

The Root of Righteousness

Highlights from A.W. Tozer

CULTIVATION OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Probably the most widespread and persistent problem to be found among Christians is the problem of retarded spiritual progress.

The causes are many. One there is, which is so universal that it may easily be the main cause: ***failure to give time to the cultivation of the knowledge of God.***

The temptation to make our relation to God judicial instead of personal is very strong.

Paul devoted his whole life to the art of knowing Christ (Phil 3:8,10,14).

Progress in the Christian life is exactly equal to the growing knowledge we gain of the triune God in personal experience. And such experience requires a whole life devoted to it and plenty of time spent at the holy task of cultivating God.

We may as well accept it: there is no short cut to sanctity. Even the crises that come in the spiritual life are usually the result of long periods of thought and prayerful meditation. As the wonder grows more and more dazzling there is likely to occur a crisis of revolutionizing proportions. But that crisis is related to what has gone before. It is ***a sudden sweet explosion, an uprushing of the water that has been increasing its pressure within until we can no longer contain it.*** Back of it all is the slow build up and preparation that comes from waiting upon God."

GOD IS EASY TO LIVE WITH

The fellowship of God is delightful beyond all telling. He communes with His redeemed ones in an easy, uninhibited fellowship ***that is restful and healing to the soul***. He is not sensitive nor selfish nor temperamental. What He is today we shall find Him tomorrow and the next day and the next year. He is not hard to please, though He may be hard to satisfy. ***He expects of us only what He Himself first supplied.*** ...

How good it would be if we could learn that God is easy to live with. ***He remembers our frame and knows that we are dust***. He may sometimes chasten us, it is true, but even this He does with a smile, the proud, tender smile of a Father who is bursting with pleasure over an imperfect but promising son who is coming every day to look more and more like the One whose child he is.

We please Him most, not by frantically trying to make ourselves good, ***but by throwing ourselves into His arms with all our imperfections, and believing that he understands everything and loves us still***.

WE MUST HEAR WORTHILY

It is carelessly assumed by most persons that when a preacher pronounces a message of truth and his words fall upon the ears of his listeners there has been a bona fide act of hearing on their part. They are assumed to have been instructed because they have listened to the word of God.

If we would be truly instructed we must be worthy to hear; or more accurately, we must hear in a worthy manner. ...

When considering a pastor the average church asks in effect, "Is this man worthy to speak to us?" I suppose such a question is valid, but there is another one more in keeping with the circumstances; it is, "Are we worthy to hear this man?". An attitude of humility on the part of the hearers would secure for them ***a great deal more light from whatever sized candle the Lord might be pleased to send them.***

God will speak to hearts of those who prepare themselves to hear; and conversely, those who do not so prepare themselves will hear nothing even though the Word of God is falling on their outer ears every Sunday.

Good hearers are as important as good preachers. We need more of both.

THAT UTILITARIAN CHRIST

We must be extremely careful that the Christ we profess to follow is indeed ***the very Christ of God.*** There is always danger that we may be following a Christ who is not the true Christ but one conjured up by our imagination and made in our own image.

Tozer warns against "the grotesque situation of the Lord of glory coming to the aid of an unreconstructed Adam - on Adam's terms."

ON RECEIVING ADMONITION

Tozer compares self-delusion to a web that over time becomes so strong that it cannot be broken. Eventually a person becomes used to the web that he was no longer aware of its existence.

"Regardless of the moral process by which he arrived at his hardened state, the bell had already tolled for him. In every particular he was a lost man. His wizened old body still held together to provide ***a kind of movable tomb to house a soul***

already dead. Hope had long ago departed. God had left him to his fatal conceit. And soon he would die physically too, and he would die as a fool dieth."

THE GREAT GOD ENTERTAINMENT

[The average man] has become **a parasite in the world**, drawing life from his environment, **unable to live a day apart from the stimulation** which society affords him. ...

