

**ARTICLES AND EXCERPTS**

**by**

**A.W. Tozer**

## A. W. TOZER

Aiden Wilson Tozer was born April 21, 1897, on a small farm among the spiny ridges of Western Pennsylvania. Within a few short years, Tozer, as he preferred to be called, would earn the reputation and title of a “20th century prophet.”

Able to express his thoughts in a simple but forceful manner, Tozer combined the power of God and the power of words to nourish hungry souls, pierce human hearts, and draw earthbound minds toward God.

When he was 15 years old, Tozer’s family moved to Akron, Ohio. One afternoon as he walked home from his job at Goodyear, he overheard a street preacher say, “If you don’t know how to be saved ... just call on God.” When he got home, he climbed the narrow stairs to the attic where, heeding the preacher’s advice, Tozer was launched into a lifelong pursuit of God.

In 1919, without formal education, Tozer was called to pastor a small store-front church in Nutter Fort, West Virginia. That humble beginning thrust him and his new wife Ada Cecelia Pfautz, into a 44-year ministry with the Christian and Missionary Alliance.

Thirty-one of those years were spent at Chicago’s Southside Alliance Church. The congregation, captivated by Tozer’s preaching, grew from 80 to 800.

In 1950 Tozer was elected editor of the *Alliance Weekly* now called *Alliance Life*. The circulation doubled almost immediately. In the first editorial dated June 3, 1950, he set the tone: “It will cost something to walk slow in the parade of the ages while excited men of time rush about confusing motion with progress. But it will pay in the long run and the true Christian is not much interested in anything short of that.” Tozer’s forte was his prayer life which often found him walking the aisles of a sanctuary or lying face down on the floor. He noted, “As a man prays, so is he.” To him the worship of God was paramount in his life and ministry. “His preaching as well as his writings were but extensions of his prayer life,” comments Tozer biographer James L. Snyder. An earlier biographer noted, “He spent more time on his knees than at his desk.”

Tozer’s love for words also pervaded his family life. He quizzed his children on what they read and made up bedtime stories for them. “The thing I remember most about my father,” reflects his daughter Rebecca, “was those marvellous stories he would tell.” Son Wendell, one of six boys born before the arrival of Rebecca, remembers that, “We all would rather be treated to the lilac switch by our mother than to have a talking to by our dad.”

Tozer’s final years of ministry were spent at Avenue Road Church in Toronto, Canada. On May 12, 1963, his earthly pursuit of God ended when he died of a heart attack at age 66. In a small cemetery in Akron, Ohio, his tombstone bears this simple epitaph: “A Man of God.”

Some wonder why Tozer’s writings are as fresh today as when he was alive. It is because, as one friend commented, “He left the superficial, the obvious and the trivial for others to toss around. ... [His] books reach deep into the heart.”

His humour, written and spoken, has been compared to that of Will Rogers - honest and homespun. Congregations could one moment be swept by gales of laughter and the next sit in a holy hush.

For almost 50 years, Tozer walked with God. Even though he is gone, he continues to speak, ministering to those who are eager to experience God. As someone put it, "This man makes you want to know and feel God."

## IN WORD OR IN POWER

*“For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.” (1 Thessalonians 1:5)*

*“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.” (2 Corinthians 5:17)*

*“You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.” (Revelation 3:1)*

To one who is a student merely, these verses might be interesting, but to a serious man intent upon gaining eternal life they might well prove more than a little disturbing. For they evidently teach that the message of the gospel may be received in either of two ways: in word only, without power, or in word with power. Yet it is the same message whether it comes in word or in power. And these verses teach also that when the message is received in power it effects a change so radical as to be called a new creation. But the message may be received without power, and apparently some have so received it, for they have a name to live, and are dead. All this is present in these texts.

By observing the ways of men at play I have been able to understand better the ways of men at prayer. Most men, indeed, play at religion as they play at games, religion itself being of all games the one most universally played. The various sports have their rules and their balls and their players; the game excites interest, gives pleasure, and consumes time, and when it is over, the competing teams laugh and leave the field. It is common to see a player leave one team and join another and a few days later play against his old mates with as great zest as he formerly displayed when playing *for* them. The whole thing is arbitrary. It consists in solving artificial problems and attacking difficulties that have been deliberately created for the sake of the game. It has no moral roots and is not supposed to have. No one is the better for his self-imposed toil. It is all but a pleasant activity that changes nothing and settles nothing at last.

