

'All Life's Problems Are Basically Theological'

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer's sermon 'All Life's Problems Are Basically Theological' emphasizes that all life's problems are rooted in humanity's forgetfulness of God and their origin, and that redemption is a slow and painful process of transforming man's character to reflect God's image.

Scripture: Romans 8:29, Ephesians 4:21-24, Colossians 3:9-10, Hebrews 12:9-10

Topics: "Theological Foundations", "Restoration of God's Image"

Description

A.W. Tozer emphasizes that all of life's problems are fundamentally theological, rooted in our relationship with God. He argues that understanding our origin as creations made in God's image is essential to resolving social, political, and personal issues. Tozer explains that humanity's fall has marred this image, but through Jesus Christ, God seeks to restore us to His likeness. He highlights the importance of God's methods, including redemption and chastening, in shaping our character to reflect His holiness. Ultimately, Tozer calls for a deep commitment to cooperate with God in this transformative process.

Transcript

All Life's Problems are Basically Theological

Pastor and author A.W. Tozer

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I have this morning, three texts in the book of Ephesians. Paul's letter to the Ephesian Christians the fourth chapter, verses 21 to 24. If so be that you have heard Him, his Christ, and have been taught by Him as the truth is in Jesus, that you put off concerning the former conversation, conduct, the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, that you put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. And Paul again, in Colossians, the third chapter, verses 9 and 10. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him.

Then in the book of Hebrews, which I think also that Paul wrote that we're not certain. It doesn't matter. The words of the writer to the Hebrews 12:9 and following. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us and we gave them reverence. Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the

Father of spirits, and live? For they verily, for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure, or as it seemed good to them. They didn't enjoy it, but they felt they had it to do. They verily, for a few days chastened us as seemed right to them. But God for our profit chastens us that we might be partakers of His holiness.

And the longer I live, the more I'm convinced that all the problems of life are at the bottom, theological problems. That there aren't any other kind, really. That all problems that psychology is trying to settle are at bottom, theological, really. And all the problems that industry, labor is trying to settle, could be settled if they were recognized as also being theological problems. Political problems and all social problems are at bottom, theological. I mean by that, this, that if you forget that God is and think of man just as being here, somehow, without any thought of his origin, then you have at least a dozen major problems on your hands. And the attempt to solve one upsets another. If you try to solve a social problem, you get yourself into a political problem and political problem upsets a labor problem, and labor problem creates an industrial problem.

And so we go mixing ourselves up because we're thinking of ourselves apart from our origin. If we realize that God made us and made us in His image, and that our first responsibility is to Him. Then, if we went on through the truth revealed to us and settled that responsibility or met it, we'd settle our theological problems and automatically, the other problems would fall into place. It wouldn't mean there wouldn't be something to do, but it would mean that we had hold of the heart of it and that we could solve it without disrupting something else.

Out in nature it is the same. Down where we live in the poor section of Beverly Hills, we used to have birds. I remember even as much as last year, no longer ago than last year and the year before, we'd wake up in the morning or they would wake us up, but I never again have complained about being wakened up by birds, birds of all kinds singing. You never heard a choir sing as they sang. Now, we have two or three kinds. I heard a cuckoo this morning, and the ever-present jay, of course, and the robins. And of course, you can't kill an English sparrow. But those are about the four that are left. What happened to the rest? What happened to the rest is this, that the elm blight came through the country, and the proper authorities decided to try to stay the elm blight and I am for them because I think that if we lost the elm tree from this section of the country, we would lose one of the most beautiful and ornamental trees that's possible to imagine. So they sprayed the elm trees to get rid of the elm blight. Little worms ate the elm leaf or other things that were touched by this poison. It didn't bother the worm, but the birds ate the worms and died. And they died by the hundreds of thousands.

Now, I use that as an illustration only. I don't know who's right nor who's wrong. It's very difficult because one thing upsets another and you get one thing straightened out and another one is on your hands. So it is in politics and society and in industry and everywhere. The attempt to settle one thing unsettles another, because we do not realize that God is and that God made us and that originally He made us in His image. Now that's one of the great pillars of our faith, that God made us in His image.

