

'The Transforming Power of Love I'

by A.W. Tozer

To become godlike is the supreme goal of all moral creatures, and loving God is the key to achieving this goal.

Scripture: Psalm 45:7, Matthew 22:37, Romans 8:29, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Galatians 5:22-23, Philippians 4:8, Colossians 3:2, 1 Peter 1:15-16, 1 John 4:8

Topics: "Transformation in Christ", "The Power of Love"

Description

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the transformative power of love in his sermon, explaining that we are constantly in a state of becoming, shaped by what we love most. He highlights the importance of loving God above all else, as this love molds our character and directs our moral compass. Tozer warns against the dangers of loving the wrong things, which can lead to moral degradation and a distorted identity. He encourages believers to reflect on their affections, as they ultimately determine their spiritual trajectory. The sermon serves as a reminder that our love shapes our destiny, urging us to choose wisely what we hold dear.

Transcript

The Transforming Power of Love I

Pastor and author A.W. Tozer

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I'm going to give two talks on the topic of the transforming power of love, one this morning and the other tonight. They will be separate and complete, each one in itself, but they will be on the same theme.

Now, in the 45th Psalm, verse seven, speaking of Jesus Christ our Lord: Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness. Therefore, God, thy God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. And then in the Book of Matthew, the 22nd chapter, beginning with verse 35: One of them which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. Then in 2 Corinthians 3:18: But we all with open face, beholding as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Now, we will begin at a common meeting point where we can all agree, that we are all in the process of becoming. We cannot stand still in our inner lives. We are moving, constantly moving in our inner lives.

We have already moved from what we were, and we are now moving to what we shall be. That is why, one of the reasons at least that, the Bible talks about the pilgrim character of the Christian. It is not because he is on his way from the cradle to the grave only; that is true also. Or because he is on his way from earth to heaven; that is true also. But because he is as a creature, a pilgrim, he is in the process of becoming. He is moving from what he was to what he will be. And what he is now is not what he will be. John said, we know not what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him.

Now, this fact that we are moving, that we are becoming; that we are in process of transmutation. That we are not fixed but fluid, is not in itself a disturbing thing. I think, indeed, that the man who knows himself really well, or perhaps in the man who knows himself even slightly, he's quite happy with the thought that he is not what he is ashamed that he used to be. And that he is not fixed in what he is now, but that he is moving towards something better than he used to be and even better than he now is. It is a comforting and heartening knowledge, that we can be changed from what we are ashamed that we ever were to what we ardently hope that we may become.

But the perturbing thing is not that we are fluid. Not that we are flowing. Not that we are pilgrims. That perturbing thing is what we are flowing toward and what the journey will end in. What is the future? What's the destination for our pilgrim feet.

Now I want to point out this to you, and this will be the biblical basis upon which the central thesis of this talk and the one tonight. That we are becoming like what we love. Love is among other things a creative affinity. It changes and draws and wins and molds and shapes and transforms and ultimately transfigures. It assimilates and transforms and makes us over from what we were to what we will be. Love does this. So powerful is love, that we are destined to become what we love most. That is, morally what we love most.

And you may be sure of that. And that is true not only in the kingdom of God and in this church, but that is true in the kingdom of the flesh and in the nearest tavern that everyone is destined with a wholly fixed purpose and fixed decree. He is destined to become that which he loves most. That is, morally that He is destined to become morally the image of that which he loves most. For that reason, what we love is of present and eternal importance.

You know, there are not very many important things. I used to say that, and now as I'm getting older, I see that it's true that there are not very many important things. You can pick up the newspaper and read it every day for one solid week and maybe never find one important thing in it. That is, never find anything that will be of any importance a week from now or a year from now. But what we love is of critical, most critical importance. Because loving wrong objects deforms the heart and debases it and twists it out of shape and destroys it, just as certainly as workmen raze and destroy a building. Just as certainly as a tree standing among the rocks on the promontory overlooking the ocean never grows into a strong, sturdy, symmetrical tree. But the constant pressure and twist of the storm, turns it into a dwarfed thing.

