

(Titus - Part 11): Inspiration by Information

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer's sermon discusses the conflict between biblical teachings and human traditions, emphasizing the need for a heart-centered faith.

Duration: 39:19

Scripture: Matthew 15:3-9, Acts 7:51-53, Romans 10:2-3, Galatians 2:11-14, Titus 1:14-16

Topics: "Titus"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by expressing his joy in seeing the work of God in the neighborhood through the Pioneer Girls program. He then addresses the perception of the church as being friendly or unfriendly, suggesting that while the church is generally friendly, there may be room for improvement in engaging with people as they leave. The speaker quotes a Scottish jingle that highlights the importance of not just professing to know God, but also living out that faith through good works. He goes on to discuss the issue of following traditions and man-made commandments instead of focusing on the righteousness that comes from the heart. The speaker emphasizes the need for true moral righteousness rather than mere adherence to formal laws.

Transcript

Last evening we met here and had an open house for the Pioneer Girls, the young girls, under the direction of Claire Moore and those who labor with her. And I was greatly cheered to see what God is doing in the neighborhood. We've lost so many who've moved to all parts of the country, but there are others, and they're coming, and I was glad to meet some of them last night.

I want you to be friendly. There have been two schools of thought about us here. Some have thought that we were about the friendliest people imaginable.

I've had people say, I never was treated so cordially as I was in your church. And then one or two have said nobody spoke to me at all. You know what I've concluded? I've concluded that this is a friendly church, but that you have an awful time being friendly with the back of a man's neck, you know, when he's on his way out.

And I found a little thing here, an old Scottish jingle, an ode for visitors, it says. So I want to read it here. My brave Scots is not what it might be.

You know, it has a Midwest accent. But I'd like to read to you this little thing. I can just see this hanging on a card, written in old-fashioned script, in many a Scottish kirk.

Kirk, as you know, means church, and by the way, means stay a while. And with that explanation, let me read this little poem to you. This is an ode for visitors.

So any of you visiting, listen to this. If after Kirk ye bide away, there some may like to speak to ye. If after Kirk ye arise and flee, we'll all seem cold and stiff to ye.

The one that's in the seat with ye is stranger here than you may be. All here have got their fears and cares. Add ye your soul to others' prayers, and be our angel unawares.

Maybe we need you. I think that's a nice little thing, don't you? So don't rise and flee after Kirk. Because if you do, we'll all seem cold and stiff to ye.

But if you'll stay around, maybe you can be our angel unawares. Just keep that in mind. Now, I want to read the rest of chapter 1 of Titus, beginning with verse 14.

Well, better read 13, too, because I don't want to break into a semicolon. Paul says this witness is true. Wherefore, rebuke them that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men that turn from the truth.

Because unto the pure all things are pure. But unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure. But even their mind and conscience is defiled.

They profess that they know God. But in works they deny him, being abominable and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate. Now, I am sorry that this isn't going to be what they call an inspirational sermon.

In preaching the Bible, if you stay close to the Bible, it's like staying close to the score of a musical composition. You can't take too many liberties, or else you're not playing Bach, you're playing somebody else. And if I'm giving expository sermons on Paul, and I take too many liberties with Paul, then I'm preaching Tozer, not Paul, which isn't a good thing.

Well, I have to stay by Paul. I don't apologize for Paul. He doesn't need my defense.

But it so happens that this Crete crowd was a bit rambunctious, and they needed some pretty severe apostolic correction, and they got it. But this is instructive if it's not inspiring, and you'll find, after all, that inspiration comes out of information. Now, he says in verse 10 above, he said there were vain talkers and deceivers, and I talked about those last week.

And then he added this melancholy little phrase, especially they of the circumcision, poor Jews. I am not anti-Semitic. I love the Jews.

I love them for Christ's sake. The blood that flowed on Calvary from its human side and standpoint was Jewish blood. Jesus our Lord was the son of a Jewish maiden, as well as of God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And my love for the Jews cannot be challenged. But the poor sons of Sarah and Abraham never seemed to keep out of trouble, especially they of the circumcision, said Paul. Too bad.

