

Holy Spirit, Why Some Can't Receive Him

by A.W. Tozer

The world cannot receive the Holy Spirit because it is hostile to the Spirit of Christ and is blind to its own sin.

Duration: 35:59

Scripture: Genesis 4:8-10, Matthew 5:10, Matthew 22:14, John 3:6, John 10:27-28, Acts 9:3-6, Hebrews 12:4

Topics: "Holy Spirit"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of being able to hear and recognize the voice of God. He compares Christians to a generation that is odd and different from the world. The speaker highlights the historical separation between the church and the world, but notes that in modern times, it has become difficult to distinguish between Christians and non-Christians. He concludes by stating that true Christians are those who are touched by God, hear His call, and respond to His message.

Transcript

John 14, beginning with verse 16, I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you forever. Even the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him. But ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

The world cannot receive the Spirit of Truth, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him. Then in 1 John 4, 4-6, Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. They are of the world, therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.

We are of God. He that knoweth God heareth us. He that is not of God heareth not us.

And herein, or nearby, know we the Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of error. Now, it would be hard to think of it as being made any clearer than this. Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.

They are of the world, and talking about the people who had the Spirit of Antichrist, they are of the world, therefore speak they of the world, naturally. They speak out of their own hearts, and the world heareth them, because it recognizes its own language. But then there is a sharp line drawn.

But we are of God. He that knoweth God heareth us. He that is not of God heareth not us.

And by this you know the Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of error, that along with the verse quoted from John 14, the Spirit of Truth whom the world cannot receive. Now, the Christian faith, and this is very hard to make clear because you fly in the face of almost the total weight of popular teaching, but the Christian faith teaches that there is a complete antithesis, that is, a complete flat contradiction between the world and the true Church. The two spirits here are sharply different from each other.

You see, man is spirit by nature. He is God-made in spirit. He is spirit with a soul and a body.

And out there in the world, the fallen world, the spirit is fallen. But inside the Church there is the Holy Spirit and the redeemed spirit of man, and there is a sharp difference between these two, a difference that is incompatible with each other, and they are not conformable to each other, and they are hostile toward each other. Now, I've prayed and I believe God will help us to understand this, that there is a division between the unregenerate world and the Church which is incompatibility and non-conformability and even hostility.

Between the spirit of the world and the Spirit of Christ, there can only be forever irreconcilable enmity. It was that spirit in Jesus that the world recognized. Not the Roman world, but the religious world.

They recognized that spirit in Jesus, and they recognized that it was their natural enemy, that spirit, and so they rose up against Jesus, and they crucified him because he had in him a spirit which altogether apart from anything he said and did brought hostility between them and him. And this, I say, is a very hard thing to tell people because it's not what we're hearing all the time, but it is what the Bible teaches, and it is what our religious fathers taught us, and it is what the Puritans taught, and what the Church fathers taught. I refer first to the fathers such as the Methodists and Baptists and the rest, but now I refer to the early Church fathers.

Now, this antithesis, this flat and violent contradiction between two spirits accounts for all of the persecution that has ever taken place down the years. He that is born once always persecutes the man that is born twice. We find that Abel, the man who was born twice, was persecuted by his brother and finally slain because he was only born once.

Come on over to Esau and Jacob, and Jacob, though he was a scoundrel by disposition, he was born twice. And there was hostility between those two men, and back of that a little, there was Esau and Jacob, hostility between them. He that is born of the flesh persecutes him that is born of the Spirit.

You hear this, my friends. This is what the Lord says, and now, acting on orders from our risen Lord, every minister ought to, and I do this night, offer redemption through the blood of Jesus Christ, the Lord, with the provision that those who hear the offer turn from the ways of the world and turn unto the Lord Jesus Christ and commit themselves to him, to follow him. And there can be no compromising the two, we ought to remember that.

There can be no reconciling ever, or reconciliation, between the two spirits, the spirit that was born once and the spirit that is born twice, the man who was born of the flesh and the man who was born of the Spirit. This has almost been lost from the Church, but it was the stock and trade of such men as Spurgeon and others that we've almost lost it in our day. We don't attempt to make our faith acceptable to the wisdom of the world, or to society in general.

