

'Thirteen Theses Nailed to the Evangelical Church Door'

by A.W. Tozer

The evangelical church has gone far from the New Testament and needs a restoration and reformation to purify and elevate it.

Scripture: Matthew 4:17, Luke 9:23, John 15:8, Romans 12:1

Topics: "Reformation", "True Discipleship"

Description

A.W. Tozer addresses the Youth for Christ meeting, emphasizing that the evangelical church has strayed from New Testament teachings and is in a state of 'Babylonian captivity.' He presents thirteen theses that call for a reformation within the church, stressing the need for true repentance, discipleship, and the importance of Christ's Lordship. Tozer critiques the superficiality of modern evangelicalism, urging a return to genuine worship and a deeper understanding of salvation. He warns against the dangers of adopting worldly methods in ministry and calls for a revival that leads to significant change rather than mere enthusiasm. His message serves as a challenge to church leaders to reflect on their practices and align them with biblical principles.

Transcript

"Thirteen Theses Nailed to the Evangelical Church Door"

Pastor and author Aiden Wilson Tozer

speaking to Youth for Christ Meeting

January 8, 1958

Reverend A.W. Tozer is no stranger to this radio audience listening in today for he's heard every week on Saturday mornings in the series of messages entitled "From the Pastor Study." Whenever I'm in town I tune in Brother Tozer to your challenging message, and God has repeatedly has stricken my heart as you have opened your heart to the Word of God to me. You may not know it, but I listen regularly and God has spoken to me many, many times from your ministry and heart.

Brother Tozer is the pastor of the Christian Missionary Alliance Church on the southside here in the city and is the editor of the Alliance weekly, the official organ of the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church.

You may be interested to know that this morning we presented to this fellowship our new editor of our magazine Vernon McLellan. We prayed with him and for him, and we believe that God has sent to us this very choice servant with a facile pen and typewriter who will be managing the editorial aspects of our Youth for Christ magazine. I want, ladies and gentlemen, that you take now to your heart this choice servant of God who has been such a blessing to many of us here in the room and to a host of people across the country, our brother, A.W. Tozer.

Thank you very much. I suppose that some of you have heard that I have been critical of some things done by Youth for Christ, but I want to tell you that I am critical of my own church and my own denomination too, and everything that I think doesn't fit quite in with the will of the Lord. So I'm among you as your friend and I believe that I am among friends. And if some of the things I say don't accord with what you already believe, it could be I'm wrong, but it also could be that you are. So what we want to do is get together, when our friend Headley called me and asked me to come, I said, well, Brother Headley, you know that I don't agree with everything. He said, well, that's why we want you. Well, that's all right.

Now, I'll tell you what I want to do, and I'm not singling out the Youth for Christ organization. I'm thinking broadly. I never think of my own church or our own denomination, the Alliance or any particular group. I think of the whole church of Christ. I try to cultivate a catholicity of approach, the true ecumenicity. The whole church of Christ is before me, the whole evangelical church. And I'll tell you what I'm going to begin with. I'm going to begin with a conclusion. I want to watch out that I don't, after the conclusion, sit down and forget because the conclusion usually comes last.

But I begin with this conclusion, an assumption, and one that I'm increasingly convinced is in accord with the facts, and one shared by growing numbers of serious-minded Christians everywhere. This is the basic thought that I'll have for you, and if you don't agree with it, I might as well stand in bed because everything I have to say is going to be based on this. It is that the evangelical church or evangelical Christianity has gone far from the New Testament and is in Babylonian captivity today and needs a restoration and reformation.

Now, you remember that when Israel was in Babylonian captivity, she was still God's people. And she still had His promises and His covenant and all the blessings that had been given to the fathers. But she was out of the land and she was in captivity. And she needed an Ezra, a Nehemiah, and a few others to bring her out of captivity into the land again. Now, to clear myself, allow me to assure you that I don't visualize myself as the reformer to do this job. I have no messianic complex. One of these times, I am going to die and go to heaven and leave the work to others. I hope maybe to some of you.

But now 450 years ago, the church was in a similar situation. She was in Babylonian captivity and a man arose. And he diagnosed her disease and he analyzed her trouble, and then he published his findings. That man, of course, was Martin Luther. And he nailed on the door of the castle church at Wittenberg his 95 theses, which he was prepared to defend by public debate or by writing anyway. October 31, 1517, he nailed his 95 theses on the door of the castle church at Wittenberg, and the great Reformation resulted.

