

# The Terrible Doctrine of the Remnant

by A.W. Tozer

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*A.W. Tozer's sermon emphasizes the alarming reality of the Remnant doctrine, urging believers to seek genuine faith amidst a spiritually complacent church.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 139:23, Luke 17:26, Romans 9:27

**Topics:** "The Remnant", "Spiritual Alarm"

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## Description

A.W. Tozer addresses the alarming doctrine of the Remnant, emphasizing that throughout history, the majority of people, including those who identify as Christians, are lost and alienated from God. He illustrates this with biblical examples, such as Noah and Elijah, to show that only a small fraction of people truly follow God. Tozer warns against the false sense of security many believers have, urging them to seek genuine peace through self-examination and a true relationship with God. He stresses the importance of being disturbed by the state of the church and the world, advocating for a return to sincere worship and a heartfelt cry for the abominations around us. Ultimately, Tozer calls for a recognition of the remnant that remains faithful amidst a largely indifferent society.

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## Transcript

Rom 9:27 Isaiah also cries concerning Israel, "though the numbers of the sons of Israel is as the sands of the sea, a remnant shall be saved."

I want to articulate a doctrine in the Bible that is very troubling and alarming. I am very much afraid that the Bible is a more alarming book than we know. Before I explain what I mean, I would like to read the words of a hymn. I love this hymn from Edwin Hodder (1837-1904) about the Word.

The Word is like a garden, Lord

With flowers bright and fair;

And everyone who seeks may pluck

A lovely cluster there.

Thy Word is like a deep, deep mine;

And jewels rich and rare

Are hidden in its mighty depths

For every searcher there.

Thy Word is like a starry host;

A thousand rays of light

Are seen to guide the traveler

And make his pathway bright.

Thy Word is like an armory

Where soldiers may repair.

And find, for life's long battle day

All needful weapons there.

All of that is true. I enjoy hearing that song and I enjoy singing it. However, I am a little bit afraid that that is the attitude we take toward the Scriptures-that it is a beautiful jewel to wear on or around our neck or our finger, or corsage to wear at some dress up occasion where the star shines on it; that it is fragrant. It is all that. But it is something more than that, and in our simple elegance, I am afraid we are not letting the Word of God mean to us what it ought to mean. Whatever the educators may be saying, whatever the current religious vogue may be, here is doctrine clearly taught in the Scripture,, which cultists have mis-read and have wrested to their own destruction. For every cultist says " We are the people." But I refuse to reject the doctrine because somebody else has wrested the doctrine to his or her own destruction. I have neither starry hopes for you to admire nor posies for you to smell; but what I do have is a terrible doctrine that hurt and bothers and makes me sorrow in spirit. It is the doctrine of the Remnant.

Only a Fragment

What is the doctrine of the Remnant? It is simply this; that in our blind, fallen, sinful world of mankind, at any given time, the vast overwhelming majority is lost. And by lost, I do not mean they have missed their way or come short of the mark or are less that they wanted to be or fail to fulfill their dreams. By lost I mean, alienated from God and an enemy to Him, without pardon, without life, without hope. What does the doctrine of the Remnant mean? "Remnant," means a small fragment, a surviving trace. It means that some-thing yet remains when the larger body is somewhere else. The Romans 9:27 text deals with Israel, but it sets forth clearly the doctrine as applying to the entire human race as well as the Church. This was true among the nations before Abraham; it was true of Israel after Abraham; and it is true of the Church since Pentecost. I am alarmed because it has been true since Pentecost that such a vast number of people who call themselves Christians-the overwhelming majority-are nominal, and only a remnant is saved.

Look at some of the examples in the Bible. Jesus said, " And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man( Luke 17:26) According to the Scripture, Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord, and there were seven other members of his family that were saved out of the whole population. I do not know what the population was, but I know at the time of the flood that there were eight persons saved out of a whole population. And I know that it is written that as it was in the days of Noah so

shall it be in the days of the coming of the Son of man. Somebody says, " Mr Tozer, your taking it too seriously. Don't you remember when Elijah felt the way you feel and Elijah said," Oh Lord, I alone am left," and God said " Cheer up, Elijah; I have news for you. Seven thousand are in Israel that have not bowed their knees to Baal nor to his image." That sounds like a lot. Isn't that encouraging knowing that in Israel 7000 true Jews did not bow their knees to Baal?