A second great pillar of our faith, I'd scarcely call it a pillar of our faith, but it's a fact necessary to the understanding of all other truths, that man fell. And that man who originally came from God's hand, in God's likeness, fell and lost that likeness, or at least had that likeness marred as a vandal might cut and smear and marr a great masterpiece in an art gallery. The artist, or the one who knows about such things might be able yet to find traces of the artistry of the master in that picture, but it's yet ruined and nobody would buy it. So, it is with mankind. In mankind, there are traces of the image of God. Every mother that

holds a baby to her in her arms and smiles down with love, is showing that there is yet remaining, there are yet remaining some traces of the image of God. But it's a marred image. The vandal we call sin has slashed it and smeared it and ruined it.

Now, the third great truth that we must remember is that God sent His Son Jesus Christ to the world in order that He might undo the works of the devil and sin, and that He might bring back again the image of God to man. That's what my text said first, that God meant to restore us again unto His image. God isn't satisfied. If we could imagine a Rembrandt coming back from where we hope he is with God, and seeing where some vandal had used acid or some other thing to destroy one of his masterpieces, or had painted it over. And that artist, out of love and pride, should want to restore that picture until it was shining once more in all its early glory.

So, the great God who looks upon mankind and sees bits of His image there and knows it's His handiwork, knows indeed that it's His masterpiece. He sees also the filth and the slashing and the efforts of sin to destroy that masterpiece. And God, out of His own pride and for His own glory, sets out to restore that masterpiece again to His own image. And He does it through Jesus Christ our Lord. For the texts say that plainly here. We have put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him who created Him. And if so be ye have heard and taught to put off concerning the form of conduct of the old man and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, that you put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. This is the purpose of God.

And then in the Hebrew text it says that to do this, to restore this picture back to the image of God again, to make men like God, He has methods. And the first and primary one is of course, is redemption through the blood of Jesus Christ the Lord. But then granted that men are redeemed, Christians are His children. Then He works on those children as the eager, indignant Artist, loving Artist, loving because it's His handiwork, indignant because it's been marred, proud with His own reputation depending upon it, He goes to work to restore that masterpiece. So God goes to work to restore the masterpiece again. And the Spirit says that even as earthly fathers, in order that they might bring their children into some semblance of civilized decency and bring them up as they should, they chasten them. But God chastens us for His own profit that we might be partakers of His holiness. God is of course primarily holy, and the restoration of the soul to God is the restoration of that soul in holiness.

Now, I want to point out, if I were an old 17th century preacher, I'd probably have my point something like this: wherein we cannot be like God, wherein we can be like God, and the method by which God makes us like Himself. That sounds like least an hour and a half, but it will be shorter. Wherein we cannot be like God. I point out to you that though men are made in the image of God originally, and it is the purpose of God to restore us to that image, there are attributes which God cannot impart to a creature. Let me name some of them, self-existence for instance. No creature can say, I AM, and have a complete sentence. But God said, I AM, and put a period there. God is self-existent and self-sufficient. Only God can say I am, and make it stick forever without modifying it. God cannot give to His creatures self-existence or self-sufficiency, because His creatures depend every moment upon Him and He depends upon nothing and no one because He is God. Again, God cannot impart eternity to His children. There was a time when we were not and God's spake and we came into existence. We can live forever, exist through all eternity, but we can't turn the clock back and go back and start the beginning of eternity which has no beginning. Only God is eternal. And He gives eternal life, but eternal life that is, what would we say, unilateral, running one direction, only out into the eternal future, not into the eternal past. There was a time when man was not, but the eternal God was.

And God made man in His image and then man was. So man had a birthdate. Man had a time when he was created. God could mark it on a calendar of the eternal centuries and say, here is where man began. So, God can't impart His eternity to us. He cannot impart His infinitude. Infinitude of course being limitlessness, boundlessness. We all have limits by virtue of the fact we're creatures. The archangels around the throne have limits. The seraphim that burn beside the sea of fire have limits. The greatest geniuses that have ever graced our world in any field of human endeavor have all had limits. Any student of Shakespeare will run into passages that Shakespeare never should have written. And every critic, every man who studies a little will smile and shrug and say, well, that was Shakespeare at his worst. He had his limits.

