

# (Reformation Within Protestantism): Actual Church Life

by A.W. Tozer

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*A.W. Tozer's sermon calls for a reformation within Protestantism to create a healthy, loving, and spiritually vibrant church community.*

**Duration:** 42:47

**Scripture:** Philippians 1:9

**Topics:** "Reformation"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the need for a revival and reformation in the church. He expresses his gratitude for the fellowship in the gospel and prays for the love of the congregation to abound in knowledge and judgment. The preacher challenges the church to discern what is excellent in the love of God and to be sincere and without offense until the day of Christ. He urges the congregation to examine their hearts and the state of the church to determine if it reflects a healthy, fruitful vine that honors Jesus Christ.

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## Transcript

Zechariah 4, 6, Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. Now, I have spoken about the need for a quickening and a reformation, sometimes called revival, though there could be no revival until there has been a reformation. And I have talked about it as imperative for Protestantism.

And then I have also said that it is imperative for us evangelicals, who are of the gospel church type, free church, the undenominational, a church such as this one. Now, I want to come a little bit closer and talk about us. And in order to do it, I want to begin with a text which so perfectly expresses the way I feel about Avenue Road Church that I might have readmit to you about you.

Turn to Philippians 1, please. And let us notice here what the man of God in the Holy Spirit said about a certain church in Asia Minor, but because God wrote it and it's inspired, has a multitude of applications to a multitude of situations. So here we go, Philippians 1, verse 3, and the following.

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you. Let me say to you, my dear people, that no preacher can do his congregation any good unless he can thank God for them, unless he is able to see what good there is and be very thankful and have his heart filled with gratitude to God on every remembrance of his

people. Verse 4. Always in every prayer of mine for you all, making requests with joy for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, be confident of this very thing, that he, God, which hath begun a good work in you, will perfect it until the day of Christ.

Even as it is proper for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my bond," now, he was in jail and I am not, so that doesn't apply there. And in defense and confirmation of the gospel, and it does apply there, you are all partakers of my grace. For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all, in the mercies of Jesus Christ.

And this I pray, and this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment, that ye may learn to approve the things that are excellent. There ought to be a sermon preached on that text, that you approve the things that are excellent, that you have a spirit of discernment so that you will know what is excellent and of God and what isn't, and that you may be sincere and without offense until the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God. Now, if you knew what I was praying for you, this would just about cover it.

And I want tonight to come to you with some ideas and lay before you what I'd like to see take place here. And while I haven't any hesitation to pray, about praying that it will take place, nor preaching in order that it might, I long for you in the tender mercies of Christ that this church may be a healthy and fruitful vine. We used to have cherry trees on our farm in Pennsylvania, and while I say vine, certainly the illustration covers it all.

They used to be attacked by little parasites of some sort, and they would get into the little branches and pierce the bark, and then it would exude a gum. Then the branch would get a knot on it and bend. And all over the trees were those little bent places with a gummy knot, which was the result of a worm that ate in the tree.

And the result would be, after 2 or 3 years, those cherry trees would not bloom. And if they did, the bloom dropped early and the cherries did not come to fruition. Or if they did, they would only be red on one side.

Have you seen them, cherries on one side but not on the other side? Flat and undeveloped on the other side. Now, my father, if he had been interested, he wasn't much interested in fruit. He was interested in cattle and horses and grain, but not much in the fruit.

My father had known how he could have got to those trees before they got in that wretched condition, and by their proper spray or other treatment, he could have saved them, gotten rid of the worms and the bugs and saved the trees. And in saving the trees, he saved the fruit. He didn't.

I believe that a pastor who will be content with a vineyard, now back to the original figure, with a vineyard that is not at its best, is not a good husbandman. And it is my prayer and I long in Christ that we may be a healthy and fruitful vineyard, and that we may be an honor to the well-beloved, who is Jesus Christ the Lord. That he might go before the Father and say, These are mine, for whom I pray, and they have heard the word and have believed on me, that these are they, and that we might fit into that 17th chapter of John, high priestly prayer, and be a church after Christ's own heart, that in us he may see the travail of his soul and be satisfied.

