

# 'How We Can Prevent the Devil From Taking Advantage of Us'

by A.W. Tozer

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*The Christian life is a warfare, and we must be aware of the devil's devices and not give him an advantage by tolerating wrongdoing, being too hard on sin, or getting cast down by defeat.*

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 2:1

**Topics:** "Spiritual Warfare", "Forgiveness and Grace"

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## Description

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the importance of vigilance in the Christian life to prevent the Devil from gaining an advantage over believers. He explains that life is a spiritual warfare, and Christians must be aware of their enemy's tactics, which include tolerating wrongdoing, being overly harsh with others, and allowing defeat or victory to dictate their faith. Tozer urges believers to maintain a balance between grace and truth, forgiving others while not condoning sin, and to remain steadfast in their faith regardless of circumstances. He concludes by encouraging the congregation to seek God's guidance through prayer and scripture to navigate the challenges of the Christian life.

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## Transcript

"How We Can Prevent the Devil from Taking Advantage of Us"

Pastor and author, Aiden Wilson Tozer

January 6, 1957

I would like to share briefly as I can about how you can prevent The Devil from getting an advantage of you during this year. Paul says, in 2 Corinthians, the second chapter, I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness. For if I make you sorry, who is he then that maketh me glad. But the same which is made sorry by me. And I wrote this same unto you lest when I came, I should have sorrow from them of whom I ought to rejoice? Having confidence in you all, that my joy is the joy of you all. Now I understand.

There's something afoot to try to prove that Paul was a Southerner, having confidence in you all that my joy is the joy of you all. For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you.

But if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved me, but in part that I may not overcharge you all. Sufficient to such a man is this punishment which was inflicted of many. So that contrary-wise, ye are rather to forgive him. And comfort him lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with over much sorrow. Wherefore, I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him. For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things. To whom ye forgive anything I forgive also. For if I forgive anything, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes, forgave I in the person of Christ, lest Satan should get an advantage of us. For we are not ignorant of his devices.

Now, that last verse will be the text for tonight. And I want to say that life is not a game, but a warfare. And everything depends, or almost everything depends upon what approach we make to the Christian life. If we imagine the Christian life to be a game, we'll act as if it was. If we know it to be a war, we'll act as if it was a war. Because life itself is at stake. When the Western plays the Eastern or when the Yankees play the Dodgers, it is a game. A little money is in it and a little glory, but it's a game and nobody gets killed. But when it comes to warfare, war is fought for keeps. And when a man goes out on the field of battle, he doesn't go out to win a game. He goes out to kill or be killed; to live or to die. And in a spiritual sense, but a real sense, this is true of the Christian life.

Now, we're at war. And this is not a Cold War, but a hot war. And it is a war with the cruelest and most deadly enemy that has ever been known. Not the helmeted soldiers of the Kaiser or of Hitler, not the wild, screaming Chinese, no soldiers, no enemy anywhere, could be possibly as cruel and as utterly sadistic and completely cynically evil as the antagonist we fight. His name, of course is The Devil. He hates God and he hates all good. Anything that is good, He hates it. Anything that has God's name in it, he hates it. He hates everything and all souls that are escaping from his clutches. And he fights to ruin every human being.

Now, keep that in mind, you're going to face up if you're a Christian, to an enemy that fights to ruin you completely. He means to tear you apart, to destroy your Christian testimony and destroy the church if he can and every church that he can, to tear down and to destroy. That's his business.

Now in this war, there are no rules on The Devil's part. He is completely evil, And he knows no rules of Geneva or any other rules. He takes advantage; he has an advantage by the reason of the fact that he has no rules and knows no rules. Just as the gangster or the burglar has an advantage over the decent citizen, because the decent citizen recognizes rules, ethical rules, moral rules, legal rules, but the outlaw recognizes none. So, the outlaw always has the advantage. So, Satan has the advantage because he will lie and the Christian won't. He will deceive and betray and poison. And he wins by getting that advantage if he can, and keeping it.

Now, whatever weakens us strengthens him, and that's why I want to talk to you now about how we can keep him from getting the advantage. He has it, but we can take it from him and we can prevent him from using it. And that will be the little talk tonight.

