



Articles and Sermons :: Errors in Thinking

Errors in Thinking - posted by lwpray (), on: 2004/10/30 13:28

Errors in Thinking
A.W. Tozer

GOD IN HIS CONDESCENDING LOVE and kindness often sends a Moses, or maybe a Joshua or an Isaiah, or in latter times a Luther or Wesley to show us that the work of the Lord is not progressing. Times are bad in the kingdom and getting worse. The tendency is to settle into a rut, and we must get out of it. The time has come to arise and go on from here because God's will is as broad as the land He gave to the Israelites—in the mountains, in the western foothills, in the Negev and along the coast, to the land of the Canaanites and to Lebanon, as far as the great river, the Euphrates (Deuteronomy 1:7).

When God sends some preacher to say this to a congregation and the congregation is even half ready to listen to him, they say to themselves, "I think the pastor is right about this. We are in a rut, aren't we? No use fighting it. I think we ought to do something about this." Then 99.99 percent of the time the remedy prescribed will be, "Let's come together and eat something. I know we are in a rut. We don't see each other often enough. We ought to get to know each other better, so let's come together and eat something." I have no objection to fellowship, but it is not the answer to what is wrong with us.

Instead of eating, someone may suggest, "Let's make plans to go somewhere." This is another way we Protestants have of curing all the sores of Job, all the leprosy and everything that is wrong with us. We either get together to eat our way out or else we travel and get out of it.

Another person might say, "Let's come together and do something religious. The church is in pretty bad shape. Moral e is low, and things are not the way they should be. We are running pretty much in a circle. Let's get together and do something." This is activism.

Someone else says, "Let's form a committee to consider it." The Baptist preacher Dr. Vance Havner says, "A committee is a company of the incompetent chosen by the unwilling to do the unnecessary." Perhaps he stated that a little too radically. There are some things committees can do, and then there are some things committees cannot do.

I am quite sure that when the man of God thundered, "You have stayed long enough in this place. You are going around in circles. Get you out and take what is given to you by the hand of your God," nobody got up and said, "Mr. Chairman, let's eat something." Eating probably would not have helped. I am quite certain that they did not get up and say, "Let's take a trip," or "Let's start another club." Starting a club is another reaction we have when we find ourselves in a rut and realize we are no taller than we were five years ago; we are no farther along than we were five years ago; we don't know any more than we did five years ago; we are no holier than we were five years ago. We simply met ourselves coming around.

If a song could be worn out, we have worn out the same old song: "Revive us again, fill each heart with Thy love." We have sung that one and nobody means it—nobody will pay the price. But we go around and around, and all we see is the other fellow's heels just ahead of us. All the fellow behind us sees is our heels. We go around and around the circle, and somebody says, "Let's start a club now."

Misunderstood the problem

Fellowship, committees and clubs are all right under the right circumstances, but this kind of an answer to that kind of a problem presupposes that those who give the answer have misunderstood the problem. There are three things they misunderstand.

First, they misunderstand the nature of Christian faith. Christian faith is inward, not outward. It is of the spirit and not of the flesh. The kingdom of God is within you, Christ dwells in your heart, and "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27) is the burning core of the Christian faith. So Christianity, the true Christian faith, is inward in nature—we are to be inwardly Christians. It is inside, somewhere in the spirit, soul and heart—the inner person—that we get into the rut. Because the problem is inward, it is ridiculous to say, "All right. The inner person, the spirit of me, the inner shrine of me, is in a rut. It isn't where it ought to be, so let's eat something."

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Now suppose we are ready to admit that we are in a rut. You say, "Well, what is the church doing?" I don't know, because it is the individual that matters. You see, the church is composed of this fellow that lives out here a little way and those two people who live out there in Scarboro and the five who live in Rexdale and the seven who live up in Willowdale and the fourteen who live out east. That is the church. What the church does is what the individuals do. How well or how sick the church is depends on how well or how sick the individuals are. In other words, it depends upon how you are. We must come to the Lord and say, "Oh Lord, what do I still lack? I have some things, Lord, but what do I lack? Or what is it that I ought to get rid of? How do I compare with what I should be? How do I know what I should be?"

In Matthew 5:3-10 we read:

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst
for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted
because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

That is what we ought to be. This passage tells us what a true Christian should be like. Go on to the epistles and see what the man of God has to say there. In Ephesians 4:26-5:2 he says,

"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

This is what we ought to be. This is the way we ought to be living. When we say, "Lord, what do I still lack?" the Holy Spirit answers, "This is what you lack."

Remember, we are compared with what we could be, not just what we should be. God being who He is, and Jesus Christ being His risen and all-powerful Son, anything we ought to be we can be. Anything that God has declared that we should be we can be.

In the wonderful book of Romans, perhaps the greatest and most profound book in the Bible, chapter seven tells us of a man who is struggling and wanting to be something that he feels he cannot be. Finally he gives up and says, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (vs. 24). Immediately, Paul says, "Thanks be to God! because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death" (25; 8:2).

In Galatians 5:22-23 we read, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." That is what we ought to be and what we can be. Now compare that with what we are. If we compare what we ought to be and could be with what we are, and we don't see that we are in a rut and we are not concerned, then one of three things may be wrong.

