

Articles and Sermons :: The Forgotten Tozer - Part 2

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The Forgotten Tozer

Literally millions of words are printed every day, but the only authoritative word ever published is that which comes from the Holy Scriptures.(1)

Without question, my greatest burden concerning contemporary Christianity is the decline of Biblical authority and Biblical sufficiency. I am thoroughly convinced that this is the watershed issue of our day. While it is true that there are many issues facing us today, such as pragmatism (Chapter 6) and no-lordship (Chapter 7), these issues and all others are merely symptoms of the real disease—the denial of Biblical authority and sufficiency. This chapter lays a foundation for those that follow.

If one will sit down and objectively compare contemporary Christianity with Scripture, it will not take him long to see the places of departure. The honest observer will quickly see that men have removed many of the necessities, such as strong expository preaching, and then added a lot of baggage. How many doctrinal statements, church constitutions, and denominational creeds say, "We believe the Holy Scriptures, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, to be the only verbally inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God, the final authority for faith and life," or words to that effect, but how many truly practice it? How many pastors are standing in pulpits and preaching "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27) and following it alone as their authority for ministry? How many Christians live a life that follows solely the principles and precepts of the Word of God?

Like any true man of God, A. W. Tozer was deeply concerned for the authority of the Word of God as the foundation of all our beliefs and activities. To Tozer, the Word of God was timeless and practical, meeting every need and answering every question. In his book *I Call It Heresy* he writes:

There isn't anything dated in the Book of God. When I go to my Bible, I find dates but no dating. I mean that I find the sense and the feeling that everything here belongs to me. . .

Many other volumes and many other books of history contain the passionate outpourings of the minds of men on local situations but we soon find ourselves bored with them. Unless we are actually doing research we do not care that much about something dated, something belonging only to another age.

But when the Holy Spirit wrote the epistles, through Peter and Paul and the rest, He wrote them and addressed them so universally applicable that every Christian who reads them today in any part of the world, in any language or dialect, forgets that they were written to someone else and says, "This was addressed to me. The Holy Spirit had me in mind. This is not antiquated and dated. This is the living Truth for me, now! It is just as though God had just heard of my trouble and is speaking to me to help me and encourage me in the time of my distress."

Brethren, this is why the Bible stays young always. This is why the Word of the Lord God is as fresh as every new sunrise, as sweet and graciously fresh as the dew on the grass the morning after the clear night, because it is God's Word to man!

This is the wonder of divine inspiration and the wonder of the Book of God.(2)

More pointedly, he speaks elsewhere of man's responsibility to the Word of God, regardless of all other factors:

You are responsible to the Light—and to the authority of the Word of God. You can't hide behind differences of opinion, and you can't hide behind church politics, you can't hide behind philosophies.(3)

Many things today are obscuring the Light. Many things are undermining the authority of God's Word. What did our beloved brother say about this authority?

"The Waning Authority of Christ in the Churches"

As mentioned in the Introduction, it was Tozer's *God Tells the Man Who Cares* that first made me aware of Tozer's strong contemporary comment. The chapter that struck me the hardest was "The Waning Authority of Christ in the Churches." (4) This chapter was originally an article that appeared in *The Alliance Witness*, a publication Tozer edited for many years. The article appeared on May 15, 1963, just two days after Tozer's death. "In a sense it was his valedictory, for it expressed the concern of his heart." Because of the power and timeliness of this article, I want to reproduce it here in its entirety and make a few applications. Tozer begins:

Here is the burden of my heart; and while I claim for myself no special inspiration I yet feel that this is also the burden of the Spirit.

If I know my own heart it is love alone that moves me to write this. What I write here is not the sour ferment of a mind agitated by contentions with my fellow Christians. There have been no such contentions. I have not been abused, mistreated or attacked by anyone. Nor have these observations grown out of any unpleasant experiences that I have had in my association with others. My relations with my own church as well as with Christians of other denominations have been friendly, courteous and pleasant. My grief is simply the result of a condition which I believe to be almost universally prevalent among the churches.

