

'Forward With Christ in Total Commitment'

by A.W. Tozer

The sermon emphasizes the importance of total commitment to Christ, including intellectual, volitional, exclusive, and inclusive attachments, and warns against adding anything to Christ.

Scripture: Colossians 1:15

Topics: "Total Commitment", "Centrality of Christ"

Description

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the necessity of total commitment to Christ, asserting that Jesus must be central, basic, and preeminent in the life of believers. He warns against the dangers of adding anything to Christ, advocating for a faith that is solely rooted in Him. Tozer outlines the importance of an intellectual, volitional, exclusive, inclusive, and irrevocable attachment to Christ, urging believers to fully embrace their relationship with Him without compromise. He concludes by encouraging Christians to live with a singular focus on Christ, rejecting distractions and fully committing to His plans.

Transcript

"Forward With Christ In Total Commitment"

Pastor and author A.W. Tozer speaking to the National Association of Evangelicals Annual Conference

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It is a privilege for me and an honor to address you. It is an honor that I have not earned and that I don't deserve. But who am I to argue with your Board. They invited me and I accepted and I'm here. Now, there's one very happy circumstance surrounding my little talk here this morning and that is that I was assigned this talk, "Forward with Christ in Total Commitment." And if I had chosen it, that's the one I would have chosen. So, when you get a sympathetic audience before a man, who's to have the pleasure of speaking on the topic chosen for him, but one that he would himself have chosen, a man should be able to deliver at least a passable sermon under those circumstances. If he couldn't, I assume he wasn't called to preach anyhow and ought to leave the ministry and go back to selling real estate or raising rutabagas. We'll do our best and I will try to keep it in the time. I quit when it's time, whether I'm finished or not.

Now, in the book of Colossians, the the first chapter it says, Jesus Christ, who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature. For by Him were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or powers, all things

were created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things and by Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead, that in all things He might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell.

Then in Ephesians, first chapter and concluding verses of the second, Paul says that God's power wrought in Christ, when God raised his son from the dead, set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. And put all things under His feet and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church which is His body, the fulness of him that fills it all in all. And then, second chapter, we are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints in the household of God and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Jesus Christ Himself being the Chief Cornerstone, in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth into one holy temple in the Lord. In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Now before we talk about our union with Christ and our conscious and volitional attachment to Christ in total commitment, we must look at who Christ is and what His relation is to the redeemed company which we call the church. In one of the passages which I have read to you, you will find this truth set forth which I think I may imperfectly condense into three words. The words being "centrality" and "basicity" and "preeminence." Now, it says that Jesus Christ the Lord is central. The old writers used to say that Christ is to the church what the soul is to the body. You know what the soul is to the body? It is that which gives it life when the soul flees the body, there's nothing that can keep the body alive. When the soul is gone, the embalmer takes over, and in the church of Christ, any church, anywhere, of any denomination whatever it may call itself, as long as Christ is there imparting life, being the life of that redeemed company, then you have a church. For Christ is central in His church. He holds it together and in Him it adheres.

And then there is the next word, "basicity." I never looked to find out whether there was such a word. I made it. But if there isn't, there ought to be. And what I mean there is, that it's basic. Jesus Christ is basic to the church. He's underneath it. And the whole redeemed company rests down upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, I know this sounds like a string of religious cliches, but I'd like to say it in at least in such tone of voice that the cliché element will go out of it and you'll hear it as though you were hearing it for the first time. That the whole Church of God rests down upon the shoulders of His Son. I think we might be able to go around the world and simply cry, "Christ is enough. Jesus Christ is enough." What weakens us in evangelical circles, and that's all I shall speak to. I never speak to the Liberals on the general ground that is not fair to kill, or shoot at a dead horse or kill a dead lion. So, I don't bother the liberals, but when I'm among the evangelicals, I like to talk to them.