This island of Crete had a very large Jewish population, as I've explained, and, of course, they travel a lot. Jews get around a lot. And some of them got converted to Christ while they were elsewhere around over the country, around over the world, and some of them were converted there in Crete, no doubt.

And they had become Christians at least by profession. But they had made the mistake of bringing their Judaism over into the church with them, and they were still strongly influenced by Judaism. That was so strong in Palestine, of course it would be strong there, that they had to have a conference, a council like we call them now, and decide on whether they did or did not have to go through the Jewish ritual before they could be a Christian, and they decided they did not.

The fathers met, James, Peter, and the rest of them, and they decided that for the sake of not offending the Jews, they were to do four things. For God's sake and Christ's sake, they were not to commit fornication, but also they weren't to eat things offered to idols. It was a concession to the standards of the Jewish people, so they would not offend them.

But they said, you do not have to keep the law of Moses. By faith our hearts are purified, even as the rest. But these Jews, these circumcision, they followed the church around everywhere, causing trouble.

And Paul said they were vain teachers, and they were teachers, these were Jewish Christians. Now I'll have to explain how this was, and then we'll be informed, and we hope that we'll get some inspiration out of information. These Jewish Christians taught this.

They said there was a written law, and that law consisted of two things. It consisted of the ten words written on stone by the finger of God, and it consisted then of the additional which was inspired by God through Moses. It was the Pentateuch, the five books, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, we say now.

But they said also that there was another law called the law of the lip, and that was an oral law. And they believed in that oral law just as certainly as they believed in the Ten Commandments. I don't know if they had been put up to take their choice, which they would have chosen, but at any rate they taught the oral law, the traditions, just as vigorously as they taught the law of Moses.

But they said this oral law of the lip was passed on by memory, and it was passed on by memory. We know that it was tradition. That's the difference between tradition and written scripture or written beliefs.

They pass it on by tradition. In some countries, I'm told, in certain Arabic countries and Oriental countries, a great deal of their literature is passed down by memory. Education consists of memorizing the great classics, and China did at least for many years until the modernization of China.

And if they destroyed all their books overnight, all the books in China had been destroyed at certain times. They could have all been reproduced out of the memory of the scholars. And they say the same is true in Arabia, that the book of the Mohammedan Koran could have been reproduced out of the memories of the people.

And so they had here, these Jews, an oral law many, many times larger than the Old Testament itself. And it was passed on by memory, by tradition, and each family gave it to their children. They grew up and gave it to their children, along with the written law, which we believe to be the inspired word of God.

Now this grew in volume through the years. Great rabbis added to it, and it became part of the canonical law. And it regulated every act, and every day, and every relation, almost every thought where God had left men free to do as they pleased within the framework of righteousness and truth.

They insisted on following that man and putting the yoke on every minute of his time. And these regulations took the character of a law, and they even superseded the law of God in some people's minds. Now those were the vain talkers of which Paul writes, the Jewish fables and commandments of men that turned from the truth.

And this later on was reduced to writing, this oral law was reduced to writing about the time of Christ or a little bit later. And it's known now as the Talmud. Oh, for 30 years I've been a little bit acquainted.

I've had nodding acquaintance with the Jewish Talmud. I've bought their books and read them. And I know what they have.

There's much good in it, incidentally. There's much good in the Jewish Talmud, much good. But they have a strange way of interpreting Scripture.

They make jots and tittles mean things. They take a certain sentence, which is obviously means just what it means, and they add a certain strange interpretation to that that makes it mean something else. And then that became part of the tradition and part of the law.

And these brethren were coming to the Christians and saying to them, now it's nice, I'm a Christian too, I have a Jewish extraction, but you must understand that you can't just come roaring in out of paganism and become a Christian, believe in Jesus Christ and be saved just like that. You have to come by way of the law of the lip, the Jewish tradition, because salvation is of the Jews. Jesus himself said it was.