Many today who appeal to the Word of God alone and who call for discernment in the areas of doctrine and practice are often labeled "intolerant" and "contentious." This was not Tozer's motive. His motive was simply the grief he felt over the Church's departure from the authority of Christ. Tozer then appeals to the Scripture as the foundation for his observations:

I think also that I should acknowledge that I am myself very much involved in the situation I here deplore. As Ezra in his mighty prayer of intercession included himself among the wrongdoers, so do I. "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens". Any hard word spoken here against others must in simple honesty return upon my own head. I too have been guilty. This is written with the hope that we all may turn unto the Lord our God and sin no more against Him.

I find Tozer's choice of Scripture here startling. Ezra was shocked and overcome by the iniquity of the people. In abject grief he falls to his knees, tears his clothes in grief, lifts his hands toward heaven, and pours out his confession of sin (v. 5). Further, he humbly identifies himself with his people. To express the magnitude of their sin, he uses a metaphor to describe it. The "iniquities" of the people have not only "increased over our heads" (been devastating), they have even "grown up unto the heavens" (attracted the attention of God Himself).

Likewise, Tozer felt that what he was about to write about was terrible sin, and that even he himself was guilty. This is a sobering thought. The Church today should face the reality that its dethroning of Christ is sin and that this iniquity has "increased over our heads" and has even "grown up unto the heavens."

Let me state the cause of my burden. It is this: Jesus Christ has today almost no authority at all among the groups that call themselves by His name. By these I mean not the Roman Catholics nor the liberals, nor the various quasi-Christian cults. I do mean Protestant churches generally, and I include those that protest the loudest that they are in spiritual descent from our Lord and His apostles, namely, the evangelicals.

The point Tozer makes here is vitally important. There are, indeed, many heresies and apostasies among Roman Catholics, liberals, and cults, but the greatest danger to any organization is always from within. As someone has said, "Planted at the beginning of every organization are the seeds of its destruction." It is often pointed out, for example, that the mighty Roman Empire did not fall from without but from within because of its own decadence and corruption. While it is true that at the higher critics, the evolutionists, and the humanists have fired their share of "fiery darts" (Eph. 6:16), the far greater danger is the self-sufficiency and self-indulgence within our own ranks.

It is a basic doctrine of the New Testament that after His resurrection the Man Jesus was declared by God to be both Lord and Christ, and that He was invested by the Father with absolute Lordship over the church which is His Body. All authority is His in heaven and in earth. In His own proper time He will exert it to the full, but during this period in history He allows this authority to be challenged or ignored. And just now it is being challenged by the world and ignored by the church.

The present position of Christ in the gospel churches may be likened to that of a king in a limited, constitutional monarchy. The king (sometimes depersonalized by the term "the Crown") is in such a country no more than a traditional rallying point, a pleasant symbol of unity and loyalty much like a flag or a national anthem. He is lauded, feted and supported, but his real authority is small. Nominally he is head over all, but in every crisis someone else makes the decisions. On formal occasions he appears in his royal attire to deliver the tame, colorless speech put into his mouth by the real rulers of the country. The whole thing may be no more than good-natured make-believe, but it is rooted in antiquity, it is a lot of fun and no one wants to give it up.

What a graphic picture Tozer paints here! No longer is Christ the Head of the Church (Eph. 5:23), He is merely the figure head of the Church. We have put His picture up on the wall as the founder of our club but carry on the traditions of the club as we see fit. He no longer rules the organization; the organization rules Him. Tozer continues this thought:

Among the gospel churches Christ is now in fact little more than a beloved symbol. "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name" is the church's national anthem and the cross is her official flag, but in the week-by-week services of the church and the day-by-day conduct of her members someone else, not Christ, makes the decisions. Under proper circumstances Christ is allowed to say "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden" or "Let not your heart be troubled," but when the speech is finished someone else takes over. Those in actual authority decide the moral standards of the church, as well as all objectives and all methods employed to achieve them. Because of long and meticulous organization it is now possible for the youngest pastor just out of seminary to have more actual authority in a church than Jesus Christ has.