Allow me to indulge in a little speculation. Suppose the population of Israel at the time was 7 million. I think that is a very conservative count. That would mean one tenth of 1 per-cent had not bowed their knee knees to Baal, and all the rest had. It would mean 1 in 1000. If you were to take at that time 1000 Jews, 999 of them secretly bowing the knee to Baal to keep out of trouble, and only one man stood boldly. But suppose for the sake of absolute fairness we cut the population in half, and say there were only 3.5 million. Then the ratio is 1 in 500. Every time you saw a synagogue or a building with 500 Jews reading the Torah or listening to the chant of the Priests, you had 499 secretly following Baal and 1 was saved. Remember, at Christ's first coming there were only a few that that recognized Him. We take it for granted, just as Israel did, that when Messiah came they would know it.

They believed just what Samson believed when he went to sleep in the lap of Delilah. He believed that he was well set for life and that he had some experience in religion, and therefore there was nothing to worry about. But when he awoke, he found out that he had been captured, and his eyes were soon put out, and he was grinding, at the mill and they were making sport of him in the name of a false god. He took himself for granted, which always is a bad and dangerous thing to do.

Either we take ourselves for granted and have a sham peace or we get disturbed and then we pray through and find true peace. Most believers take themselves for granted and have a false peace. If they did what the Bible taught, they would be bothered and alarmed about themselves and would go to God with an open Bible and let the Bible cut them to pieces and put them together again, then give them peace. And the peace they had when they had been chopped to pieces by the Holy Spirit and the Sword of the Spirit-that peace, then, is a legitimate peace. There are two kinds of tranquility, and do not forget it. Well, maybe there are three kinds now. There;s the kind that you buy in bottles, and then there's the kind that you get from taking yourself for granted and believing good things about yourself that is not true. That brings a certain tranquility to the mind.

Then there is the tranquility that comes following a disturbance of the soul that shakes it to its foundations and drives the man or woman to God with an open Bible to cry " Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts" (Ps.139:23) Then when God does that, we have an experience with God that gives us tranquility grounded upon the Rock. But with most Evangelical Christians today, their leaders go outside to bring them tranquility.

## THE TRANQUILIZED CHURCH

The first offer from the Lord is not tranquility at all. The Lord at first offers us deliverance, forgiveness, renewal and making things right; and following that comes tranquility. But we are marketing tranquility now, selling it like soap, and asking our people in the name of John 3:16 to come and get tranquilized. And so we have tranquilized the Church that is enjoying herself immensely at banquets and times of fun and coffee-klatches and fellowships. Then she is singing about the Lord, "Thy Word is like a Garden Lord." I only call attention to ti because there is a danger that we make the Word of God to be something to give us tranquility. The wings of the churches, the ones that left open all day in the busy sections, you will find

people come in and sit down. They do it, as the poet said, " To invite their souls and call in their thoughts of home and abroad and get still."

Businessmen and advertising men do that, and mystics from India and from Burma do that. That is not necessarily a Christian thing. It is a good thing, but it is not enough. We gear our services to tranquilize people and paralyze them. We ought to be alarmed by this doctrine of the Remnant. We ought not to allow ourselves to take ourselves for granted. We ought to be alarmed about it. Paul was troubled about this and wrote " But I keep under my my body, and bring into subjection; lest by any means when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor 9:27) I have known preachers that preached a lifetime and ended up telling dirty stories-ended up being dirty, filthy old men. It is entirely possible for us to teach Bible school and be board members and sing in choirs and take part in church services and then finally find out that we are castaways and have never been of the Remnant at all. That is an alarming thing, but I do not apologize for alarming you. I am afraid that we are not alarmed enough. We ought to be disturbed about this, for it is summed up in the text " Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sands of the sea, a remnant shall be saved" ( Rom 9:27)

There were a few friends of God during Jesus' time, but when we think that the population of Jerusalem alone at the time of the Passover was a million, and that at Pentecost there was also a million people in that city but only 3000 were converted, we say " What a vast harvest that was." Well 3000 out of 1 million is not a vast harvest in my opinion. I wonder if there has ever been a time when there was a vast harvest. I know it was said of Scottish missionary John G. Paton (1824-1907) that he went to the New Hebrides and found not a Christian, and when he left, there was not a heathen. But I have always crossed my fingers when I read that statement because it is not according to the doctrine of the Remnant. For the doctrine of the Remnant is " though the number of the religious people should be as the sands of the sea, only a remnant shall be saved." It is not that they could not be, it is not that God does not want them to be, it is just that they are not.