If the conditions we describe were confined to the ballpark, we might pass it over without further thought, but what are we to say when this same spirit enters the sanctuary and decides the attitude of men toward God and religion? For the Church has also its fields and its rules and its equipment for playing the game of pious words. It has its devotees, both laymen and professionals, who support the game with their money and encourage it with their presence, but who are no different in life or character from many who take in religion no interest at all.

As an athlete uses a ball, so do many of us use words: words spoken and words sung, words written and words uttered in prayer. We throw them swiftly across the field; we learn to handle them with dexterity and grace; we build reputations upon our word skill and gain as our reward the applause of those who have enjoyed the game. But the emptiness of it is apparent from the fact that after the pleasant religious game *no one is basically any different from what he had been before*. The basis of life remains unchanged; the same old principles govern, the same old Adam rules.

I have not said that religion without power makes no changes in a man's life, only that it makes no fundamental difference. Water may change from liquid to vapour, from

vapour to snow, and back to liquid again, and still be fundamentally the same. So powerless religion may put a man through many surface changes and leave him exactly what he was before. Right there is where the snare lies. *The changes are in form only; they are not in kind.* Behind the activities of the non-religious man and the man who has received the gospel without power lie the very same motives. An unblessed ego lies at the bottom of both lives, the difference being that the religious man has learned better to disguise his vice. His sins are refined and less offensive than before he took up religion, but the man himself is not a better man in the sight of God. He may indeed be a worse one, for always God hates artificiality and pretence. Selfishness still throbs like an engine at the centre of the man's life. True he may learn to "redirect" his selfish impulses, but his woe is that self still lives unrebuked and even unsuspected deep within his heart. He is a victim of religion without power.

The man who has received the Word without power has trimmed his hedge, but it is a thorn hedge still and can never bring forth the fruits of the new life. Men do not gather grapes from thorns nor figs from thistles. Yet such a man may be a leader in the church, and his influence and his vote may go far to determine what religion shall be in his generation.

The truth received in power shifts the basis of life from Adam to Christ, and a new set of motives goes to work within the soul. A new and different Spirit enters the personality and makes the believing man new in every department of his being. His interests shift from things external to things internal, from things on earth to things in heaven. He loses faith in the soundness of external values, he sees clearly the deceptiveness of outward appearances, and his love for and confidence in the unseen and eternal world become stronger as his experience widens.

With the ideas here expressed most Christians will agree, but the gulf between theory and practice is so great as to be terrifying. For the gospel is too often preached and accepted without power, and the radical shift that the truth demands is never made. There may be, it is true, a change of some kind; an intellectual and emotional bargain may be struck with the truth, but whatever happens is not enough, not deep enough, not radical enough. The "creature" is changed, but he is not "new." And right there is the tragedy of it. The gospel is concerned with a new life, with a birth upward onto a new level of being, and until it has effected such a rebirth it has not done a saving work within the soul.

Wherever the Word comes without power its essential content is missed. For there is in divine truth an imperious note; there is about the gospel an urgency, a finality that will not be heard or felt except by the enabling of the Spirit. We must constantly keep in mind that the gospel is not good news only, but a judgment as well upon everyone that hears it. The message of the Cross is good news indeed for the penitent, but to those who "obey not the gospel" it carries an overtone of warning. The Spirit's ministry to the impenitent world is to tell of sin and righteousness and judgment. For sinners who want to cease being wilful sinners and become obedient children of God, the gospel message is one of unqualified peace, but it is by its very nature also an arbiter of the future destinies of men.

This secondary aspect is almost wholly overlooked in our day. The *gift* element in the gospel is held to be its exclusive content, and the *shift* element is accordingly ignored.

Theological assent is all that is required to make Christians. This assent is called faith and is thought to be the only difference between the saved and the lost. Faith is thus conceived as a kind of religious magic, bringing to the Lord great delight and possessing mysterious power to open the Kingdom of heaven.

