

Dangers in the Way #4 'Dangers of Bondage and Liberty'

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer's sermon addresses the dangers of bondage and liberty, emphasizing the importance of true freedom in Christ and the rejection of superstition and legalism.

Scripture: Matthew 11:30, John 4:24, Romans 6:1-2, Romans 14:13, 2 Corinthians 3:17, Galatians 5:1, Galatians 5:13, Ephesians 5:15, 1 Timothy 4:3, 1 Peter 2:16

Topics: "Christian Liberty", "Bondage and Freedom"

Description

A.W. Tozer addresses the dangers of both bondage and liberty in the Christian life, emphasizing that believers must avoid returning to the yoke of bondage from which they were freed, such as superstition and legalism. He warns against the dangers of misusing Christian liberty as a license to sin, stressing that true freedom in Christ is the ability to live righteously and love others without the constraints of external traditions or fears. Tozer encourages Christians to embrace their identity as children of God, living in the Spirit and exercising their freedom responsibly, while also being mindful of how their actions may affect others. He concludes by affirming that the yoke of Jesus is easy and His burden is light, urging believers to stand firm in their freedom without falling back into bondage.

Transcript

"Dangers of Bondage and Liberty"

"Message #4 in Dangers in the Way and How to Avoid Them "

May 8, 1955

In the book of Ephesians, the fifth chapter, fifteenth verse, see then that you walk circumspectly. Not as fools, but as wise, if you walk looking around.

Now over the past few weeks, I have been preaching on the dangers in the way. And I have previously shown that there are dangers to the Christian life. But that there is escape from those dangers, and protection in the midst of them. Then, I went on to warn, and point out by name, some of these dangers. I spoke of the danger of prosperity and the danger of adversity. And last week of the danger that lies in idleness and the danger that lies in busyness. Today, I want to talk about the danger that lies in bondage and the danger that lies in liberty. We'll consider them in that order.

The danger of bondage. Now, Galatians 5:1, the man of God says that we are to be careful and not return again to the yoke of bondage from which we were once delivered. And I want to talk about the bondage to superstition, and bondage to legalistic forms, and bondage to externals such as food and dress, and bondage to holidays and seasons.

Now, first of all, the bondage to superstition. You might wonder why I should speak thus at a time or to a congregation like this because superstition is something that American people laugh about in public. Superstition as they say, an abject attitude of mind toward nature founded upon ignorance. It is a belief in magic and chance. Now, there are those that tell us that the hope of the world is returning to primitive conditions. And they say why do you go into the Baliem Valley, the Shangri-La of World War, and there, 150,000 Monies and Donies who are stone age people. Why don't you let them alone? You will take to them the common cold, tooth decay, bad digestion, tuberculosis, and all others; the white man's curses. Why don't you leave them in their simple childlike beauty?

Well, whoever talks like that is talking from the airless ivory tower, completely out of touch with reality. Ask any missionary whether there is such a tribe on the face of the earth. There is none. Not one. Superstition rides the primitive peoples of the world; rides them like iron yokes. It keeps them in constant bondage. And they carry a ball and chain heavier than that, that used to be welded upon the legs of convicts in the olden days. They are afraid of everything. They're afraid of the sun. They're afraid of the stars at night. They're terrified at an eclipse. They're afraid of the wind. They're afraid of the cry of the night bird. They're afraid of everything and live in a state of trembling terror. When twins are born in some parts of the heathen world, they save the first twin because they say that God sent that one, but they take the second one out and pound this helpless little mouth full of hot sand and kill it. They say it's a child of the devil.

And so, superstition rides the primitive peoples of the world constantly. There is the fear of the spell and the charm and the evil eye, magic and enchantment and witchery and sorcery, and bondage to the amulet and the incantation and the taboo. All of these things are found in the heathen lands. And now if that were all, then I suppose that I would save myself the trouble of preaching except I would use it as a reason we should become missionary-minded and send missionaries to these benighted people. But superstition is found wherever men are found. It is refined, and some of the grosser manifestations are probably not present, but most people are superstitious. I know in the part of the country where I came from, superstition had become a chain, had become a yoke, perhaps, if not an iron yoke, at least a wooden yoke. And it rested upon the shoulders of the simple country people and rode them all their lives long.