And I think that our trouble is, what weakens us is, that we put a plus sign after Christ-Christ plus something else. Remember, it's always the pluses that ruin our spiritual lives personally. And it's always the admissions or the additives, as they say now, that weaken the church. Let's remember that God has declared that Christ his Son is sufficient. He has the way, the truth and the life. He is wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. He is the wisdom of God and the power of God. He gathers up in Himself all things and in Him all things consist, so that we do not want Jesus Christ plus something else or Jesus Christ and something else. And we never want to put a comma after Christ; not Christ with a comma waiting for something else, or Christ with a dash leading to somebody else, but we must preach Christ period. For Christ is enough. He's basic to the church of Christ,

Hear, O Heaven and give ear for the Lord hath spoken and called the earth from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof. And what He has said is, this is my beloved Son, hear ye Him. So the Lord Jesus Christ is enough. So I think that we of the evangelical faith, which is I have always believed to be the faith of our fathers, and a Biblical faith, that we should not preach Christ plus science, or Christ and philosophy, or Christ plus psychology, or Christ plus education, or Christ plus civilization, but Christ alone and Christ enough. These other things may have their place and fit in and be used just as you can throw sand into vat where they're making glass and it will all melt up so we could lose all of these things, but we're not leaning on any of them, but we're resting down on Him who is basic to the faith of our fathers.

And then there's that word preeminent, that He might be preeminent and have a place above all things. So let's think of Jesus Christ, above all things, and underneath all things, and outside of all things, and inside of all things. He's above all things, but not pushed up as the old bishop said. And He's beneath all things, but not pressed down. And He's outside of all things, but not excluded, and inside, but not confined. He's above all presiding, and beneath all upholding, and outside of all embracing, and inside of all filling. So we are committed to Jesus Christ our Lord alone.

Now, our relation to him is all that matters, really. I want to talk a little about a true Christian faith as an attachment to the person of Christ. An attachment to the person of Christ and total commitment to Jesus Christ includes this or is this. There are four or five things I'll talk about if I have time to get to them, that the attachment of the individual person to Jesus Christ is an intellectual attachment and I will tell you what I mean the that, and a volitional attachment an exclusive attachment and an inclusive attachment and an irrevocable attachment.

Let's look at the first one. That to follow Christ forward in complete commitment, total commitment means there's got to be an intellectual attachment to Christ. That is, we cannot run on our feelings or on wisps of poetic notion about Christ. There are a good many bogus Christs among us these days. And I believe that you and I as followers of the Lamb are not only ought to, but that it is obligatory upon us that we point out these bogus Christs and show them for what they are, and then point to the Lamb of God that taken away the sins of the world.

You know that it was old John Owen that said to mourn people in his day the old Puritan, he said, he have an imaginary Christ. And I warn you that if you're satisfied with an imaginary Christ, you must be satisfied with imaginary salvation. There is many Christs and many lords and many gods but there is only one Christ. And the really saved man and the man who is following Christ has an attachment to Christ that's an intellectual attachment, in that, he knows who Christ is, theologically. For you know, there's the romantic Christ of the female novelist and there is the sentimental Christ of the half-converted cowboy and there's the philosophical Christ of the academic egghead. Then, there's the cozy Christ of the effeminate poet and the muscular Christ of the All-American halfback.

Well, we have this kind of Christ, but there's only one kind of Christ, and God has said about Him that He is His Son. I like what they say about Him in the creeds, that He is God of the substance of His Father begotten before all ages, man of the substance of his mother, born in the world, perfect God and perfect man, a reasonable soul in human flesh subsisting, equal to His Father as touching His Godhead less than His Father's touching His manhood. Who, although He be God and man, yet he is not two, but one Christ. For as the reasonable soul in flesh is one man, so God in man is one Christ. This is the Christ we adore, and we must have a knowledge of this, that is, we must have the Christ of Christian theology.

I have been blamed or praised for being a mystic. I don't know what the word means. If to be a mystic, you have to have dreams and all sorts of things. I never had one in my life that I couldn't trace to something I ate. So, I am not that kind of mystic, but I'll tell you this, that I would never have anything to do with any book or any new movement or any religion or any new emphasis, that doesn't begin with Christ, go out from Christ and return to Christ again. The Christ of God, the Christ of the Bible, the Christ in Christian theology, the historic Christ of the Scriptures, He is the one.

So we must have an intellectual attachment to Christ. You can't simply let your heart run out to Christ as the Catholics let it run out to the Virgin Mary in a kind of warm feeling about Christ, not being sure of who Christ is. This is the essence of heresy. We must believe in the Christ of God. We must believe as what God says He is.

