

(Reformation Within Protestantism): Preserve the Truth and Go With God

by A.W. Tozer

The sermon emphasizes the importance of preserving the truth of God's Word and going with God, rather than modifying it to attract more adherents.

Duration: 40:55

Scripture: Isaiah 42:15-16, Revelation 2:1-3, Revelation 2:6-7, Revelation 2:10, Revelation 2:17

Topics: "Reformation"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the need for reformation among Protestant churches. He speaks to a serious-minded and responsible adult audience, urging them to be deeply concerned about the religious situation and to seek the approval of God. The preacher highlights the importance of being a new testament church, a source of truth in a spiritually dry world. He laments the lack of warmth of heart, the compromise with truth, the absence of the spirit of prayer, and the coolness of heart among believers. The preacher concludes by expressing his dissatisfaction with the current state of Christianity and the need for a genuine longing for God.

Transcript

42nd of Isaiah, Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect in whom my soul delighteth. I have put my spirit upon him. He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.

He shall not cry nor lift up nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. The brood shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench. He shall bring forth judgment unto truth.

He shall not fail nor be discouraged till he hath set judgment in the earth, and the isles shall wait for his law. Thus saith God the Lord, he that created the heavens and stretched them out, he that spread forth the earth and that which comes out of it, he that giveth bread unto the people, and spirit to them that walk therein, I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles, to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, them that sit in darkness out of the prison house. I am the Lord, that is my name, and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.

Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare. Before they spring forth, I tell you of them. Sing unto the Lord a new song and his praise from the end of the earth, ye that go down to the sea and all that is therein, the isles and the inhabitants thereof.

Let the wilderness and the cities thereof lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar doth inhabit. Let the inhabitants of the rocks sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains, let them give glory unto the Lord and declare his praise in the islands. The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war, he shall cry a roar, he shall prevail against his enemies.

I have long time holden my peace, I have been still and refrained myself. Now will I cry like a traveling woman, I will destroy and devour at once. I will make waste mountains and hills and dry up all herbs, and I will make the rivers islands, and I will dry up the pools, and I will bring the blind by way that they knew not.

I will lead them in paths that they have not gone or known. I will make darkness light before them and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them and not forsake them.

Then there is another passage in the book of Revelation, this time the 2nd chapter, unto the angel of the church of Ephesus writes, These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil. Thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars.

This born in his patience and for my name's sake hath labored and is not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He that hath the nearer, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

Father, we pray that thou wilt answer a great many prayers tonight. Prayers have been made in home groups, pre-service prayer meetings, in lonely bedrooms and kitchens. Now, O Lord, we pray, answer.

And may we have a visitation of thy grace to our hearts this night, that you may hear us, the complement of assuming that you were serious-minded and responsible adults, that you were seriously concerned with the religious situation today, and that you were deeply desirous of enjoying the approval of the great God Almighty, and that you were eager to be and make this church a New Testament church, a little ark in the midst of the waters, a fountain of truth in the midst of deserts. And I hear God saying to me, Son of man, I do send thee unto this people, thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord. And they, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear, yet shall know that a prophet has been among them.

Now, I want to talk a little tonight briefly about the great decision, the great decision that every denomination has to make somewhere in the development of its history. And every denomination does make it. And every church has to make it somewhere at its beginning or a little later, usually it's a little later.

And every board is faced with a decision and has to keep making it, not by one great decision once for all made, but a series of little decisions every time they meet, adding up to one great big one. And every

pastor has to face it, every pastor has to make this decision and keep making the decision and keep renewing it on his knees before God. And every church leader has to make it, every editor, every evangelist, everyone has to make this decision.

And this decision is a matter of judgment. It is a matter of judgment upon that church, that denomination, that board, that pastor, that leader, and upon their descendants and spiritual children. Now, I've talked about the decision, but haven't told you what it is, and now I want to tell you what it is.

The decision that denominations have to make at first or later, often later, that churches have to make sometime in their history, usually a little long after they become prosperous, that boards have to make and pastors have to make, is this one. Shall we modify the truth to attract more adherents, or shall we preserve the truth and go with God? This is the decision, I repeat, that every denomination has had to make. Shall we modify the truth in doctrine and practice, or doctrine or practice, and gain more adherents, or shall we preserve the truth in doctrine and practice and go with God and take the consequences? Now, if the decision is the first one, that we modify the truth and the practice of the church, then we're responsible for the consequences, whatever they may be, and God knows what they are.

History has shown what they are. But if we make the second choice, to preserve the truth and go with God, then God accepts the responsibility. Now, I say that this is the choice we've got constantly to be making.