I want to be fair to everyone and to find all the good I can in every man's religious beliefs, but the harmful effects of this faith-as-magic creed are greater than could be imagined by anyone who has not come face-to-face with them. Large assemblies today are being told fervently that the one essential qualification for heaven is to be an evil man, and the one sure bar to God's favour is to be a good one. The very word *righteousness* is spoken only in cold scorn, and the moral man is looked upon with pity. "A Christian," say these teachers, "is not morally better than a sinner; the only difference is that he has taken Jesus, and so he has a Saviour." I trust it may not sound flippant to inquire, "*A saviour from what?*" If not from sin and evil conduct and the old fallen life, then from what? And if the answer is, "From the consequences of past sins and from judgment to come," still we are not satisfied. Is justification from past offences all that distinguishes a Christian from a sinner? Can a man become a believer in Christ and be no better than he was before? Does the gospel offer no more than a skilful Advocate to get guilty sinners off free at the Day of Judgment?

I think the truth of the matter is not too deep nor too difficult to discover. Self-righteousness is an effective bar to God's favour because it throws the sinner back upon his own merits and shuts him out from the imputed righteousness of Christ. And to be a sinner confessed and consciously lost *is* necessary to the act of receiving salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. This we joyously admit and constantly assert, but here is the truth that has been overlooked in our day: *A sinner can not enter the Kingdom of God.* The Bible passages that declare this are too many and too familiar to need repeating here, but the sceptical might look at Galatians 5:19-21 and Revelation 21:8. How then can any man be saved? The penitent sinner meets Christ, and after that saving encounter he is a sinner no more. The power of the gospel changes him, shifts the basis of his life from self to Christ, faces him about in a new direction, and makes him a new creation. The moral state of the penitent when he comes to Christ does not affect the result, for the work of Christ sweeps away both his good and his evil, and turns him into another man. The returning sinner is not saved by some judicial transaction apart from a corresponding moral change. Salvation must include a judicial change of status, but what is overlooked by most teachers is that *it also includes an actual change in the life of the individual.* And by this we mean more than a surface change; we mean a transformation as deep as the roots of his human life. If it does not go that deep, it does not go deep enough.

If we had not first suffered a serious decline in our expectations, we should not have accepted this tame technical view of faith. The churches (even the gospel churches) are worldly in spirit, morally anaemic, on the defensive, imitating instead of initiating, and in a wretched state generally because for two full generations they have been told that justification is no more than a not guilty verdict pronounced by the heavenly Father upon a sinner who can present the magic in *faith* with the wondrous "open sesame" engraved upon it. If it is not stated as bluntly as that, at least the message is so presented as to create such an impression. The whole business is the result of hearing the Word preached without power and receiving it in the same way.

Now faith is indeed the open sesame to eternal blessedness. Without faith it is impossible to please God; neither can any man be saved apart from faith in the risen Saviour. But the true quality of faith is almost universally missed, namely, its moral quality. It is more than mere confidence in the veracity of a statement made in Holy Writ. It is a highly moral thing and of a spiritual essence. It invariably effects radical transformation in the life of the one who exercises it. It shifts the inward gaze from self to God. It introduces its possessor into the life of heaven upon earth.

It is not my desire to minimise the justifying effect of faith. No man who knows the depths of his own wickedness would dare to appear before the ineffable Presence with nothing to recommend him but his own character, nor would any Christian, wise after the discipline of failures and imperfections, want his acceptance with God to depend upon any degree of holiness to which he might have attained through the operations of inward grace. All who know their own hearts and the provisions of the gospel will join in the prayer of the man of God:

*When He shall come with trumpet sound,  
O may I then in Him be found;  
Dressed in His righteousness alone,  
Faultless to stand before the throne.*

It is a distressing thing that a truth so beautiful should have been so perverted. But perversion is the price we pay for failure to emphasise the moral content of truth; it is the curse that follows rational orthodoxy when it has quenched or rejected the Spirit of Truth.

In asserting that faith in the gospel effects a change of life motive from self to God, I am but stating the sober facts. Every man with moral intelligence must be aware of the curse that afflicts him inwardly; he must be conscious of the thing we call ego, by the Bible called flesh or self, but by whatever name called, a cruel master and a deadly foe. Pharaoh never ruled Israel as tyrannically as this hidden enemy rules the sons and daughters of men. The words of God to Moses concerning Israel in bondage may well describe us all: "I have indeed seen the misery of My people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering." And when, as the Nicene Creed so tenderly states, our Lord Jesus Christ, "for us men, and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried, and the third day He arose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father," what was it all for? That He might pronounce us technically free and leave us in our bondage? Never. Did not God say to Moses, "I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey"? For sin's human captives God never intends anything less than full deliverance. The Christian message rightly understood means this: The God, who by the *word* of the gospel *proclaims* men free, by the *power* of the gospel *actually makes them free*. To accept less than this is to know the gospel in word only, without its power.

