

(Hebrews - Part 48): Seven Christian Virtues

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer's sermon explores seven Christian virtues as essential practices for believers based on Hebrews 13.

Duration: 26:15

Scripture: Hebrews 13:4-8, Hebrews 13:16, Hebrews 13:23

Topics: "Expositional"

Description

The sermon transcript describes various anecdotes and situations to illustrate the importance of having reasons for our actions. The speaker shares a story about a boy trying to sell volume one of an eight-volume set, highlighting the need for a purpose or reason behind our actions. Another story involves a boy jumping onto a moving streetcar without a token, emphasizing the significance of having a reason to act. The speaker then contrasts these situations with the example of a train approaching on a railroad track, where the reason to jump is clear and urgent. The sermon concludes by discussing the Christian virtues of sympathy, purity, generosity, and courage, emphasizing the importance of having reasons for living a righteous life.

Transcript

Now over in the thirteenth chapter of the book of Hebrews, the Holy Spirit says, Let brotherly love continue, and be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember them that are in bond, as bound with them, and them which suffer adversity as being yourselves also in the body. Marriage is honorable in all, in the bed undefiled, but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.

Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have, for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee, so that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me. Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God, whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever. I have one more sermon on the book of Hebrews, which will be given the next Sunday after the close of the missionary convention.

That is, one more sermon after this one today. Then after that we're through the book of Hebrews. It's been quite a while.

I hope you've gotten some help from it. I have enjoyed preaching it. In these first 8 verses of Hebrews 13, there is exhortation here, based upon doctrine.

I want you to be wise and learn the apostolic method, for this is the apostolic method. This is St. Paul's method. He first gives a scriptural reason for something, and then he exhorts us to do that thing for the reason given.

The whole book of Hebrews precedes this, at least up to the beginning of the 11th chapter. The whole book of Hebrews lays for us the spiritual pattern and gives us great, certain, foundational facts. It tells us that here is what Christ has done for us, that here is what Christ is to us, that Christ is greater than Moses, greater than Aaron, greater than Melchizedek, greater than angels, and that he once for all by his own blood purchased our redemption.

He lays the foundation so very strong, and then after he has laid it, he says, Now, since all this is true, let brotherly love continue, etc. He tells us that because we have reasons for doing something, we ought to do it. There is abroad in the land what we call the inspirational preacher.

The inspirational preacher, as he has come across my bough, has been this, that he gets up and raises his arms and exhorts people to be a little hotter, a little holier, a little better, a little busier, but doesn't give one lonely reason there should be any of those things. Now, this is not biblical. Suppose that you were standing in the middle of your lawn and I suddenly yelled at you, Look out! Jump! There would seem to be no reason for it.

The sun is shining and everything is calm and restful, and there is nobody around, and the grass is nice and green, everything is normal. There is no reason for it, and I could stand and wave my arms and scream at you to jump, and you would just be puzzled you wouldn't jump. But suppose that you were standing on a railroad track and I looked up and saw coming 50 feet away a train at 70 miles an hour.

I would say, There's a train coming, jump! And you would break all, not only high jump records, but distance jump records to get out of there, because I'd have given you a reason. There's a train coming, look out! You'd get out because there's a reason for it. Now, I can be very hard to move, and I am hard to move simply by the excitation of a man who's overheated.

If he wants me to do something, I want to know why he wants me to do it. And if there is no valid reason, I am likely to drag my feet. But if there's a valid reason for doing it, at least I would consider it.

This is precisely the method used by the men of God who gave us the scriptures, particularly Paul and the book of Hebrews, if Paul did or didn't write it, that we lay the foundation and say, Now, this is the reason you should do this. Now, are you going modernism and in the liberal Christian circles? They want the same piety that we want, they want the same honesty, the same purity, they want the same degree of righteousness, they want the same degree of philanthropic love for their fellow men. They want that, but they don't give you any reason for it.