You businessmen have to make that choice in your business. You have to make it when you make out your income tax. You students have to make it in school.

We have to make it everywhere in our life as we touch society. Shall we preserve the truth and the practice of the truth and go with God, or shall we alter it just comfortably in order to be more popular, gain more adherents and get longer in the world? Now, actually, such a question never should need to be asked at all. It is like asking, Should a man be faithful to his wife? There is only one answer to the question.

Only one answer to the question. When we say, Shall we preserve the truth and practice of the church and go with God, or shall we modify it for immediate and visible results? We ought to have only one answer to that. It's not a debatable question, and yet it is one that has to be constantly debated in the secret prayer chamber, constantly debated when the great conferences meet, debated when boards meet, debated when the pastor must make a selection or a choice or a decision.

Here is what separates me from a great many men who are perhaps greater power than I am in ability. It is this, it is my conviction long held and deeply confirmed by knowledge of the fact that modern gospel churches, almost without exception, but not quite, modern gospel churches, almost without exception, have decided to modify the truth and practice a little in order to have it easier, to have more adherents and to get along better. Now, I say that when we make such a decision, we have the consequences then upon ourselves.

We are responsible for the consequences. Now, what have the consequences been? The consequences have been an absence of the spirit of worship in the church, so that many people do not even know what you mean when you say a spirit of worship. That's what's tragic to me.

I wish God would either change things a little and give me a sight of his glory among his people, or I wouldn't dare take me home. Elijah said that, and they sent a chariot for him. I want to stick around a while and work.

I'm not anxious to go home right now, but I want to stay around a while. But I admit sometimes I feel like the man of God who said, Oh, that I had the wings of a dove that I might fly away into the wilderness and be at rest. But so many of the Lord's people don't know what you mean when you say a spirit of worship in a church, and they look at you and don't know what you're talking about.

That is because they are poor victims of boards and churches and denominations and pastors who have made the ignoble decision to modify truth and practice a little. God said, All right, if you do, I withdraw from you the spirit of worship. I remove your candlesticks.

And then there is the absence of spiritual desire. I want to ask you a question tonight. Do your own preaching, brother.

You don't have to have me stand up here. You have to do your own preaching. How many people do you know that are all burnt up with spiritual desire? Tell me that, will you? How many people do you know in Toronto? How many do you know that are all burnt up with longing after God, that when you talk to them there are tears in their eyes, tears of eagerness? When you talk to them and the conversation soon gets around, Oh, that I might know God better.

How many? Yet our fathers had it, and used to go and spend days with God, days with God. And the coldness of heart, which of course is the same thing. That is one of the consequences, another one of them.

And we are responsible because we have made the wrong choice. The coldness of heart, oh, the cold heart! To be baptized with the fire of inward longing just a little, when you have once known it, you are never satisfied afterward with the coldness of heart. When G. Campbell Morgan, the great British, great English preacher, had been over to Wales and had seen the Welsh revival and then had come back to Westminster Chapel beside Buckingham Palace.

Incidentally, I've been invited over there a number of times to preach and never have gone. I haven't got any good censure, I'd go, so I could say I preached there. But I never did.

When he was over to Wales and came back to that place, what he had seen in Wales so moved the great expositor that he got up and roundly lectured his audience. He said, You're a cold, but you don't even sing warm. I suppose he said warmly.

But anyway, he blamed them, he said, You don't even sing right. He had heard them sing, and you know how they did it. They sang the psalms, they sang nothing but the psalms, they sang only the psalms, they sang the psalms.

And the man would get up to preach, and down there in the audience somebody would raise a hand. And off the whole congregation would go singing the psalms, and the preacher would have to sit down in confusion. God never told him to preach anyhow, and they knew it.

So they just sung the boy down. And then two or three people would get down on their knees and get converted down there. No altar, just got converted where they were.

The fire of God would fall upon them everywhere. One fellow got up and said, I have a sermon tonight that consists of three C's. And he gave his C number one and C number two and C number three.

And before he was half through with C number one, the Holy Ghost fell on the audience, and somebody with a high voice raised a sand. And they sang him down, and he sat down with the other two C's unmolested, never even opened them. That was that warmth of heart, that kind of thing, warmth of heart.

But we don't have it because we have made the ignoble decision that we would rather compromise a little bit with truth and practice than to go with God. And then the lack of the spirit of prayer. The spirit of prayer.

No child is born until there is labor, until there is labor. And when Israel prevails, she shall bring forth. Then that man whom God used to start the great revival, Evan Roberts, where Evan Roberts was in a prayer meeting, somebody said to him, some old Ethan said to him, Evan, never miss a prayer meeting, because if you miss a prayer meeting, that may be the one where the Holy Ghost falls.

