

'The Kingdom of God Lies Not in Words'

by A.W. Tozer

The kingdom of God lies not in words, but in power, and it is the Holy Spirit that brings this power to the church.

Scripture: Matthew 28:18, Luke 10:19, John 16:8, Acts 2:37, Romans 1:16, 1 Corinthians 2:4-5, 1 Corinthians 4:20, Ephesians 3:20, 1 Thessalonians 1:5, 2 Timothy 1:7

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Power Of God"

Description

A.W. Tozer emphasizes that the Kingdom of God is not found in mere words but in the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. He reflects on Paul's authority and the challenges he faced from those who undermined his teachings, asserting that true faith is demonstrated through the power of God rather than eloquent speech. Tozer warns against the misconception that correct doctrine alone can lead to spiritual renewal, highlighting the necessity of the Holy Spirit's power to convict and transform hearts. He calls for a church that embodies both correct doctrine and the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit, urging believers to seek a deeper, more powerful experience of faith. Ultimately, Tozer's message is a call to recognize and embrace the power of God in the life of the church.

Transcript

" The Kingdom Lies Not in Words "

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I want to read a section from the book of 1 Corinthians, fourth chapter. Let a man says Paul, let a man, so count of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful. But with me it is very small thing that I should be judged of you. Yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. He said, these charges you bring against me, I don't know any of them that are true, but he said, I'm not hiding behind that. He that judges me is the Lord. Therefore, judge nothing before the time until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and we'll make manifest the counsels of the heart. And then shall every man have praise of God. In verse 15, he says, for though he has 10,000 instructors in Christ, yet have you not many fathers, for in Christ Jesus, I have begotten you. Since you believe, said Paul, through my preaching, 10,000 people have instructed you, but don't forget, I preached the gospel that won you, Wherever I beseech you be ye followers of me. For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church. Now some are

puffed up, as though I would have not come to you. But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will. And then I will know not the speech of them, which are puffed up with the power. For the kingdom of God is not in Word, but in power. What will ye? Shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness? Or are you going to accept the truth and begin to obey it so that I can come in love and in the spirit of meekness? Now, that's what Paul said in partly in that fourth chapter of First Corinthians epistle.

Now Paul, had authority, there's no getting around that. He had the authority of the chief apostle. He was appointed by the Lord for several things, one of them being to receive and shape church truth. The man Paul received the revelation from God which was behind. Jesus said, I have many things to say to you, but you can't receive them yet. But when the Spirit of God comes, He will reveal these things, and He will take of Mine and will show them unto you. And that Spirit that came entered to Paul when Ananias prayed for him. He was filled with that same Holy Spirit. And he received that which was behind. And he was the mold in which God poured it. And then he was also appointed by the Lord to set up a system and polity for the church, for there was system and there was polity. And he was appointed by the Lord to embody all authority that there was in the meantime. And then, perhaps most important of all, to show by example, the Christian way. He said, I sent to you Timothy, my beloved son and faithful in the Lord, and He will bring to your remembrance my ways, which be in Christ.

See the man of God here was having his authority under cut by schismatic men who came in and taught that Paul was not a real apostle. They said the reason Paul isn't a real apostle, he never saw the Lord. The other apostles walked with Jesus while he walked among men, but this man Paul was not, is not an apostle. And we can prove it by the fact that he never walked, he came after Jesus died and had risen. That was their argument. They overlooked the vision Paul had of Jesus of one born out of due time.

And these schismatic and dividers of the church had to repudiate Paul's authority in order to establish their own. And they attacked Paul and as far as Paul was personally concerned, he said, it didn't matter. He said, it's a very small thing with me that I should be judged by you. As far as he was concerned, he didn't care. He said, I don't even judge my own self, I'm in the hand of God. But he knew that if he was going to have any authority, he was going to have to establish that authority. And so, we sent Timothy, to tell them about Paul and straighten them out. And then finally, he warns them this, he said, now I'm coming in the will of God one of these times to you. And it's alright for you while I'm not there, to listen to these schismatics and these puffed-up fellows. Isn't it strange that there isn't anything new under the sun?

I remember years ago, there used to be a writer for The Daily News. What was his name? He died finally, but a very wonderful writer up on the literary level. And he once went to see the old Greek play Lysistrata. And he came back after seeing it and he reported it in his column. He said, I went to see the old Greek play by Aristophanes. And he said, I came away deeply discouraged. And he said, here's what discouraged me. Not that it wasn't well written, not that it wasn't well done. But he said, I came away convinced that nobody had been able to think of a new joke in 2400 years, that everything old Aristophanes wrote into his funny play, he said, is floating all around here.