So if a man loves the wrong thing, he certainly will become deformed and debased in his heart. This is a tragedy that is being enacted, not on a stage, but in stark reality before us daily. There is the innocent, bright-faced a boy who still kisses his mother when he goes to school and who still listens humbly to what his father tells him. And then he comes up through that strange and mysterious period when he ceases any longer to be a little boy but becomes a young man. And about there somewhere, he learns to love the wrong things. He gets to going, we'll say, out with a crowd that isn't quite what it ought to be and goes from there to what may be innocent; to the pool hall and then from there to someplace else a little worse, and

so on, until he develops a love for that kind of thing; rebellion and individual independence and self will. And he stops kissing his mother goodbye. And he stops listening to his father's kindly admonitions. He's in love with something else now. He becomes ashamed to show affection around the house. He's in love with another thing now. He gets to talking tough.

And the simple innocency of his boyish language now changes and he begins to spit out harsh, tough, brittle words that he didn't use to. And the parents look at each other and shake their heads and wonder what's happened? The tragedy has begun, act number one of the terrible tragedy of becoming, the tragedy of transformation. The terrible story of the boy who learned to love the wrong thing. There's that man now, maybe in his 20s or his 30s. He has a wife for whom he would give his life. He has little children that he adores. He has a home, a car, a good job. And then for some reason he begins to drink. First, it's nothing. He waves it off. And when his wife smells it on his breath, he laughs it off and says, I just had one with the boys.

And then she notices they're more frequent. And then she notices, a bleary eyedness about him. And it isn't very long until she has an alcoholic on her hands. This man has been changed by his love of drink until the money goes there. And until his job is in jeopardy. Until he has accident after accident as he drives. And he swears and weeps as he promises his wife that he will not drink anymore and swears off, but it always comes back to the same thing. He can't help it. He's in love. The cells of his body, the tissue that makes up his system, have become addicted to alcohol.

Or there's that young fellow who's in college, maybe, and in love with Plato or Spinoza or the rest of them. He's reading fine literature and thinking well. And then he leaves it and gets out into the world. And pretty soon he becomes a playboy, and he gets in love with the bright lights. Then the nightclubs and the entertainment world gets ahold of him. And at first, it's alright. He thinks we'd love it. And he argues in favor of it and says, you just don't know these people, Dad. They're nice people. They're nice people.

But pretty soon, act number three, act number four, moving on to a terrible climax. This boy ceases to have a sense of responsibility. He ceases to be even the good American and becomes a cheap, floating thing; floating because it's light on the surface of the moving stream of society; a cheap lover of his own flesh. Or the girl, the sweet-faced, little girl that dashed to her father's arms and kissed him. And then that strange thing happens to her. Something wakes up inside of her and she gets her eye on a boy. And she becomes what they say sarcastically, boy crazy.

And we shrug it off and say they all go through that, but they don't all go through that. That's a mistake. They don't all go through that. They all arrive at a place as God meant it to be in nature, where the attraction of man for a woman is there. That's perfectly all right. But the girl-crazy business is something else again. That's where a girl forgets she's a girl and forgets she's feminine and forgets that she has and holds that which is in practically all societies of the world, except the degenerate ones, that which is more precious than gold or silver. And she falls so in love not with anybody in particular, but with just men.

And pretty soon you have not the tender, pleasant, innocent girl on your hands, but you have a wild thing, almost like an animal. And my friends, I've seen that in my days. I've seen that happen to homes. And I've seen those homes in tears because this lovely little thing, that was too pretty for her own good, had broken her anchorage and was out now at the mercy of the wild winds that roar across the sea. And she justifies it. Pretty soon she begins to look like the world and then ceases to look like the refined part of the world. And the very look in her eyes and the hang of her lip shows the sensuality and sex. And pretty soon you

have not a lovely innocent young woman. But you have a girl who's gone, or ready to go.

I'd say there's the tragedy that's being enacted all the time. And I've seen it in my ministry as I've touched here and there and throughout all our country. I've touched homes and lives and talked with parents and young people and heard awful confessions and tried to untangle the live wires, and counsel and pray and instruct. And I've seen what will happen when we love the wrong objects. When we get in love with that which is not good.