In order for us to be a vineyard like that, there must be a basic purity. That is, each one must have a great purity of heart. I believe in the validity of no emotional experiences that do not rest upon great purity of

heart.

No one can impress me, nor intimidate me, nor interest me in any kind of spiritual manipulations, if it were raising the dead. If his heart is not pure and his life right, sound righteousness in conduct must be at the root of all valid spiritual experience. I am afraid of that new wave of religion that has come, that started in the States and is spreading around a sort of esoteric affair of the soul, of the mind, and there are strange phenomena that attend it.

I am afraid of anything that does not require great purity of heart on the part of the individual and great and sound righteousness of conduct in his life. Then I long after you in the tender mercies of Christ that among us there may be, let me name them for you, a beautiful simplicity. I am weary of the artificialities of religion and the complexities of religion.

I would like to see a great simplicity. Our Lord Jesus was one of the simplest men that ever lived, one of the most utterly simple. You couldn't involve him in anything formal.

He said what he had to say as and as naturally as a bird sings on the bough of a morning. That's what I'd like to see restored to the churches, and why not to this church, the opposite of all that is artificial and complex. Then a new and radiant Christian love.

What do I mean by Christian love? Everybody is talking about it, but what do we mean by Christian love? I want to see a restoration of a radiant Christian love where it will be impossible to find anyone who will speak unkindly about another or to another, where it will be impossible to find anyone who will speak uncharitably about another or unkindly to another. Do you hear me? This is carefully thought out and carefully prayed through. I'm not wasting words, and I'm saying that I would like to see us brought into a place where there would be a beautiful and radiant Christian love where you won't be able to find anybody that will speak unkindly to another Christian brother or speak uncharitably about another Christian brother.

The devil would have a spasm, he would be so chagrined, I think that he would sulk in his self-made hell for years if there should be a group of Christians met together in this last worn-out, dying period of the Christian dispensation, a people who would be so loving that you couldn't get them to speak unkindly and you couldn't get them to speak uncharitably. Then I long after you in the bowels of Christ that we might be a church where our gathering would be marked by a feeling of humble reverence. I am disappointed that we come to church without a sense of God, a feeling of humble reverence.

There are heathen and there are false religions and there are strange religious cults and Christian cults. They think they have God in a box someplace, and when they approach that box they feel a sense of awe. Now of course you and I want to be saved from all paganism and all false cultism, but also we would like, I would like, and I think I'm right in this, I would like to see a company of people who were so sure that God was with them, not in a box or in a biscuit, but with them, God was with them in their midst, and that Jesus Christ was truly among them to a point where they would have a sense of humble reverence when they gathered together, and where there would also be an air of joyous informality.

The great English preacher who was pastor for so many years of the Westminster Chapel in London, where Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones now is, E. Campbell Morgan, left his church and went down to Wales, where the Welsh revival was going on under Evan Roberts earlier in this century. He stayed there a while, and he soaked up the glory of it so that when he came back, I read the sermon he preached to his congregation when he came back from the Welsh revival. It was as near scolding as that great preacher ever did.

He said to them, your singing is joyless, your demeanor is joyless, you don't have the lift and the joy that I saw in Wales. And he urged them that they might get into a place where that sense of joyous informality might be upon them. Then I long after you in the tender mercies of Christ that this communion may be a place where each esteems others better than himself.

And as a result of that, everyone is willing to serve, but nobody is jockeying for position. I suppose that there isn't anything quite so bitterly humorous as ambition in the Church of Christ, politics, a desire to have position and place in the Church of Jesus. It would be as though a man who was on a lifeboat being saved from certain salty death in the ocean depths, that man should become ambitious to be captain of the little boat that is on its way to save those on board.

It is as though a man were to enter a disaster area where an earthquake had hit and people were dying, and would fight for a high position there. My brethren, the Church of Christ is no place for the ambitious, and it's no place for the lazy. So I'd like to see our Christian communion be a place, I say, where each one esteems the other better than himself.