We admit no necessity to make our religion acceptable to them, or so to have what they call now the dialogue. That's a lovely little expression. We have what we call the political dialogue and the religious dialogue.

Dialogue is two fellows talking, but that doesn't sound learned enough, so we call it now the dialogue. One man said once, and he thought he was saying something terribly bad about the Alliance Witness, he said, outside of the editorials, the Alliance Witness is not engaging in the religious dialogue. Well, of course not.

We're a magazine devoted to foreign missions and the deeper life and the exalting of Jesus Christ, and we're not talking to some unbeliever to try to achieve a compromised position. We won't compromise our position. We're not engaged in dialogue, we're engaged in declaration, which is something else again.

So we don't admit there's any necessity for us to try to smooth things over so that we will make our Christianity acceptable to the world. First, we know it can't be done, and second, we know that we don't need to do it. Now, the world spirit, they of the world, they of the world have a spirit, and they've been baptized into that spirit.

And that spirit is a fallen spirit, and it's an alienated spirit, alienated from God, and it's evil, and it's blind. And the God of this world blinds the minds of the unbeliever, and it's full of vanity, and hypocrisy, and stubbornness, and lies, and pride, and lust, and all the rest. So the world can't receive the spirit of Christ whom the world cannot receive.

And when you hear anybody saying that God is going to pour his spirit out upon all humanity, you know that they're wrong, because the scripture says the world cannot receive the spirit. He pours his spirit out and makes him available to all flesh. But even when the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, he was only poured out to the 120 who were prepared.

The rest did not receive because they were not prepared to receive. The world can't receive. It takes a work of God in their heart to enable anyone to receive this new spirit, this spirit which is of God of which John talks, you know.

John said, You're God, little children, and he that is in you is greater than he that is in the world. They that are in the world, of the world, therefore speak they of the world, and the world hears them. We're of God, but he that knoweth God heareth us.

You see the bigotry here? If you talked like this now, they'd say that's bigotry. That's bigotry. No, that's not bigotry, that is simply knowledge.

You know what family you belong to. Your name is Jones, and you belong to the Jones family. It isn't bigotry for you to say, My father was Christopher Jones, and my mother Mary Jones, and my name is Jones, I'm Ed Jones.

That's not bigotry, that's simply you know it's fact. And so when we know that we have a spirit that is from God by the new birth, by the blood and the fire, it isn't bigotry to say we know that we are of God. But you're not supposed to be sure of that now in this day.

We are supposed to try to harmonize everything and get everybody together and work out of the general religious situation a common pattern that will please everybody. But this is not the way God has it, for the world cannot receive this Holy Spirit. They can't understand, the man who hasn't been regenerated can't

understand the simplest thing.

He can't understand repentance, he doesn't know what it means. And he can't understand faith, he has no conception of what faith means. He can't understand the new birth, he calls it joining the Church.

He says, I want to join the Church. He doesn't know what it is to be born of the Spirit and of the water and washed in the blood. He doesn't know what redemption means.

He's all excited at Christmas because the angel said, I bring you good tidings. He's all excited at Easter because Lent is over, and the spring is coming. But the fact is, he doesn't know what this is.

The world cannot understand Christ. He says in John 6.44, No man can come to me except the Father draw him. Now, I want you to hear that.

No man can come to me except the Father draw him. And he says in verse 45, But every man that hath heard and hath learned of the Father, he cometh to me, everybody that heard and learned. The Spirit teaches inwardly, then men can come.

There must be an illumination from heaven when Peter said, Lord, thou art the Son of God. Or Lord Jesus said, Blessed are you, Peter, because nobody taught you this except my Father which is in heaven. Any religious truth that you pass on from one to the other is passed on from one mind to another mind.

But there is an illumination from heaven. There is that Spirit which is in men. The men of the world cannot feel the depths of their own heart's sin.

If a man commits murder, and he confesses he committed murder, or he embezzles and confesses he embezzled, any sin, we confess, I did that. But always we excuse ourselves inside for having done it. There is an excuse, always an excuse.

But the Holy Spirit alone can enter and make the depths of our hearts' sin real to us. When he has come, he will convict the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. Now, hear me, nobody can repent until he knows the depths of his own sin, and nobody can know the depths of his own sin unless the Holy Spirit shows him.