A quite a well-known violinist, probably the best-known violinist in religious circles, showed me once when we were staying in the same home what his violin practice had done to him. I never dreamed it. He took his shirt off, and with only his top on, showed me in private. He said, when I was five years old, I began to play the violin, a little one my father bought me because I couldn't handle the big one. And he has never had an violin out of his hand except long enough to eat and sleep precariously from that hour to this hour. And you know what has happened to him, a part of his body is all twisted and sunk.

I think he wears padded clothes so it can't be noticed much. But there's a great hole here, and his chest, hollow and sunk. I didn't know this could happen, but I actually saw this with my eyes. The man showed me that the constant use of the violin, the constant holding of it up here, twisted him all out of shape and until, if it were not for the padding, you would see that you had not a symmetrical man not even as symmetrical as the normal rank and file of us, but a man all deformed and twisted out of shape by his addiction to the violin.

Now I don't say it's wrong to play the violin, I only point out that the human body can get twisted out of shape, so the human mind can get twisted out of shape and more particularly, the human character twisted out of shape.

There are three things, my brethren, that can happen to a youngster; three things that can happen in a home. One is, that there can be a crippled, deformed condition in the home. Now, no one wants to think of this. No one wants to think. We all want to think that our families are all well and healthy. But it isn't so in every home. Occasionally there will be through disease or through some genetic accident that we know not of, somebody born who is not sound physically. I always feel sorry for and deeply sympathize with anyone who is physically handicapped. But it's possible to rise joyously above a physical handicap,

My son, Bud, who is now 32. This boy now, not that he was born that way, but in the war, he got it. One leg is four inches shorter than the other and so crooked that he has to have his clothes tailored to try to hide the fact that there's a crooked twist there. And he'll never walk without a cane. But you know, I can't find it in my heart to be sorry for Bud, because he lives above it so completely. He is so utterly happy about the whole business that he ever got back at all, that he ever got back to see Rosemary and the babies. He's so completely delighted and so completely free from anything like morbidity, that I can't find it in my heart to be sorry for him.

You can rise above physical handicaps, my friends. You can get above that easily. And some of the sweetest characters living in the world are those who have been physically handicapped. They've had a twisted or shrunken leg, or they've had something wrong. We don't like that. We wish that all of us could be healthy and well. But some of us can't, so we have to get along with what we have. And if we can rise above it in our spirits, why, we will hardly notice.

Then there's a second thing. And this is harder still. And in the grade of things we don't want to happen, down a little further; and that is mental conditions, insanity. When the mind goes wrong and in the homes where anyone has mental trouble, always there's a sense of shame as though somebody was to blame.

One of the most brilliant men in the United States of America, without a doubt; I don't agree with him in everything, but I admit that he is one of the most brilliant men in America. You know that that man has two subnormal children. It's not his, not his fault. His wife is a brilliant woman. But somewhere in those streams of nature, it happen that way. And we're sorry when it happens. We're sorry when the mind goes wrong. It's still worse than when the body is wrong.

But there is a third thing. And here, my brethren and my sisters in Christ, here is the worst of all. And that is when the soul goes wrong. When our young people are not physically deformed and not mentally off, but are morally off. When up out of our Sunday schools, or up out of our Christian homes, or down out of our Christian homes there go young men or women to disgrace the name of Christ and to live a life that borders on crime or that becomes crime, indeed. I say this is the worst of all.

If I could ask God as David did of the three things that could happen. You know, God said, David, I'll give you one of three punishments. Which would you like? David made his choice. And if God were to say to me, which would you like to have, which would visit your home, physical deformity, mental incompetence, or a crime.

And I would say, My God, I don't care about the physical. The physical can take care of itself somehow. If they're mentally all right and morally all right, they can lick any kind of physical trouble. We're sorry for it, but, God, it's alright. You can send it. And then I would say, God, if it should be that any of my family should lose their mind and they would have to be committed or would have to be understood as being mentally beneath, below par, I would say I'm sorry God, but still, they can help that. And they may be as dear to God as the brightest intellect that walks America's streets.

But, O God, spare me, spare me the horror. Spare me the tragedy of crime. Spare me the tragedy of a twisted, deformed life. A man to be made in the image of God and then take that image and twist it and deform it by loving wrong objects; bring to bear upon it the powerful, formative influences of a wrong love. And then live to see the innocent little babe that we used to hold in our arms, look at us with cold, unseeing eyes and snarl. And now, a sinner confirm and defending his sins. And yet that's what happens to people.

