

I mean, you go 2,000 years, you see what happened. One after the other, churches are derecognized, little groups come up, and then they think we are the ones. They become proud, and God derecognized them.

Then another little group comes up, and so we have these hundreds of churches today. So that it might be manifest whom God has approved. Now, I want to be where God is moving in my generation, not where he was moving 500 years ago.

And that's like saying, you put your children in a school which is a good school today, not the school your great-grandfather attended, which may have been a best school then. How many of you send your children to the school your great-grandfather went to? No. That may have been the best school in his time, but it's not today.

You don't send your wife, put your wife in a hospital where your great-grandmother was admitted 150 years ago. No. That may have been the best hospital then, but the better ones today.

But I find people, when it comes to a church, they say, oh, brother, my father, my grandfather, my great-grandfather always been in this church. Why don't you say that about the school you send your child to? Why don't you say that about the hospital you send your wife to? Why is it only when it comes to church, you say, well, my father, great-grandfather, I'll tell you why. Because for such people, education is important.

Medical treatment is important. Spirituality, ah, it's not so important. That's the real reason.

Otherwise, they would seek for the best church. They wouldn't say which is around the corner or which has got the most parking place or which has got the best music. No.

You don't send a church, you don't send your wife to a hospital because they play good music there. You don't send a child to school because they have good music there. It's education you look for in a school.

It's medical treatment you look for in a hospital. And it's holiness you look for in a church. See why Christendom has drifted.

And there are always, God has always had a witness on the earth. You'll see that when we see him face to face throughout the ages. And there's always been that corrupt Babylonian Christianity and the true Christianity.

Now, this Babylonian Christianity is called in Revelation chapter two, there's an expression. I don't know if you've studied the Bible, you'll notice there's a little expression that comes only two times in the whole Bible. It's called the synagogue of Satan.

You find that first of all in Revelation two, verse nine. I know your tribulation. This is one of the good churches, very good church that the Lord approved of, the church in Smyrna and the leader.

I know your tribulation, your poverty, but spiritually you're rich. And the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews, or you can read Christians, but are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. In those days, it was nominal Jews, today's nominal Christians.

Instead of synagogue of Satan, you can say a church of Satan. I'm not talking about the satanic church where they worship Satan. This is a church which takes the name of Jesus Christ, but is influenced by Satan and his principles of worldliness.

The blasphemy of people who say they are Christians, but a church that is influenced by Satan, where purity and moral purity and financial integrity are not valued. Where fervent love for Christ is not valued as much as eloquence. Do you know the difference between an eloquent preacher and an anointed preacher? I think the vast majority of Christians don't know.

You can be an eloquent politician. There's a difference between eloquence and anointing. Anointing will deliver you from sin.

Eloquence will only make you admire the preachers. Like I heard of a man who was in a particular town and he visited the two churches and heard two preachers. And after hearing one of those preachers, he said, boy, what a fantastic preacher.

He listened to the other one and said, what a fantastic savior. That's the difference between eloquence and anointing. Here's synagogue of Satan.

Here's another one in chapter three to the church in Philadelphia. He says, verse nine, behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan who say they are Jews, but lie. I'll make them come and bow down at your feet.

So these are the two good churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia. And they are the ones who are tremendously opposed by the synagogue of Satan, teaching us that wherever some church seeks to stand up for the truth, they will be opposed most not by non-Christians, but by Christians who are the synagogue of Satan, who want satanic principles and whose love for money is exposed by a true church, whose impurity and low standards are exposed by a true church. Those are two churches.

They didn't have any splits. They were preserved themselves for many years. I'll tell you, there are very few like that.

But notice another church in Pergamon. Why did they go astray? It says here in verse 14, they had the teaching of Balaam. Balaam was a preacher who asked God, shall I go and preach there? And God said, no.

But when those people offered him more money, he asked God again, God, can I find out again? God said, as it were, I know you love that money, go. Even his donkey had more sense. You read that in the Old Testament.

That's a teaching where a preacher begins to preach for money. That destroys the church. And if you don't have discernment to discern the teaching of Balaam in a church where a preacher is interested in money, well, you'll be in the wrong church.