And you've got to listen to us. So they began to lay these Talmudic rabbinical laws upon the Jews. About the sixth century, it was collected and written down, so we now have it as the Talmud.

One man said about it that it consists of countless ceremonies and the practice of elaborate ritual, which never was written in the book of the Bible at all. And to these Talmudists, righteousness or a holy life lay in living according to these rabbinical laws or rules. And when our Lord Jesus Christ came to Jewry, he found that the law of Moses, the Old Testament law, which was inspired of God, had been pushed into the background and that this oral law or tradition had taken over and the Jews were under what Peter called a yoke of bondage, which neither we nor our fathers could bear.

Now let me give you an example of it from the 15th chapter of the book of Matthew. Here's a perfect example of how Christ met this head-on. He didn't fool with it.

He didn't try to find the common ground and do all that they tell us now he should do. He simply butted into it head-on. Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, and they, of course, were the rabbinites, the Talmudists, those who were traditionalists.

Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? There it is, the tradition of the elders, the law of the lip, the Talmud. Why do they transgress the tradition of the elders, for they wash not their hands when they eat bread? And he answered them by asking them a question. Why do ye transgress the commandments of God by your traditions? They said, Why do you transgress the traditions? And he said, Why do you transgress the

law of God by your traditions? There we have it.

As long as there are human beings alive in the world, we'll be at least under the shadow of traditions. There's a great deal of tradition in this church, a great deal of tradition. We do things because our fathers did and were too lazy to change it, and after a while it begins to take on a certain form.

And because we do it a certain way, there are churches where if you didn't have an altar call with people kneeling at the front of the church, they'd think you'd bachelored. And yet you go back as far as the Wesley's and you'll find no altars, no place for people to kneel. Finney, when he came along, had to argue and fight to have an anxious seat.

That was the front row for people to come and sit if they wanted to be saved. That's how tradition takes over. Now there are people that come to this church and because I don't give an altar call every Sunday night and say, Now come down here and kneel to walk out and say they're backslidden there.

You don't baptize nine, three or four weeks ago and eight or nine tonight and not have God doing something in people's lives, and yet because we don't follow the tradition, they don't like it. Well, he said, Why do you transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? Then he said in verse 9, In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. Now they carried that same tradition.

You'd think a crucified Christ, a risen Christ, and the coming of the Holy Ghost would have swept that away as a wind sweeps away the mist, but it didn't. Those talmudic Christians followed along, believing in the traditions of the elders and the law of the lip. Now in Paul's mind and in the mind of Jesus our Lord, there's a line sharply drawn between those who believe that righteousness is a formal thing and those who believe that righteousness springs out of the heart.

The Talmudists, the traditionalists, believed it to be a formal thing. Now I'm not condemning. I'm not scolding.

I'm not adding anything. I am explaining what sound scholarship will confirm that the Pharisees and scribes of Jesus' day, the Judaizing brethren of Paul's day, which Paul writes here, call them circumcision, they believed, as all religions believe, that there has to be righteousness, that you've got to be righteous to please God. But now the question is, what is righteousness and what does righteousness consist in? Well, they believed that righteousness was dietary, seasonal, ceremonial, and maybe ascetical.

And there were four words here, what, when, how, and how much. Dietary, that is, what men eat or do not eat. And Paul said, they come and try to bother you with their eating and not eating.

And he said, rather, I wouldn't say angrily, but sharply in verse 15, under the pure, all things are pure. But under them that are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but their minds and consciences are defiled. So Paul said, now, I want you to appoint elders and appoint bishops in Crete in order that they might, by bringing the sound word of God to bear, they might clear the air and deliver these new Christians in Crete from dietary traditions.

You're good if you eat this, you're not good if you eat that. I won't say it because I want to be kind, but can you think as we go along about certain great church or two that are also under bondage to traditions, diets, and times, and seasons? Well, here we have the seasons, that was when. What men do or do not eat, that's a dietary.