But on the other hand, loving right objects does exactly the opposite. Loving right objects will change us and transform us and turn us and put the shine upon the countenance so that no matter what nature does to the body, and no matter what weary nerves do to the mind, they still can't get away from it. God is in that man.

Dr. A.B. Simpson, the founder of the society which this church is a part. was 71 years old when his tired, overworked mind lay down and refuse to work anymore. And yet, they said he walked around smiling at everybody, shaking hands; God bless you, young man. God bless you. Good morning, sister. God bless you. I'm praying for you. And they said it was one of the few times when his mind would get right, was when he knelt to pray for his missionaries.

And the very afternoon that he died, he knelt out on the porch of his Nyack home and prayed for his missionaries by name. He didn't have as many as we have now. He prayed for them all by name, and then

went in and laid down and died. He would get normal when he prayed. But when he wasn't praying, he just walked around in a haze. He didn't know people. There's nothing wrong there. I think that'd be nice way to go, wouldn't it? I think that would be a nice way to go.

God just looked at him and said, Albert, you've suffered so much, and you've worked so hard, and you've never had but one vacation, and you're ran home from it to get back to the office. And you have loved me so much and prayed so many nights in silent, secret prayer, that I don't think I'm going to let you suffer the pangs and irritations of old age. And so, he just pulled a veil over Albert's mind, and He walked around smiling until he died. He didn't know his friends, but was happy in God, a beautiful way to go, I think.

If you have somebody that loves you enough to take care of you when you're like that, and he did. So, it isn't so bad, if about the mind. But, oh my brother, to know that the heart is right and that the shine of God is on the heart.

Now I thought I had enough for two sermons, but I see I've got enough for three or four. But I'm going to try to stagger through this, anyhow if you will wait another 5-10 minutes.

Now I read a verse here that tells us what the first and great commandment is. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. Now, why is this here? What is the rationale, the reason, the sound reason underneath this? It is, that to become godlike is the supreme goal all moral creatures. To become like God is the reason for their existence. And the only justifying reason that can be given for their ever having been created in the first place. And leaving out of consideration for the time being, those strange and wonderful creatures that we call seraphim and cherubim and archangels and angels and principalities and powers. We don't know too much about them. They're hinted at, but not a very full picture is given. Leaving them out of consideration and thinking only of man as a moral creature; that he was created in the image of God, that he fell; and that under God, he's now in process of restoration.

Thinking of this now, I think I understand this commandment. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, because it's the business of God, now in his work, to restore again to the divine image man who fell and lost, to a vast degree, that image. And so since man is in process of becoming, and since he is destined to become what he loves most, God said, you shalt love God most. Because your reason for existence is that you should become godlike, and the power of love is transforming. It is like a potter shaping clay. It is like a sculptor chiseling out the rock. It is like an artist using his paints on the canvas. It is like a carpenter building his cathedral. And so, love is the workman, making us like what we love. Thou shall therefore love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and strength. This is the first and the greatest of the commandments.

Now, we can't begin by loving God, for the reason that man is fallen, and there must be an impartation of divine life. Fluid as human nature is, it cannot run up hill over the falls. We ran down over the falls and roared away in dirty foam below and we can't reverse ourselves. The human race cannot run backwards over the falls. Neither psychiatry nor education nor psychoanalysis nor brotherhood nor integration nor anything else can cause the human race to run backward over the falls, because we run the other way. We don't run backwards. The human race does not normally run upward, it runs downward over the falls.

But when God implants and imparts new life, then the whole stream is lifted up onto the divine level. And after that then, God goes to work to model that life and shape it and mold it until it becomes Godlike; until it changes from what it was to what it is to be, when we see Him as He is. And God provides approved

models and proper moral objects for our admiration. And toward these objects, we move by moral likeness.

Now my brethren and sisters and young friends, you don't have to listen to this and say that it's too philosophical or too mystical. I tell you, that it's much a part of you as the blood in your body. It's just as real as the physical laws that hold and govern your physical life, that you are in process of becoming what you love and you are destined, finally, to be like that which you love most.