Now, superstition is not something to joke about as we do now. It is a specific defamation of the character of God. For superstition assumes, without knowing it, that God is weak and so can't control things. They're afraid of devils and combinations of numbers and certain days, and stars and they come to the nations in certain combinations of star patterns. They're afraid of them, assuming all the time that God created a juggernaut which he can't control, and that the universe is too big for Him and that God moves about and hurries here and there excitedly through His universe as an old maid who took a tiger cub home with her. And now it's grown to full adulthood and turned vicious and roams the house while she cowers in terror in some closet waiting for the police to come.

So, God is pictured by the superstitious man as being a little limited God who created a universe over which He can't have full control. And so, witches and spells and incantations and devils and demons and omens, and the rest, roam up and down the earth. And God hides in some cosmic closet afraid of what He's created. That's defamation of the Divine character. My brother, God Almighty rides upon the wings of

the wind and sitteth on the circle of the earth, and measures the waters in the hollow of his hand and comprehends the dust of the earth in the balance. And weighs the mountains in scales and the hills in a measure. And all that thou can know cannot be compared under Him. He speaks and it is done. He commands and it stands forth. He calls the end from the beginning and declares the things that are not as though they were.

God is a sovereign God moving sovereignly through His world. And they that know God and know His character will never be afraid of, nor will they take comfort in rabbit's foot, feet rather than the rabbit's foot, or rabbit feet, nor will they have a rabbit foot hung around their neck or a horse chestnut in their pocket to keep away rheumatism.

It sounds funny, doesn't it, but men can get in bondage to that and be paganized Christians with only the name of Christian and not be Christians at all. I say that superstition is a defamation of the Divine character because it casts aspersions upon the wisdom of God and assumes that God is limited and can be fooled and cheated like any common Roman god. Whereas, God knows all things and our thoughts are loud, and our heartbeats are like hammer blows. And God can hear the tiniest thought that lies in the back of your mind infinitely amplified. And He knew it before you entertained it, or you knew that you entertained it, so that God can't be fooled. He knows what's in men. He looks on the inside and he predicts and predestinates and God is not limited in any sense.

So, there's no such thing as cheating God. There is no such thing as telling or making God a promise and then having God ring His hands and say why that man broke his promise to me, whatever shall I do? That kind of God would never get my loyalty. Never would I bow my knee to a God that I could cheat. Never would I worship and cry, holy, holy, holy in the presence of a God that I could lie to successfully. No, no, superstition makes God limited in power and limited in wisdom, or it shows him to be spiteful, so that He takes childish revenge. Superstition is in some measure a projection of our own nasty little personalities into heaven and making God in our own image. Spitefulness in us becomes a vast and limitless spitefulness in God. So, people are afraid of God,

I remember as a boy that mothers would never say a word against a baby that was born anywhere lest she should have one. If she said, he's an ugly little mutt isn't he. Never would she dare say that. Because somewhere there was a spiteful God with a sour grin on His face, that would watch and remember that, and when she had a baby, it would be an ugly little mutt too. Now that kind of belief in God is a disgrace, and it doesn't belong to Christians, and it isn't a part of the divine revelation. God is above spite. And that is why He pays no attention to those who get up and say, if there's a God let him strike me dead in 10 seconds. And then in ten awful seconds when scarcely a heart beats and nobody breathes, this two-legged ass stands and waits for the spiteful God in the heaven to strike him down, a God he knows isn't spiteful. And so, he's all right, but the superstitious don't breathe waiting for God to rise up and act like a man. No, God isn't spiteful. God is infinitely patient with us poor little chest-beating boasters. He is infinitely kind and merciful, lest, if He were not, we should all be in hell today.