Nobody can repent properly until the Holy Spirit shows him. And the man out of Christ can't understand the divine communion. Church membership is simply a getting together, two or a lot of people getting together.

It isn't very much above the ordinary lodge meeting or coffee clutch. It's nice people who have interest in the same things meet together and chat about the same things, and maybe they will mumble a little prayer before they leave, or when they get together, or just before or just after their coffee, sir. It's harmless enough, and I'm not against it if I were thirsty for coffee, but the point is that that's not Christianity, and that's not communion, and that's not the fellowship of the Holy Ghost.

I believe in the communion of saints. What do we mean by this? We mean that there is a fellowship that is in the Spirit which lifts those who enjoy it way out of and above and beyond the natural fellowship, things that are of nature. But you know, while the world cannot understand communion, and while the world knows nothing of the depths of its own sin, yet God has his elect.

He has them, always he has them, and these elect of God, they're not morally better than other people by nature. God doesn't select people who have a religious bent. Now, let's get that out of our head.

Some people have a religious bent, they say. Some have a poetic bent. Some have a musical bent.

Some have an artistic bent. Some people can paint pictures and make them look very natural and very beautiful, even though they've never taken any lessons. Others can sit down to a piano, and I had a sister, I don't think she ever took a lesson.

If she did, it was only at school in the early grades, and she could simply make a piano, stand up and beg for mercy, because she had an inner to do it. I think she was the only one in the family that had, at least none that I know ever had it, but she had it. She had a bent in that direction.

Some old hormone come floating down the stream and landed on her. Missed me, missed my brothers, missed my sisters, but got on her. That's a musical bent.

Some have a poetic bent. But there's no such thing as a religious bent, or if there is, it isn't what God's talking about. Some people are by nature religious, and I wouldn't doubt that there are some people by nature religious, but that isn't what God's talking about.

The religious bent is not what's meant here. The man God finds and elects and saves and gives of his illumination and of his spirit is not necessarily morally better than the other. I don't think that Jacob was morally better than Esau.

I don't think so at all. And I don't think that David was morally better than Saul. I don't know about Abel and Cain.

They had the same parents, and they had no heredity at all. There was no line that they went back to anywhere. They started from scratch.

Parents were the same two people. Their parents had no parents, and so they had nothing to inherit. They were two people who didn't inherit anything, except directly from their parents, so they must have been very much alike.

But there had happened something to them inside of them, and that was what mattered. One of them inside of him was an unregenerate man, and his spirit was the spirit of the world. The other man, somehow by some mystery of God, had found a new birth, and that inside of him was the spirit of God.

And so they were at a source point, one with another. They couldn't get along, and yet I don't think that Abel ever quarreled with Cain. But Abel's offering was accepted, and Cain said, that bigot, I'll get him.

He won't engage in a dialogue. He says he knows God. He says when he offers a lamb, God accepts a lamb, and I don't like that.

And so he took him out and killed him. They were two brothers, but they were two spirits nevertheless. Contrary spirit, contrary the one to the other.

Now, who are these? Who are these? Who is this Abel? Who is this Jacob? Who is this David? Who are these that in the midst of a fallen world manage somehow to get through? They are they that are touched, touched in the right sense. The whole God lays his hand upon a man, and God calls a man, and they hear,

and God speaks and rouses them, and they wake, and God enlightens them, and God moves upon them. This makes a Christian, this that makes a Christian.

He hears a message declared. He may hear it in Sunday school, or from the pulpit, or read it in a tract, or read it in the Bible itself. He may hear it in a testimony, but he hears that God is calling him.

And so, that touch of God comes upon him. He hears that call. My sheep hear my voice, he says.

My sheep know my voice, and they follow me. But a stranger they do not hear. Blessed are they, for they shall find mercy, said Jesus, and theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

These, these strange ones. You know, if you're a Christian, you're something of a miracle. Do you know that? If you're a Christian, you're something very odd, indeed, if you're a Christian.

Isn't this odd-sounding talk for a man, in this day when you can't tell Christian from sinner, a half-saved Christian from a half-saved sinner? You can't tell one from the other, and everybody runs together, and there's little distinction? Isn't this a strange situation? Always down the centuries, armies had uniforms, and they wore those uniforms. Down there they had the blue and the gray, the blue and the gray. And in the wars, First and Second World War and Korean War, mostly they knew each other by their uniforms.