Well then, I must go on. There's the volitional attachment to Christ. What do I mean by that? I mean that if I'm going to follow Christ forward in complete and total commitment, I must do it by my will. The fellow was in a bad shape, and he's making a bad mistake who tries to live on impulse and inspiration, who hopes to sail across the undulating sea of titillating feeling. You can't do it my Brother, because the devil gets you down. The man who lives on his feelings is not living very well and is not going to be able to last very long. The old writers used to tell us of the dark night of the soul, that there's a place where the Christian goes through darkness, where there's heaviness there. God isn't going to take us off to heaven all wrapped up in cellophane looking like we ought to be hanging on the Christmas tree. God is going to take us there after He has purged us and disciplined us and dragged us through the fire and has made us strong and has taught us that faith and feeling are not the same, though thank God, faith brings feelings sometimes.

You know, they use to say High Heaven, that heard the solemn vow, That vow renewed shall daily hear, but people are afraid of that now. But I believe that just as Daniel determined that he would not eat of the king's meat and just as Jesus set His face like a flint and just as Paul said, "this one thing I do," I believe that the true follower of Christ must be a man who's will has been sanctified, not a will-less man. I never believed when we teach the deeper life that we say that God destroys our will. A will-less man would be like a man without a backbone. He would be of no good in the world. You'd have to put him in to traction to the hold him up. And so, if if you have no will, you're no good. But the beautiful thing is that God unites our will with His will, and our will become strong in His will. And sometimes, as you go on in God, you hardly know whether it's your will or God's will that is working at a given moment.

Well, now I go on to an exclusive attachment, and what do I mean by that? I mean that our attachment to the person of Christ must exclude all that is contrary to Christ. You see, there is a polarity in the Christian life. And this polarization begins at the very threshold. These are the days when we're trying to be positive, 100%, positive. But the Scripture says that Jesus, that Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity. And that was said of holy Christ Himself, higher than the highest heavens and separate from sinners. And if He had to hate in order to love, so do you and I. But they tell us that we ought to be positive. People write to me and say, you're negative. Why don't you go positive? Well, to be positive 100% would be as futile and as useless and thank God, as fatal, as to inhale steadily along all your life without exhaling. You can't do that. The human body requires that you inhale to get oxygen and exhale to get rid of the poison.

And so, the church in Christ has got to inhale and exhale. When she inhales, she must exhale. And when the Church of Christ inhales, the Holy Ghost, she must exhale everything that's contrary to Him, or maybe I've got that backwards. I tell you some of the churches wonder why the Holy Ghost hasn't been around since last Christmas. And the reason is, they haven't exhaled. They've not gotten rid of the old business

that's in there.

Well, I don't believe that any man can love until he's able to hate. I don't think that any man can love God unless he hates the devil. I don't think that he can love righteousness unless he hates sin. For the Scriptures would leave us with the opinion, with a belief that in order to accept, there are some things you've got to reject. In order to own, there are other things you've got to repudiate. In order to affirm, there are things you've got to deny. In order to say yes, you've got to be able to say no. And the man who hasn't the courage or the intestinal fortitude to rear back on his hind legs and roar a thundering no, that some things can never say yes and make it mean anything. I, for my part have long ago come to the conclusion, I can't get along with everybody. This idea of soft-handed pastors with a saintly flush on their face trying to get along with everybody, quit it Reverend, quit it, it won't do any good, because in an effort to please everybody he'll succeed in pleasing nobody.

I've been asked to go on your television a few times and to talk with priests and rabbis and all the rest. Why do I want to do that for? I told the newsman who called me, I'm an evangelical preacher. I preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and I couldn't think of a thing that I could say there. Can you imagine for me to get up with a bunch of fellows who hate my Lord and believe that He was not the Son of God at all, and that I sit there and do or sit there and do fancy footwork. Now, how can you do both? Sit there and try to do fancy footwork, trying to keep from offending somebody that hates my Lord? No, I don't want to do that at all. If they don't want Him, they don't want me. And, if they don't want to hear Him, they don't want to hear me. I don't want a watered-down Christianity, bless God. But I want to be able to say no. I say no to the devil and no to Khrushchev and no to the Pope and no to everybody that has anything to say that's contrary to the Lord whom I adore and to whom I am attached with an intellectual attachment that theological and with a volitional attachment that is final, and with an exclusive attachment that would exclude everything that's contrary to my Lord Jesus.

And then there's the inclusive attachment. Now, what do I mean by that. Well, that's the inhaling you see. That's all that Christ is and does and says and promises and commands, and all the glory that circle around His head and all the offices He holds and all the shining beauty of the various facets of His infinite nature. All that is and all that is said and all that is promised, I take that all, I include that all.