They to whom the Word comes in power know this deliverance, this inward migration of the soul from slavery to freedom, this release from moral bondage. They know in

experience a radical shift in position, a real crossing over, and they stand consciously on another soil under another sky and breath another air. Their life motives are changed and their inward drives made new.

What are these old drives that once forced obedience at the end of a lash? What but little taskmasters, servants of the great taskmaster *Self*, who stand before him and do his will? To name them all would require a book in itself, but we would point out one as a type of sample of the rest. It is the desire for social approval. This is not bad in itself and might be perfectly innocent if we were living in a sinless world, but since the race of men has fallen off from God and joined itself to His foes, to be a friend of the world is to be a collaborator with evil and an enemy of God. Still the desire to please men is back of all social acts from the highest civilisations to the lowest levels upon which human life is found. No one can escape it. The outlaw who flouts the rules of society and the philosopher who rises in thought above its common ways may *seem* to have escaped from the snare, but they have in reality merely narrowed the circle of those they desire to please. The outlaw has his pals before whom he seeks to shine; the philosopher his little coterie of superior thinkers whose approval is necessary to his happiness. For both, the motive root remains uncut. Each draws his peace from the thought that he enjoys the esteem of his fellows, though each will interpret the whole business in his own way.

Every man looks to his fellowmen because he has no one else to whom he can look. David could say, "Whom have I in heaven but You? And earth has nothing I desire besides You," but the sons of this world have not God; they have only each other, and they walk holding to each other and looking to one another for assurance like frightened children. But their hope will fail them, for they are like a group of men, none of whom has learned to fly a plane, who suddenly find themselves aloft without a pilot, each looking to the other to bring them safely down. Their desperate but mistaken trust can not save them from the crash which must certainly follow.

With this desire to please men so deeply implanted within us, how can we uproot it and shift our life drive from pleasing men to pleasing God? Well, no one can do it alone; nor can he do it with the help of others, nor by education, nor by training, nor by any other method known under the sun. What is required is a reversal of nature (that it is a fallen nature does not make it any the less powerful), and this reversal must be a supernatural act. That act the Spirit performs through the power of the gospel when it is received in living faith. Then He displaces the old with the new. Then He invades the life as sunlight invades a landscape and drives out the old motives as light drives away darkness from the sky.

The way it works in experience is something like this: The believing man is overwhelmed suddenly by a powerful feeling that *only God matters*; soon this works itself out into his mental life and conditions all his judgments and all his values. Now he finds himself free from slavery to man's opinions. A mighty desire to please only God lays hold of him. Soon he learns to love above all else the assurance that he is well pleasing to the Father in heaven.

It is this complete switch in their pleasure source that has made believing men invincible. So could saints and martyrs stand alone, deserted by every earthly friend, and die for Christ under the universal displeasure of mankind. When, to intimidate him,



Athanasius' judges warned him that the whole world was against him, he dared to reply, "Then is Athanasius against the world!" That cry has come down the years and today may remind us that the gospel has power to deliver men from the tyranny of social approval and make them free to do the will of God.

I have singled out this one enemy for consideration, but it is only one, and there are many others. They seem to stand by themselves and have existence apart from each other, but it is only seeming. Actually they are but branches of the same poison vine, growing from the same evil root, and they die together when the root dies. That root is *self*, and the Cross is its only effective destroyer.

The message of the gospel, then, is the message of a new creation in the midst of an old, the message of the invasion of our human nature by the eternal life of God and the displacing of the old by the new. The new life seizes upon the believing man's nature and sets about its benign conquest, a conquest that is not complete until the invading life has taken full possession and a new creation has emerged. And this is an act of God without human aid, for it is a moral miracle and a spiritual resurrection.

