

# 'Peter and the Lord'

by A.W. Tozer

---

*A.W. Tozer's sermon explores the conflict between human sympathy and divine truth as exemplified in Peter's interactions with Jesus.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 16:13

**Topics:** "Human Sympathy vs. Divine Truth", "Spiritual Judgment"

---

## Description

A.W. Tozer's sermon 'Peter and the Lord' explores the duality of Peter's faith and human sympathy, illustrating how even a blessed revelation from God does not exempt one from error. Tozer emphasizes that Peter, despite recognizing Jesus as the Christ, allowed his human affection to cloud his spiritual judgment, leading him to rebuke Jesus for predicting His suffering. This highlights the danger of relying on human sympathy over divine truth, as it can lead to misguided actions and thoughts. Tozer warns that human reasoning, influenced by fallen nature, can distort our understanding of God's will, urging believers to seek divine illumination to navigate their faith. Ultimately, he calls for a reliance on God's wisdom rather than human sentimentality to truly follow Christ.

---

## Transcript

"Peter and the Lord"

Author and Pastor A.W. Tozer

March 10, 1957

In the 16th chapter of Matthew's gospel, the Gospel as written by Matthew under the inspiration of the Spirit, beginning with verse 13. When Jesus came into the coast of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, whom do men say that I the Son of Man am? And they said, some say that Thou art John the Baptist, some Elias, others, Jeremias or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, but whom say ye that I am? Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. And charged He that his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ. From that time forth, began Jesus to show unto His

disciples how He must go up unto Jerusalem and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took Him and began to rebuke Him saying, be it far from thee Lord. This shall not be unto thee. But Jesus turned and said unto Peter, get thee behind me, satan. Thou art an offense unto me for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

Now, I want you to notice the illogic that is here. First, Jesus blesses Peter because Peter is illuminated and has a testimony that our Lord approves. And then following immediately upon that, Jesus, because there's more light there, gives still more light and says, I must go up and suffer and be killed and rise again. And the same Peter, whose name had been changed and who was said to be the rock, and thou art Peter, and the same Peter that had had the words blessed art thou for the Father has revealed this to thee, takes Jesus aside. Took Him I assume, took Him aside and rebuked Him and said, be this far from thee Lord. This shall not be unto thee. What you've said, isn't so. It can't happen to you. But He turned and said under Peter, get thee behind me satan. The same one that He had said, blessed art thou, Simon Barjona. Get thee behind Me satan. Thou art a stumbling block to me, for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

Now, if these two stories, or the two situations that are revealed here, had been backwards to each other, I could have understood it. In verse 21-22, and three where Jesus says that He has to be crucified, and Peter rebukes him for it, and Peter says, get behind Me, Satan, if that had come earlier. And then the great confession had come later, I'd have done what everybody is forced to do. I'd have concluded that there had been a conversion take place in between. But it was a backward conversion. Jesus had predicted that He should be taken and arrested and crucified, and finally He should rise again from the dead. And Peter had protested this. And Christ then rebuked Peter. Now that's the situation. And the fact that Peter had been illuminated by the Heavenly Father, according to Jesus own words previously, that he had faith in Christ Jesus and nobody else had, and that he was willing to give that as a testimony. This, though it brought the approval of the Savior, and the pronouncement of blessing upon Peters head, it didn't guarantee Peter against mistakes.

Now, with that thought as a background, I want to go on and point to you simply, that human sympathy can impair spiritual judgment. Peter loved the Lord Jesus. And when Jesus said, I'm going up to Jerusalem now; and you're thinking of me as the great Jesus that can heal the sick and raise the dead and still the waves and do wonders. But I'm going up to Jerusalem and in a measure, I'm going to disappoint you. I am going to be taken by the Gentiles. And at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, I'm going to be killed. And then He added, I'll rise again the third day.

Now, if it had been today, they'd have suggested a vacation to our Lord. They'd have said, now the pressure is too heavy, Master. And we love you and we believe in you, but the pressure is too heavy. Evidently, you're not in a very good mental state. And therefore, we suggest, we will pay your way to Florida. And we will give you a month just to loll around in the sun. But there was nothing wrong with our Lord's mind. Nothing at all, no exhaustion here, no need of a vacation. He rested when he needed to and told them to do the same. But that wasn't the trouble here. The trouble was, as He said to Peter, thou savorist not the things that be of God, but the things that be of man. Peter's mistake was natural enough, and that was just why it was a mistake. It was a natural conclusion.