You may not know it now. For remember, the mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small, and so slow and slow the great mills go that they hardly move at all. But they move nevertheless. And you will be next year a little more like that which you love now, whether it's God or whether it's something else.

Young fellow, you're beginning to feel your oats. And the old man's bald head looks quaint and wonderful and funny to you now. And his old-fashioned moral ideas aren't what you like. He's not hip. He's a square. All right, Junior. Let me tell you, you're busy becoming what you admire. You will be a year from now nearer to your heart's desire. For remember God gives every man his heart's desire. If his heart's desire is to be God-like, he will be. If his heart's desire is to be like the world, he will be. And the sadness of looking upon a face, a young beautiful face and seeing the great old artist sin, sketching and making his preliminary sketches getting ready to paint, darkness and sin and hell under that countenance. You will become what you are in love with. It's a sweet and solemn thought that human nature never moves on a horizontal plane.

It's sweet, because it indicates that we can move on an inclined plane going upward. And it's solemn because we can move on a plane going downward, but the human life never moves on a horizontal plane.

In the book of Revelation, it says: He that is unholy, let him be unholy still. And he that is evil, let him be evil still. And other translations point out that actually what that says is this: Let him that is evil become more evil still, and let him that is unrighteous be get to becoming more unrighteous still. And let him that his holy, be holy still is not that. It's let him that is holy become holier still. Never does man move on a level plane. Always, he's mounting up or sinking down. That's the sweet thing that he can mount up and the solemn thing that he can move down. And so God the great Potter is within us, shaping us and working and molding and helping us to become.

Now, I gave you this verse that was the text, from the Philips translation and on through. But all of us who are Christians have no veils on our faces but reflect like mirrors the glory of the Lord. We are transfigured by the Spirit of the Lord in ever-increasing splendor into His own image.

Oh, you older Christians, you older Christians that have had a long time for the artists to work on you. Why don't you look more like God? The young convert just newly bounced out of Adam's old world into the kingdom of God, all flustered and doesn't know where he is yet. You demand more him than he demands of you. We expect saintliness in the teenagers.

What about you, Grandpa? You've had a half a lifetime. You were converted in your teens and now you're old, and the days of your years aren't many. And it says here that if we look into the face of Jesus Christ in love, that God will, the Spirit of God will in ever increasing splendor transform us into God's image. Grandpa, why is this? Why are you so testy and churlish and hard to live with? Why are you so cruel in heart, Grandpa? Grandmother, you say it's your nerves. It isn't your nerves. It's carnality. And it's a lack of the image of God.

I'll die a disappointed man. I'm sure of that. But some would say, well, a man with a temperament like yours, nothing would ever satisfy you. Maybe that's true. But I'm sure I'll die a disappointed man, because I would like to see a company of men and women with shocks of white hair, that is their crown of glory, and that age and experience and suffering and prayer and study of the Word have worked to change into the likeness of God. And the Holy Ghost, the artist working inside their souls, painting on the inside of the lens, and then the people on the outside see it? They should, they should be the saints, the dear old people. They should be the saints. And that's why you young people need the old people. Because there are some like that. You need them.

But I'd like to see, I wouldn't mind being a pastor of an old congregation, or congregation of old men and women if they all had yielded to the indwelling Artist. And as the years went on and elections and presidents came and went, and wars came and went, and time mowed them down and bent them to the earth. If their faces became more and more radiant with the love of God. If they were tender and sweeter and more understanding and sympathetic and reminded me more of Jesus, I'd like to preach to people like that. I'd like a congregation like that, just to help me.

But it isn't that way as a rule. Too many never change for the good as they get older. Why? Because they've become like what they like. They have taken on the image of that which they love. They love themselves and God fated them to be like themselves. They love money and God let them look like the dollar sign. They love easy living and God let them look like the gourmets they are. They love this world and God let them look like this world. Maybe they're Christians. I don't know. Don't press me for that. But only I know that theoretically, as we get older, we ought to get more like Jesus; being transformed with increasing splendor into the image of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Remember, you will be what you love most, and you are becoming what you love.

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