## THE CHRISTIAN'S GREATEST ENEMY

*“East of the Jordan in the territory of Moab, Moses began to expound this law, saying: The Lord our God said to us at Horeb, ‘You have stayed long enough at this mountain. Break camp and advance into the hill country of the Amorites; go to all the neighbouring peoples in the Arabah, in the mountains, in the western foothills, in the Negev and along the coast, to the land of the Canaanites and to Lebanon, as far as the great river, the Euphrates. See, I have given you this land. Go in and take possession of the land that the Lord swore He would give to your fathers - to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - and to their descendants after them.’” (Deuteronomy 1:5-8)*

In the Old Testament, the enemy that threatened Israel the most was the dictatorship of the customary. Israel became accustomed to walking around in circles and was blissfully content to stay by the safety of the mountain for a while. To put it another way, it was the psychology of the usual. God finally broke into the rut they were in and said, “You have been here long enough. It is time for you to move on.”

To put Israel's experience into perspective for our benefit today, we must see that the mountain represents a spiritual experience for a spiritual state of affairs. Israel's problem was that they had given up hope of ever getting the land God had promised them. They had become satisfied with going in circles and camping in nice, comfortable places. They had come under the spell of the psychology of the routine. It kept them where they were and prevented them from getting the riches God had promised them.

If their enemy, the Edomites, would have come after them, the Israelites would have fought down to the last man and probably would have beaten the Edomites - Israel would have made progress. Instead they were twiddling their thumbs, waiting for the customary to keep on being the customary.

What is the worst enemy the church faces today? This is where a lot of unreality and unconscious hypocrisy enters. Many are ready to say, “The liberals are our worst enemy.” But the simple fact is that the average evangelical church does not have too much trouble with liberalism. Nobody gets up in our churches and claims that the first five books of Moses are just myths. Nobody says that the story of creation is simply religious mythology. Nobody denies that Christ walked on the water or that He rose from the grave. Nobody gets up in our churches and claims that Jesus Christ is not the Son of God or that He isn't coming back again. Nobody denies the validity of the Scriptures. We just can not hide behind liberalism and say that it is our worst enemy. We believe that evangelical Christians are trying to hold on to the truth given to us, the faith of our fathers, so the liberals are not our worst enemy.

Neither do we have a problem with the government. People in our country can do just about whatever they please and the government pays no attention. We can hold prayer meetings all night if we want, and the government would never bother us or question us. There is no secret police breathing down our backs watching our every move. We live in a free land, and we ought to thank God every day for that privilege.

## Dictatorship of the Routine

The treacherous enemy facing the church of Jesus Christ today is the dictatorship of the routine, when the routine becomes “lord” in the life of the church. Programs are organised and the prevailing conditions are accepted as normal. Anyone can predict next Sunday’s service and what will happen. This seems to be the most deadly threat in the church today. When we come to the place where everything can be predicted and nobody expects anything unusual from God, we are in a rut. The routine dictates, and we can tell not only what will happen next Sunday, but what will occur next month and, if things do not improve, what will take place next year. Then we have reached the place where what has been determines what is, and what is determines what will be.

That would be perfectly all right and proper for a cemetery. Nobody expects a cemetery to do anything but conform. The greatest conformists in the world today are those who sleep out in the community cemetery. They do not bother anyone. They just lie there, and it is perfectly all right for them to do so. You can predict what everyone will do in the cemetery from the deceased right down to the people who attend a funeral there. Everyone and everything in a cemetery has accepted the routine. Nobody expects anything out of those buried in the cemetery. But the church is not a cemetery and we should expect much from it, because what has been should not be lord to tell us what is, and what is should not be ruler to tell us what will be. God’s people are supposed to grow.

As long as there is growth, there is an air of unpredictability. Certainly we can not predict exactly, but in many churches you just about can. Everybody knows just what will happen, and this has become our deadliest enemy. We blame the devil, the “last days” and anything else we can think of, but the greatest enemy is not outside of us. It is within - it is an attitude of accepting things as they are. We believe that what was must always determine what will be, and as a result we are not growing in expectation.

## The Progressive Stages

As soon as someone begins talking like this, the Lord’s people respond by getting busy. What I’m talking about, however, is internal. It is a matter of the soul and mind that ultimately determines our conduct. Let me show you the progressive stages.