And Jesus said, you think not, though I've looked up about a dozen versions and read about a dozen versions, the most scholarly and accurate, to see what He really said, and they vary. And what Jesus said

seemed to be about this. He said, your point of view is earthly instead of heavenly. Your viewpoint is man's and not God's. You're thinking like man, instead of thinking like God. That's what he said, in effect, thou savorist not is rather old English and we don't say that anymore. You don't walk up to a man and say thou savorist wrong. You go up to him and say, I think you've got a wrong opinion. It's just a different way of talking. But that's what Peter said. And it was Peter's sympathy. That's what Jesus said, and He said it because Peter's sympathy had led him to deny truth, rebuke the Lord and called down self-pity on the Savior. The margin says, pity thyself, Lord. Another version says, why, God have mercy on you Master. This can't happen to you.

Now, human sympathy then can impair spiritual judgment. Now, we can hardly exaggerate the injurious effect of the fall. When the devil began to deny the fall, about the time of higher criticism and what we now call modernism; when he began to deny the fall and say that humanity has not fallen from a better place, but climbed up to its present position from a worse one. One of the major tenets, one of the keys to unlock all Christian understanding was taken away from us. But we can hardly exaggerate the injurious effects of the fall. And we are made to see, by the words of our Lord and by the Bible generally, that even our good is bad. Or if that's too strong to say that even our good is bad, then we may say that if it is not bad, it is at least, it at least may blind us and mislead us.

Now, it's pretty hard to walk up to Peter and say, Peter, your human sympathy is bad. And yet our Lord seemed to do it, for He said, you're satan; that's satan talking through you. And this viewpoint of yours, that I'm to be protected and not allowed to suffer, it's not right. It's a human thing and a fallen thing, and it's not God thinking in you. It's you thinking yourself, or the devil thinking through you. Get behind me satan. So that human affection, one of the most beautiful and tender things left in the world, yet places us on the other side from God, for that's exactly what happened here. Peter was placed on the other side from God because his affection for the Lord Jesus forbade that Jesus should go and suffer, and said, God, have mercy on you. Don't you pity yourself Master? Don't you see, this can't be. We won't allow this. And his human sympathies were talking, and his affection was eloquent. And it was this beautiful thing as we say. Human sympathy untouched by Divine Love that placed Peter over on the other side, even though I hesitate to say it, on the side of the devil temporarily and away from Jesus Christ.

Now, the human reason is fallen. And being fallen, it's not trustworthy. It is like a false compass that is just a little bit off, not much, but enough off so that if a ship or a plane trusts it, there'll be tragedy and break. It is like a watch that varies, first running ahead and then falling behind. And it may do for a farmer maybe who doesn't care whether it's seven or nine to him. It doesn't make too much difference, but to someone who depends upon a watch, such as a railroad man, it can mean wreck and death. If it's a varying watch, the human reason is like a colorblind eye in traffic that doesn't know when the lights have changed.

Now, that's human reason. And that's what Jesus meant when he said, Thou thinkest as man thinkest and that's why you're so mistaken. And because the human reason is fallen, the religious judgments are warped. They're warped by passion and by fear and by desire and by prejudice and by pride, all these warped human judgments, just as a watch may have something wrong with it, and its hands may thus be deceiving the owner. Or, just as a compass may deceive the sailor, so human judgments are deceiving to the human who has to trust them, because they're twisted by the magnetic attraction of passion. They are driven by the dynamic force of fear, desire and prejudice and pride and many other things, twist our judgments. And yet, we are dependent upon our religious judgments to a great degree, because we're bound to approve and disapprove every day, we're alive. The Bible says, test the spirits and see whether they be of God.

And the Bible also says, prove all things and hold fast that which is good. And the Bible says, by your fruits, you shall know them. And it says that in one place where it's possible to be where our senses are sharpened, and our inner life able to tell what is good and what is bad. Hebrews and Paul talks about that now, yet be even though we have a warped, religious judgment, and even though some of those things that are best to us, our sympathies and our affections, will help to warp our judgments. Yet we are forced to use those judgments I say and make decisions that involve life and death and heaven and hell. A carpenter or a farmer or a coal miner or a man who deals in great rough chunks of things, a little mistake might not be so harmful to him, but let us surgeon make a mistake. Let a surgeon make a mistake and how tragic it is. Let a pilot in the air there make a serious mistake, and how tragic it may be and sometimes is for everybody on board.