And then in addition to that, I'm joined to Him and identified with Him, so I accept His friends as my friends, his friends. I love all people of God. I've never been a good denominationist. The president of the society to which I belong, and a lot of the other big wigs, but I like to say this to you Brethren that while I work faithfully along with all my brethren, I never was much of a denomination list. I believe that God has His children everywhere and all of God's children got wings, and all of God's children got a robe. And so, I love them all and preach to them all and some of them listen. I accept Jesus Christ's friends. You know, the Lord has some odd friends really. That fellow that goes down the street with a "Jesus Only" button or a "Jesus Saves" button as big as a dinner plate here, you know, and his hair not combed too well, staring ahead. If he belongs to Jesus, I'm gonna own him.

You've got to be willing to own the friends of the Lord, whoever they are. His friends are my friends, and His enemies are my enemies, too. I've already talked a little about that. And I think we ought to have the courage to have enemies. This togetherness that everybody's talking about now; everybody sits down you know and has a togetherness orgy. I can't go for it at all. I don't like it. I want to know, what do you stand for? Who do you love and what do you hate? And then after that, I may be able to get on with him.

I remember one time on a streetcar, there was a good brother, he was a Pentecostal brother. He was giving out tracts. He was making a bit of a nuisance of himself I admit there in the middle of the streetcar. People were getting on and off. But you know, my heart warmed to him. And on my way out, I stopped and shook his hand and took a tract and said, Brother, I'm on your side. I'm one of them too. And I shook his hand and we had nice little time there. And I hustled off the car before it got away from my block. So, I like to own all of them you know. The old bishop said that the Lord has His treasures in earthen vessels and some of the vessels are a bit cracked.

Well, I accept the enemies of the Lord as my enemies and the ways of the Lord as my ways and the cross of Christ as my cross. That's crucifixion. And His life is my life and that resurrection? What is a good definition for a Christian? Well, a good definition for a Christian is somebody that is back from the dead. I think that Paul was one of the oddest and strangest and one of the most glorious of all Christians that have ever lived. And he gave us a little text there that no editor; any of you editors listening to me, you'd thrown that out and shot that back in the first mail going in the direction of the fellow that wrote it. I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live.

Now, how do you get that way? I am crucified with Christ, He's dead. Nevertheless, I live He's alive. Is He alive or is He dead? And the life that I now live, I live not within myself, but I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who will loved me and gave Himself. You see, Paul is contradicting himself there. And yet, within all that contradiction, there is a synthesis of marvelous and glorious truth, that a Christian is one who was crucified and is alive, being joined to Jesus Christ as He was joined and humanity was joined to the Deity in the hypostatic union forever, and the eternal God joined to the nature of man, never to be reversed. So all the members of the body of Christ join to His body, share in some major in that hypostatic union, so that were united with Him and when He died on a cross, we died on a cross; and when He rose from the dead, we rose from the dead. And when He went to the right hand of God, we went to the right hand of God. If they need be risen with Christ, seek those things that are above. And it's written that will sit in the heavenly places, which means that we are willing, where He is, members of his great mystic body? Wonderful.

I remember hearing a great Bible teacher years ago who's long gone to heaven, Mr. Tucker, Dr. Tucker, he talked about being under the circumstances. He said some lady said, well, I'm feeling as good as I could be under the circumstances. And he said, no Christian average should be under circumstances. You should be on top of them. Rise with God through Jesus Christ to live again and let his life be your life and look down on circumstances. If you look out, you'll be confused, and if you look down, you'll be terrified and if you look up, you'll understand. But if you look down from heaven, then you will indeed be victorious. You will be on top of it all.

Well, there's the irrevocable attachment. What do I mean by that? It means that the Lord doesn't want any experimenters. Some movie actor wrote a book one time called, "Try Jesus." I never read the book. I wouldn't be caught dead reading it. Try Jesus, all this experimentation. I don't believe in it. I believe that we ought to be suicide bombers, that we ought to tie ourselves into the cockpit and dive on the deck. And if we go out, we go out. Sink or swim, live or die, irrevocably attached in love and faith in full devotion to Jesus Christ the Lord.