I began with what I call the *rote*. This is repetition without feeling. If some day someone would read the Scripture and believe it and would believe what is sung in the great Christian hymns, there would be a blessed spiritual revolution under-way in a short time. But too many are caught up in the rote, repeating without feeling, without meaning, without wonder and without any happy surprises or expectations. In our services God can not get in because we have it all fixed up for Him. We say, “Lord, we are going to have it this way. Now kindly bless our plans.” We repeat without feeling, we repeat without meaning, we sing without wonder, and we listen without surprise. That is my description of the rote.

We go one step further and come to what I will call the *rut*, which is bondage to the rote. When we are unable to see and sense bondage to the rote, we are in rut. For example, a man may be sick and not even know it. The doctors may have confided in the man’s wife instead, “We don’t want to frighten your husband, but he could drop

any minute. He is critically ill, so just expect it any moment.” The man himself does not know he is seriously ill. He goes about his business as if nothing is wrong. He may play golf or tennis, maybe even go on a hunting trip. He is sick, and yet he does not know how sick he really is. This may in fact hasten his end. Not knowing is risky business and full of danger. Spiritually speaking, the rut is bondage to the rote, and the greatest danger lies in our inability to sense or feel this bondage.

There is a third word, and I do not particularly like to use it, but the history of the church is filled with it. The word is *rot*. The church is afflicted by drive rot. This is best explained when the psychology of non-expectation takes over and spiritual rigidity sets in, which is an inability to visualise anything better, a lack of desire for improvement.

There are many who respond by arguing, “I know lots of evangelical churches that would like to grow, and they do their best to get the crowds in. They want to grow and have contest to make their Sunday school larger.” That is true, but they are trying to get people to come and share their rut. They want people to help them celebrate the rote and finally join in the rot. Because the Holy Spirit is not given the chance to work in our services, nobody is repenting, nobody is seeking God, nobody is spending a day in quiet waiting on God with open Bible seeking to mend his or her ways. Nobody is doing it - we just want more people. But more people for what? More people to come and repeat our dead services without feeling, without meaning, without wonder, without surprise? More people to join us in the bondage to the rote? For the most part, spiritual rigidity that can not bend is too weak notice how weak it is.

### **WHAT IS THE CHURCH?**

For clarification, what is the church? When I say that a church gets into the rote and then onto the rut and finely to the rot, what am I talking about?

For one thing, the church is not the building. A church is an assembly of individuals. There is a lot of meaningless dialogue these days about the church. It is meaningless because those engaged in the dialogue forget that a church has no separate existence. The church is not an entity in itself, but rather is composed of individual persons. It is the same error made about the state. Politicians sometimes talk about the state as though it were an entity in itself. Social workers talk about society, but society is people. So is the church. The church is made up of real people, and when they come together we have the church. Whatever the people are who make up the church, that is the kind of church it is - no worse and no better, no wiser, no holier, no more ardent and no more worshipful. To improve or change the church you must begin with individuals.

When people in the church only point to others for improvement and not to themselves, it is sure evidence that the church has come to dry rot. It is proof of three sins: the sin of self-righteousness, the sin of judgment and the sin of complacency.

When our Lord said, “One of you will betray Me,” thank God those disciples had enough spirituality that nobody said, “Lord, is it he?” Every one of those disciples said, “Lord, is it I?” If they would not have so responded there could not have been a Pentecost. But because they were humble enough to point the finger in their own direction the Holy Spirit fell upon them.

Self-righteousness is terrible among God's people. If we feel that we are what we ought to be, then we will remain what we are. We will not look for any change or improvement in our lives. This will quite naturally lead us to judge everyone by what we are. This is the judgment of which we must be careful. To judge others by ourselves is to create havoc in the local assembly.

Self-righteousness also leads to complacency. Complacency is a great sin and covers just about everything I have said about the rote and the rut. Some have the attitude, "Lord, I'm satisfied with my spiritual condition. I hope one of these days You'll come, I will be taken up to meet You in the air and I will rule over five cities." These people can not rule over their own houses and families, but they expect to rule over five cities. They pray spottily and sparsely, rarely attending prayer meeting, but they read their Bibles and expect to go zooming off into the blue yonder and join the Lord in the triumph of the victorious saints.