When Christ came, there were shepherds and wise-men. And we hear about these friends of God, we are glad for them. But the point is, they were typically a small percentage of the whole. Well then, at the second coming of Jesus, He says " And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" ( Matt 24:12) It does not say the love of many only, but every student of Greek will tell the same thing. There is an article, a positive definite article in there: "the." The specific ability to love shall wax cold. And Jesus said " Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8) He did not say that He will not find faith, but He said, "Shall He find faith on the earth?" So at the second coming of Christ, it will be as it was in the days of Noah; and in those days, Noah, the eighth person, was saved by water, by the ark. The rest of the population drowned. If you still want more support for the doctrine, read Church history. A small fragment, a surviving trace, always kept the faith while others took things for granted.

#### KNOWN BY THEIR FRUIT

Do you know what is wrong with us as a Church today? We are taking ourselves for granted. We are assuming that which may not be true at all; that which is founded upon wishful hoping and not upon sound Biblical experience in many cases. We have not been disturbed enough. We have not allowed God to plough furrows on our backs. We have not dared to go before God and have the examination made. We are afraid of what God will find , and we would rather wait. Therefore we have waited and settled down. There has always been a small remnant and they have been in the midst of all the rest. A million might

wish with their lips and worship with their lips, but only a small fragment truly worship in their hearts in a way that honors and pleases God. We do not need to imagine it as an indication of vast spiritual or high degree of holiness when we see a church door open and multitudes spew out on the sidewalk. Follow them home. Follow them a half a block and see how they live. That is the way to tell. "Wherefore by their fruits you shall know them"( Matt 7:20)

Ask them to lead in prayer. Announce a prayer meeting and see how they will leave. Announce a banquet and see how they will come. In the church of God the " stop and go," signs are these: When it says go, "Banquet"; when it says stop " prayer meeting." The church of God follows it and we smile about it, but it is an alarming thing. I do not want to come before the Lord having soothed and petted people into some false sense of smug spiritual security. Read church history and see the fragments, or the remnant, that lived in the midst of it all. Read about the Waldensians and the Friends of God and the Brethren of the Common life and how few there were but how many went to church. It is possible to worship God with our lips and not worship God with our lives. If your life does not worship God, your lips do not worship God either.

I am troubled about all the people I see singing Handel's Messiah, especially during Easter season, without having the remotest notion of what it is about. They will stand up and sing, "Come unto Him, come unto Him," and they will not have any idea what it means. When Handel wrote it he said " When I was through, me thought I saw heaven open and all the angels of God gathered." That is how he felt. But many of us sing it and only enjoy it as music. We can come, sing hymns in church and only enjoy the dignity of the music as a relief from rock 'n' roll. Read about the remnant 600 years before Christ was born in Ezekiel 9:1-6. We say, :begin in the Kremlin, O God begin in the Kremlin and destroy those godless wretches." God says, "Begin at my sanctuary."

We say " Go to the church where the pastor denies the Bible and had nothing to preach but poetry." God says " Begin at my Sanctuary." But He says " Look out for the mark on the forehead." That indelible mark. He sent the man with the linen with an inkhorn, indelible ink, and said, " Go mark them, mark them." Which ones will I mark? The ones that stand and pray the longest? The ones that give the most to missions? " No, no," He says, " that is not the test. Here is the test in a day of corruption: those who sigh and cry for all the abominations that are coming in the midst of Jerusalem."

That is all they have to do. Some things are like a wave on the sea. You can stand, and Paul himself could not shout it back, for it would engulf him. But you do not have to get the mark of the remnant on your forehead, you do not have to succeed, and you do not have to be popular. You only have to sigh and cry for the abominations that are taking place in the earth today. I cannot stop people from doing what they are doing, but at least I can grieve because they will not stop; and I am going to do that. I am going to let my tears water the footsteps of those who go astray. . And when the churches will not come back to the New Testament standards and worship the Lord our God in the beauty of Holiness, if I cannot make them do it or persuade them to do it in this awful hour of crisis, at least I can weep because they will not come. And I can sigh if I cannot weep.

I do not know what the future holds. But I know one thing: Rather than betray the sheep of God, rather than lie to them and deceive them and keep them agitated and stirred up with all kinds of popular topics; rather than take my material from Time magazine, I'll preach the Word of God to empty seats and sigh and cry for the abominations that is in the earth.

So God says " Begin with my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house" (Ezek 9:6) Sounds like these young people are the trouble. These young people are filled lust and wild ideas; but the Scriptures say, begin with the ancient men, which are before the house. "These old bearded pillars of the church,' says the Holy Spirit, begin with them. " And it came to pass, while they were slaying them, and I was left, that I fell upon my face, and cried , and said, Ah Lord God! Wilt thou destroy all the residue of Israel in thy pouring out of thy fury upon Jerusalem?" (Ezek 9:8)

If the evangelical church, the fundamentalist believing Church, will not accept this, then I can at least sigh because they will not, and cry to God because they do not.

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