And you and I are compelled to make decisions, not great chunks of decisions that don't matter; don't matter whether it's seven or nine o'clock, whether we're on this latitude or longitude or another one or what, but that involves life and death and heaven and hell and peace, a woe forever. And yet, the Lord said to this man, Peter, your thoughts are not God's thoughts, but the thoughts of man and you think like a worldling.

Now my brethren, up to now it might be discouraging, but I have this to tell you, that the Bible, the Christian dynamic, engages to redeem and save the human mind. The Christian dynamic engages to purify the emotions and to deliver us from the things that warp our judgment: fear and hate and prejudice and pride in these things, and warp our judgment. And the Christian message and the dynamic engage to save us from the carnal human sympathies and from inordinate, carnal affections.

Do you want me to give you an example of what a carnal, human sympathy will do? Here is a pastor, and while he may be himself a saved man and believe in the new birth and the gospel, his human sympathies, such as Peter showed here, often lead him to do, to say this. He goes to visit a man who has been and is known to be a sinful man, a very sinful man. And he's always been sinful and he's never lived any other kind of life but a sinful life. And they tell him at the door of the hospital room, the nurse whispers this man has only a few hours. And he checks with the doctor, yes, he has only a few hours. And the weeping wife outside trying to keep back her tears and says, John's gone in only a few hours. And then she says, but Pastor, I want to ask you one thing. He's a very sensitive man. He has been all his life, easily hurt, and he's an affectionate, warm-hearted man and his ideas of religion have all been very broad, and please don't talk to him about Jesus. Please don't talk to him about the Savior at all. Because if you do, you will stir him up and he may even have fewer hours to be with us. So when you go in, console him and comfort him.

Well, this pastor stands there in the door, looking at the sad, eager face of the wife, and then looking in at the set face of his old sinner friend whom he knew, and he's caught in the middle. Is he going to think like God, or is he going to think like a man? Is he going to have divine love or human sympathy? Is it going to be God's way or man's; but he's too weak. He has his children think of, a nice job, and he's too weak. So, he allows sympathy to get the better of him.

So, he goes in and chats a bit about the weather and he saw a robin this morning, and you'll be ought of here soon, John. You'll be back on the golf links and I'll see you again. He knows he's lying. And so, after a little perfunctory prayer in which nothing is mentioned about sin or repentance, or the new birth, or hell or death, he goes. He's made his pastoral call. Three days later, he has the funeral. Again, human sympathy comes and dictates, and human affection says you don't dare tell the truth about this man. So, he gets up

and reminds the public what an outstanding citizen John was. And the shadow falls over everything. The coffin is screwed shut. The man is put down in the grave to await the judgment of the wicked dead. And there has been a falsification of divine truths. Human sympathy has conquered over God's love. And human affection and pity have taken the place of the tender mercies of the Holy Ghost. Truth dictated that he go in and say to the man, friend, please don't feel bad, but I must tell you that you've been a sinner and except you be born again, you shall surely perish. You may not have long and I'm here as your best friend you ever had. You don't know it, but I am the best friend you ever had, because I'm telling you, you don't dare face judgment the way you are. That would be the kindest thing, but it wouldn't be the most sympathetic thing. It would be the truest thing, but it wouldn't be the most affectionate thing. And that happens all the time. Afraid to talk to them when they're dying, for it will hurt their feelings and then preach them into heaven after they're in hell.

Jesus turned on his old friend Peter and said, and I can hear sadness in that voice, but I can also hear sharpness there. He said, Peter, satan has taken control of your thinking. Get behind me. You are an offense unto me. That is, you're stumbling block in my road. Get behind me. He was trying to get Jesus to pity himself and miss Calvary.

I think there has not been a time since I've been a preacher and been connected with the Missionary Alliance, which has been most of my all, of my adult life that I ever felt this until the Maxeys. Somehow or other I fell in love with those, Shirley and Ed and their lovely children. And they seem, as my wife and I often say, like our children and grandchildren. And for once, human sympathy rose up in me. And I felt like saying, you can't take these darlings, to that awful Valley. You can't, this refined, gracious, smiling little woman, you can take her in there Ed. I didn't say it. But my human sympathies were at war with my, the divine love in my heart. For if ever there was a rose in a dirty junk heap, it is to send the Maxey's into the Baliem Valley. Human sympathy would have said, no.