Here's a third one, church in Thyatira, verse 18. What is the problem with this church? This church, verse 20, had a woman called Jezebel. In one translation, it says the wife of the elder who was controlling the church, a church controlled by a woman.

Now God has given a woman such a fantastic ministry that no man has. You know what it is? Giving birth to children. No man can ever have that, no, how hard he tries.

It's a unique ministry. It's to be able to bring forth into the world a unique human being. All right.

That's her ministry, primarily. God's given man the ministry to be the head of the home and to be the leader of a church. Both are equally important, one in their ministry, one in this ministry.

But when a woman moves out of her realm and says, I wanna lead the church and I want to direct the church, very often she becomes Jezebel. There are no prophetesses in the New Testament except this false one. The ministry of a prophet, the authoritative teaching in the church is given to men.

There are no, there were in the Old Testament. But in the New Testament, you never read of a prophetess. Philip had four daughters who prophesied.

They were not prophetesses. And God wanted to give a message to Paul in Philip's house. He did not use any of those girls.

He called Agabus. From a long distance away, you read in Acts 21 because God doesn't have female prophetesses in the church. He has prophets.

So when a church begins to be influenced by women and immorality comes in pretty soon, verse 20, God withdraws. That's the other type of reason why God has to start a church. Losing their first love.

Second reason, the teaching of Balaam, creatures interested in money. Third, women taking over, immorality coming in. Here's a fourth one.

Church in Sardis. You have a name that you're alive, but you're dead, where hypocrisy reigns in a church, where hypocrisy is permitted, where people are more concerned about their name. We hope that everybody thinks we are a good church.

We wanna be reported in the papers. We want all the other Christians to think we are a good church and we want them to come here. They're more interested in a name.

That church will be derecognized by the Lord. That's the reason why God has to start another church in a place called Sardis. And number five is the fifth reason is the church in Laodicea, chapter 14.

A church that says, in verse 17, I'm rich and wealthy, I'm need of nothing, self-satisfied, content, not judging itself, not seeking to grow in purity. And the Lord says, you don't know your real condition. You're wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.

A church that has slidden back so much that it doesn't even know its spiritual condition. That's pathetic. There's one church about which the Lord had nothing good to say.

And he says, I stand at the door and knock. Now, if the Lord is standing at the door and knocking in a church, where is he, inside or outside? Anybody knows. Imagine the Lord standing at the door of a church and knocking and inside they're saying, oh Lord, we thank you.

We are gathered in the name of Jesus. You're here and they're singing praise to him and he's outside the door, he's trying to get in. But if an individual hears his voice and opens the door and becomes an overcomer, there will be another church of overcomers in Laodicea.

So this is what we see, the reason why God has to raise another church. Because he wants a pure testimony for his name in every place, all the time. God doesn't like churches being split.

But if that is the price to pay, to have a pure testimony, he'll have it. Even if it is seven or eight people eating in a cow shed who are going to be the body of Christ. Just like in King Saul's time, King Saul is a picture of the great Babylonian church sitting on the throne for some years and poor David hanging around in the cave with a few people.

That was the real church in those days. The Lord was with them, not with this big organization. So we need to understand where the Lord is moving in our time and all those people in David's time who knew the Lord, they knew God is with David, not with Saul.

He's being persecuted, but God is there. We need to pray that God will open our eyes to see, Lord, where are you moving today? I want to be where you're moving today. I want to be a part of that testimony for your name and cooperate with it wholeheartedly and preserve a testimony for your name.

In the town I live in, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we're not better than anybody else. Every last one of us is sinners saved by grace, but you have called us and given us this awesome responsibility to preserve a testimony for your name on this earth.

Give us grace to be faithful and to put our face in the dust, humble ourselves, recognize that we are nothing, we'll always be nothing, and that you, Lord Jesus, are everything. You will always be everything

in our hearts, in our homes, and in our church. To you be all the glory.

Amen.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/fK5U9D1wqLg.mp4>
Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/gathering-in-jesus-name/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net