For that reason, nobody pushes and nobody jockeys for position, but on the other hand, nobody refuses to serve. And where there is childlike candor in all things, utter childlike candor. You know why I love children so much? They are unbelievably beautiful candors.

They look at you and say the most utterly simple things. If they were just a little older, they'd blush, as they used to say in the old love stories, to the roots of their hair. But they are utterly and completely candid.

I like to talk with them, I like to have them come up and chat with me, because they are bound and sure before they leave to tell me things. If you don't want it told, don't let the little ones come upstairs, because they just tell me anything. And utter candor.

They haven't anything to hide at all, nothing. And I believe that with the limitations proper to our adult years, that we ought to be at a place where spiritually we should be so candid that there would be no duplicity and no dishonesty and no duplicity. Look at that word a little bit.

Let's, as they say at the board meetings of the big companies, let's kick it around a little. That word duplicity, now look at it. What does it mean? Well, you've heard of a duplex.

I don't know whether you use that word here. Do you use duplex for houses here? That means there are two of them. Now, a duplex is a dwelling where there is more than one dwelling, there are two dwellings.

And duplicity is the same thing, it means two, two-fold. And there are those Judas Iscariot, for instance, he was duplicity incarnated. He was so slick that even the disciples didn't know which one was Judas, that is, they didn't know which one was the traitor.

They said, Lord, is it I? Lord, is it I? Lord, is it I? And Jesus said, there's the man, when he dips in the dish, you'll know him. He had to actually tell them. This son of perdition had lived with Jesus and his twelve disciples, his eleven disciples, for three years and had fooled them so completely that they didn't know which one was the traitor when the showdown came.

They had to have a little sign to indicate, there was the slickest piece of duplicity that I know anything about. Two faces he had, and he could change faces with the occasion, and was so slick in the change that nobody caught on that it was two faces. He had two faces, and he showed one to Jesus and his

disciples, and the other to the enemies of Jesus.

Now, that's duplicity. I say that in this Christian communion, we ought to be, all of us to be, a people without duplicity. Each one of us have only one face.

Now, I know this place here for cracks, but I'm too serious tonight to think about that. I know that some of us had two faces, would use the other one, I've heard all that. But I also know that if you have more than one face with which to present to the public, something is desperately wrong, and one of your faces is going to face an awful judgment of God one of these days.

So I say, without duplicity and without dishonesty and without hypocrisy. Now, what is hypocrisy? That's variously pronounced, but I'll use my good American pronunciation, hypocrisy. What is it? Well, hypocrisy is an old Greek word that they used for actors on the stage.

Somebody who pretended to be what he was not. He wasn't Joe, but he pretended to be Joe. So he put on a mask of some sort and strutted around the stage.

They do it now, you know, they put you up before on the theater or on the TV stage and they glue whiskers on you and put this and that on you, and you're somebody you're not. Now, a hypocrite is an actor. He's somebody who is playing a part that isn't key.

And then where the presence of Christ is as the fragrance of myrrh and aloes. And when you become accustomed to the smell of these garments, you'll be spoiled for anything less than that. If we never smell the myrrh and aloes out of the ivory palaces, we may get along a lifetime and not miss it.

But one beautiful whiff of the fragrance of these garments and we'll never be satisfied anymore with anything less. My wife and I, before we were married, we attended a church, an alliance church in the city of Akron, Ohio. And we sang some of the songs we sang here tonight, incidentally, brother.

And there was something there on that church. There was a sense of the fragrance of God. The great big organ voice, Dr. Jerome preached there in those days.

And they had some sweet Christian brethren, some wonderful men of God and women. And there was a fragrance on that place. And I have never forgotten it.

And I have, remember, you know they tell us that our youth meetings, there is where we learn. Brethren, that isn't where we learn. That's where the youth learn.

But the older people ought to have on them the fragrance of Jesus' garments so the youth could come to them. I look back on those days. I was 19, 20, and 21 for those three years that I spent in that church.