Now, here are some ways The Devil will try to get an advantage this year. He has an advantage when we tolerate any wrongdoing. That is in the text which I read to you from Paul. You know what wrongdoing it was back there. It's a rather a weird kind of verse in 1 Corinthians 5 and I don't know exactly what it means. And there isn't any use to read the commentator, because they don't know what it means either. But it looks like this. It looks as if a man had married his deceased father's wife, who would not be his mother, but his father's wife, his stepmother. And he married her and was living with her openly in the

Corinthian church. Well, that was too much for Paul. So Paul wrote a severe letter and said he would turn that man over to The Devil for the destruction of the flesh, in order that Satan might not get an advantage, he explains here in his second letter. So, any tolerance of evil, any tolerance of wrongdoing gives The Devil an advantage.

Now, tolerance is a virtue sometimes. You know, that we are now being literally snowed under with pleas for tolerance, the Anti-Defamation League, the Roman Catholics and the Northerners and Southerners and the Asiatics and the Europeans. Everybody is to tolerate everybody. And tolerance is a virtue where it means, patience with views divergent from our own. Now, by disposition, I don't want anybody to disagree with me. And it takes God longer to take that out of my system than it does to take it out of some people, because I've got more of it. But tolerance is a virtue when we tolerate divergent views, when people see differently, and we can still live beside them in what is now called peaceful coexistence.

And then tolerance is a virtue, when it means patience with tastes different from our own. We can't all be alike. We can't possibly all be alike. And even Christians cannot all be alike. So, we've got to recognize that and allow people a certain latitude for their humanity's` sake. So, tolerance is a virtue then. And it's a virtue and it means living at peace at least with other races and colors and languages and religions.

I remember when I was a lad at home, or when I was in middle teens, that if I were to hear a Hungarian, we had an ugly name for them then. And if I heard him chatter or heard her chatter, I looked down on these Hungarian people who were laborers in that city where I then lived in the East. And I really looked down. I didn't have a thing myself, but I looked down on anybody that didn't speak English. I didn't speak English that a learned man could have recognized, but at least it was English and I looked down on anybody that had any other kind of English, or had any other language at all. But I hope I got over that. So, I can listen with some, with even some interest to languages that I don't understand. Now, that I say is a virtue and it's on God's side.

But there is a tolerance which is quite different, and it means to tolerate that which God abominates. And if you allow that in your home or in your business or in your life, anywhere this year, Satan will get an advantage. What God abominates, it's not a virtue to tolerate. Keep that in mind. And no matter how much trouble it gets you in, or how much persecution you draw on your head, what God abominations don't you tolerate.

Take that man, Eli. Do you remember Him? You know, you can't help what your children do when they're not at home, but you can help what they do when they're at home. And here was a man, Eli, a big fat priest. And he had two sons, Eli, he had two sons Hophni and Phineas. And Eli was the name of course of the father. And he tolerated wickedness in those men, those growing young men. They got old enough themselves to be priests. And he was too weak to say no. So he permitted those boys to get away, with what we say, was murder. And you know what the result was, the result was the ark of God was taken, Hophni and Phineas were both slain, the wife of one of them died in childbirth, and Eli fell and broke his neck. And the priesthood passed from him to Samuel's line.

So now, that is what happened to a man who tolerated what God abominated. And if you do that this year, or we do it in this church, I know that some people imagine that I'm a bit hard and they say that. They think I'm a bit hard and they want to know why I do some things. My brethren, I want to be as soft as possible with people, but not allow to get into the church that which is evil. Keep it out, keep it as far out as you can, enough of it will get in that I don't know about without allowing any of it to enter that I do know about.

Now, you remember how Israel tolerated sin? And the result was that she alienated God and turned Him from a friend into an enemy and brought desolation upon herself. You will hear the name Israel, and now Israeli; and you hear the name Jew, and sometimes you'll hear it spat as though it were an evil word, and it's been so now for 3000 years. Throughout the world, the name Jew has been a name that has brought a lot of unpleasantness.