For centuries the Church stood solidly against every form of worldly entertainment, recognizing it for what it was--a device for wasting time, a refuge from the disturbing voice of conscience, a scheme to divert attention from moral accountability. For this she got herself abused roundly by the sons of this world. But of late she has become tired of the abuse and has given over the struggle. She appears to have decided that if she cannot conquer the great god Entertainment she may as well join forces with him and make what use she can of his powers.

BIBLE TAUGHT OR SPIRIT TAUGHT?

The great need of the hour among persons spiritually hungry is twofold: First, to know the Scriptures, **apart from which no saving truth will be vouchsafed** by our Lord; the second, to be enlightened by the Spirit, **apart from whom the Scriptures will not be understood.**

THE TERROR OF THE LORD

The current trick of frightening people into accepting Christ by threatening them with atom bombs and guided missiles is not scriptural, neither is it effective. By shooting off firecrackers in the face of a flock of goats you could conceivably succeed

in herding them into a sheep-fold; but ***all the natural fear in the world cannot make a sheep out of a goat. ...***

Whence then does the true fear of God arise? ***From the knowledge of our own sinfulness and a sense of the presence of God.*** Isaiah had an acute experience both of his personal uncleanness and of the awesome presence of Jehovah: the two were more than he could stand. On his face he cried out a confession of his own sinfulness, made all the more intolerable because his eyes had seen the King, even the Lord of Hosts.

NO REGENERATION WITHOUT REFORMATION

The promise of pardon and cleansing is always associated in the Scriptures with the command to repent. 'The widely-used text in Isaiah, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as Snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool," is ***organically united to the verses that precede it:*** "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well

TRUE FAITH BRINGS COMMITTAL

What we need very badly these days is a company of Christians who are ***prepared to trust God as completely now as they know they must do at the last day.*** For each of us the time is surely coming when we shall have nothing but God, Health and wealth and friends and hiding places will all be swept away and we shall have only God. To the man of pseudo faith that is a terrifying thought, but to real faith it is one of the most comforting thoughts the heart can entertain.

It would be a tragedy indeed to come to the place where we have no other but God and find that we had not really been trusting God during the days of our earthly

sojourn. It would be better to invite God now to remove every false trust, to disengage our hearts from all secret hiding places and to bring us out into the open where we can discover for ourselves whether or not we actually trust Him.

OUR ENEMY CONTENTMENT

One of the big milk companies makes capital of the fact that their cows are all satisfied with their lot in life. Their clever ads have made the term "contented cows" familiar to everyone. But ***what is a virtue in a cow may be a vice in a man***. And contentment, when it touches spiritual things, is surely a vice.

For every Christian will become at last what his desires have made him. ***We are all the sum total of our hungers***. The great saints have all had thirsting hearts. Their cry has been, "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" (Psalm 42:2). Their longing after God all but consumed them; it propelled them onward and upward.

To such we offer this word of exhortation: Pray on, fight on, sing on. ***Do not underrate anything God may have done for you heretofore. Thank God for everything up to this point, but do not stop here***. Press on into the deep things of God. Insist upon tasting the profounder mysteries of redemption. Keep your feet on the ground, but let your heart soar as high as it will. ***Refuse to be average or to surrender to the chill of your spiritual environment***. If you thus "*follow after,*" heaven will surely be opened to you and you will, with Ezekiel, see visions of God.

CHRIST IS THE PATTERN

The Christian faith takes for granted that men should be and can be changed, and the change it sets before them is so radical as to amount to a moral transformation.

The message of Christ lays hold upon a man with the intention to alter him, to mold him again after another image and make of him something altogether different from what he had been before.