I remember once being at a recital where they were singing the Messiah, and the song director we had here years ago, Mr. Marston Pierson, many of you remember, was with me. We had the score in front of us and were watching and looking on while the Apollo Club sang Messiah. And before we started, we were chatting and I said, Marston, I'd have one criticism of the Messiah. He said, What's that? He smiled down with a big expansive smile of his and I said, it's too long. Well, he said, I'll tell you, Mr. Tozer, that would be a question of your judgment against Handel's, and I'll go along with Handel. And I smiled and admitted that he had a point. But after they began to sing, then I noticed that every once in a while they skipped a chorus. And they would skip another chorus. Then they would skip five or six pages. Then they would skip a solo. And they'd skip another chorus. And along toward the end I said, how's this they're skipping so much. Oh, he said, nobody ever does all of the Messiah. I felt better. I still think it's too long. Even Handel had his imperfection.

And the finest composers that ever lived couldn't escape themselves. I don't promise always and I don't want to be put to the test, but I think if you'll put on a record, and if it's Mozart, I'll know it. He couldn't escape himself. He had a happy, joyous disposition that wouldn't go two bars until it started shouting, delighted to be alive, and it's there and you can't help it. Every man has his limitations. The angels of God have their limitations, but God has no limitations because God embraces in Himself in one effortless embrace all that there is. God can't impart that to you. You're limited. He is infinite. Again, God can't impart His omnipotence. And he can't impart His omniscience. You can know a great deal and you can know increasingly, but you never can know all. The only person that knows everything is a freshman in college. But as he goes on, he knows less and less until he gets his degree. And by the time he gets his PhD, he knows still less.

A man who just had his PhD degree, gotten it, wrestled it out of New York University, I was talking with him. And he said, you know what they did to me? And I said no, Harold, what did they do? He said, they examined me on things I hadn't studied. And he said, when they had reduced me to blubbering incompetence where I didn't know anything, they gave me the degree. They said that's the way they did it. They gave a degree of Doctor of Philosophy to a man not because of what he knew, but because of what he knew he didn't know. And I've said to many colleges where I've spoken, that if I was grading students, I would never grade them on what they know. I would grade them on what they knew they didn't know. That would be far and away better because, if you're graded on what you know, you never can pick up anything but a little sand by the seashore. But if you're conscious of how much there is that you don't know and that you'll never know, you'll have at least humility on your side. But if you're graded by how much you know, you're likely to have pride, and a pride that has no foundation. So you see, there are attributes of God that He cannot impart to us. What is it then that God would impart? In what does He mean when he says made in His image, restored to His image through redemption?

Well, there are attributes of character. These that I have named before, are attributes of being, and as attributes of being they belong to the uncreated God. But there are attributes of character that God can impart to His creature. What are they? Let me name seven of them briefly. First of them is love. Love is an attribute of character, not of being. An act of good will toward all creatures, not necessarily an emotional binge. We've degraded love in our day until we don't know what it is. And the God who made Adam to love Eve, wouldn't recognize this whimpering, psychotic stuff now that we call love. Love is active goodwill toward all creatures, the love that rejoices in the good of all. And God is love and supremely God has this quality of character and He would impart it to all of His children. That we also, I have no malice, no grudges, no hard feelings, no ill will, no evil wishes, but only a high goodwill toward all mankind with the wish and hope that everyone might prosper, forgive everyone and love everyone.

Then there's righteousness. Righteousness is not an attribute of being but an attribute of character. And all the acts of God are in harmony with righteousness, and He would restore His people to righteousness. I have no confidence whatsoever as I said yesterday on the radio. I have no confidence whatsoever in any kind of Christianity that doesn't make a man good. I know that a lot of us have a fear that we might emulate the Catholics and preach salvation by merit. We've gone so far the other way that the New Testament doesn't recognize it. There's a horrible incongruity in the universe. God redeems us unto righteousness. And the first way you should be able to tell a Christian is by the fact that he's a good man.

Then there's mercy. Mercy is an attribute of character, love operating toward all sinful creatures. Quality of mercy is not strange, it then falleth like the gentle rain from heaven upon the place below. And mercy of course we can all show. And there's patience, long-suffering it's called elsewhere in the Scriptures, long-suffering. I want to break down here and admit that all the years I've served Christ, this is my toughest one. I don't know Brother whether you have any tough ones or not. But this is my toughest one. To be patient and to wait and to be long-suffering with people who ought to know better. That's the hardest thing for me, and that's temperamental. That isn't because I'm good necessarily, that's temperamental. I got that and I know where I got it. I can show you pictures of the man that passed that on to me. It was my English father.