He said, I'll remember that. I want to be present when the Holy Ghost falls. And so Evan never missed a prayer meeting.

And one night when he was on his knees, the Holy Spirit fell on him, and he began to pray, O God, bend me, bend me, bend me. And he didn't want to break in on another man's prayer, and he said, I waited for the other man to get through, but it seemed he would never get through. He prayed on and on and on.

Finally he tapered off and petered out and said, Amen. And Evan began to pray, and the place was shaken with that man's prayer. And from there on, the revival in Wales was under way.

Now, that's the spirit of prayer. When the spirit of prayer falls on people, God answers their prayers, and things are done. When the spirit of prayer isn't on us, we just mumble on endlessly.

But when the spirit of prayer is on us, the spirit praying in us to the God above us will get things done around us. And then no sense of God's presence in the average church. I get around quite a little, but I don't go into many places where I find the sense of God's presence at all.

I preached the other night in the Presbyterian Church, and we went in with the processional and went out with the recessional, and I walked up the wrong side and got in the wrong seat. But let my children say I never do know which foot to head or where I'm going. I did it, but it was all right.

I preached to them and told them about what I tell you here and went home. Some of them said it was good, but that's all I was to it. But it was average, a good average church and a nice Brother in Charge, and I enjoyed it.

But I didn't sense particularly God's presence there, as I don't particularly sense God's presence almost anywhere. I have almost no answers to prayer and almost no divine manifestations. And then, as I've pointed out before, this deadliest of all, the absence of saintliness.

We got a few Saints around Avenue Road Church, thank God. I've never been in a church yet that there weren't a few Saints. The few that were so sold out to God that you couldn't keep them still and that they were always coming up with something, you know they had been in the presence of the Lord, and who lived their lives regularly and consistently, right down the way.

Everything they did was congruous with everything they testified to, but as a rule, were not a saintly people. And why? It's God that the spirit of worship should be on us until tears would be as common as the snow over Toronto. And it's the will of God that we should be burnt with spiritual desire, that when we sing, O Jesus, Jesus, dearest Lord, forgive me if I say for very love thy precious name a thousand times a day, we wouldn't be singing hypocritically, but we would mean it.

It is God's will that we should have no coldness of heart. You know the difference between coldness of heart and warmth of heart? It's the difference between being in love and not being in love. When a person loves deeply, whether it's the opposite sex or whether it's a baby or a child or someone you deeply love, it warms the affections.

When our telephone rings at night and the lady at the other end of the line says, Would you receive this phone call, please? It's collect, somebody named Becky. Why, sure, and as soon as that voice, Hi! Why, there's something warm inside of you. It's the difference between, I get calls from people and I don't feel anything warm, a long distance call, somebody down here or there wants me to do something, and I like them, but I'm not particularly warm.

But that's the difference. God wants us to have warm hearts, and he wants us to have a spirit of prayer so that prayer is effective. Most prayer is forever turning the key on a dead battery and sit there and turn the key and it doesn't even whine.

Turn the key for a half hour, 20 minutes, and say, Our Lord and our Father, 29 times. And still when it's all over, not a buzz, nothing! God doesn't want us to pray like that. He wants a spirit of prayer to be on the people, and you know you can have that spirit of prayer.

We can have that spirit of prayer. And he wants to answer our prayers, and he wants the sense of his presence to be upon us. And always remember one thing, when the Spirit of the Lord comes, that is the presence, and you have that presence.

And he does want to manifest himself. I'd like to put myself on record, I don't care what people say or what they think of me, other churches and other people, but I'd like to put myself on record as saying, Our eagerness to be proper and never get out of order or do anything or have anything happen, fanatical, has chilled us down until nothing happens at all. No divine manifestation and an absence of saintliness.

He wants us to have all of this. How do we get into this fix that we're in? Evangelicals follow the trend. It's always dangerous to follow a trend unless your eyes are open and you know where the trend is going.

Evangelicals followed a trend that began in the last decades of the last century and carried on over with some big names promoting it, largely United States preachers, I am very sorry to say. And it was weakly adopted by the churches, even by our good Canadians who were weak enough to adopt some of the degenerate practices of the U.S. preachers. And in their zeal to make converts and adherents, they oversimplified the Christian faith.

See, that's our difficulty, we oversimplify it and yet we never get simple. Isn't that odd? We oversimplify the truth and yet we're the most complex, mixed up. The average Christian is like a kitten that has found a ball of yarn and he has played with it and romped until he's wrapped in a cocoon and can't get himself out.