Now I don't feel that way about it. I love the Jews. I'm a friend of the Jews. And I pray for them and I am on two boards dedicated to their welfare, and there is nothing antisemitic here and this. I merely mean to say that God scattered them abroad and they have been scattered abroad. And before that, for many years, they were in trouble with the Midianites and the Canaanites and the Philistines and all the rest, because God withdrew His protection because they tolerated what God abominated.

And you know, that happened to Israel. And to tolerate anything in yourself, if I can only get the people of God. If I could get you people to take yourself seriously, take yourself for the scruff of the neck and pull yourself clear up and say, now I'm going to stop this ragged, sloppy living, and I'm going to stop tolerating bad habits in myself. Well, you'll excuse it, but God won't excuse it. And if you tolerate the things that are wrong, you'll give The Devil an advantage. It's like going into the ring with one hand tied behind your back. You've got enough of an enemy on your hands without deliberately putting yourself at a disadvantage, lest Satan should get an advantage, said Paul. Well now that's one way we can give The Devil an advantage.

Now, there is another way we can do it, and Paul pointed that out. And that is by being too severe with wrongdoers. Paul had been stern with sin in the Corinthian church, as I pointed out to you, but he had withheld punishment, nevertheless, against this man who was sinning this terrible sin. And He grabbed the first evidence that he could grab, that this man was repenting. The very first bit of evidence he could grab, he took hold of it. He was eager not to turn that fellow over to The Devil. He had been a heathen. He had come in out of darkness. He had been a Greek with very low standards. For the Greeks, you know, were not all philosophers and stoics. They were pagans, and when he'd come into the church, he had done this thing. And Paul was praying and hoping that he'd repent before his body was destroyed. And as soon as he found out that he had repented, he said, why, forgive the man now. Don't bear down too hard, because you will give The Devil an advantage if you refuse to forgive the persons that God has forgiven.

And so, every church ought to have that rule. Every mother and father out to have that rule. Don't tolerate wickedness in your children, but don't throw up their past to them if they repent and do better. But this man, Paul, felt that the transgressor had already been punished enough by the displeasure of the Corinthian crowd and by his own conscience.

Brother, when God starts to lash a man for sin, I don't want to add anything to it, not a bit to it. For I remember that when God, in order to punish Israel allowed a certain king to come up upon Israel. Then he turned on that king and said, I was punishing my people and you are adding to the punishment. Now, you'll get it. And so we punish the people that had punished Israel, through great harshness toward the weak and the poor, and the sinning is always bad.

There go I, but by the grace of God, said John Wesley when he saw a man stagger down the street. There go I but for the grace of God. And there isn't one of you here that has any right in the world, to look down your religious nose at anybody, and I don't care who he is.

Last Monday, at noon exactly, 11:30 to 12, I preached to 200 men. Brother Moore was with me. And he said, this building, this smells better than most missions, doesn't it? We were in the office then, or in the

little parlor where they kept people, and I sniffed and said, yes, it doesn't. It really does. It's fine. Then they led us in to where 200 men off the street were. Men with the blank look, the faraway look, men with beards that hadn't felt a razor for God knows when. And then we changed our mind. It was the old strange combination of uncleanness and antiseptic.

Well, I preached to those men. And I think I had a tender heart toward those men, even though there wasn't a man there but what was there by his own choice. He was there of his own accord. He chose to sin. Why wasn't I sitting there, a humped-over old bum? Why wasn't I sitting there with a 10-day beard and a shirt that hadn't been changed since Thanksgiving or before? Why? The grace of God my brethren, what have I that I haven't received? But if you look down on people that backslide or that fall or that are weak, you're giving The Devil an advantage. They give Satan an advantage in the church. Harshness never was a right remedy, never since the world began.

My father was an old farmer and he was a harsh man, that is, not with his family. But he believed in doing everything that tough, rough way. And if he could find medicine somewhere, he didn't even ask what it was, he took it if he didn't feel well. He didn't know what it was, he took it. We used to have a stuff called Haarlem oil, a small bottle about the size of my finger there. And when a horse got sick, no matter what he had, anywhere from spasm on up, we just pulled out his tongue, held it and poured this Haarlem oil on the horse, and there was some of it that wasn't used. So, one day, my father got sick, and bless my soul and body if he didn't take this Haarlem oil. I don't know, I don't know what good it did or didn't do. It didn't kill him. But it was a harsh way to go about it. He might have gotten off a lot easier. And there are those who know only one way and that is the harshest, roughest way possible.