Not only does Christ have little or no authority; His influence also is becoming less and less. I would not say that He has none, only that it is small and diminishing. A fair parallel would be the influence of Abraham Lincoln over the American people. Honest Abe is still the idol of the country. The likeness of his kind, rugged face, so homely that it is beautiful, appears everywhere. It is easy to grow misty-eyed over him. Children are brought up on stories of his love, his honesty, and his humility.

But after we have gotten control over our tender emotions what have we left? No more than a good example, which, as it recedes into the past, becomes more and more unreal and exercises less and less real influence. Every scoundrel is ready to wrap Lincoln's long black coat around him. In the cold light of political facts in the United States the constant appeal to Lincoln by the politicians is a cynical joke.

This reminds us of the corruptness of the American political system. The character and basic morality of men like Lincoln and the Founding Fathers is no longer the norm in American politics. To illustrate, during the 1992 presidential campaign, Republicans raised several issues that called Bill Clinton's character into question. The cry among the Democrats then became: "Character doesn't matter. Let's just deal with the issues." How ridiculous it is to suggest that character has nothing to do with leadership! In much the same way, Tozer contends, the character of Christians does not match the character of Christ.

The Lordship of Jesus is not quite forgotten among Christians, but it has been relegated to the hymnal where all responsibility toward it may be comfortably discharged in a glow of pleasant religious emotion. Or if it is taught as a theory in the classroom it is rarely applied to practical living. The idea that the Man Christ Jesus has absolute and final authority over the whole church and over all of its members in every detail of their lives is simply not now accepted as true by the rank and file of evangelical Christians.

What we do is this: We accept the Christianity of our group as being identical with that of Christ and His apostles. The beliefs, the practices, the ethics, the activities of our group are equated with the Christianity of the New Testament. Whatever the group thinks or says or does is scriptural, no questions asked. It is assumed that all our Lord expects of us is that we busy ourselves with the activities of the group. In so doing we are keeping the commandments of Christ.

Another vital point. Very few Christians or Christian leaders today discern anything. Very few question the validity of the beliefs, practices, or ethics of their group. As we'll detail in Chapter 6, the typical attitude toward "Christian service" today is that "anything goes" unless it's downright wicked, and even that is often judged subjectively. Any method or ministry is okay unless God specifically says it isn't, while the Biblical approach is that nothing is okay unless God specifically says it is.

To avoid the hard necessity of either obeying or rejecting the plain instructions of our Lord in the New Testament we take refuge in a liberal interpretation of them. Casuistry is not the possession of Roman Catholic theologians alone. We evangelicals also know how to avoid the sharp point of obedience by means of fine and intricate explanations. These are t

ailor-made for the flesh. They excuse disobedience, comfort carnality and make the words of Christ of none effect . And the essence of it all is that Christ simply could not have meant what He said. His teachings are accepted even theoretically only after they have been weakened by interpretation.

Indeed, a typical way of getting around a truth is to simply misinterpret it or explain it away. To illustrate, one very popular California evangelical pastor and author was preaching on the qualifications of elders (bishops and pastors) in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 on his daily radio broadcast. He actually explained them quite well. The problem was, however, that he prefaced his explanation with the statement that these are only the "ideal" and that we should never expect to find them. This is clearly a grave error. These are qualifications, not ideals. If a man does not measure up to these standards , he is not qualified. Indeed, many of the problems in Christianity today stem from men in leadership who are not Biblically qualified to be there.

Now, all this was not theory to Tozer, not just general accusations. He looked at everything in the light of the authority of Christ and His Word, and in so doing cited specific examples of the Church's disregard of this authority:

Yet Christ is consulted by increasing numbers of persons with "problems" and sought after by those who long for peace of mind. He is widely recommended as a kind of spiritual psychiatrist with remarkable powers to straighten people out. He is able to deliver them from their guilt complexes and to help them to avoid serious psychic traumas by making a smooth and easy adjustment to society and to their own ids. Of course this strange Christ has no relation whatever to the Christ of the New Testament. The true Christ is also Lord, but this accommodating Christ is little more than the servant of the people.