He just lies there and whimpers. Somebody has to come and unrewind him. And yet we've tried to be simple, but instead of being simple, we've simplified, but we've not become simple.

We're sophisticated and over-complexed. We've simplified it so that Christianity amounts to this. God is love, Jesus died for you, believe, accept, be jolly, have fun and tell others.

And away we go. That's the Christianity of the day. Ladies and gentlemen, I wouldn't give a nickel for the whole business of it.

Once in a while God has a poor bleeding sheep that manages to live on that kind of thing, and we wonder how. I've traveled through the American Southwest and I've seen cattle there with swaybacks and you could count every rib if the train wasn't going too fast, standing out there between stalks of long grass that's brown and dry and hard. And as we sailed by on a fast, streamlined train, I wondered how the poor thing ever lived, but somehow they managed to do it.

So you'll find a few God people here and there, even in that kind of an atmosphere. The whole generations of Christians, that's the hard part about it, have grown up believing that this is the faith of our Father, living still inside a dungeon, fire and sword. The devil wouldn't be caught dead trying to kill anybody for acting like that.

It doesn't bother him, you see. The only thing the devil hates is somebody that's after him. Somebody that's after him.

When my good friend Alan Redpath shakes your hand to say goodbye, he smiles and says, well, K.O.K.T.D. Now some of you English people know what that means, but a lot of you don't. It means, keep on kicking the devil. Keep on kicking the devil, he says.

The devil doesn't mind if you're not a bother to him. If you're not a bother to him, and most of us aren't a bother to him, the devil looks at us and smiles and says, that poor little emasculated, effeminate weakling can't do my kingdom any harm. The whole generation has thought that that's Christianity, that that's the faith of our Father, living still inside a dungeon, fire and sword.

Nobody would ever put that fellow in a dungeon, he was already there, he was born in it. Nobody would ever throw him to the flames because he was harmless, I repeat. Well, there must come a reformation, a revival, if you like, that will result in a fresh emphasis on neglected truth.

I don't preach any new truth, none. I don't have a new doctrine, not one lonely new doctrine do I believe in, not one. And if anybody would come here preaching a new doctrine, I'd say, I'm sorry, brother, but the place is taken.

I wouldn't lie him in the pulpit. We don't want a new doctrine, we want a fresh emphasis on doctrine already well known by all of us. And then we must have a revival that will mean purity of heart as a normal standard for everybody.

Purity of heart. We must be clean people, not only clean outside. The average evangelical doesn't smoke, and so because he doesn't smoke, he feels that he is doing God's service.

And he also doesn't drink. Thank God for that. Thou hast, says the Holy Ghost, done a few things.

He said, I know your works. Thou dost not smoke, and thou dost not drink. And thou dost not go to theatres, but thou dost not mind having them come to your house.

Excuse me, that was another version, but it's there. And the pure purity of heart is taken for God. That we must have, purity of heart, so that we are a clean people.

Even in my lifetime, and I haven't lived 500 years yet, I can well remember where if anybody got mad, he had to go to an altar and get cleansed. Everybody knew he was out of victory and wasn't right with God. Anybody got jealous, he had to go down before God and get cleaned out.

He took that for granted. People were supposed to have pure hearts. And we need and must have a revival that will mean divine energy to give our Christian witness.

You shall receive power when the Holy Ghost has come upon you and you shall be my witnesses. It's pretty tough to try to talk to people about the Lord and not get anywhere with them at all, not have any power at all on you. And then where there are frequent answers to prayer and this, the calling out of Christian missionaries and preachers, I'd like to see our young people come up and feel the call of God on them until they had to leave us and go.

And begin to preach everywhere, everywhere preaching as the book of Acts says. I'd like to see the Spirit of God move upon us until our young people can't afford to sit and figure out who they are going to marry and when. But that will come in its time, but they are thinking, where can I serve God? And then one day suddenly the hand of God will be laid on their shoulder and off they'll go.

How many have I seen like that? How many have I seen like that? That the Lord laid his hands on young fellows and young girls. I don't like to speak about it because I know how odious it is. And I also know, as I have pointed out, that always a blessing comes someplace else.

But I've seen it so many times. Some people come and say, I feel that God has his hand on me. And I've had people say, God's got his hand on me.

I knew God during the Second World War. He's an oddball, literally, and that's a matter of temperament, just a plain oddball. I never thought him to amount to very much, really.

He went off to the war and he got wounded and was tumbling over a crag over a cliff and would have fallen to his death below. Before he went over there he said, I'm called to Ethiopia. When he got on the war he said, I'm called to Ethiopia.