My friends, to strike the balance between tolerating wrong or not tolerating wrong and yet being patient with the wrongdoer, takes more grace and more wisdom than you and I have. God has to help us. And if he doesn't help us, we give The Devil an advantage. We're too hard on people, The Devil grabs that and runs with it. Where we're too easy on sin, The Devil grabs that and runs with it. So, let's watch out we don't play into his hand either way.

And then, another way that we can allow The Devil to get an advantage is when we're cast down by defeat. Now you say, aren't you a preacher, known to be a preacher of what they call the deeper life, the victorious life? Yes, but I'm a realist today. There isn't any reason in the wide world to walk up and say I'm feeling fine when I'm sick or when I'm pale and can hardly stand. And there isn't any reason to say the sun is shining today in Chicago when there's a heavy drizzle and the birds have to walk. There's no use to be unrealistic about this thing. We might as well face it out. And Wesley said, You'll never hinder the cause of Christ by admitting your sin, but you will hinder it if you cover your sin.

So, remember this, that defeat does come to people. It shouldn't, but it does come to people. People are defeated. Sometimes, defeated in their living and their hopes; defeated in their plans, defeated in their labors. I've never been very successful, but I've never made a complete flop. And I am wondering how I'd take a complete flop. That is, if the Board were to call me in and say, you've been around long enough. It has been nice knowing you. Now, that I've never had happen to me. Or if the New York office would call up and say you have been editor long enough. Would you kindly send in your typewriter? I don't know how I'd take it. I've never been a big success, but I've never been a complete flop. And so I'm giving you something here that I don't know too much about myself, that is, that kind of failure, the failure of plans and labors. But failure in personal living, that, I'm an expert on. And I can talk to you about it.

Bob Walker of Christian Life wanted to advertise. He said, Mr. Tozer who is-what did he call it- an authority on the deeper life. I called him up and said, "edit that out of there. Don't put that in. I'm not an authority on anything, much less the deeper life or victorious life." I am barely, barely, one old poet said he never was an authority on anything but wind. And I am not an authority on anything. So remember it please. But I am an authority I think in a measure on what it means to fall flat on your face and then have the grace of God lift you up out of it. But you will give The Devil an advantage if you get cast down by defeat. There's nothing particularly terrible about falling down, but when somebody gives up and lies down, then you've got trouble on your hands. It's final my friend, it's falling, it's final only when we accept it as final. A man that can still raise a hand and say God help me can get back on his feet again.

Now, you might as well, some of you might as well admit this. I don't want have anybody in mind, but you might as well admit it, even a congregation, an average small congregation, this size, there's somebody in it that's been tumbling around last week. You made a New Year's resolution Monday night and broke it Wednesday afternoon at three o'clock, and that's about par for your course. And that's about as far as you get. Brethren, don't get cast down. Some of God's dear people are always dragging their feet. They're never quite able to rise and face life and face up to things.

Now, if you would ask God immediately to cleanse you, ask him immediately. Don't wait and let a thing fester, don't. If you get something, if you get a cut on your finger and you don't do something with it, it could turn into blood poisoning. But if you will deal with it immediately, you can catch it in time. And so God has a first aid for his people. And you know what it is? It's back there in 1 John 1:7-9, 2:1-2, where he says, If we say we have not sin, then we deceive ourselves, and we make God a liar. But, if we confess our sin, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And there isn't any reason why anybody here tonight should go out from here with a stain on your soul, not one, because God has a remedy, the blood of Jesus Christ. And He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world.

So remember, that if your soul has been defeated, or you have been defeated in your plans, or defeated in your prayer life, defeated anywhere, and things haven't gone so well, that in itself is not too bad. But if you allow it to discourage you and cast you down, you play straight into the hands of The Devil. And you will allow yourself to go out onto the field of battle without a gun. You will let yourself get into the prize ring with one hand behind your back.