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We may not be converted

First, we may not be converted at all. I am convinced that many evangelicals are not truly and soundly converted. Among the evangelicals it is entirely possible to come into membership, to ooze in by osmosis, to leak through the cells of the church and never know what it means to be born of the Spirit and washed in the blood. A great deal that passes for the deeper life is nothing more or less than basic Christianity. There is nothing deeper about it, and it is where we should have been from the start. We should have been happy, joyous, victorious Christians walking in the Holy Spirit and not fulfilling the lusts of the flesh. Instead we have been chasing each other around the perpetual mountain.

What we need is what the old Methodists called a sound conversion. There is a difference between conversion and a sound conversion. People who have never been soundly converted do not have the Spirit to enlighten them. When they read the Sermon on the Mount or the teaching passages of the epistles that tell them how to live or the doctrinal passages that tell how they can live, they are unaffected. The Spirit who wrote them is not witnessing in their hearts because they have not been born of the Spirit. That often happens.

People clean up, throw away their pipes, start to pay their bills and live right and then say, "I want to join the church." So we question them, "Do you believe that Christ is the Son of God?"

"Yes," they reply.

"Do you believe He rose from the dead?"

"Yes."

"Do you believe He is coming again?"

"Yes, I do."

Well, so does the devil and he trembles.

People get into the church who are not converted at all. We are so tenderhearted, sentimental and eager that we get them on any grounds at all, if they just say the right words for us. But maybe some of these people have never been converted in the first place.

Second, people may not be concerned about the rut because of sin they have committed. Perhaps they have been regenerated but have sinned against light too often, so the light has become darkness. That often happens.

I don't say these people are lost, but I do say that they are in a terrible state. Only the power and grace of God working within them can help. I think there are lots of people like that. They have been regenerated, but they have become busy with their real estate office or their store. Many have said, "Well, I'd like to come to your church, Reverend, but I have to keep my store open seven days a week." They cannot serve God because they do not have time to serve Him. They will have time to die, but they do not have time to serve God.

Third, some people are so self-righteous that they are impervious to any work of the Holy Spirit. They cannot be cured of their blindness because they think they see. The Pharisees never got under conviction. They crucified Christ, they hated the Son of God, but they never got under conviction. They had ordered their religious life so as to be impervious to the arrows of the Holy Spirit. The adulterous woman could fall at the feet of Jesus, the tax collector who knew he had been crooked could run to the feet of Jesus to ask for help, and the poor came from everywhere to say, "What must I do?" They could come, but the Pharisees never did. They never got under conviction, and in hell I suppose they are still fighting and saying they are right.

If people judge what they could be and ought to be with what they are and can still go home and have a good night's rest, shrugging it off, perhaps they have never been converted. Maybe they have sinned against light until they are temporarily under a terrible cloud of God's judgment. Or maybe they are so self-righteous that they cannot get under conviction.

There is hope

But if they are concerned, wounded by the Spirit's sword and are deeply dissatisfied with the religious rut, there is hope. Remember, complacency is a deadly foe. Complacency is as great a foe as any other carnal malady, any other fleshly manifestation. To be complacent is to have no desire to get anywhere.

There was a celebrated Englishman who sat with a friend once, watching and listening to a philharmonic orchestra. As they listened, the Englishman watched a man playing second violin. He was playing it well, but he was second violin. The Englishman said to his friend, "See that man there playing second violin? If I were playing second violin in that orchestra, do you know what I would do? I would never rest day or night until I was playing first violin. And then I would never give myself rest day or night until I was directing that orchestra. When I got to be director I would never rest until I had become a composer. And when I got to composing music for the orchestra I would never give myself rest until I was the best composer in England."

Re: Errors in Thinking - posted by lwpray (), on: 2004/11/1 0:21

Children of the world are wiser

The children of the world are sometimes wiser than the children of light. We have been offered not the directorship of a great orchestra, but glory and truth unsearchable. We have been offered the face of God and the glory of Christ. We have been offered holiness and righteousness and indwelling by the Spirit. We can have our prayers answered and have hell fear us because we have a hold on God who invites us to draw on His omnipotence. We are offered all this, and yet we sit and play second violin without ambition.

Israel was once in that condition, and an old prophet with shining eyes came to them and said,

Woe to you who are complacent in Zion,

and to you who feel secure on Mount Samaria,

You put off the evil day

and bring near a reign of terror.

You lie on beds inlaid with ivory

and lounge on your couches.

You dine on choice lambs

and fattened calves.

You strum away on your harps like David

and improvise on musical instruments.

You drink wine by the bowlful

and use the finest lotions,

but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph.

Therefore you will be among the first

to go into exile. (Amos 6:1-7)

Israel was in a rut, and they did not want anybody disturbing their calm. They liked music and food and beds of ivory, and they anointed themselves with ointment. They had everything that we call sumptuous living. But they were not grieved at the affliction of Israel. They didn't care.

Let us not rest upon beds of ivory. By the grace of God let us begin to grieve a bit for the affliction of Joseph and be anxious and bothered in the Holy Spirit for the state the church is in.

END

From Rut, Rot or Revival