### **IS SIMPLY SELF-DECEPTION**

I wonder if we are not fooling ourselves. I wonder if a lot of it is simply self-deception. I hear the voice of Jesus saying to us, "You have stayed long enough where you are. Break camp and advance into the hill country." This would be a new spiritual experience that God has for us. Everything Jesus Christ did for us we can have in this age. Victorious living, joyous living, holy living, fruitful living, wondrous, ravishing knowledge of the Triune God - all of this is ours. Power we never knew before, undreamed of answers to prayer - this is ours. "See, I have given you this land. Go in and take possession of [it]." The Lord gave it to you in a covenant. Go take it - it's yours. It was given to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all their seed after. Jesus prayed, "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message" (John 17:20). That embraces all those who belong to the church of Jesus Christ.

If we call Him Lord, how dare we sit any longer in the rut! The Lord has called us to move on. But when people are in a rut, not even the angel Gabriel can help them if they will not come out of it. This is not an accusation but a suggestion. If you are not in a rut, don't get mad - somebody else is. But if you *are* in a rut you ought to get out of it.

The difference between a wooden leg and a good leg is that if you prick a wooden leg the person would never notice. The difference between a church that has dry rot and a church that is alive is that if you prick the live church it will respond. If you prick the other kind, it is already dead. The tree that stands alive has lush, green leaves. Take a knife, scar the bark deeply and the tree will bleed. It is alive. The old dead tree just stands there, a watchtower for old sentinel crows. Take your knife and dig in as far as you want to, and nothing will happen because the tree is dead.

So it is with my message. If you'll get neither mad nor glad nor sad under my preaching, I know nothing can be done. But there are some who are alive, and I believe it is the majority.

## THE GIFT OF PROPHETIC INSIGHT

A prophet is one who knows his times and what God is trying to say to the people of his times.

What God says to His church at any given period depends altogether upon her moral and spiritual condition and upon the spiritual need of the hour. Religious leaders who continue mechanically to expound the Scriptures without regard to the current religious situation are no better than the scribes and lawyers of Jesus' day who faithfully parroted the Law without the remotest notion of what was going on around them spiritually. They fed the same diet to all and seemed wholly unaware that there was such a thing as meat in due season. The prophets never made that mistake nor wasted their efforts in that manner. They invariably spoke to the condition of the people of their times.

Today we need prophetic preachers; not preachers of prophecy merely, but preachers with a gift of prophecy. The word of wisdom is missing. We need the gift of discernment again in our pulpits. It is not ability to predict that we need, but the anointed eye, the power of spiritual penetration and interpretation, the ability to appraise the religious scene as viewed from God's position, and to tell us what is actually going on.

There has probably never been another time in the history of the world when so many people knew so much about religious happenings as they do today. The newspapers are eager to print religious news; the secular news magazines devote several pages of each issue to the doings of the church and the synagogue; a number of press associations gather church news and make it available to the religious journals at a small cost. Even the hiring of professional publicity men to plug one or another preacher or religious movement is no longer uncommon; the mails are stuffed with circulars and "releases," while radio and television join to tell the listening public what religious people are doing throughout the world.

Greater publicity for religion may be well and I have no fault to find with it. Surely religion should be the most newsworthy thing on earth, and there may be some small encouragement in the thought that vast numbers of persons want to read about it. What disturbs me is that amidst all the religious hubbub hardly a voice is raised to tell us what God thinks about the whole thing.

Where is the man who can see through the ticker tape and confetti to discover which way the parade is headed, why it started in the first place and, particularly, who is riding up front in the seat of honour?

Not the fact that the churches are unusually active these days, not what religious people are doing, should engage our attention, but *why* these things are so. The big question is *Why?* And no one seems to have an answer for it. Not only is there no answer, but scarcely is there anyone to ask the question. It just never occurs to us that such a question remains to be asked. Christian people continue to gossip religious shoptalk with scarcely as much as a puzzled look. The soundness of current Christianity is assumed by the religious masses as was the soundness of Judaism when Christ appeared. People know they are seeing certain activity, but just what it means

they do not know, nor have they the faintest idea of where God is or what relation He has toward the whole thing.

What is needed desperately today is prophetic insight. Scholars can interpret the past; it takes prophets to interpret the present. Learning will enable a man to pass judgment on our yesterdays, but it requires a gift of clear seeing to pass sentence on our own day. One hundred years from now historians will know what was taking place religiously in this year of our Lord; but that will be too late for us. We should know right now.