But because in recent times what little traces of morality there may be in war, has even gone out of war during the Second World War, some took the uniform of the other side in order to infiltrate and get past the lines wearing the uniform of the other side, intermingling and mixing. Instead of the lines being tight between Canadian soldiers and Nazi soldiers, between American soldiers and Japanese soldiers, instead of the lines being drawn tight, they intermingled because they of the other side took our uniforms and came in. And many a man died because he walked up innocently to a man wearing his uniform with his own insignia on it.

He thought it was his own man who died because he had been trapped and betrayed by the other side. And there was a day when the church and the world were separated so they at least knew where they stood. And the world didn't like the church and began to try to kill them off, but the old man said, the blood of the martyr is the seed of the church, and he said there's no use to kill these Christians because every time you kill one, three others spring up, you might just as well save yourself the butchering.

So they quit trying to kill them and set about wooing them. And when they stopped trying to kill them and began to woo them, they won. Today the world isn't trying to kill us Christians, it's trying to make us harmless by pulling our claws and our teeth and turning us into harmless tabby cats that purr by the fireside while the world goes to hell.

The world passes by and says, what pretty kittens they are, but we'll lie there harmless. God means that you and I should have the life of God in us and that we should have it there as the spirit within us, and that the world should know that and that there should be a division. And if you're having trouble in your work where you're working, if you're having trouble, don't you let it bother you at all.

It's a good thing that you're having trouble. Don't you let anybody tell you that you're fanatic or that you're wrong. If you're living for Christ and you fellows that aren't living for Christ are making it hard for you, thank God every night when the whistle blows that you were counted worthy to suffer for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake.

And remember, you have not resisted under blood striving against sin. I've not seen anybody running around here with scars. Somebody may sneer at you, but what's the difference about that? It's not nice, nobody likes it, but what's the difference? Well, my sheep know my voice and they follow me.

Our Lord is coming back, and when he comes back, he'll come back for his sheep. And there will be many sheep running around or goats running around with sheep's clothing, but the funny part about it is the goat doesn't know the shepherd's voice. The sheep know the shepherd's voice, and when they hear the sound of the voice, they'll start up.

And the goats will say, where do they think they're going? Well, they're going up to meet the shepherd because they recognize the shepherd's voice. They listen to the voice down here, and they listen to the voice up there. But the goat doesn't know the shepherd's voice.

I shall not insist tonight, I'll let it go, and not insist because I believe the Spirit of God knows what he's doing. But upon these that have had the change, upon these that have had the infusion of the Spirit, God makes his great bestowal, his great bestowal. My sister Mildred, who is a little older, a little younger than I am, four years younger, she was a nice, good-looking spitfire of a girl.

She and I fought. They used to pull her hair, my mother told me to quit it. And she had it coming, and she wasn't converted.

I got converted, Mildred didn't, and she wasn't the kind that got converted easy. Stick her jaw out and you couldn't do much with her. But she got the hearing about the Lord's return.

One night she went to bed, and she fell asleep. She dreamed a dream, and the dream was that the Lord had returned for his people. And our mother, who was not yet converted, according to this dream, stretched her hands up and tried to go because there were other people going.

My sister in her dream saw other people being taken up like a magnet, drawing pieces of iron to be with the Lord. And my mother couldn't go. Oddly enough, my sister was so grieved because our little mother had failed to be ready for the Lord's coming, and she woke up so grief-stricken and so badly frightened that she jumped right out of bed, kneeled right down, didn't wait even to put a robe on, right down beside the bed she got, gave her heart to Jesus Christ and was soundly converted.

And that's been 40-some years ago, and Mildred is still serving God. Pastor Brother Pennington told me a year or so ago, I'd like to tell you something about your sister, Mrs. Ling. He said, She has been my right-hand man.

He said, I've counted on her prayers, I've counted on her counsel, I've counted on her. That's been a long, long time ago, for she was only, I think, a teenager at that time. She's had her family now, and they're grown-up jazz grandchildren, but she's still living close to God.