The Gospel not only furnishes transforming power to remold the human heart; it provides also a model after which the new life is to be fashioned, and that model is Christ Himself. Christ is God acting like God in the lowly raiments of human flesh. Yet He is also man; so He becomes the perfect model after which redeemed human nature is to be fashioned. The beginnings of that transformation which is to change the believing man's nature from the image of sin to the image of God are found in conversion when the man is made a partaker of the divine nature. By regeneration and sanctification, by faith and prayer, by suffering and discipline, by the Word and the Spirit, the work goes on till the dream of God has been realized in the Christian heart. ***Everything that God does in His ransomed children has as its long-range purpose the final restoration of the divine image in human nature. Everything looks forward to the consummation.***

THE CROSS IS A RADICAL THING

So the cross not only brings Christ's life to an end, it ends also the first life, the old life, of every one of His true followers. ***It destroys the old pattern, the Adam pattern, in the believer's life, and brings it to an end.*** Then the God who raised Christ from the dead raises the believer and a new life begins.

THE HUNGER OF THE WILDERNESS

"Man ***was made to dwell in a garden,***" says Dr. Harold C. Mason, "but through sin he has been ***forced to dwell in a field,*** a field which he has wrested from his enemies by sweat and tears, and which he preserves only at the price of constant

watchfulness and endless toil. Let him but relax his efforts for a few years and the wilderness will claim his field again."

OUR FRUIT WILL BE WHAT WE ARE

No man has any right to speak to men about God who has not first spoken to God about men. And the prophet of God should spend more time in the secret place praying than he spends in the public place preaching.

THE PRESENCE MORE IMPORTANT

... evangelistic and revival services in New Testament times were never divorced from worship. The Book of Acts is a record of evangelism and missionary activity, but ***the Presence is always there***, and never for a moment do those early Christians forget it. Never do the disciples use gimmicks to attract crowds. ***They count on the power of the Spirit to see them through all the way***. They gear their activities to Christ and are content to win or lose along with Him. The notion that they should set up a "programmed" affair and use Jesus as a kind of sponsor never so much as entered their heads. ***To them Christ was everything***. To them He was the object around which all revolved; He was, as He still is, Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending.

THE WORLD'S MOST TRAGIC WASTE

The tendency in popular thinking is to extract the soul from the total man and focus all attention upon it as the only thing about which God is concerned and by inference the only thing about which we should concern ourselves. This has always appeared to me to be an extremely restricted view of things. Paul said 'Christ loved *me* and gave himself for *me*.' ***The death of Christ was for the whole person, not for the soul only and His invitation is to the entire man, the entire woman.***

THE SANCTIFICATION OF OUR DESIRES

At the root of spiritual growth is a set of right and sanctified desires.

Unsanctified desires will stop the growth of any Christian life. Wrong desire perverts the moral judgment so that we are unable to appraise the desired object at its real value.

As Christians our only safety lies in complete honesty. We must surrender our hearts to God so that we have no unholy desires, then let the Scripture pronounce their judgment on a contemplated course. If the Scriptures condemn an object, we must accept that judgment and conform to it, no matter how we may for the moment feel about it.

To want a thing, or feel that we want it and then to turn from it because we see that it is contrary to the will of God is to win a great battle on a field larger than Gettysburg or Bunker Hill. To bring our desires to the cross and allow them to be nailed there with Christ is a good and beautiful thing. ***To be tempted and yet to glorify God in the midst of it is to honour Him where it counts. This is more pleasing to God than any amount of sheltered and untempted piety could ever be. To fight and to win in the name of Christ is always better than to have known no conflict.***

THANKFULNESS AS A MORAL THERAPEUTIC

Thanksgiving has great curative power. The heart that is constantly overflowing with gratitude will be safe from those attacks of resentfulness and gloom that bother so many religious persons. ... In trying to count our many blessings the difficulty is not to find things to count, but to find time to enumerate them all.

ABOUT HINDRANCES

The essence of spiritual worship is to love supremely, to trust confidently, to pray without ceasing and to seek to be Christ like and holy and to do all the good we can for Christ's sake.