And our Lord would have said, get thee behind me. This isn't the way my church is run. My church isn't run on human sympathies. My church is run on sacrifice and giving up and cross-carrying and dying, and it means martyrdom or death or cannibalism. My church is run that way, not run by human sympathy. Well, thank God, the Christian dynamic, the power of God in the human life, I say, engages us to deliver us from carnal human sympathies which may be very dangerous. And other cases of sympathies get in the way.

A couple pray and they believe God and finally, years go by and there's no children, at last, thank God, they've got a little girl. Well, now she's, their delight. And they offer her to the Lord in dedication and they pray over her, and their faces shine as they tell how God answered their prayer and when they had given up hope of ever having children, had this lovely girl. Now, she's 20 years old and she's at a missionary convention somewhere. And she's a Christian and she hears the call and she goes forward with the rest and says I am putting myself in the hands of God. I'll go anyplace. And she comes home, delighted to tell her parents, I am going to be a missionary.

And that beautiful thing, human love rises and strikes and says we brought you up, we've educated you, we've prayed over you. You can't treat us like this. And many such a young woman or man, young man has been beaten down and defeated and forced to take a path God never called him to take, and the foreign field lost a missionary because human sympathy said, no, you can't go and waste your culture and your education and your intelligence somewhere in some hole in a foreign land among half naked pagans. Sympathy, won over consecration, and human affection over divine love. That's happening all the time.

And so, the carnal mind is present. It's present even after we say, thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And even after Christ repeats, blessed art thou, you're my child. The Father has revealed who I am in your mind. Even after that, the carnal mind is present, and the world influences, and it has its educational media, tradition, and history and society; in schools and literature and all the rest. And these capture and charm even Christian minds. And so, we say, we're Christians, but we think like men, we're going to heaven, but we're thinking like the earth. We say God has our heart, but our mentality is a carnal thing. How shall we then escape the world influences?

It would be time for another sermon, and I wonder, if right here, I shouldn't break off, and next week, give you a four-point sermon on how we can escape the carnal mind and the earth and the world's thinking and think like Christians. I've got a little four-point conclusion here. But I think I'm going to hold it. It's five minutes to twelve and I've talked about long enough.

But I'll conclude anyhow by saying this. That we don't dare trust our human sympathies, and we don't dare trust our human affections. And yet, we can't eliminate our human affection. How can you? Already I've loved that little boy that I held in my arms this morning. I've never seen him before, but already, he grinned at me with that broad, toothless grin. Already I love him. How can you keep from it? What can you do? Is it wrong to love your babies? Is it wrong for me to grin every time I think of my little grandson Paul? No.

Human sympathy is a valid thing. Human affection is a valid thing. But when we project it upward into the spiritual realm and try to understand the strange, self-contradictory mystery of a cross, by means of it, we always fail. And that's what's the matter with liberalism and modernism and half of these so-called churches that have no life in them. They have glorified the tender virtues, sympathy and kindness and friendship and tolerance. They've glorified the human virtues, and they've pushed them upward into the kingdom of God, or tried to do it. And their religion is simply a composite of human virtues.

My brethren, salvation is not a human thing, though it was done for human beings. It's a divine thing. And My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are My ways your ways said God. And when we try to understand Christianity with our human heads and evaluated it with our human sympathies, we'll miss it every time. Now thinkest not as God thinkest. Thou thinkest as man thinkest. Get behind me.

Now, those are pretty stern words. And I'm sure, Christ would have been called unChristlike for doing it. But he did it and boldly put Peter behind him. In one version says He turned His back on Peter it's told, dramatically saying, get out, I can't listen to that kind of talk. And just three to four verses above, He'd said, blessed art thou. No, my friend, the fact that you've been converted, won't save you from thinking like a worldling unless you do something about it; unless you let God save you from it.

Next week, I want to talk about four escapes: revelation, inspiration, illumination and the power of the Holy Ghost. That'll be next Sunday morning's sermon. In the meantime, let us thank God we don't have to be carnal men and think like carnal men. That God has given us His book and He's given us His Spirit. And if we dare to be cross-caring Christians, we can get deliverance from the sentimentality of the world and rise into the love of God and see clearly. Amen.

---

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/aw-tozer/peter-and-the-lord/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**