One of my boys, I had six boys, five of them had a uniform on during the Second World War. One of them was a dive bomber in the Navy and they gave him seven battle engagements on the Pacific as a dive bomber off the carrier under, Admiral Michener, we had heard there was such thing as suicide bomber, but I didn't know whether it's true. But when he came home he told me about it. He said, yes, there were

suicide bombers in the Jap navy. He said, One day, we saw one coming out of the sun down on our deck, and we desperately tried to get to stop him, but he got through our flak and hit the deck and bounced and came to a stop and the bomb was a dud. And so we got to see a live suicide bomber. We opened the cockpit and found a 15-year old Japanese boy chained in the cockpit. When he had gotten in that plane back at the airfield, they chained him and he'd said goodbye. And now with a bomb in the nose of his plane, he dived on the deck of the carrier. Fortunately for my boy and all the other boys, it didn't go off. But they took a scared, shaking Japanese kid of fifteen out of there. That's suicide bombing. And you know, that Christians ought to be those who are so totally committed that it's final. This weak, looking back over your shoulder to see if there isn't something better; I can't stand it.

Now, a young man came to one old saint one time who taught the deeper life and the crucified life and said to him, Father, what is it mean to be crucified? And the old man thought for a moment and said, well, to be crucified means three things. The man who was crucified is only facing one direction. I like that. He said, they only face in one direction. If he hears anything behind him, he can't turn around to see what's going on. He's stopped looking back. He's looking straight ahead. So, the crucified man on a cross is looking only in one direction, that's the direction of God and Christ and the Holy Ghost, the direction of Biblical revelation. And the direction of world evangelization and the direction of the the edifying of the church, the direction of sanctification and the direction of the spiritual life. He only looks in one direction. And the old man scratched his scraggly gray hair and said, one thing more Son about a man on the cross, he's not going back. Now, I like that. The man on the cross is not going back. A fellow who's going out to die on the cross, he doesn't say to his wife, oh, goodbye Honey, I'll be in shortly after five. He isn't coming back.

When you go out to die on a cross, you bid goodbye to your friends. You kiss your friends, goodbye. You've had it and you're not going back. And if we preach more of this and stop trying to make the Christian life so easy that it's contemptible, we'd have more converts that would last. Get a man in who knows that he's a suicide bomber and if he joins Jesus Christ, he's finished, and that while he's willing to come up and live in the new as far as this world's concern is not going to go back. So, the fella who takes a cross on his shoulder is not coming back. Then the old man said another thing about a man on a cross, Son. He has no further plans of his own, and I like that. He has no further plan. Somebody else made his plans for him. And when they nailed him up there all his plans disappeared. On the way up to the hill, he didn't see a friend and say to him, well Henry, next Saturday afternoon about three I'll be by and we'll go fishing out by the lake. He wasn't going fishing out by the lake. He was finished. He was going out to die and he had no plans at all.

Oh, we busy-beaver Christians with all our plans, and some of them, even though they're done in the name of the Lord and evangelical Christianity, there as carnal as goats, and they're our plans, they're our plans. I met some gentlemen out in the hall and one of them said about a certain book I had written, how what a blessing it had been. And I said yes, that's the only book I didn't try to write. I said I didn't try to write that one and the Lord blessed it all over the world. But I've tried to write quite a number that fell flat on their faces. So when you see it depends on who's making your plans for you. It's beautiful to say I'm crucified with Christ and know that Christ is making your plans. I tell you gentlemen, ladies and gentlemen, twenty minutes on your knees in silence before God will sometimes teach you more than you can learn out of books. They teach you more than you can even learn in churches. And the Lord will give you your plans and lay them before you. If the boards of the churches would only learn to spend more time with God and less time debating, they could save all those midnight board meetings where everybody leans back weary

and on the shades of aging grease on the wall behind where the hair tonic got on the wall, and in the boardroom weary from discussing things. I tell you, you can cut down, you can cut down your time in debating and discussing if you spend more time waiting on God, He'll give you the Holy Ghost and teach you and give you His plans.

All right now, I think that's about all I want to say, that we are to be joined to Jesus Christ, intelligently joined by knowing who He is. We're to be relationally joined and not try to live on our feelings though thank God there'll be a lot of feelings that go along with it. And we're to be exclusively attached and exclude everything that's contrary to him, and inclusively attached, taking in everything that He's surrounded Himself with. And irrevocably attached, so we're expendable. And we're not going back. Well, may God bless us all now. It's time to stop. Fortunately, I ran out of material just as I ran out of time.

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