When they're supposed to eat or not to eat, that's seasonal. How they dress and kneel and hold their hands, and when they wash their hands or don't wash their hands, that's ceremonial. And how much they suffer and give, and how often they pray, and how long, and how often they fast, and deprive themselves, and punish themselves, that's ascetical.

So these four things, they all sprang out of self-righteousness and a misunderstanding of the grace of God. Dietary, what men eat and what they don't eat. Seasonal, when they eat it and when they don't eat.

Ceremonial, how they dress, how they kneel, how they stand, how they rise, how they get up. Ascetical, how much they punish themselves. All of this was a part of the law of the lip, the tradition of the elders.

And Jesus broke it right and left, and they said, why do ye break our traditions? He said, why do you break God's law with your traditions? Now some examples, a way of illustration from the Pharisees. You remember that passage where the disciples walked through the field on the Sabbath day, and as they walked, they reached out, the King James Version says, it was corn, but it was wheat. They reached out, and the heavy heads of wheat were hanging there, I can just see them from my boyhood days, heavy and yellow, ready to cut.

And they just reached out, as I've done a thousand times as a boy, took a couple of heads, rolled them, blew the chaff off, and ate the wheat. That's the way to get it, you know, with none of the vitamins taken out. And those disciples did that.

And the Pharisees saw them do it. Should have been somewhere praying or helping the sick, but they were out spying on Jesus and his disciples to see if they could catch them on the breaking of the traditions. They said, now wait a minute here.

We have a law that says you shan't thresh wheat on Sabbath day, and you're threshing wheat. And Jesus turned on them and said, the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. And he defended his poor hungry disciples who had rubbed out some wheat and eaten it.

But there you had it. They weren't interested in hungry disciples. They were interested in not breaking that law of the lip that says you can't rub.

They actually went so far as to say, some of them did, I don't know whether it was universal or not, but some did, go so far as to say that you're not to walk on the grass on the Sabbath day because you're likely to trample on a head of grass and the seed will be crushed out of the head and that'll be threshing. Therefore, stay off the grass and walk on the concrete on the Sabbath day lest you thresh. And if you thresh, you're a sinner.

You're ceremonially unclean, you've broken the tradition of the elders. Now that to you and me sounds silly, but to somebody brought up in that it isn't as silly as it sounds. And they followed over to Crete, mind you, and taught this kind of crazy business.

Then Jesus here, you'll remember, he and his disciples didn't eat, didn't wash. I've seen men working in factories. They only had a half an hour to eat and they wanted to read a little or chat a little and they'd sit down, their hands were all covered with grease.

I've seen fellows eat their lunch with greasy hands, perfectly harmless. But to a Jew it was terrible. They said, why? According not to the law of Moses, mind you, but according to the law of tradition, you're

supposed to wash your hands before they eat.

And Jesus said, I don't recognize your traditions. I recognize the law of my Father and you're breaking the law of God all the time with your traditions. That's my answer to our friends over on the other side, Catholics.

I'm not against them. I love them. I'd cut their lawn.

I'd lend them my hose. I'd do anything for them. But I'm not going to allow them to put a yoke on my neck.

Now, remember another time Jesus sat down with some sinners. Now, who were the sinners? Were the sinners men who committed adultery, stole, lied, cheated, widows out of their property, had bad tempers? No, those weren't considered sinners by the Pharisees. The sinners were those who didn't wash their hands before they ate, who walked on the grass on Sunday, who rubbed wheat in their hands and threshed and thus broke the law of the fathers, who didn't either come in and drew, as they said they should have, and who thus broke the law of the tradition, the law of the lip, the oral law.

They were sinners. But the Pharisee who hated with a black hate that finally crucified Jesus, he was ceremonially clean, and that's a holy man. Kept the law of the fathers.

And the evil man who would rather a poor sick man would lie and suffer and die a tortured death than to be healed on the Sabbath day, he was not a sinner. He was a good man. He was a holy man because he kept the law of the fathers.