So, superstition makes God to be spiteful, or it makes God to be childish and touchy, so that we always have to be afraid of Him. I hear this sometimes among us good fundamentalists. God bless our memories. We're afraid ever to say anything that isn't exactly the right formula lest the God who goes in big for words and symbols should be angry with us. I know there are some who never pronounce the name of Jesus apart from all of His titles; Lord Jesus Christ, or Jesus Christ the Lord or Christ Jesus the Lord. Always they've got to have the three. As a poor, cheap preacher who's been given an honorary degree and is

jealous to be called doctor, so they feel that Jesus is jealous of all of His titles and that He gets miffed unless we give Him all His titles every time we speak about him. What kind of a Christ would that be? A little, spiteful, childish Christ, that you never knew exactly how to predict.

Ah, you can predict Him my brethren. His character is holy and infinitely above and beyond all of the cheap, little, moral weaknesses of men. And you can always know how God is going to act. No, no, Jesus isn't jealous of all of His titles. Of course, God has made this same Jesus whom He crucified, both Lord and Christ. But when Mary stood at the open grave and grabbed her heart and said, Rabboni. He said, Mary, he didn't say, don't you respect me? Why didn't you call me by my three titles? He smiled and said Mary and stretched out His hands. Mary knew Him better than we do. In this terrible day, superstition makes Him to be little and childish. It makes Him to be limited or weak, whereas He is none of these things. I think that we could throw chains; I think there would be carload after carload of shackles that could be carried out and melted up into metal into soft metal and made into useful things, if we could only believe in the greatness of God and see how big and glorious and sovereign and mighty and patient and loving and holy God is. For almost all weaknesses in the Church of Christ spring out of an inadequate view of God. They spring out with a low view of God. If God is seen big enough, there will be a wonderful liberty. Now, bondage to superstition, let's get free from it. All the black cats on the south side can't hurt a child of God, not all of them.

Now, bondage to legalistic forms. That is, there are those who can't worship unless they worship after a certain form. If they have been brought up to kneel, they can't pray standing up. If they've been brought up to pray standing up, they can't pray kneeling down. And they've just got to get into that certain formula, and certain form, and get into that certain posture, and say certain words. No, my brethren, they that worship God must worship Him how, in spirit and in truth, and that gives us complete liberty. Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty. And the child of God has infinite liberty in worshiping God.

My old friend, good and honored friend, Dave Fant the engineer, used to pray to God and praise God all day long in his great train roaring along, the engineer he was. Roaring along from Atlanta to the coast, and praising God all the time; was saved in that old cab, if you don't mind, and filled with the Holy Ghost in that old cab. And when he got to a certain town, he used to salute them by pulling the whistle. It wasn't necessary, but he preached there, and so he pulled the whistle, and one day he forgot to pull the whistle. And the news went like wildfire every place. Dave Fant didn't salute us this morning. Do you suppose the Lord took him away and didn't tell us. It sounded like the Old Testament in the days of Elijah. No, he just forgot.

You can pray on a train. You can pray in an airplane, most people do. You can pray standing up or sitting down or in any position. Because we worship God in spirit. We don't practice our religion as a witch her formula. We worship God spontaneously out of our hearts. We love Him and He loves us. And there is no form there. Although, there must be some form in public worship, otherwise, of course, it would be bedlam. There has to be somebody to know which, we're going to sing next, and so on. So, I believe in a certain limited, modified form in church service, but oh brother, it's possible to get so legalistic and into such bondage and formality, that you'll blow up and have a temper fit if things aren't done the way they should be done in church.

Sure, our brother there had an experience like that one time. He was supposed to be leading the service and he took an offering and, or did something out of turn, and one old deacon got up white-faced and roundly scolded him in un-Christian harsh terms and said, we must have this done in order. He committed

more sin by that act ungodly volcanic eruption than if there had never been any order in the church.