She used to write me occasionally and warn me, now don't let anything people say about you puff you up, now don't let anything puff you up. I'd get those letters, and now watch it, watch it, don't get puffed up. I gave her the idea, I could be puffed up, but mostly what I got wouldn't puff anybody, deflated.

But she'd say, don't get puffed up. Now, that was Mildred. The point is, some don't believe the Lord's coming like that, but Mildred did and got converted over it.

When anybody gets converted over something that isn't so, I can't figure it, but anyhow, she did. I never had a dream like that, so don't think I'm a dreamer. Behold, this dreamer cometh, not me.

I never had any dreams like that. God never honored me with a dream. I had to always figure things out for myself.

But the Spirit of God finds these and gives them the great bestowal. It's something you have and that the worldly people just don't have at all. They just don't have it.

Even though they're good people, they don't have it. And charming people, and they take you into their home and treat you graciously, treat you so you'll feel ashamed that they're so kind to you, and they'll smile and look starry-eyed and try to look past you and try to get what you're talking about. But they don't.

The great bestowal hasn't come to them, whom the world cannot receive. You see, it's a great mistake to think that everybody in the world is a scoundrel. Evangelists, and maybe I've been guilty of myself in that sometimes, of making out, unintentionally making out, that the dividing line between the world and the Church, sinners and Christians, is a dividing line between all the good people and the rapists and dope fiends and embezzlers and liars and cheaters and murderers, and over on the side of the lost, we put the murderers and the embezzlers and the rapers, we put them all over here, and we leave the impression that over on the other side, there's the nice people, and there's the converted, there's saved people.

That isn't so at all. See, there are many kinds of lost people. There are lost people who rape and embezzle and murder and rob banks and shoot guards.

There are those kinds. Then there are the gentlest, kindest, friendliest, most cultured lost people, and those people will invite you into their home and treat you beautifully, and they'll remember Christmas and they'll do all nice things for you, but they are of the world, little children. But the Christian is one who has been by a bestowal of a gift of God, eternal life in the Spirit.

He belongs to a different race altogether. He's a different person. He belongs to a different race.

It's a new race. It's the new creation. The world cannot receive, not even the good world can receive, not even educated world can receive.

Not even the cultured world can receive. Kind people, but they can't receive, and they can't receive because they have another spirit. It's the spirit of the first Adam, and not the spirit of the second Adam or the last Adam.

It's the spirit of Adam, and not the spirit of Christ. It's the spirit that fell, and not the spirit that was restored. You see, there's the dividing line.

My longing, my dream, my hope for Avenue Road Church is that we shall become a company of ransomed ones, all of us. A company who have the second spirit, the new spirit, the spirit of the shepherd that knows the shepherd's voice. This new spirit of Christ comes to the souls of men.

The dear world out there, the friendly world, they listen to us talk, and maybe they think what we talk about is ridiculous, and so they're amused, of course. Maybe they think it's meaningless, and so they're bored with it. Maybe they think it's offensive, and so they're insulted by it.

And maybe they don't make any response at all. They're the hard ones to deal with. If you're trying to be a soul winner, the man who asks you every kind of question, you don't have to worry about him.

The man who glares in your eyes, nose to your nose, and tells you off, don't worry about him, he'll be back. But the fellow that looks with glassy eyes and has no reaction at all, he's the hard fellow to deal with. The glassy-eyed fellow that nods and smiles but doesn't know what you're talking about, he's the hard one.

But there's that spirit, and then there's this blessed Holy Spirit. And the Christian groups are those who are anointed with the spirit of Christ, that new spirit of the regenerate world, that spirit that will sometime take over and fill all the universe, the blessed spirit of God through Christ and in Christ, imparted to the spirit of men that the world cannot receive. I will pour out my spirit, but the world cannot receive.

God grant that we, through holy living and humility and repentance and penitence and obedience and faithfulness and cross-carrying, may grow into a company upon whom the spirit can rest. It can rest as the dark, it can rest as the cloud and fire rested upon Israel. Now, there is a song which I want you to join in singing, if you will, please.

It's a song a generation old, a generation and a half old, and I want you to believe it while you sing it. Believe it as we sing all four stanzas in the choruses. Believe it and quiet your heart before him while your voice is singing, and let's expect him to do something that we've wanted so long.

All right.

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