And I do not remember getting any help from others of my age. But oh, how I remember getting help that's with me to this day from the older Saints whose garments were redolent of the myrrh and aloes and cashew out of the ivory palaces. And I believe that this should be present here at all times.

And I believe that in this communion there should be answers to prayer, that answers to prayer should be common and miracles not be uncommon. I am not a miracle preacher. I have been in churches where they announce miracle meetings.

If you look in the Saturday paper, you will see that occasionally somebody will hit town and he will announce, come out and see some miracles. That kind of performing I don't care for. I went one time to a Bible conference, my wife and myself and the little girl arrived, just after the supper hour when the meeting was taking up hours to begin the next day.

And they had announced that they were having miracle night that night. And the only miracle that took place was that a fellow fell out of a boat and drowned. It's all a miracle I saw around the place.

That was no miracle, but that's the only thing exciting that happened. No miracles at all. You can't get miracles as you can get chemical reactions.

You can't get a miracle as you can get a wonderful action on the stage by a magician. God doesn't sell himself into the hands of the religious magician. You can't get miracles that way.

I don't believe in that kind of miracle. I believe in the kind of miracles that God gives to his people who live so close to him that answers to prayer are common, and these miracles are not uncommon. John Wesley never allured himself to preach miracles once in his life, but the miracles that followed John Wesley's ministry were unbelievable, even to one instance where he had to make an engagement and his horse fell lame and couldn't travel.

He got on his knees beside his horse and prayed for healing and got back up and rode without the horse's limping to where he was going. He didn't publicize that and say, We'll have a big tent here and advertise it. He just did it.

God did those things for him. And he said about Spurgeon that while he didn't preach healing, he had more people delivered in answer to his prayers than any doctor in the City of London. That's what I'm talking about, and there's no reason why these things should not be true here at Avenue Road.

Now, in the light of the scripture and in the light of the judgment seat of Christ, which we all must face, the behemoth that our primate brethren and friends talk about, and in the light of eternity, is what I'm asking unreasonable? Is the description I've given unreasonable? Is this portrait of a true church an unreasonable portrait? Is it undesirable that we should have this kind of church? Is it impossible that we should have this kind of church? Is this an unscriptural picture that I have presented? Let me sketch it again. A healthy, fruitful vineyard that will bring honor to the well-beloved, even Christ. A church after Christ's own heart where he can look at the travail of his soul and be satisfied.

A people among whom there is a beautiful simplicity and a radiant Christian love, where it will be impossible to find gossips or talebears. Where there is a feeling of humble reverence and an air of joyous informality, for each one will esteem the other better than himself, and where everyone is willing to serve but no one jockeys to serve. Where there is a childlike tender and without duplicity or dishonesty, for the presence of Christ is felt until it can be felt, and where the fragrance of his garments can be smelled by his beloved.

And where prayers are answered so regularly that we think nothing of it. It is common because God is God and we are his people, and where, when it is necessary, miracles will not be uncommon. Is that in the light of scripture and in the light of the coming judgment and in the light of eternity? Or is this an unreasonable thing to expect of the church? Is this an undesirable thing? Is there something better? If there is something better, you name it! If there is something better, what is it? Is this impossible? Oh, my

brother, is anything impossible with God? Is anything impossible where the Lord Jesus Christ is? Is this unscriptural? No.

The only thing that is unscriptural about it is that it isn't up to the standard of scripture yet. The scripture standards are still higher. If you answer me no, it's not unreasonable, brother Tozer.

It's not undesirable, it's not impossible. If you answer no, then you say yes, because what you are saying is that you believe in this. All right, if we believe in this and we'd like to become the church that could have and begin this reformation, this change toward the better, this recapturing of the ancient power of God in the souls of men, then there must be a radical psychological break with the prevailing religious mood.

Now, hear me on this. Right here I, of course, will not take everybody with me, but I hope I'll take the majority. But there must be a radical psychological break with the prevailing religious mood.

Now, why do I say that? Because in the churches, in the churches, the religious mood, the prevailing religious mood, I'm going to describe it for you. I've told you by a careful description of what a church ought to be. Now I'm going to describe churches as they are, with beautiful exceptions, of course, for there are poor saints almost in all the churches, a few here and there.