They simply urge it and quote poetry, but they don't tell you why we should have it. They want the effect without the cause. They want to be new creatures without the new birth.

They want forgiveness without atonement, and they want the fruit of the Spirit without the fullness of the Spirit. They want the fruit without the tree. So it, of course, can only be disappointing.

Now, seeing that there are good, sound, eternal, biblical reasons for our being men and women of virtue, the Holy Spirit says, Let brotherly love continue. There is our first virtue, love. He says in effect that you are a minority group born of the same Spirit, living in the world, waiting for the coming of Christ.

And since you are all of one Spirit and one Father and born of one level of life, why, love each other. Love each other. Now, I think that I have told you here before, I never heard anybody say this, and I suppose that if I were in some churches I would be at least taken before the board and questioned about it.

But I have insisted that it's possible to love people when you don't like them. You see, there are some people that are compatible. They are just nice people.

You have no hesitation loving them at all. They draw it out of you normally and naturally. Then there are others that they just can't make you like them.

They can't. But the scripture says that we are to love everybody. The Lord Jesus Christ loved people that nobody could like.

You see, a talkative, noisy, boasting fellow, I've met a few of them. We had a couple in our church in Chicago, one fellow named Bill, God bless Bill. He'd read up on the jokes in Reader's Digest.

Then we would cut into the most serious conversation with a hollow jury, and then he'd give it to you. It was awfully hard to take. I didn't like that, but I think I can say I loved the man.

You see, you can love them when you don't like them. So that if sometimes you have a feeling of incompatibility with somebody, don't fall on your face and beat the floor and go to an altar someplace and say, I'm not right with God. You could be right with God and not like the way some people act.

But you can love them in a bigger, broader, more comprehensive way, because they are in Christ Jesus. You might have a brother or sister in your home, and you're a member of your family that's hard to like. We had out of the six boys that my wife and I had, he had them, but you know how it is.

Out of the six boys, we had one. We used to do this, we'd say, in order to keep them quiet around the table and keep them from arguing and fighting while we ate, we'd say, we're starting over here and going around, and each one would think of something nice to say about each one of the others. So he'd start over here and he'd say, Well, Lowell is very bright, he likes to read, and Bud is very kind and forgiving.

And down they would go until they came to the next to the last one. And they'd all hang on the sandbar. They couldn't get any further, because definitely he wasn't a nice member of the family.

He was a dentist, if ever there was one, and worse. Some of the things he did were utterly out of this world, utterly hopeless. Some woman came in one day and she said to us, Are you trying to sell Volume 1 of an 8-volume set? And I said, Well, not that I know of.

Why? She said, Your boy had it over here trying to sell it to me. Volume 1 of an 8-volume set! Now, that was the boy. And he had old streetcars there that never bothered to close the back door at all.

And his mother had him out shopping, and he saw a streetcar flag down. He ran and jumped on the other end without even a token. And he started to pull away, and of course she stood there helpless on the sidewalk with her shopping bag.

Then when he looked back and saw her receding in the distance, he lost heart and jumped off. Of course, they had picked up speed, and he went rolling like a ball for several times his length. And we all wondered what would happen.

I wasn't there, but finally they brought him home. The doctor brought him home, dumped him down and said, Give him a spanking and put him to bed, nothing wrong with him. But he almost, things like that, he just piled them up.

You could tell one or another or two or three, but just pile them up, you know, live like that. That's the way he lived. It's all right now, but that's the way he lived when he was little.

It was pretty hard. It was hard for the rest of the family to like him because he wasn't likeable. He is now, but he wasn't then.

But I think they loved him all right. I know I did. I know I prayed for him more than for all the other five put together.

More earnestness and serious burden. So it's possible to love and not to like. Love is a Christian virtue.

Then there's second, hospitality. He says in verse 2, Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby let Abraham entertain angels unawares. It's pretty hard to be hospitable in our day.