Well then, another way we can play into the hands of The Devil is when we're elated by victory. Not only cast down by defeat, but elated by victory. I used to hear a preacher who would always talk about the good atmosphere. He would say, "oh, we had a wonderful meeting with a fine atmosphere." He was a religious meteorologist. And he always had to have the right atmosphere before he could feel right about it. Brethren, there is such a thing as being victorious and not having a very good atmosphere to be victorious in. God sends His own oxygen tent around with the children which he has begotten.

Now, the portion of the true Christian, of course, is peace and joy and a certain delight, and it's the perfection of God. And here is the Christian's philosophy. If I have God, I can't have anything more than God. So if I am defeated, or if I have a victory or don't have a victory, I can't have anything less than God. I always have God. If the children of the Lord could only find that out, that when you've got God, you've got everything else in one package. But when God has you, and you have God, there is no such thing as permanent defeat. And if you're defeated, you don't lose anything. And if you're victorious, you don't gain anything, because you have God win or lose. And talking not so much about sins, to talk about plans and

purposes and projects that you may have failed on. Nothing can be added to perfection.

And when you have God, you have that which is perfect. And it'll take you a lifetime and perhaps several thousand years in the world to come to develop it all, and perhaps God being infinite, it'll take eternity to develop it all. But still all that you have of God would lead you to say this is my philosophy, if I have God, no success can elate me and no defeat can beat me down. For I still have God.

Now, this isn't in the sermon, but I'm going to introduce it here, because I've observed it. You see, the good preacher, if he's any good at all, if he's ever learned anything, he studies, three books. He studies first of all, this book. Then, he studies his own heart. And then he studies other people. And in those three books, he gets all he needs to get, other people, himself, and the Word of the living God. And the Word of the living God gives him 1000 keys, that can unlock 1000 secrets in his own heart and in the hearts of his fellow man.

And so, I sometimes preach to my people just because I see that they need it. And I'd like to say to some of you, you want to come around and check on it afterwards. I'll tell you whether I mean you or not. But there are some people that just are never there when the blessing falls. That's the oddest thing. If God blesses, they're never there. They're somewhere else at the time. Now, they have too many circles of friendship that are not spiritual. And they have too many little areas of social connection that is not built around the church of God. So, when the Holy Ghost falls on an occasion, they're out with some of their borderline, marginal gatherings, and the result is they're just not here. Or if they are they, they don't understand it and leave. By the time they've had a soda and told two jokes and gone home, they've forgotten everything.

Well, my brother, the Holy Ghost said through the man who wrote Hebrews, let us press on to perfection, and this will we do if God permits. It looks as if there were some people that were born under a gloomy cloud or maybe shot an albatross, because everything they do turns into defeat for them. And if a sermon is preached or a song. Some people come to you afterward and you know as a minister of the gospel, you know you haven't done very well. You've done the best you could, but that wasn't very well. And somebody will come to you with a shining face, and say that blessed my heart. Well, that person is in a spiritual attitude that he can get help.

I preached a very ordinary sermon this morning. And a man came with a big smile and said, my heart hasn't been warmed so much in years as hearing that sermon. Well, it wasn't a good sermon at all as a sermon, but it was just some truth. But here was a man whose heart was in a spiritual condition to take truth, that's all. But some dear children of the Lord are never satisfied unless there is letter perfection. If a soprano goes flat in singing "How Great Thou Art, I don't know that they did brother. I'm using it as an illustration merely. They'll carry that one little flat squeak out with them and talk about in for ten days. And some other people will go out and say, oh, how great Thou art, how great Thou art. My God, when I adoring wonder look to Thee, all I can say is, how great Thou art. But others hear a flat note. It's not funny, it's tragic, absolutely tragic, for it puts us straight into the hands of The Devil. And it gives The Devil an advantage.