Now, I believe that we need not only the evangelical thrust which Youth for Christ supremely embodies, but I believe that we need to have and are in critical need of a reformer to diagnose our difficulties; find out what's wrong with us, analyze us and then find the cure and then publish it abroad so that we can relocate ourselves, not lose any of our evangelistic zeal, but direct it into a more perfect way.

So, I have for you here now, and I'll be very cautious; and I'm going to quit when the time comes, because I've seen that WMBI sign there so long that I never run over, not even one second. But I want to present to you thirteen theses for the door of the evangelical church. I want you to take these down. These are theses which I am prepared to defend from the Scriptures any warm day or cold one.

The first one I quote from Martin Luther himself, it's his first thesis. He said, our Lord and master Jesus Christ in saying, repent ye, meant the whole life of the faithful to be an act of repentance. Now, that was his first thesis. And we're in need of having this repeated in our day, that when the Lord says repent, He meant that the whole life of the faithful should be an act of repentance. We are, in our day I am afraid, certainly I'm not saying this is true of Youth for Christ everywhere; I am saying it's true in my denomination, it's true among evangelicals, and I feel that it needs to be corrected if we're to have the revival we want and escape our Babylonian captivity.

We are forgetting that the whole life of the faithful ought to be an act of repentance. And we're making Christians either without repentance or with inadequate repentance or with superficial repentance. And you can be absolutely sure that your Christianity will be just what your repentance has been, no more, no less. You dare go high in your building only when you've gone deep in your foundation. And repentance is the foundation, and the rest is the superstructure raised on the foundation. And unless we go to bedrock with our repentance, we're due to have our building tumble down later on. Now that's thesis number one, that our Lord means that the whole life of the faithful should be an act of repentance, not simply a statement, but the whole life.

Second one, and I borrow this from Luther is, that when, that Christ does not mean interior repentance only. Nay, interior repentance is void if it does not externally produce different kinds of mortification of the flesh. Now, he defended that and I am prepared too, that it isn't enough to say, well, I have changed my mind. They tell us you know, that repentance is a change of mind and it is. But it is more than a change of mind. It must eventuate in external conduct. But the acceptance of Christ without cross-carrying and without self-denial, is a snare and a delusion. And to present Christ to be accepted, either not mentioning, or denying that there's anything of cross-carrying and self-denial as we sing, much self-denial that the dear old Brother wrote into his song, nothing between my soul and my Savior. He said much self-denial.

Well, we're living in an age when the spirit of self-denial has been, has gone from the earth. But into this snare, the evangelical church has fallen, so that now we're preaching acceptance of Christ and not telling our new converts that they're going to have to take up a cross and follow Him, our Lord, and denying themselves. And we're not telling them, and thus we are betraying them.

The third thesis is, and now we depart from Luther, is that there is no salvation apart from discipleship. Take that down if you wish. In our days now we make a distinction, and I hear it in my denomination as well as in whatever denomination you are in. We make a distinction between the believer and a disciple. I will give any man ten dollars right out of my own little wallet if you'll find me anything in the New Testament, which properly understood, allows a distinction between the believer and a disciple. The New Testament knows no such distinction. We believe on Christ unto discipleship. We go to the school of Christ by believing on Christ. Believing on Christ is the open door, the act, the way in, but it's unto discipleship. Now, until we change this, we will stay in Babylon.

And then the fourth thesis is that the way of the cross is hard. Now we have no authority from the Bible, Old or New; we have no authority to make the way of the cross easy, yet we have done or tried to do just

that thing. We have made salvation ridiculously easy when Christ made it extremely hard. I would suggest that all of you dear friends listening to me, reread the Gospels, reread the Gospels. Now don't fall victim to the man who puts the Gospels in another dispensation. Believe as our fathers believed from Paul on down and take the Gospels and read them and see what Jesus says about the difficulty of becoming a disciple; and the way of the cross, how difficult the way of the cross is. But we've made salvation ridiculously easy, with the result that we have a cheap grace and a superficial Christianity.

My brethren, I believe that what we need more than we need evangelism, now, is a reformation that will purify and elevate the evangelical church so that her evangelistic thrust may bring people to her, up unto a higher level than we're now bringing them.

The sixth thesis is that there is no Saviorhood without Lordship. I have been taught, and even I admit being taught in my own denomination, I have been taught that you can accept Christ as Savior now and so have eternal life, and then later on decide whether you want to have Him as Lord or not. You know, nobody ever thought of a more vicious heresy than that, and yet good men teach that.