Then, there are other traditions which may not go back to Christ and the apostles at all. Let me give you a rather silly illustration of what I mean. It's possible to follow old certain mannerisms or forms, traditions, and not know where they originated, or know how they got there, and yet they're religiously followed and imitated by all aspiring Christians. I told you this before several years ago, but it's time for a repeat. Several years ago, Walter Post, a missionary from our church over in the Netherlands East Indies, saw a young converted Diack preacher, and he was quite a preacher, this Diack. He could declare the Word of God in the language of his people wonderfully. And Walter had won this boy to God and taught him what he knew. And Michaelson, another missionary there told me smilingly afterward this. He said, this young Diack preacher was a great preacher, but he had the peculiar mannerisms. He would pluck at his collar while he preached and reach for his collar and pluck out and then reach with the other hand and pluck at his collar. And he said, I didn't understand why he did it until I heard Walter preach. And he plucked at his collar. And then he said, I didn't know why Walter did it until I came home and heard you. And you pluck at your collar. And listen now, the reason I plucked at my collar was that the collar didn't fit the shirt band, and I used to have to get them straight while I preached. Now, that kind of thing sounds silly, but you can get into bondage to that thing and carry it down the years and found churches upon it and get your soul into a straitjacket. Throw your shoulders back and breathe deep and say in Jesus Christ, I'm a free man. And I will not be subject to bondage of any kind.

And then there is another type of bondage we've got to watch out for, and that's the bondage to foods and to dress. Now, Jesus said, it didn't matter what entered into a man's mouth. That didn't defile him, but it was what came out of a man's mouth. And Paul said in 1 Timothy, that in the latter days, certain men should come. And they should give heed to doctrines of devils. And that the doctrines of devils were that they should not marry and that they should abstain from meat, meat which God had created to be received with thanksgiving in them that know and believe the truth. For all the gifts of God are good. All creatures are good and are to be received with thanksgiving. For it is sanctified by the Word of God and prayer.

Now, there is certainly an emancipation proclamation that delivers you from foods. And yet, in spite of that, we find lots of God's dear children running right back in and taking the oath. They don't feel comfortable without it. Like the man who had the crutch so long that now he feels naked when he doesn't wear his crutch. And there are people like that. They just must have something to make them miserable. They just won't be free in God. So, they won't eat this or they will eat that, and they buy a book somewhere for 25 cents to show us why they're right, scientifically. Oh, no, no, no brother, the rule is if it doesn't hurt you, eat it, as you can afford it. And if you don't have an allergy to it, go ahead and eat it because all creatures of God are good and are to be received with thanksgiving. to them that believe and know the truth.

Now, here's a place to tell you about a wonderful letter that I received last week, about a thirty-page letter, twenty of them numbered, and a lot of them on both sides only numbered on one, from a Presbyterian woman down in St. Louis, who had been converted to God; marvelously converted to God. And she said, oh, she grew up in an atmosphere and still is in it apparently in that church where they drink a little and do all sorts of other things that Christians don't do. And she said, she had never heard of A.B. Simpson and she never heard of the Alliance Weekly, obviously, though she had read a couple of other books that I had written. But she said that she had a little baby, about eighteen months old and has got eczema. She said this little baby with the eczema was so sick that it couldn't sleep and she couldn't sleep and her husband couldn't sleep and it had sores and it bled and the little bed in the morning was bloody from the scratching and the sores off this sweet little baby girl's body. She said she went to God about it. And she said, God,

I'd like to know what's the matter with my baby. She went to the doctor. The doctor said it's an allergy, but I don't know what allergy. So, he began to make tests. He ran one test after the other and still she suffered and still she couldn't sleep and still the home was in an uproar. No sleep at night and crying all day. She said she went to God and said, now God, I am Thy servant and I ought to know what's the matter with my baby. Nobody knows. Now God, you tell me. I'll be listening. She said, the next morning she went to salt the baby's food and she felt checked in her heart. And she dashed to the telephone and said doctor, doctor, is it possible to be allergic to salt? He said yes, iodized salt. So she didn't salt the food that day and for the first time in weeks the baby slept all night. She said she kept iodized salt out of the baby's diet, and in seven days it was perfectly well, not a sore and sleeping all night.