Now, that was a worldly man talking about a worldly thing. But the same thing is true in the spiritual life. So many of us imagine that we're original. There's nobody original except Adam. And if you find puffer-uppers and men who are puffed up now, Paul wrote in the eighteenth verse, now some are puffed up, and some are puffed up thinking that I won't come. But when I come, he said, and I'll do it shortly, I'll make a test. And I'll not test the words of these men, but I'll test their power. For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.

Now, here's what I want particularly to emphasize. The kingdom of God doesn't lie in words. I am among a few who are trying to tell the church that in this day. I was encouraged Thursday, as you know, I spoke and Brother McAfee sang and we kind of took Wheaton over Thursday. And after the last talk, Dr. Redmond came over and said, well, God bless A.W., keep telling them. There are a few that see it, but not very many yet. But re-see, or see over again, see again what they saw back there, that the kingdom of God is not in words but in power.

You see, the words are the form of truth. They're the outward image of truth only. And they can never be the inward essence. And words are incidental. They're incidental. If I were to say, now everybody here that can speak Swedish, bring your New Testament next Sunday. And everybody that speaks German bring yours, Norwegian yours. And so, we have a half a dozen different languages. And I would say now read that fourth of Revelation. It would be quite a revelation or First Corinthians. It would be quite a revelation to us to hear that the words were only incidental. It was the meaning that matters.

Somewhere in the middle of this all there is a meaning, a spiritual meaning. And the six different people embody that meaning in six different set of words. And those words were not alike, or only occasionally alike. We ought to remember that. We ought to know it. The kingdom of God is not in words. They're only incidental and they never can be fundamental. When fundamentalism ceased to emphasize fundamental meanings and began to emphasize fundamental words, and we shifted from meanings to words and from power to words, we began to go downhill.

Now, there's an essence of truth. And it may follow the form of words, as the kernel in an English walnut follows the configuration of the shell. But the shell is not the kernel and the kernel is not the shell. And so, while the truth follows the form of words, it sometimes deserts it. A great error is in holding the form to be essence, and putting the kingdom of God in words, so that if you've got the words right, you've got the whole thing. And if you can get a better set of words, you have more truth. Not necessarily at all.

Now, words deceive even good, honest Christian people. They deceive because we feel that if we mumble words, there's certain safety in mumbling words, and that there's a power to frighten off Satan if you mumble certain words. Now, my brethren, if a man is as just as plainly ordinary as I am, and not afraid of words, would you ask me please why the devil should be afraid of words? The devil, who is the very essence, was of ancient created wisdom back there, and had the perfection of beauty and the fullness of wisdom, and whose power lies in his shrewdness and in his intellectual brilliance, can you tell me how that devil should suddenly become so foolish as to be afraid of a word, or afraid of a motion, or afraid of a symbol? To keep the devil away, I put a chain around my neck, or to keep the devil away, I make a motion with my fingers in front of my face. I wonder what a man without any arms would do, an amputee, if the devil came after him, and he couldn't make the sign of the cross. I hadn't thought of that till now, but it's worth considering anyhow.

But the devil isn't afraid of words and he isn't afraid of symbols. You can surround yourself with symbols, religious symbols, Protestant or Catholic or Jewish, and you haven't helped yourself in the slightest, because the devil isn't afraid of a symbol. He knows better. Do you ever see the little child it's afraid of a false face? Put a false face on and the little runs and yells. But if the child did that when he's sixteen, you'd be ashamed of him. We assume as we grow up, we know that false faces don't mean anything. And words don't mean anything as words. But if we imagine if we say certain words, we will have power, they have power to bring good. If we say certain other words, they have power to fend off the devil.

And there is safety in mumbling words. And if we fail to mumble the words, we're in for it. And if we remembered to mumble the words, we're all right. That's just paganism under another form. And Paul told them plainly, for these were pagans, recently but only lately converted. And he said, you've got a lot of you Greeks, you're Greek and the Greeks love oratory, and they love fine language and they produce a lot of fine literature. And he said, you Greeks, you love fine words, but he said, I don't come to you with fine words. I come to you, in this second chapter, I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but instead a demonstration of Spirit and of power, that your faith should stand in the wisdom, not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. So, we ought to throw this off. You may feel a little bit mentally naked when you throw all this off. You know, it's one thing that we do when you strip superstition away from a man, he feels terribly naked for a moment. But until we strip off our superstition, the Lord can't put on us a cloak of truth.