But I suppose I should offer some concrete proof to support my charge that Christ has little or no authority today among the churches. Well, let me put a few questions and let the answers be the evidence.

What church board consults our Lord's words to decide matters under discussion? Let anyone reading this who has had experience on a church board try to recall the times or time when any board member read from the Scriptures to make a point, or when any chairman suggested that the brethren should see what instructions the Lord had for them on a particular question. Board meetings are habitually opened with a formal prayer or "a season of prayer;" after that the Head of the Church is respectfully silent while the real rulers take over. Let anyone who denies this bring forth evidence to refute it. I for one will be glad to hear it.

What Sunday school committee goes to the Word for directions? Do not the members invariably assume that they already know what they are supposed to do and that their only problem is to find effective means to get it done? Plans, rules, "operations" and new methodological techniques absorb all their time and attention. The prayer before the meeting is for divine help to carry out their plans. Apparently the idea that the Lord might have some instructions for them never so much as enters their heads.

Who remembers when a conference chairman brought his Bible to the table with him for the purpose of using it? Minutes, regulations, rules of order, yes. The sacred commandments of the Lord, no. An absolute dichotomy exists between the devotional period and the business session. The first has no relation to the second.

What foreign mission board actually seeks to follow the guidance of the Lord as provided by His Word and His Spirit? They all think they do, but what they do in fact is to assume the scripturalness of their ends and then ask for help to find ways to achieve them. They may pray all night for God to give success to their enterprises, but Christ is desired as their helper, not as their Lord. Human means are devised to achieve ends assumed to be divine. These harden into policy, and thereafter the Lord doesn't even have a vote.

In the conduct of our public worship where is the authority of Christ to be found? The truth is that today the Lord rarely controls a service, and the influence He exerts is very small. We sing of Him and preach about Him, but He must not interfere; we worship our way, and it must be right because we have always done it that way, as have the other churches in our group.

What Christian when faced with a moral problem goes straight to the Sermon on the Mount or other New Testament Scripture for the authoritative answer? Who lets the words of Christ be final on giving, birth control, the bringing up of a family, personal habits, tithing, entertainment, buying, selling and other such important matters?

What theological school, from the lowly Bible institute up, could continue to operate if it were to make Christ Lord of its e

very policy? There may be some, and I hope there are, but I believe I am right when I say that most such schools to stay in business are forced to adopt procedures which find no justification in the Bible they profess to teach. So we have this strange anomaly: the authority of Christ is ignored in order to maintain a school to teach among other things the authority of Christ.

These are truly pointed questions, so pointed that they stab deep into contemporary Christianity. In short, the authority of God's Word simply does not rule every aspect of ministry. The Lord seems to be merely a "member of the board" who can offer input, instead of the One Who dictates policy and practice.

Tozer continues by offering two causes of this decline in Christ's authority. The first he submits is "tradition." In his words, "Not Christ but custom is lord in this situation." The second cause, he maintains, is "the revival of intellectualism among evangelicals."

The causes back of the decline in our Lord's authority are many. I name only two.

One is the power of custom, precedent and tradition within the older religious groups. These like gravitation affect every particle of religious practice within the group, exerting a steady and constant pressure in one direction. Of course that direction is toward conformity to the status quo. Not Christ but custom is lord in this situation. And the same thing has passed over (possibly to a slightly lesser degree) into the other groups such as the full gospel tabernacles, the holiness churches, the Pentecostal and fundamental churches and the many independent and undenominational churches found everywhere throughout the North American continent.

I'm glad Tozer placed "tradition" first, for I am convinced that it is, indeed, the leading cause of this decline. This was, in fact, the key issue of the Reformation. As one author puts it, sola scriptura (Scripture alone) was "the so-called formal principle of the Reformation. The Reformers appealed to the sole authority of Holy Scripture as the infallible Word of God over against human opinion and ecclesiastical tradition."⁽⁵⁾ In numerous ways we evangelicals cling to traditions in our associations, conferences, and other such groups, as well as in our worship, programs, gimmicks, methods, and so called "ministries."