Now, there's your point, brother. If you break out in a rash, don't eat it. But, if you don't, don't think there's any such thing as religious food. I'm here to tell you there isn't any such thing as religious food. No food is any more religious than any other food. Neither are we any better if we eat. Neither are we any of the worse if we do not eat, said the man of God. And that ought to take care of that. I won't talk about dress this morning.

In Toledo I had occasion to talk about the kingdom of God being liberty, that in not meat nor drink, and I added dress and whiskers to it. And I said that the kingdom of God didn't lie in a man's beard, and if it were, to take it off, and it didn't make him any nearer to God. And a dear old missionary that had studied under Simpson years ago, came smilingly down and shook my hand and talked to me and he had a long beard. And I felt mean for having said that, but it was true nevertheless. Beard or no beard, spirituality does not lie in the length of your hair. It does not lie in the length of your beard. It does not lie in the length of your garment. And it does not lie in the quality of your garment. The rule I would lay down is the easiest rule in the world; if it's modest, and you can afford it and it's appropriate, that's all God cares about dress.

Well, in bondage to days and seasons, I don't think I have to go into that. Certainly, we don't need that fear, bondage the days and seasons. How they fill the churches on Easter and how they empty them the next Sunday. Which all goes to show that such Christians are bound, if they are Christians at all.

Now, that's the dangers of bondage. Don't let's get into bondage. Jesus Christ set us free. Was it Luther who said, love God with all your heart and due as you please, knowing that if you love God enough, you're only pleased to do the will of God.

Now with that saying, which is a dangerous same, I go to the second, the danger of liberty. That is the danger of antinomianism. There's a long jaw-breaking word. It means that certain people tend to run by unchecked logic to extremes. And that if I get up and say you are free, they immediately leap into the air and say thank God, I'm free, I'll do as I please, and they go out and commit sin to show how free they are. You wouldn't believe it, but that is the case. That has been done. I just finished reading a book called, "Small Sects in America." It is quite an exhaustive treatise on the small denominations and sects in America over the past history and extant now. And it's quite amazing how many of those sects ran to free love and sexual extremes because they were free in the Holy Ghost therefore they were free in the flesh. Now, there is your danger brother. Paul said I am free, but I will not use my freedom as a cloak for the flesh. God set us free but he didn't set us free to do evil. He set us free to do good. Freedom to do good is the Christian's liberty, not freedom to commit sin. God never said you're free now, go on out and sin.

Some Christians have carried freedom to such a ridiculous and unholy extreme that they have said, I've got to sin a little, right along to keep grace operating. I think that's tragic heresy. And the children of God

should know it for such and flee it as they would polio; for it is a disease.

Christian liberty is freedom to live in the Spirit unhindered by externals. Christian liberty is freedom from the fear of the government, freedom from fear of my sins, freedom from fear of God, servile fear of God that is. Freedom from fear of the devil, freedom from black cats and birds and amulets and spells and charms and wizardry. Freedom from religious bondage of every kind. Freedom from traditions, the iron yoke. Freedom to live in the Spirit and worship God in spirit and in truth. That's Christian freedom.

But, when it becomes freedom to commit sin, that grace may abound, Paul cries out against it from his high hill with a shout, God forbid! How should we, that had been dead to sin live any longer, there in. Freedom to love, so that our conduct springs out of love, and freedom not to hate. Ah, it's wonderful to be free from hate so that you don't have to hate. Hate is a moral cancer. And it eats on the soul till it kills the victim. And to get free from hatred is like getting healed of cancer; delivered from that cursed wild bunch of cells that eat on our liver. Freedom from hatred and freedom from envy and freedom from unholy ambition and freedom from wanting your own way and freedom to do the will of God, that's Christian freedom. That's Christian liberty, but never free to commit any sort of sin. For the child of God who lives from within and whose heart is a fountain of affection and love for God, will not sin, but if he does, he will confess it with sorrow and be forgiven and cleansed from it and determined not to go back to that wallow anymore.