Now, the Kingdom lies in power. Its essence is in power. The gospel is not the statement that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures. The gospel is the statement that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures plus the Holy Ghost in that statement to give it meaning and power. And just the statement itself, never will do it. Have you wondered at times as I have, why those churches, some of them, who drill their young people from their childhood in the Catechism, and teach them the doctrines so that they're positively instructed in the word of the Truth, yet somehow strangely failed to get them through to the new birth. Have you noticed that? And we're not referring by name to any denomination. And I have nothing against the Catechism. I think it's a fine thing for young people.

But have you noticed that there are whole generations of so called Christians who are drilled in the Catechism, and who know the doctrine, and can recite the gospel as well as the law, and still never manage to break through to the new birth. They never come through to that shining wonder of inward renewal. The reason is, they are taught that the power lies in the words. And if you get the words, you're all right. Whereas Paul says, the kingdom of God doesn't lie in words at all. The kingdom of God lies in the power that indwells those words. And you can't have the power without the words, but you can have the words without the power, and a lot of people do. So that the power of the Spirit operating through the Word, that's the gospel. It's the statement of the fact that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures. That He rose again, and that He was seen of many and that He's at the right hand of God and will forgive those who believe on Him. That's the gospel in its shell, that's the shell of the gospel, but the power must lie in there, or there'll be no life in it.

So Paul appealed away from man given authority. And he appealed away from talk, however eloquent. And he appealed away from even his own position, and appealed direct to the power of the risen Lord who manifest true the Spirit. And he said, I want you to know, and I sent Timothy to try and straighten you out and remind you, that it's the power of God that talks, not a man's mouth.

Now, the appeal, I say was to the power of the risen Christ. And my brethren, if this church and the people who compose it, are not living in a constant miracle, they're not Christians at all, because the Christian life is a miracle. It is what the ark of Noah was in the day of the flood. It is completely separated from that flood and yet floating upon it, completely separated from it. It was what Jesus was when he walked among men, right in the middle of them and yet separate from sinners and higher than the highest heavens. There operates within the true Body of Christ a continual energizing by the Spirit that makes a continual miracle. A Christian is not somebody who's believed only. A Christian is somebody who has believed in power. And the working of the power is a moral power. It has power to expose sin to the sinner's heart.

Nobody will ever be truly saved until he knows he's a sinner. And nobody will ever know he's a sinner, truly know he's a sinner by simply threatening him or warning him or telling him. You can go to a man and say you're a sinner. You swear and lie and you're wrong. You're evil. He'll grin and shake his head and say, I know, I know I shouldn't do those things. But I guess we're all human. You haven't convinced him. You can read Plutarch and Aristotle, and Herbert Spencer and all the rest of the books of ethics, and showing him he's dead wrong, and he still will never know what it is to be a lost sinner. You can threaten him that if he doesn't look out and doesn't straighten out his ways, the atom bomb will get him or Khrushchev will be over. And you're still haven't convinced them. You haven't told him anything he didn't know.

But when the Holy Ghost is come said Jesus, He will convict the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. When Peter preached at Pentecost, the Scripture says, being pricked in their hearts, they cried out and said, what shall we do to be saved? And that word pricked they say, Wayman says, is a word stronger and deeper than the word pierced, where they pierced the heart of Jesus with a spear. The words of Peter in the Holy Ghost, the new, baptized prophet and apostle, the words of Peter penetrated like, like a Donee spear, so deep, deeper than the spear had gone into the heart of Jesus on the cross, when forthwith came water and blood.

So my brethren, the Holy Spirit isn't something that we can argue about. Or somebody that we can say, well, you believe your way and I believe my way. The Holy Spirit is an absolute necessity in the church, an ungrieved Holy Spirit. Because there's a power in the Spirit to expose sin and revolutionize and convert and create holy men and women, and nothing else can do it. Words won't do it. Instructions won't do it. Line upon line, precept upon precept won't do it. It takes the power to do it.