But the prevailing religious mood is self-centered instead of world-centered, that is, mission-centered, instead of soul-winning-centered, and instead of being outgoing, the average church is self-centered, and the average church is self-satisfied. We make our reports and we spend pages telling what wonderful good boys we've been and what nice girls. Self-satisfaction seems to be upon us all.

And then worldliness of spirit. The average church, the prevailing mood in the average church is worldliness, there's no question about it, and the carnality of heart. Paul said, Dear Colonel, and I can't speak to you, he told the Corinthian church, he said, I'd like to come and preach deep things to you, but you're too colonel.

And then the prevailing mood of the average church is to be Christian in name and in practice to be un-Christian. This is the terrible thing, the thing I can't understand. When we were down in Miami at the council last May, they asked me to come over to the newspaper, and I went and they gave me a little interview and asked me a few questions.

And among other things they said, Do you think, Mr. Sorger, that you're preaching, writing, helping things any of you? Do you think it's doing any good among the churches? And I said, I don't know whether it is or not, but I said, Our trouble is not that we refuse to believe right doctrines, but that we refuse to practice them. And so we have the peculiar contradiction of believing the right thing and living the wrong way. This strange anomaly within the church everywhere.

And then the lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. Now, if you don't like what I'm saying, I want to ask you, think about the company you run with. What do they talk about most? God and the love of God, or other things? You decide that.

You preach your own sermon there. And that will not endure sound doctrine and have itching ears. I hesitated whether I ought to bring this up or not, but I thought I would anyhow, because they don't martyr you here, they just don't come.

But I thought that I'd tell you about this. You know where Paul said in the last days men should have itching ears, Christians should have itching ears? They didn't like sound doctrine, but they were Christians. They called themselves Christians, but their ears were itchy.

Well, now a commentator that I read some years back explained this. And he said that in Paul's day, the pig, the swine, had a disease called the itching ear. What they called it in Greek, I never found out.

But the symptom was that their ears got inflamed and itched terribly. And the only way they could get relief from these inflamed ears was to go to a pile of rock and rub their ears earnestly and vigorously on the rock, and that scratched it for the time. Paul saw that and smiled a sad smile and said, I'm running into Christians here and there like that, and in the latter days they'll be like that.

They will love pleasure more than God, will not endure sound doctrine, but they will have itching ears so that they will be so eager for something else besides the sound doctrine and holy ways that they'll pile up teachers everywhere and rub their ears for dear life. Now, I think that's the most dramatic and colorful illustration, and I don't put it past the man of God, Paul, because he was nobody's disciple. And I don't put it past him at all, that a lot of the Christian so-called, they have to have piles of rock to rub their ears on, and they will not endure sound doctrine.

I think that's the description of the church, Protestantism and even Evangelicalism. Now, in the light of the New Testament predictions, and in the light of the New Testament teachings, and in the light of New Testament standards, is what I just said about the prevailing religious mood unfair? Is what I've just said about the prevailing religious mood untrue? Is what I've said about the prevailing religious mood uncharitable? Is it extreme? I don't think it is, but I only ask you to do one thing, look around you, and look in your own heart, and see which of these pictures describes the churches you know. Is it the church of healthy, fruitful vine that honors Jesus Christ and gives him the seeds that travail of his own heart, where there is in its membership great purity of heart and great righteousness of conduct? Is it a place where there's a beautiful simplicity and a radiant Christian love that won't criticize? Where there's feeling of humble reverence and an air of informal joy, for joy is in formality, where each esteems other in humility better than himself, where everyone is willing to serve but there are no bellwethers seeking the head of the flock, where there's childlike tender without duplicity and without hypocrisy, where the presence of Christ is like a fragrance on the garments of the priest, where prayers are answered until it's common to have them answered, and where miracles and wonders are not uncommon? I say, is this, does this describe what we know as Protestantism and Evangelicalism, or does this describe it? Very much self-centered and quite satisfied, quite worldly in spirit and carnal in heart, jealousy and fleshliness and anger and getting miffed at people and little baby malice in our hearts? Does that describe the average church? Where we're Christian in name but in practice we're a long way from being Christian yet, lovers of pleasure but not too deeply in love with God, where there is not too much love of real sound doctrine but where it has to be mixed with something to scratch our itching ears in order to make it palatable, if you'll excuse my mixed-up figures there.