Now I want to point out another thing that a Christian will not use his freedom to put other Christians into a bad conscience. Paul told about meat that was offered to idols, and some Christians had a conscience about it. Now, Paul said, I have no conscience at all about meat that has been offered to an idol, if it's good, clean meat, because I don't believe an idol is a real thing. There's one God, one Lord, one Spirit, and all these other so-called gods are all imitations. They don't exist for me, said Paul. Yet said Paul, when I'm in the home of a young Christian that doesn't know this, I will respectfully pass by meat offered to idols lest I hurt his conscience.

So, a Christian is in danger of allowing his very liberty to be a stumbling block to somebody else. So that he does freely, things that other people will think he's sinning when he does. And thus, he's a hindrance to other people. Well, there was a little rule I think that we can put down here, it is, take your freedom in Christ Jesus. Be as free in Christ as He made you. And remember, you're not a bond slave, but a son. You're not a servant in the house. You're a child in the household. You're your father's child, not the king's servant. Be free. Yet, not use your freedom for a license to the flesh. But mortify the flesh and keep your flesh under. And lay your loving burdens on yourself for Christ's sake. A burden that I voluntarily lay upon my shoulder is no burden at all.

I don't tell many stories, but the missionary told us one of a little girl about ten I suppose, carrying her little brother piggyback on her a little back in one of our foreign fields. And she carried him around all day while the mother worked in the field. And the missionary sympathized with the little girl and referred to the little boy on her back as a burden. And the girl looked up and said, "That's not a burden, that's my brother."

What you do voluntarily is not a burden. It is only a yoke when somebody else leaves it on your neck, and says, take it or go to hell, where they shall but perish. Somebody with a beard, or clothing of certain kind, or tradition behind him, or stained glass to give him authority that the poor little shivering fellow doesn't have in his own heart. Or some other religious accoutrement to add to his personality, that authority, which he doesn't have inside. He tells me you do it this way, or you perish. I smile, I hope not too perilously, and tell him, oh, friend, you don't know my Father. My father doesn't look at it that way. My Father says, child,

you were free, absolutely free. Free to take voluntary burdens for the sake of others; carry those burdens on your shoulder. And the burden you carry voluntarily will never make your shoulders sore. But the burden that religion lays upon you or philosophy or tradition or superstition, will gall you and scar you and kill you at last.

But, the easy yoke of Jesus, His yoke is easy and His burden is light, I found it so, I found it so. The yoke of Jesus is easy. I stand to declare to you, that the Lord Jesus has never asked a hard thing of me. My miseries have always come out of my own flesh. They have never come from any burden Jesus ever laid on me. And what few burdens I have laid on myself, I've never felt the weight of them at all. They are as easy and light as can be. For as little song says, as He always takes the heavy end and gives the light end to me.

So, let's watch it. Let's not get bound to anything, for we're free men and women in Christ Jesus. But, let's be sensible and not use our freedom as a cloak for the flesh. And let's not hide behind liberty in order to practice license. Let's remember that the man in whom Jesus Christ dwells will be wrought to be a good man. And don't be afraid of the word "good." Let us not fling back in the face of Jesus the charter of freedom which cost Him His blood. Stand fast therefore in the Liberty where with Christ has made you free and be not entangled with the yoke of bondage. But use not your freedom as a cloak for the flesh, but knowing your free, discipline yourself for Jesus' sake. We trust the indwelling Spirit to fulfill in you the law of God, for what the law could not do and it was weak through the flesh, God sending His Son, has done by the indwelling Spirit within us.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/aw-tozer/dangers-in-the-way-4-dangers-of-bondage-and-liberty/>

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