There's no place to put anybody. We build houses that are now called functional houses. They used to just build houses, and there were four or five rooms nobody ever got into but spiders year in and year out, and if you wanted to take anybody in, you took them in.

There was plenty of room. You'd save your Uncle Oliver over in Coburg. You'd say, Come on, come on, there's room for everybody, and there would be plenty of room left over.

But now we build functional houses. Every inch is accounted for. There's no place to put anybody.

But nevertheless, hospitality is here. Some way or other, we've got to beat the modern architect and in some measure be hospitable somehow. Be hospitable, entertain strangers, because some have entertained angels unawares.

I remember reading the life story of one of the great Saints in days gone by, how he went to a home and was taken in. This is in Church history, this is dates back into the century. He was taken into a home and was given a place to stay and was fed and looked after while he was there.

He had a little blind boy in the home. When he was leaving, he turned to the mother and said to her, Sister, you have been very good, you and your husband, and I thank you, I want to thank you. In the Lord's name I want to thank you.

Is there anything I can do for you? No, she said, I can't think of anything you could do for me, but maybe you would pray for my boy. And away that something came down from God on that little Saint, he turned around and put his hand on the head of the little blind boy and said, Lord, make him see, and he saw. That's in Church history.

He was no fanatic, no healing evangelist, he was a man God could talk to. So this woman, by being good to an old Saint, got the eyesight of her boy back. Many have entertained angels unawares.

Then there is verse 3, Sympathy, Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them, and that suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body. Do you ever stop to think that some of our brothers and sisters behind iron curtains and bamboo curtains and other curtains are going through a little hell now? Do you ever think about it? Do you ever think that in the country of Columbia, South America, alone over the last few years, we have lost by martyrdom, I wouldn't give you the statistics, but dozens of Christians, including pastors who have died to keep it out of the papers and keep it hushed, but it's true nevertheless, they are dying there and other places throughout the world for Christ's sake. Sympathy, it's a great word, the ability to extend your own feelings into that of others and feel with them if they are bound, be bound with them if they suffer, suffer with them.

It's a Christian virtue. Verse 4, Purity. We used to go into that.

Certainly we don't have to expound that in a congregation like this. Marriage is honorable in all, but the impure, God will judge. Purity.

Generosity, verse 5, Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have. There is generosity. Don't reach out and grab, but give all you can.

Then there is courage, verse 6. He says that we are to say boldly, The Lord is my helper and I will not fear what man can do unto me. There is submission, verse 7. He says there, Remember them that have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God, whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever. That's the verse that gives meaning to all the rest that I have spoken here now, that mighty verse 8, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever.

It was out of this verse that the Christian and missionary alliance was born 75 years ago. This truth is moral dynamite if we only had the faith in it. Above all, I believe this verse could bring back again the power of the primitive church.

I feel like saying, They have taken away my Lord and I know not what they have done with him. But if we would only have our Lord present, we would know that he was the same Lord as always. The church now, the evangelical church, is weighed down with moral boredom and life weariness.

The church is tired, discouraged and unastonished, and Christ seems to belong to yesterday. The prophetic teachers have placed everything out in the future where we can't get to it, and have dispensationalized us into poverty and have left us there. But the scripture says that Jesus Christ is the same today, yesterday and tomorrow.

He is the same Lord because he is the same God. Same substance, same power, same wisdom, same love, same mercy. Christ is the same as a person.

He feels now the same as he always felt about everybody and about anybody. So we don't have a faraway Christ, we have a Christ at hand. We do not have a Christ that belongs to yesterday, we have a Christ that belongs to today.

He is as powerful now and as near now and as real now and as loving now as he ever was when he walked there in Galilee. If you were to go home and read, and I trust you frequently do, the Gospels, and then remember that when they killed him, they didn't change him. When they slew him, they didn't alter his personality.

They didn't drain away his love, they didn't destroy his affections, they didn't take away his power. He is the same Lord Jesus Christ now. He can't be seen now, whom having not seen we love.