And then it's a persuasive power, convince and persuade and break down resistance. And it's a worship power, to create reverence and excite ecstasy. If we were to put statues all around this place, and have candles burning here, and have beautiful Italian made glass, colored windows, pictures of shepherds and altars and all that, and I were to come in here in a long black robe, you'd have a sense of, well, I think you, probably you being you, you'd probably have difficulty restraining your mirth. But if you've been brought up to it, you wouldn't. You'd think that reverence.

No Brethren, reverence is not created by beautiful windows, although I like to see them, nor by symbols. Reverence is the astonished awe that comes to the human heart when God is seen. And that, the Holy Ghost can do through the Word, and that nobody else can do. I can imitate holy tones, all I will, and we can try to be just as religious and ecclesiastical as we can and still want when it's all over, the feeling we get is psychological or aesthetic at best. But when the Holy Ghost came upon the early church, they dares not join themselves to them. And in 1 Corinthians, the sinners fell on their faces and said, God's in this place of a truth.

So, there's a power to bring reverence to excite ecstasy, to bring worship. It lies in the Word when it's given in power. And the power of the Holy Spirit brings a magnetic, is a magnetic power to draw us to Christ. And will exalt Him above all else and above all others. And in this church, we must demand more than correct doctrine, though we dare not have less than correct doctrine. More than right living though, we do not have less than right living. More than a friendly atmosphere, though we dare not have less than a friendly atmosphere. We must demand that the Word of God be preached in power, and that we hear it in power. For in First Thessalonians, you remember, Paul wrote and said to them there that the gospel came not unto you, I know a little better, he said, that you're the elect of God, and here's how I know it. Our gospel came not under you in Word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost and in much

assurance. That is, not only Paul had the power, but the gospel could run in power, because it was heard by them in power.

And so, when the Spirit of God, the Spirit of God through the Word, preaches in power and it's heard in power, then the objectives of God are wrought out, and men are made holy, and sins forgiven, and the work of redemption is done.

And briefly now, the way to attain it, is through prayer and faith and surrender, the old-fashioned ways, and I know of none other. Prayer and faith and surrender, pray and as you pray, surrender, and as you surrender, believe, and that's for all of us. It's for all of us. You as God's people have every right in the Scriptures, every scriptural right to demand to hear the Word in power, and if you do not hear the Word and power, you have a right to rise up and ask why. If you're hearing nothing but teaching, nothing but instruction, if there is no evidence of God in it, then the preacher can't say I appeal to God, to say whether this is true or not. If this can't be, then you have a right to demand somebody come that can.

On the other hand, any man who stands here to preach has a right to expect that you believe in power. And that we're so close to God and so surrendered and so full of faith, and so prayerful that the word of God can work in power. Shall we not believe God for that kind of church here? For the kingdom of God is not in words. The kingdom of God is in power. And you can take the little Alliance manual and read it and sign your name under the bottom of every page. It won't mean one lonely thing to you. But, if the word of God is in power, it means everything to you.

So, let us trust God for correct doctrine. We dare not have less, but we must have more. Right living, we dare not have less, but we must have more. Let's be a friendly church, but beware lest it be simply a friendly church. It's amazing how socio-religious or religio-social atmospheres can permeate a church so that it's hard to tell which is of the Holy Ghost and which is simply nice social contacts. I believe that both ought to be there, and I believe they can both be there. And I believe that when the early church met and broke bread, they fulfilled both their spiritual communion and their social fellowship. So, there's no reason why they can't be fused. There isn't any reason why the warm, cordiality of social fellowship can't be made and can exist with the indwelling Holy Ghost, so that when we meet and shake hands and sing and pray and talk together, we're doing both these things. We're having social fellowship, plus, the mighty union and communion of the Holy Ghost. Let's be very careful that it's both. Not one only, to try to destroy or prevent social contact and social fellowship is to grieve the Spirit for the Spirit made us for each other. And He meant that there should be social fellowship and friendliness together. He meant that we should break bread, not only formally in a church, but be times when we meet. And He meant that we should know each other by our first names and have our social fellowships. He meant it, and the churches that try to destroy that, succeed only in getting a lopsided and fanatical type of church. But be very careful my friends, lest that we don't mistake the one for the other.

So, let's have a friendly church, and let's have a morally right church, and let's have a church where correct doctrine is taught. But let's also have a church of which any man can come here, and say when he goes away, I know the entrance I had unto you, that I could preach unto you not in Word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance, because you are the kind of people that could take it. I say this is most important. For the kingdom of God lies not in words, but in power.

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