And the men who finally crucified Jesus, as Billy Sunday's old song used to say, passed off for moral men too. Righteousness to them were those who were clean according to the ceremony. They did the thing they were supposed to do.

They got up when they were supposed to get up, sat when they were supposed to sat, put their hands up like this when they were told to, peered when they were told to, and did everything just as they were told to. Said that's the tradition of the fathers. Well, we have it on our hands today.

It isn't affecting us here much. But wherever I see it, I like to leave the main path and go out and hew it down. I used to have a weed when I was a boy.

My father called wild parsnip, but it was really a wild carrot. And he hated it so bad that if he was driving along the road, along the lane, and he saw one over in the field, he'd stop the wagon, jump off, jump over the fence, go out, take an ax, and cut it out at the roots, throw it up, and then drive on. And I feel that way about all these traditional laws they want to put on God's people.

And place righteousness where it doesn't belong. I say there's a sharp line of demarcation drawn between those who believe that righteousness lies in formal law-keeping and those who believe that righteousness springs out of faith, that it's a moral thing. That a liar can't be wholly a man no matter how often he goes to church or makes his confession or gets confirmed or how much he avoids meat on Friday or how he keeps the traditions of the elders.

He's not a good man if he's a liar. He's not a good man if he has hate in his heart. He's not a good man if he has a churlish temper.

He's not a good man. Let him be, let him be baptized any way he wants to be baptized. Sprinkle, pour, three times, once, immerse, any way.

And he's not a good man if he's an evil man. For faith, righteousness, comes out of faith and out of love. And it has its source in the heart.

That was the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's worshiping in spirit and in truth. And such have only one question.

Those who worship in spirit and in truth have only one question. It isn't, what shall I eat? When shall I do this? How shall I dress? How much shall I deprive myself of? Never ask those questions. That belongs to the traditions.

He has only one question. And that is, why? Why, that's motive, you see. Why? Why? Why do I do this? Why? What's your motive for it? If you do it out of love, it's right.

If you do it out of hate, it's wrong. If you do it out of faith, it's right. If you do it out of self-righteousness, it's wrong.

What's the motive for this? And there's the liberty of the Christian, my brethren. You can walk upright on the earth and look at God's sunshine and sing the spacious firmament on high and worship God and delight in his world and everything that his hands has made. And you'll be all right before God as long as you keep your motive right.

Your motive is to do the will of God, to follow Jesus Christ the best you know how and to love everybody and to love God. Your motive is all right. The question is not how much shall I eat, but why? What shall I eat, but why? Not shall I go to church so many times a week, but why do I go to church? Motive is everything.

Now, by placing sin and holiness in formal ceremonies, these people destroyed the true meaning of both sin and righteousness. Because just as soon as I believe that I can cheat in a real estate deal, lie, abuse my wife, and do other things that are not right, hate my enemy, and yet I'm right with God provided I tithe fast at stated times, appear at church at certain times, wash my hands before I eat, and follow the ceremonial laws of the tradition of my church, I'm all right. If I don't do that, I'm a sinner.

Who were the sinners in Jesus' day? They were the men on the street, the people who neglected the ceremonies of the Talmud. Jesus said he came to save sinners. They were the ones that came to him.

The common people heard him gladly and flocked to him. But the people who stood by the traditions, the law of the lip, that overshadowed the law of God, couldn't reach them. Now, in a climate such as the Pharisees had and as these traditionalists tried to take to Crete, Christianity couldn't grow.

The conscience couldn't live. It had to die because the conscience tells you not what you're doing, but why you're doing it. Some little lady doesn't show up at church.

Now, I believe we ought to go to church every Sunday. I think it's the first day of the week, and I think nothing short of sickness should keep us away from the church of God. I believe that.

But many a person has been condemned for not being at church who is obeying the higher call of love, who stayed by the bedside of an ailing, aged father or mother, or who did some other kindly deed for

Christ's sake. Now, I think the wise thing to do is to try to do that at other times and get to church anyhow. I think the wise thing to do is to appear at church because the Scripture said, forsake not the assembling of yourself together.