Now I say, which is it? You look around and then look in your own heart and see. Well, and if then we must have a radical psychological break with the prevailing religious mood, then we must not imitate other churches and not even other alliance churches. We must not copy them, we must not follow religious trends, we must create religious trends.

Are you hearing me? That God has called us here not to meekly follow and weakly and stupidly follow religious trends but to boldly and courageously establish religious trends. And if there's any following to do, let others do the following. If you'll listen to me and if you'll go along with me and you'll obey God as I ask you to do, there'll be a day when the churches of Toronto will say they didn't imitate us but we must imitate them.

They weren't following us but we want to know what do you have that we haven't got and how can we get it. That's happened, that's happened. We must set a new trend and we must create a new image of Christ in Toronto.

We must. It's taken me three years to find out the state of affairs in this city and I have told you and I repeat that I thank God for you upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making requests with joy for your fellowship in the gospel and being confident that what he has begun and he will finish. Because I have you in my heart and how greatly I long that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in judgment and if he may approve the things that are excellent being filled with the fruit of righteousness by Jesus Christ under the glory and praise of God.

Now that's revival ladies and gentlemen. We can decide whether we want to hear this and whether we want to obey this and do something about this or whether we want something else but I have every reason to believe that you're not a wild vine but that you're a true vine and that God is going to do something for us. That we are not going weekly and weekly to follow and accept the radical psychological prevailing religious mood but we're going to break with it and instead of imitating the churches that are on their way to die we're going to let them imitate us if there's any imitation to do and we're not following the trends but we're going to get on our knees before the scriptures and establish things and to do this we'll require that each one of us forgive everybody else.

Now I don't know anybody's mad at anybody in this church but I know human beings well enough to know there probably is are some and never get off the ground until until we forgive each other until we clean up. God won't bless dirty people even if they take a bath twice a day and have all the modern cosmetics and are as fastidiously as well groomed as the prince of Wales still there's such a thing as inwardly being unclean. They've got to clean up and they've got to quit secret sins secret sins, a hidden sin.

You can smile and smile and have secret sins, pray and pray and have secret sins, lead a department of the church and have secret sins, sing and have secret sins and I'm not charging anybody. I'm saying Lord is it I but I'm only saying what we must be doing we must be right in our home. You're only spiritual as you are at home not as you are in church and in your work.

Your spirituality is not known or will not be known before God by how spiritual you are when you're in the company of other Christians but when you're at your work and with your neighbors and in your school. You can't be a Christian at home you'll not be a very good Christian at church so of course you can pass for one. You can't be a Christian in your business you'll not be a very good Christian anywhere else.

You can't be a Christian to your neighbor over next door both directions and across the street and up the alley you won't be a very good Christian at church. Well I want you to close this service with me as Brother McNally leads us in singing a song that's a prayer. I want you to sing it all and I want you to sing it prayerfully.

I carefully thought this out so that we'd know I know just what we want to do and I want you to pray this prayer. I don't know if you know it or not it's an old Alliance hymn. It goes way back to the days of Dr. Simpson.

Not written by him but thought to before the public by him. I want you to what number is it? 239. I want you to sing it.

I want you to stand. I want you to sing it with the utmost reverence and meaning and make it your prayer. Your prayer.

Breathe upon us Lord from heaven. Fill us with the Holy Ghost. Promise of the Father given.

Send us now of Pentecost. Written by Captain R. Kelso Cogger of the Salvation Army. Warm personal friend of Dr. A. B. Simpson who helped him to found the Alliance in those early days.

I want you to sing reverently and prayerfully this whole song.

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