But God is patient and long-suffering, and He waits and He waits and He waits. Think how long God waits? The ability to wait and keep sweet is a god-like virtue. And God would pass that on to us, but He can't give that to us as you would give a man a dollar or ten dollars. That has to be wrought into the man, beaten into him as a woman beats flavoring into a cake batter, beaten in until it's all thoroughly mixed, patience, long-suffering. And there's gentleness, mercy operating toward the weak and the vulnerable. And there's faithfulness, integrity toward every moral obligation, toward God, toward each other. And there is purity, holiness above all qualities. This is probably the one that takes the others all in, holiness of character, unmixed perfection. Now, all this is summed up in the phrase, of His holiness.

Redemption, I repeat, undertakes to restore the character of God to the character of a man. It undertakes through Jesus Christ, beginning with the new birth, to go on to perfect that man and make that man God-like in his character. I'm glad God is patient. If He were not patient, He would take His hand and wipe the church from the face of the earth, for we're certainly a long way from being God-life. But, it's the purpose of God in redemption to restore us unto His image. This is the ultimate purpose of God, conformed to the image of His Son it says in Romans 8:29. And the possession of this image is the bliss of heaven and the absence of this image is the grief of hell. And it's imperfect possession in the church is the cause of all of our troubles. It produces discontent and unhappiness. It's the cause of spiritual weakness. It's the source of coldness. It's the cause of quarrels and divisions among Christians.

So, the way of God in bringing to us His own image again, you can't do it in an easy way. This is the time when everybody wants everything done in an easy way. They say now, no more mussy ice cubes. I can remember when ice cubes weren't known. You had to saw your ice out of the nearby pond and put it in sawdust and keep it over winter. And we got refrigeration, and women thought they were in Utopia. Now, they're calling it mussy. And they're figuring on something else. I don't know or remember what. I never listen to closely to the commercials. But I remember hearing that. The thing that ten years ago was the latest invention. Now it's considered old-fashioned and you scorn it for something new. We want everything so that we put a nickel in the slot, pull the lever down and take it and go.

Religion has degenerated into that too. No, no, my friend. God doesn't make things like that. God doesn't put a few grains of dust on His hand and blow and there's a flock of chickens. God has a hen lay an egg and then sit on that egg 21 days and then watch over what she's hatched out for another month and a half. God doesn't speak and the tree grows, but He lets a seedling get in there and swell with moisture until it suddenly burst. Then up comes the sprout. Winter follows Fall and Fall follows Summer and Summer follows Spring year in and year out until two or three generations of human beings have come and gone and then there stands a tall noble tree there. God works slowly and sometimes He works painfully.

And the more wonderful the object God is trying to bring into being, the more painful it's likely to be, and the more trouble it's likely to cause. Why doesn't God whisper and have a baby born? Because He's got something wonderful in mind. So, He takes it the slow, inconvenient, painful way. And after inconvenience and discomfort and trouble, comes what Jesus called the sorrows of a woman, then the baby. But is it all over? No, she spends the next fifteen years keeping him from committing suicide accidentally. Trouble, trouble, trouble all the time, because she's rearing a man. She's bringing up a man, a man-child, said Jesus, is born into the world.

And the more wonderful the creature is, the longer it takes God to bring it to maturity. So, it is with a Christian. He works on us and works in us and chastises us and corrects us and humbles us and encourages us and humbles us again. He chastises us once more and humbles us again and encourages us some more until we become a partaker of His Holiness. This is so vital, so vital, so critically important that He should restore the image of His Son again in us and we should be made back into the image of God from which we fell.

So vitally important it is that it should engage our painstaking attention, Bible searching, prayer, self-examination, cooperation with God, humbling of ourselves, self-sacrifice, meditation, every means of grace, the church, the sermon, the song. Every means of grace that God has placed before us we should use, that we might work with God and having His holy image restored again in our souls.

For remember, the imperfect image of God in the Christian soul is the cause of all of his troubles. And no image of God in the soul, is the terror of hell. And the image of God perfectly restored is the bliss of heaven. May God grant that we would be wise enough to work with Him in His slow and sometimes painful, but wondrous plan to restore again in the souls of His people, His own image that we might be like Him and someday might gaze without embarrassment on His holy face. Amen.

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