This subject is so vital that it calls for further investigation. Mark 7:1-13 (cf. Matt. 15:1-9) records an incident that strongly emphasizes Biblical authority, and what makes the emphasis so strong is that the words are the words of our Lord Himself. Here the Pharisees confront our Lord and ask Him why His disciples did not observe the traditions of the elders. The word "tradition" in verse 9 is the Greek *paradosis*, which means "that which is passed along by teaching." When used in this negative sense it speaks of the teachings of men in contrast to the teachings of God.

The specific tradition in question, which was actually just one representative example of all the traditions that the disciples and Jesus ignored, was the ceremonial washing of the hands before eating. The washing had nothing to do with hygiene but was merely a ritual that symbolically washed away defilement. As with all the traditions of the elders, this was not a part of God's law, rather it was man-made. These traditions were given equal authority to Scripture and in some cases were said to impart eternal life. But of such traditions our Lord said: "Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition" (vs. 7-9).

In verses 10-12 our Lord goes on to indict the Pharisees further by proving that one of their traditions actually contradicted the fifth commandment, "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" (Ex. 20:12). Contained in that command is the responsibility to love and respect our parents and help meet their needs. The Pharisees, however, held to a tradition that in essence said, "If a gift that would have relieved the need of the father or mother has already been dedicated to God, the giver is not under obligation to give it to them and must give it to God." On the other hand, nothing prevented the giver from changing his mind and simply keeping the gift, which usually was exactly what happened. The vow was usually an empty one said out of selfishness. Our Lord then brought home His point in verse 13: "Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye" (cf. Matt. 23).

This incident is a dramatic example of what we see in Roman Catholicism and other cults (yes, Roman Catholicism is a cult), which equate church tradition with Scripture. In very much the same way, however, many Protestants and evangelicals enthrone their own traditions, rules, regulations, practices, and associational pronouncements and thereby dethrone the Word of God. The result, to paraphrase the great Matthew Henry,⁽⁶⁾ is that God's Word not only lies forgotten as o

obsolete laws, but It even stands repealed, replaced by the traditions of man.

The Apostle Paul echoes our Lord's teaching when he writes: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Col 2:8). "Spoil" is the Greek *sulagogeo*, which means "to plunder, to carry off as prey." How many have been spoiled, plundered, and carried off to apostate cults. The cults today are, in fact, populated with former members of so-called evangelical and fundamental groups. How did it happen? Because of ignorance, because of the serious lack of teaching that exists in Christianity today. People are not being warned of the danger and trained to defend against it.

People also get "carried away" by tradition. We can get so comfortable with "the way we've always done things" that we fail to evaluate them in light of the Scriptures.

Before going on, let us make it clear that tradition is not always wrong. The word is, in fact, used in a positive way in II Thessalonians 2:15: "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye were taught, whether by word, or our epistle." Likewise, in 3:6 we read: "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us."

In contrast to the negative way "tradition" is used, it is used in this positive way to mean divinely revealed teaching. We should also notice that Paul says the Thessalonians received this teaching by "word" and "epistle," that is, by preaching and his written letters. Likewise, the only source of our teaching today must be the Word of God and the sole method of teaching must be preaching.

Additionally, in and of itself there is nothing wrong with tradition. Most of us have family traditions, for example, which make our family unique and special to us. But when any tradition, whether family, church, or society, replaces the teaching of the Word of God, it has become "the tradition of men" (Mk. 7:8) and is apostasy.

Returning to Tozer's reasons for the decline in Christ's authority, he offers another reason.

The second cause is the revival of intellectualism among the evangelicals. This, if I sense the situation correctly, is not so much a thirst for learning as a desire for a reputation of being learned. Because of it good men who ought to know better are being put in the position of collaborating with the enemy. I'll explain.