THE USES OF SUFFERING

The Bible has a great deal to say about suffering and most of it is encouraging. The prevailing religious mood is not favorable to the doctrine, but anything that gets as much space as the doctrine of suffering gets in the Scriptures should certainly receive ***careful and reverent attention from the sons of the new creation.***

PRAISE GOD FOR THE FURNACE

It was the enraptured Rutherford who could shout in the midst of serious and painful trials, "***Praise God for the hammer, the file and the furnace.***"¹

The hammer is a useful tool, but the nail, if it had feeling and intelligence, could present another side of the story. For the nail knows the hammer only as an opponent, a brutal, merciless enemy who lives to pound it into submission, to beat it down out of sight and clinch it into place. That is the nail's view of the hammer, and it is accurate except for one thing: ***The nail forgets that both it and the hammer are servants of the same workman.*** Let the nail but remember that the hammer is held by the workman and all resentment toward it will disappear. ***The carpenter decides whose head shall be beaten next and what hammer shall be used in the beating. That is his sovereign right.*** When the nail has surrendered to the will of the workman and has gotten a little glimpse of his benign plans for its future ***it will yield to the hammer without complaint.***

¹ Letter To Robert Gordon of Knockbrenn 1st January 1637 'Benefit of Affliction'

The file is more painful still, for its business is to bite into the soft metal, scraping and eating away the edges till it has shaped the metal to its will. Yet the file has, in truth, no real will in the matter, but serves another master as the metal also does. It is the master and not the file that decides how much shall be eaten away, what shape the metal shall take, and how long the painful filing shall continue. Let the metal accept the will of the master and it will not try to dictate when or how it shall be filed.

As for the furnace, it is the worst of all. Ruthless and savage, it leaps at every combustible thing that enters it and never relaxes its fury till it has reduced it all to shapeless ashes. All that refuses to burn is melted to a mass of helpless matter, without will or purpose of its own. When everything is melted that will melt and all is burned that will burn, then and not till then the furnace calms down and rests from its destructive fury.

With all this known to him, ***how could Rutherford find it in his heart to praise God for the hammer, the file and the furnace? The answer is simply that he loved the Master of the hammer, he adored the Workman who wielded the file, he worshiped the Lord who heated the furnace*** for the everlasting blessing of His children. He had felt the hammer till its rough beatings no longer hurt; he had endured the file till he had come actually to enjoy its bitings; he had walked with God in the furnace so long that it had become as his natural habitat. That does not overstate the facts. His letters reveal as much.

Such doctrine as this does not find much sympathy among Christians in these soft and carnal days. ...

It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until He has hurt him deeply.

SOMETHING BEYOND SONG

... the Bible and the testimony of a thousand saints show that there is experience beyond song. There are delights which the heart may enjoy in the awesome presence of God which cannot find expression in language; they belong to **the unutterable element in Christian experience**. ...The Bible and Christian biography make a great deal of silence, but we of today make of it exactly nothing. ...

Where the Holy Spirit is permitted to exercise His full sway in a redeemed heart the progression is likely to be as follows: First, voluble praise, in prose speech or prayer or witness; then, when the crescendo rises beyond the ability of studied speech to express, comes song; when song breaks down under the weight of glory, then comes silence where the soul, held in deep fascination, feels itself blessed with an unutterable beatitude.

... more spiritual progress can be made in one short moment of **speechless silence in the awesome presence of God** than in years of mere study. ... in **a breathless encounter with Omniscience** ... when **prostrate and wordless** the soul receives divine knowledge like a flash of light on a sensitized plate. The exposure may be brief, but the results are permanent.

WE CAN AFFORD TO WAIT

A real Christian is an odd number anyway.

He feels supreme love for One whom he has never seen,
talks familiarly every day to Someone he cannot see,
expects to go to heaven on the virtue of Another,
empties himself in order to be full,
admits he is wrong so he can be declared right,
goes down in order to get up,
is strongest when he is weakest,
richest when he is poorest,
and happiest when he feels worst.

He dies so he can live,
forsakes in order to have,
gives away so he can keep,
sees the invisible,
hears the inaudible,
and knows that which passeth knowledge.

We are waiting for a trumpet note that will call us away from the hurly-burly and set in motion a series of events that will result at last in a new heaven and a new earth.