They invite me, I get invitations from all denominations almost, asking me to come and put on deeper life conferences. Well, you see, the trouble is, the only reason we need a deeper life conference is that we didn't start right in the first place. If we had taught the truth when we made our convert, he'd move right along nicely and grow like a little weed or flower. The difficulty is, we have said, believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and you're saved, and then later on discuss this matter of His lordship and their surrender to Him.

Now, if you have accepted Him without knowing that He was to be your Lord, then of course, the only thing to do is to back up and accept Him as Lord. But you can't take Christ, one of Christ's offices and neglect the other. He is Lord and Christ. And the Scripture does not say, believe in Jesus and thou shalt be saved. It says, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. So when you preach, accept Christ and believe on Christ to a sinner, you'll include the Lordship of Christ and the right and authority of Christ to be the Lord and boss of that convert's life all during the days of his pilgrimage.

Seventh is that the methods of the Holy Ghost and those of men are diametrically opposed one to the other. Many evangelical leaders, and I certainly find it among my friends in Youth for Christ, and I find it among my friends in the Alliance; many evangelical leaders lack historic perspective, and thus do not know how the Holy Spirit has worked and how He works. We lack knowledge of God's ways and so we substitute our own.

Now, there are three methods that are being introduced in our time which are contrary to, and diametrically opposed to the methods of the New Testament. One, the method of big business, the second, the method of show business and the third, the method of the Madison Avenue advertiser. And Bible methods are supplemented, and the Holy Spirit is grieved and withdraws Himself. And we, because we're young, I'm not, but some of you are, because we're young and have a lot of animal spirits, we make up by sheer enthusiasm what we lack in the power of the Spirit. And because we lack historic perspective and spiritual discernment, we don't know one from the other, so Bible methods are supplanted.

Gentlemen, you can be sure of this, that to attempt to carry on a sacred, holy work such as the work of the church of Christ and of evangelism and missionary activities around the world, after the methods of big business and show business and the Madison Avenue advertiser is to grieve the Holy Ghost and remain in Babylonian captivity.

Eight is that Christ needs no sponsors. Now, this particularly irks me. I hope it doesn't irk me in a carnal way. I try to be sanctified and keep spiritual with all my criticism, and sometimes I have failed and have to apologize, but I do want to be right about this. But you know, the Wheaties approach, it's this, this ballplayer likes Wheaties, therefore Wheaties must be good. This ball player likes Wheaties. That boxer likes Wheaties. This movie actress likes Wheaties. This big politician, the Chairman of the Board of this so and so company eats Wheaties therefore Wheaties must be good.

Now that's the Wheaties approach. And we have blossomed out in our day, and it's in our magazines, our religious magazines, and the philosophy is that this entertainer believes in Jesus Christ, therefore Jesus Christ must be all right. This politician believes in Jesus Christ, why don't you accept him? This movie actress prays to Jesus Christ, why don't you pray to Him? This playboy, this politician, this athlete, they have accepted Christ, ergo, why don't you accept Christ?

Now that's the Wheaties approach. Do you know what that does? That makes Jesus Christ to ride in on the sponsorship of some big shot. That's big shot-ism, brethren, and I am against it 100%. And it's your business to preach Jesus Christ as the sky-tall Savior and never make Him to depend upon the sponsorship of any man. For Paul said, you see your calling brethren. Not many great men believe in Christ. And Jesus said He hides these things from the wise and prudent and reveals them unto babes. And I have seen humble ladies, little old ladies who read little who know nothing except their Bible that were greater, greater examples and demonstrators of true Christianity than a lot of these who were supposed to be big shots. Now, this is an affront to the Lord of Glory. We're guilty of sinning against the Majesty of the great God when we make Him be to be sponsored by somebody.

Then nine, Christ saves us to make us worshipers and workers, but we evangelicals ignore the first altogether, worshipers, so that we're not producing worshipers in our day. Workers, yes, we're producing workers. Founders, yes, they're a dime a dozen. Promoters, producers, artists, entertainers, religious DJs, we've got them. We got them by the thousands. Beat a bush and there'll be two artists hop out and a DJ. And they'll have a Scofield Bible under their arm, but they've departed far from the Scofield Bible.

We are to be worshipers brethren, Tarry ye until ye be endued with power from on high. Why? Because God wants worshipers first. Jesus did not redeem us to make us workers. He redeemed us to make us worshipers. And then out of the blazing worship of our hearts, springs our worship. In the thirteenth of Acts, it was when they were meet together, worshipping the Lord, that the Holy Ghost said, separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work where unto I have called them. And I challenge you that every great spiritual work from Paul to this hour, has sprung out of spiritual experience that made worshipers. Unless we're worshipers, we are simply religious, Japanese dancing mice moving around in a circle, getting nowhere.