Nobody would have him, the lions wouldn't have him, nobody would have him. When he got wounded he said, I'm called to Ethiopia. And when he was tumbling and sliding slowly to certain death, he was called to Ethiopia.

And a great big old tough sergeant saw him and grabbed him as he was going over and hauled him back. And he got well. He came back after the war, nobody wanted him, hadn't been to the proper amount of schools, but finally some society got hold of him, a well-known society and as large as the Alliance, and they sent him to Ethiopia.

He went over there and has been preaching there ever since. I believe this. So desperately needed now that such times of revival and reformation have come, in Exodus they came to end 400 years of Israel's defeat.

I read only today of Hezekiah, the son of an evil father Ahaz, who had brought Israel to the lowest condition morally that she had been in for a long time. He died, I almost said thank God, and his son Hezekiah reigned in his stead. Hezekiah was a holy man and he sought God immediately.

And he threw the dirt out of the temple and sent word throughout all Israel and said, Come to the meeting. And they began to be blessed and they cleansed the temple and started the fires again, and first thing they know they had a revival on their hands. And it was Hezekiah that prayed when this Sennacherib came down like a wolf on the fold, with his cohorts all gleaming in purple and gold.

It was under Hezekiah that the breath of the Lord smote all those thousands and delivered Hezekiah. Then they returned from Babylon when God spoke to a man who cared, a man with a concern who was compared to the king. And the king said, What's the matter with you? You haven't been gloomy like this before.

And he said, Your Majesty, pardon me, please, but I can't help it, my heart's not broken. He said, What's the matter with you, Nehemiah? He said, My father's city lies in rubble and the foxes run over the walls, and the glorious temple where we used to worship Jehovah has been razed to the ground, and the religion of Israel has gone into decay. The old king, not knowing that God was working in his life, said, You go back and look it over and then come back and we'll send somebody over.

That was the beginning of the return from Babylon. Since Bible times, we've had these periods of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, and now I, in my conclusion of this series, lay it at your feet. Hear what the Spirit said unto the churches.

But I don't want to leave you in low key. I want to read something to you here that one good brother who wrote a book on this that he sent me last week, I just happened to notice this today as I was looking at the 2nd chapter. He said, God added a postscript to that, and here is the postscript.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

Each of you has a private battle on, each of you has a private fight, and you are in the midst of a wicked and adulterous generation. But you've got to overcome. He that overcometh indicates that you can overcome, but he that overcometh indicates that not all do overcome.

But the overcoming Christian, they used to teach it even, they used to say, we've got to be overcomers to be ready for the Lord's return. But you can overcome. You can overcome your own flesh, which will be the hardest.

You can overcome tradition and custom, which will be the second hardest. You can overcome all things, the devil and the world. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

My brethren, Toronto doesn't know it yet, but Toronto is waiting to hear an authentic voice. Toronto is waiting to hear an authentic voice, a voice that's from God, not an echo of what others are doing and saying, but an authentic voice. Oh, it would be an honor that we don't deserve if it would be from here that God would send that voice out.

It would be an honor we don't deserve if it would be from here that the news would slowly get booted abroad and wouldn't cost a penny. Why do you know that God is working over there? God is working, and they would come to see him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life. I know you're with me in this.

With my whole heart I know it. I know mobs and masses are not, but I know you are. I'll tell you what I'm going to do tonight.

I'm going to ask that you will join me in a time of prayer. Maybe the best way would be to stand one after the other and pray instead of going to a side room and pray. I thought we might go into a side room, but I don't know we'd need to.

Suppose that we just get quiet now for a little bit and we wait a little on God for a moment or two, and then when I give you the word, one after the other rise. Maybe it will be to pour out a confession to God. Maybe it will be to pour out a brief but heartfelt yearning for God.

Maybe it will be to intercede for some loved ones with groanings that can hardly be uttered. If we're not free enough in the Spirit to pray and make ourselves heard and pray, then we're even worse than I've described. But I believe we're free, and let's pause for a moment now in the stillness and get our hearts tuned to God's voice.

Remember, God's word comes down from heaven as scripture. It goes back to him as prayer and comes back again from him as answer. So the answer and the word are all tied up together.

The word comes down from God to us, goes back to him as prayer and comes back from him as answer. Remember that. Now, those of you who feel free in God, please don't pray a long time.

If you pray a long time, I might have to tap the microphone or something. But pray your heart out to God, one after the other. Who will stand first and lead off in an earnest prayer for revival for this church, for this city, for the evangelical churches, then to spill over into the semi-liberal churches until Toronto shall feel the throb of a new, new afflatus of power.

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