I think God has given us the first day of the week as a time to appear, not as we're compelled to do it, but we do it voluntarily. But at the same time, there are occasions where a higher law of love keeps me from being at my wanted place. And God recognizes that higher law of love.

I've told it, I suppose, a hundred times. But old Meister Eckert, somebody asked him, said, how about praying and how do you manage to harmonize prayer and service for the poor? Well, he said, here's the way I harmonize it. He said, if I'm in prayer and I'm even caught away like Paul to the third heavens and I happen to remember that I'd forgotten to take a widow some food, I break off my prayer, go take her the food.

He said, God will see you don't lose a thing. He said, when you come back, you can start writing where you left off and the Lord will see you don't lose a thing. I believe in that.

The law of love, my brother, that dictates that I do out of love deeds that may not be written, may not be prescribed, may not be found at all in the law of the church, but they're the obvious, wise, right, good thing to do and I do them for Christ's sake. That's the righteous man. Now, Paul said, I want to read that and I'm about finished.

He said that these Jewish fables and commandments of men that turn from the truth said, under the pure all things are pure. Pure person, everything's pure. They came and said, now you can't eat this kind of meat.

Paul said, don't you believe it. To the pure everything's pure. But unto them that are defiled and unbelieving in their hearts, you see, nothing's pure.

To the Pharisee, he fasted, but his fasting was impure. He prayed, but his prayers came back and slapped his own face. He deprived himself, but his deprivation was a sin because his motives were rotten.

They profess they know God, but in words they deny him, being abominable and disobedient and unto every good work reprobate. That's terrible, that's terrible. And it's spoken about the poor Jews, they of the circumcision.

Do you often pray for Israel? Do you often pray for the Jews? You should. You should often pray for the Jews. Remember, they gave us our Bible.

They preserved that Bible and died defending it down the years. Remember it. Remember they carefully preserved it and went over it and put every jot and every tittle in place.

The old scribes, we use the word scribe almost as an epithet of a program. But those scribes, we owe them a lot, just as we are translators a lot. Careful scholars who spend days over sentences, we owe them a lot.

We thank God for Moses and Isaiah and Daniel and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and sweet David with his harp. We're grateful for the Jews. We're grateful for those twelve apostles, all Jews who went out to the four corners of the earth to preach the truth.

We're grateful for Paul, that great Jew. We're glad. We ought to pray for them and pray for them often and much and pity them and don't feel superior to them because after all you're a Gentile grafted into the wild, to the olive tree.

But Paul would have none of this stuff in Crete, none of this, none of this tradition out of which he'd escaped by the skin of his teeth. It took a knock down and drag out conversion on Damascus Road to save him from it. Now that God had taken him out of it, I've been getting letters recently.

Some time ago we published an article how to win one of our missionaries, how to win Roman Catholics to Christ. I suppose I'd get skinned for that. My poor hides are all spotted with what I get but I've got nothing but the most gracious, the most enthusiastic letters from people saying, some of them saying to this effect, Oh, you don't know how glad we were to read this, that your people are interested in winning Catholics to Christ.

And they have written articles for me about how to win them, all the kind things they said and gracious things they said, how never to offend them but how always to take the Word of God in your own testimony and go to them and try to win them. But almost all of them said the same thing. How we thank God we escaped.

It was almost like a concentration camp. And when they got out into the liberty of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, they only could use one word and that was the word escape. They said we escaped.

And how we thank God we escaped. So I'm glad I've escaped, glad I've escaped from the laws of the elders. But we must pray for those who haven't and we must by love and faith and grace and careful walk not to offend people, we must live such lives as shall be worthy of the liberty we claim to hold and not use liberty as a license for the flesh but in meekness of humility follow our Lord Jesus Christ.

If we do that, God will bless us and we may be used of him to deliver some who are now in bondage.

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