If Christianity is to receive a rejuvenation it must be by other means than any now being used. If the church in the second half of this century is to recover from the injuries she suffered in the first half, there must appear a new type of preacher. The proper, ruler-of-the-synagogue type will never do. Neither will the priestly type of man who carries out his duties, takes his pay and asks no questions, nor the smooth-talking pastoral type who knows how to make the Christian religion acceptable to everyone. All these have been tried and found wanting.

Another kind of religious leader must arise among us. He must be of the old prophet type, a man who has seen visions of God and has heard a voice from the Throne. When he comes (and I pray God there will be not one but many) he will stand in flat contradiction to everything our smirking, smooth civilization holds dear. He will contradict, denounce and protest in the name of God and will earn the hatred and opposition of a large segment of Christendom. Such a man is likely to be lean, rugged, blunt-spoken and a little bit angry with the world. He will love Christ and the souls of men to the point of willingness to die for the glory of the one and the salvation of the other. But he will fear nothing that breathes with mortal breath.

We need to have the gifts of the Spirit restored again to the church, and it is my belief that the one gift we need most now is the gift of prophecy.

## WE MUST HAVE BETTER CHRISTIANS

To talk of “better” Christians is to use language foreign to many persons. To them all Christians are alike; all have been justified and forgiven and are the children of God, so to make comparisons between them is to suggest division and bigotry and any number of horrible things.

What is forgotten is that a Christian is a born-one, an embodiment of growing life, and as such may be retarded, stunted, undernourished or injured very much as any other organism. Favourable conditions will produce a stronger and healthier organism than will adverse conditions. Lack of proper instructions, for instance, will stunt Christian growth. A clear example of this is found in Acts 19, where an imperfect body of truth had produced a corresponding imperfect type of Christian. It took Paul, with a fuller degree of truth, to bring these stunted disciples into a better and healthier spiritual state.

Unfortunately it is possible for a whole generation of Christians to be victims of poor teaching, low moral standards and unscriptural or extra-scriptural doctrines, resulting in stunted growth and retarded development. It is little less than stark tragedy that an individual Christian may pass from youth to old age in a state of suspended growth and all his life be unaware of it. Those who would question the truth of this have only to read the First Epistle to the Corinthians and the Book of Hebrews. And even a slight acquaintance with church history will add all the further proof that is needed. Today there exist in the world certain Christian bodies whose histories date far back. These have perpetuated themselves after their kind for hundreds of years, but they have managed to produce nothing but weak, stunted Christians, if Christians they can be called. Common charity forbids that we identify these by name, but any enlightened believer will understand.

Evangelicalism as we know it today in its various manifestations *does* produce some real Christians. We have no wish to question this; we desire rather to assert it unequivocally. But the spiritual climate into which many modern Christians are born does not make for vigorous spiritual growth. Indeed, the whole evangelical world is to a large extent unfavourable to healthy Christianity. And I am not thinking of Modernism either. I mean rather the Bible-believing crowd that bears the name of orthodoxy.

We may as well face it: the whole level of spirituality among us is low. We have measured ourselves by ourselves until the incentive to seek higher plateaus in the things of the Spirit is all but gone. Large and influential sections of the world of fundamental Christianity have gone overboard for practices wholly unscriptural, altogether unjustifiable in the light of historic Christian truth and deeply damaging to the inner life of the individual Christian. They have imitated the world, sought popular favour, manufactured delights to substitute for the joy of the Lord and produced a cheap and synthetic power to substitute for the power of the Holy Ghost. The glow-worm has taken the place of the bush that burned and scintillating personalities now answer to the fire that fell at Pentecost.

The fact is that we are not today producing saints. We are making converts to an effete type of Christianity that bears little resemblance to that of the New Testament. The



average so-called Bible Christian in our times is but a wretched parody on true sainthood. Yet we put millions of dollars behind movements to perpetuate this degenerate form of religion and attack the man who dares to challenge the wisdom of it.

Clearly we must begin to produce better Christians. We must insist on New Testament sainthood for our converts, nothing less; and we must lead them into a state of heart purity, fiery love, separation from the world and poured-out devotion to the Person of Christ. Only in this way can the low level of spirituality be raised again to where it should be in the light of the Scriptures and of eternal values.