Now tenth, I'm trying desperately to crowd these in. The tenth is that the spirit of modern evangelicalism seems to me to be foreign to that of the New Testament. There was an old fellow by the name of Democritus or I believe that's the way you pronounce his name. He was an old Greek philosopher. And George Santayana has written about him. And in the shade somewhere, the philosophers were gathering in and he said, and Democritus began to sniff. And he said, I smell a false philosophy. And the young fellows said, now just a minute there Grandpa, you don't mean you can smell philosophy. He said, I can. He said whenever an idea emanates from a human mind, it gives off an odor. And he said, I can tell whether it's good and sound and fragrant or whether it's putrid. He said, I smell a putrid philosophy here someplace.

Well, I only read that recently. But I've been saying for years, that God gives us a sense of discernment and enables us so that we can smell and know when things are right or when they're wrong. For instance, if an unprejudiced observer who had spent say, ten years in the book of Acts and in the Epistles, if he should come from another planet, or runaway Sputnik or something, and he'd come back down, he'd never been among us evangelicals at all. He never attended a Youth for Christ meeting or been in an Alliance missionary meeting. He just came from another world down. And his nostrils were all tuned to the sweet fragrance that he had got in the Book of Acts or the Gospels and the Epistles, and then He sniffed around. I'm perfectly certain that he'd say they don't smell the same. They say the same words. They talk about the same Lord, but there's a difference of spirit here. I recognize a difference of flavor. So, do I. I recognize it among us evangelicals that we don't smell like those Christians who came out of the ivory palaces along with their Lord, smelling of myrrh and aloes and out of the ivory palaces.

Now, the eleventh is that evangelical Christians every day violate the Scriptures without compunction and without rebuke from their leaders. Such Scriptures as, be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers. What fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? What communion hath light with darkness and you know the rest. And this, love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man loved the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life is not of the Father, but is of the world and the world passeth away and the lust thereof. But he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.

The church of Christ, to change the figure, is like the ark of Noah that sprung a leak. If the ark of Noah sprung a leak, you wouldn't be here, because they would all have drowned and there would have been no human race. But the church has sprung a leak and the world is leaking into the church.

Then the twelfth is, meekness, modesty and humility make a man dear to God. The Old Testament, the New Testament Proverbs, Psalms, prophets, Gospels, Epistles, Revelation, all the New Testament teaches and all the Old, that meekness and modesty and humility are dear to God. And the man who's meek and modest and humble, God will honor. But we evangelical Christians have geared our philosophy to the exact contrary. Instead of meekness, we're show-offs. Instead of modesty, it's arrogance. Instead of humility, it's ambition.

Well, the thirteenth. Thank the Lord we've arrived, the thirteenth. The thirteenth thesis is that we seek revival, but we don't know what we mean when we use the word revival, because we interpret the word revival or the concept which the word covers, to mean a big enthusiastic increase of what we now have. Whereas, revival must be preceded by a mighty change from what we now have. If what we now have was all right, why don't we have that revival? The simple fact is, it is not all right and must be corrected and changed and edited and purified and elevated. We must have self-knowledge which we don't have. We must have a changing, a giving up, a dying. Did anybody ever preach about dying to self among you brethren? It's in the Book all right, dying to self. Dying to that snappy, vibrant you; dying to that and living in Christ Jesus, a mighty confession of carnality and pride and ambition and self-confidence and timidity and all these things.

Now, there is no escape from our Babylonian captivity. We've had a generation born in Babylon. And there'll be another generation born in Babylon unless we brethren, who are in places of leadership and undoubtedly you, most of you are, unless we see these things and make some specific changes. When Luther nailed his 95 theses, there was a reformation. But I have nailed my thirteen and I don't suppose there be anything but a song and a prayer. But I do pray, I do pray that we may do something about this.

Like it or not brethren, Youth for Christ is in a place of leadership, and you're the die that is stamping out thousands of other Christians. And the terrible thing is they're going to be just like you. And what you want to do dear friends is to pray that God will help you to be the kind of Christian so that when he makes other Christians in your image somewhat and they follow you innocently, they will be following the Lord at the same time. Don't you want that? I think you do. Now, we'll turn it over to the chairman.

Thank you. Brother Tozer. Some things have been said this morning that we need to heed, not just the voice of man, but I believe to us as an organization, to us as members, leaders in this organization, to me, needs to be said and received by us. We're grateful to God for this this morning and thank you Brother Tozer.

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