

(Dangers in the Way Series): Dangers of Bondage and Liberty

by A.W. Tozer

The sermon emphasizes the dangers of bondage and the importance of liberty in worshiping God, highlighting the need to break free from superstition, legalistic forms, and other unnecessary rules.

Duration: 36:54

Scripture: Romans 8:3, Galatians 5:1, Ephesians 5:15

Topics: "Bondage"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of understanding and embracing the freedom that comes from being in Christ Jesus. He warns against using this freedom as an excuse to indulge in sinful behavior or to neglect the responsibility of living a good and righteous life. The preacher encourages believers to walk circumspectly, being wise and vigilant in their actions. He also addresses the dangers of superstition and legalistic forms of worship, urging listeners to break free from these bondage and have a proper understanding of the greatness and sovereignty of God.

Transcript

In the book of Ephesians, the fifth chapter and fifteenth verse, see then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, that 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 will consider them in that order. The danger of bondage. On Galatians 5, 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 holy days 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 is, 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 Balearic Valley, the Shangri-La of world war, and there are 150,000 Monis and Danis 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 other of 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, keeps them in constant bondage, and they carry a bow and chain heavier than that that used to be welded upon the legs of convicts in the olden days. They're 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 its 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 were to 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 the constellations and certain combinations of star patterns. They're afraid of them, assuming all the time that God created a jaggernaut 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 has 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 created, a 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 know cannot be compared unto 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's feet, rather the rabbit 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, that 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 the 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 in knowledge. So there's no such thing as cheating God.

No such thing as telling, making God a promise and then having God wring 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 God, 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 unless she should have one. If she said he's an ugly little mutt, 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 ten seconds. And then in ten awful seconds when scarcely our 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 bring 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's 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 were afraid ever to say anything that isn't exactly the right formula lest the God who goes in big for words and syllables 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, 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 mixed 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, churlish 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's going to act.

No, no, Jesus isn't jealous of all of his titles. Of course God has made this 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, makes him to be limited or weak, whereas he's none of these things. I think that we could throw chains.

I think we could, there'd 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 of a low view of God.

If God is seen big enough, there'll be a wonderful liberty. Now, bondage to superstition, let's get free from it. All the black cats on the south side can 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 down. And they have just got to get into that certain formula and certain form and get into that certain posture and say certain words. So, 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 Fink, the engineer, used to praise God all day long in his gray 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'd preach there, and so he'd pull the whistle. And one day he forgot to pull the whistle, and the news went like wildfire every place. Dave Fink didn't salute us this morning.

Do you suppose the Lord took him away and didn't tell us? Sounded like the Old Testament in the days of Elisha. No, he just forgot. But 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 witcher formula. We worship God spontaneously out of our hearts.

We love him, and he loves us, and there's 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 of prick if things aren't done the way they should be done in church. Our brother here had an experience like that one time.

He was supposed to be leading the service, and he took an offering or did something out of turn, and one old deacon got up white-faced and wrongly scolded him in un-Christian harsh terms and said, We must have this done in order. He committed more sin by that act of ungodly volcanic eruption than if there had never been any order in the church. Then there are the 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 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, missionary from our church over in the Netherlands East Indies, saw a young converted Dayak preacher, and he was quite a preacher, this Dayak. He could declare the word of God in the language of his people wonderfully. And Walter had won this boy to God and had taught him what he knew, and Michelson, another missionary there, told me smilingly afterward this.

He said, this young Dayak preacher was a great preacher, but he had a peculiar mannerism. He would pluck at his collar while he preached, and reach for his collar and pluck at it, 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 hurt 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 that hat to get him 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 am 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 in prayer. Now, there is certainly an emancipation proclamation that delivers you from fruits, and yet in spite of that we find lots of God's dear children running right back in and taking the yoke.

They don't feel comfortable without it, like the man who had to 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 twenty-five cents to show them why they are 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 is 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, now, she never heard of A. B. Simpson, and she never heard of The Alliance Weekly, obviously, though she'd read a couple of other books that I'd read.

But she said that she had a little baby, about eighteen months old, that 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 of 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 she, 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, 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 the worse if we do not eat, said the man of God. Now, 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 is, 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 that he could wear it or 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, then you can afford it and it's appropriate. That's all God cares about, dress. Well, then bondage to days and seasons, I don't think I have to go into that.

Certainly we don't need that here. Bondage to 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 that said, love God with all your heart and do 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 dangerous saying, I go to the second, the danger of liberty.

That is, the danger of antinomianism. There is 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.

Now you wouldn't believe it, but that is the case. That has been done. I just finished reading a book called Small Sex in America.

It is quite an exhaustive treatise on the small denominations and sex in America over the past history and extent now. And it's quite amazing how many of those sex ran to free love and sexual extremes because they were free in the Holy Ghost, therefore they were free in the flesh. Now there's 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 said, I've got to sin a little right along to keep operating.

I think that's a 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, several 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 and shouts, God forbid, how should me that had been dead to sin live any therein? 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's been offered to an idol if it's good, clean meat, because I don't believe that 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'll 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 is a hindrance to other people.

Well, there is 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.

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 use not your freedom for a license to the flesh, but mortify the flesh and keep your flesh under, and lay 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 the little girl, about ten, I suppose, carrying her little brother, Pickyback, on her 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 lays it on your neck and says, take it or go to hell.

Wear this yoke or perish. Somebody with a beard, or a clothing of a certain kind, or a 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 counterment to add to his personality that authority which he doesn't have himself.

He tells me, you do it this way or you perish. I smile, I hope not superciliously, 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're 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 is Jesus. His yoke is easy, and his burden is light.

I have found it so, I have 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. In what few burdens I have laid on myself, I've never felt the weight of them at all.

They're as easy and light as can be. For as the little psalm says, he always takes the heavy end and gives the light end to me. So let's watch.

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 or ought to be a good man. 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 wherewith Christ has made you free. Be not entangled with the yoke of bondage, but use not your freedom as a cloak for the flesh. And knowing you're free, discipline yourself for Jesus' sake.

And trust the indwelling spirit to fulfill in you the law of God for what the law could not do and would lead to the flesh, God sending his Son has done by the indwelling spirit within us.

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