He can't be seen now, but he is the same Lord Jesus Christ as he always was. You could keep that in your mind. What does Jesus Christ think about the sinners that walk up and down the streets? You and I get righteously indignant.

He loves them. What do you think of the outcasts? We say, is he worthy of being helped? I don't think Jesus ever helped a worthy man in all of his life on earth. He said, the worthy don't need a physician but the sick.

What about the doctor that would not visit a patient unless it could be proved that he wasn't sick? And what about the church that would not help a man unless it could be proved that he doesn't need it? Christ loved the outcasts. There is a sense in which we are all outcasts. He descended from that man and woman who were cast out of the garden with a flaming sword to keep them from returning.

He felt the same way about babies, put his hand on their little head and blessed them. A man that introduced me Thursday night down in Newark, New Jersey, told the people, he said, I understand that Dr. Tozer has quite a following in Canada. He paused and said, among the children.

He said, I don't know whether he has his black bag along or not, and here I was, caught in the middle. I told about me giving candy to babies. Now somebody says, why does he do that? I don't know.

I like kids is all. I just like babies, and I like little girls and boys, all sorts of little girls and boys, every color and kind. I like them.

I believe that Jesus Christ loved them with a love I could not even remotely approach or use. He loved them, and he loved flowers and birds and his disciples. He is the same, the same.

Do you ever go through tough periods, any of you Saints of God? Do you ever go through tough periods when it isn't easy to pray and things aren't as bright and fresh as they were maybe a month before? Do you ever go through that? I do sometimes go through tough periods when my prayer isn't as fresh as I feel it ought to be. What do you do in a case like that? Remember one thing. I change, he changes not.

He is the same, and he feels the same toward me regardless of how I feel toward him for the moment. He never changes, and we change like the weather. So don't imagine that because the sun isn't shining on you, the sun isn't shining.

I left Newark airport Friday in the goofiest brain that I have ever seen in all of my life. It cost me \$23 cab fare to get where I had to get because helicopters weren't flying and nothing was happening and it was raining and still raining and going on raining, and yet we took off into that. In a short while we were in the sunshine, and even so bright I had to pull the blind down.

I thought, well, this will be lovely. Then we came to Toronto and we had been in the sunshine for an hour and 20 minutes. I thought that it would be nice and sunshiny when I got here.

Then we suddenly lost altitude, as they call it, and we were down into whipped cream, just whipped cream. We got cleared down almost touching the fence post before we could see the ground. The sun wasn't shining in Newark and it wasn't shining in Toronto, but it was still shining because I was up in it.

So regardless, my dear men and women, about how you feel, remember, he always feels the same about you. Clouds may pour the moon and shut out his glorious face from you, but nothing can quench his love for you. Love is so great that many waters cannot quench it.

His eternal plan by the cross never changes and has never changed and will never be changed. That's why we can, after the passing of more than 1,900 years, take communion this morning and say, we do show for his death till he comes, because we are in the middle of a great stream of flowing truth that doesn't diminish but that flows on. He is coming, he did come, he is coming, and we are in the middle somewhere, maybe way near the end.

But we are somewhere in between he did come and he will come, and he hasn't changed his plan. He never starts a house and then changes his mind and leaves it. Michelangelo died, they found in his big backyard scores of statues that had been started, and he gave up on them in disgust and discouragement and threw them aside, only partly done.

The Lord never started one yet that he won't finish. He is the same. But our job is to believe his truth and practice Christian virtue in the power of the Holy Ghost, expect him to come and do what he tells us to do.

That's our job. So this morning we, along with I wouldn't know how many other churches in this city and throughout this province, shall celebrate the dying of the deathless one and the rising again of the man that couldn't be dead, and his glory is coming back to earth. And we do this, we trust, with the intention that we shall practice the Christian virtues, all the Christian virtues, not only the seven mentioned, but all of them, through the power of the Holy Spirit that worketh in us.

Amen.

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