Someone came to me this morning. A dear good soul that I have known and prayed for and prayed with for a long time. And He said-I'll telescope two talks-I had said you know that I was getting defeated in my heart and things weren't going so good, and you know, I discovered what it was. I'd been criticizing you-me. Well, God knows brother, if you want to criticize anybody, I've got ammunition for the next five

years. You'll never even need to look at anybody else. I can furnish you with ammunition to criticize me, because I throw myself open to those criticisms. This woman said sometime back now, a few months back, when I saw that and repented of it, she said, oh, the victory and the difference, that difference. And it always is so. I don't care if it's not.

I am talking about so much. It's just anybody. Just anybody. Criticize the usher. Well, maybe he is. Sometimes, I feel like wringing their blessed necks because some things they let get by, but you know, they're hard-working fellows that never get one decent word said to them for year in and year out. Yes, they are. And sometimes, I don't like the way the trustees do things, but whoever walked over to a trustee and said, God bless you, Jim. You've done a wonderful job this year. Nobody ever did. Trustees worry about the church and work around it and spend hours looking after things and nobody knows they're here but me and God and their wives usually.

Well, sir, we can be critics and fault finders and give The Devil an advantage. Every time The Devil hears a sour criticism, The Devil says, "goodie, he's on my side." But when we clean up our hearts by the grace of God and the blood of the Lamb, and that doesn't make us so that we don't see faults. It doesn't make us so that we just have to walk around and purr. Some people expect the preacher to have all his claws, carefully peeled clear back to the quick and his teeth taken out. And so, he gums it and walks about a dear man with the sun shining on his noble, bald dome. That's the poet's concept of the preacher. You don't have to be that. And the beloved John was the sharpest critic the church of Christ ever had. But it was kindly done. It was done in love.

So, you you don't have to accept everything. You can be critical and you can point to faults and ask in God that they be remedied. All prophets and psalmists and apostles and reformers down the centuries have done that. That's one thing. It's quite another thing to be a fault finder. Well, if we're fault finders, I hope the Calvinists are right and everybody that gets converted goes to heaven willy nilly, because that's the only way they'll ever get in.

Now, it says here, we're not ignorant of his devices. I'll try to be brief, but only to say this, that Satan is a criminal. And every criminal establishes what is called an unconscious pattern. Every expert on crime, that is, every criminologist knows, and every cop knows if he's been on the beat any time. He knows that crime has a strange way of repeating itself. If a man is a burglar, he always burgles in the same way. It's very rare that he changes his MO, modus operandi, or method of operation for you, Mr. McAfee. And The Devil is the criminal of the universe. But he isn't quite wise enough to escape his own pattern. So, God says, if you will read this Bible and pray, I'll teach you the pattern so you will never need to fall into it. You'll know The Devil when you see him and smell him. We're not ignorant of his devices. In all of his tricks there's a certain sameness, and we defeat him when we know what they are. And then by the grace of God avoid them.

Well, how can we know them? I briefly say this. By the light of the word, by prayer for wisdom, and by the Spirit's illumination. I don't want to give aid and comfort to The Devil do you? Not for one split second. Peter once played right into his hands. He said not so Lord. And Jesus turned sadly and said, get behind me. The devil, he said, you speak not as from heaven but from earth. Peter didn't mean to do it, but he did it. He played into the hands of The Devil.

Brethren, you and I want to be clean victorious this year, clean victorious. We want every week to be a victorious and fruitful week. And we want every day to be a good and clean and victorious day. So now, let

us by the grace of God watch out and keep free from these things. But nothing I can tell you tonight will save you from stumbling, unless you search the Scriptures, pray and trust to the Holy Ghost to illuminate your heart, Be obedient and loving and trustful. You can have a victorious life all through 1957. And you know what? This could be the last year. It may not be, but it could be.

Now, I'm not going to give an invitation tonight. I'm going to let you go home after we've sung a number. But beginning next Sunday night, as I have said, we are going to deal with the victorious Christian life. We're going to deal with the four stages in the road toward, path toward spiritual perfection. Don't go out and say I'm not coming back towards a perfectionist. No. For I tell you that I believe in a perfection that is begun here, but ends in the glory. But we've got a long way to go, most of us, even to get started on the beginning of it. And I want to talk about that through the next weeks. All right

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