Our evangelical faith (which I believe to be the true faith of Christ and His apostles) is being attacked these days from many different directions. In the Western world the enemy has forsworn violence. He comes against us no more with sword and fagot; he now comes smiling, bearing gifts. He raises his eyes to heaven and swears that he too believes in the faith of our fathers, but his real purpose is to destroy that faith, or at least to modify it to such an extent that it is no longer the supernatural thing it once was. He comes in the name of philosophy or psychology or anthropology, and with sweet reasonableness urges us to rethink our historic position, to be less rigid, more tolerant, more broadly understanding.

These words are even truer today than they were when Tozer wrote them. The cry we hear today is, "Let us all throw off our doctrinal differences and unify." Many evangelicals are calling for the total abolishing of denominational barriers so that we can all get together for the sake of political ends and "the betterment of life in America." At first hearing, this sounds admirable and desirable, but when we just stop and think about it, it calls for a total compromise of doctrine. Why? Because denomination barriers exist because there are differences in doctrine, so the only way to unify is to get rid of anything specific, to make everything existential and experiential. As Paul makes crystal clear in Ephesians 4:1-6, the ground of unity must be doctrine. Tozer continues:

He speaks in the sacred jargon of the schools, and many of our half-educated evangelicals run to fawn on him. He tosses academic degrees to the scrambling sons of the prophets as Rockefeller used to toss dimes to the children of the peasants. The evangelicals who, with some justification, have been accused of lacking true scholarship, now grab for these status symbols with shining eyes, and when they get them they are scarcely able to believe their eyes. They walk about in a kind of ecstatic unbelief, much as the soloist of the neighborhood church choir might were she to be invited to sing at La Scala.

Tozer's words here remind me of how Christianity has fallen into the trap of "accreditation." The attitude today is that a man must go to an accepted and accredited school. But may we ask, accredited by whom? By men and their opinions or by the Word of God and its authority? The philosophy of accreditation is totally subjective. Standards set in one accrediting agency may not meet the standards set in another. Every bit of this is humanistic and contrary to the absolute truth s

et down in the Word of God, which is the only "accreditation" we need.

Please do not misunderstand, I am not saying Bible Colleges are wrong. On the contrary, I believe they are desperately needed, but they should be true Bible colleges. The philosophy, psychology, and many other secular subjects have no place in a Bible College, but this is standard fare today.

Was Tozer just ranting? Was he just some crackpot? Was he just splitting hairs? No! Did he offer any alternatives? Yes:

For the true Christian the one supreme test for the present soundness and ultimate worth of everything religious must be the place our Lord occupies in it. Is He Lord or symbol? Is He in charge of the project or merely one of the crew? Does He decide things or only help to carry out the plans of others? All religious activities, from the simplest act of an individual Christian to the ponderous and expensive operations of a whole denomination, may be proved by the answer to the question, Is Jesus Christ Lord in this act? Whether our works prove to be wood, hay and stubble or gold and silver and precious stones in that great day will depend upon the right answer to that question.

What, then, are we to do? Each one of us must decide, and there are at least three possible choices. One is to rise up in shocked indignation and accuse me of irresponsible reporting. Another is to nod general agreement with what is written here but take comfort in the fact that there are exceptions and we are among the exceptions. The other is to go down in meek humility and confess that we have grieved the Spirit and dishonored our Lord in failing to give Him the place His Father has given Him as Head and Lord of the Church.

Either the first or the second will but confirm the wrong. The third if carried out to its conclusion can remove the curse. The decision lies with us.

I have no other comment except, "Amen."

The Sufficiency of Scripture

As mentioned earlier, using the principle sola scriptura the Reformers (Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and others) reaffirmed the authority of Scripture. To them Scripture was the norma normans (determining norm) not a norma normata (determined norm).

For example, while many Christians are aware of Martin Luther's (1483-1546) maxim of justification by faith alone (sola fide), few are aware of his other maxim, namely, the sufficiency of Scripture alone (sola scriptura). In Luther's day the problem with the Roman Church was not so much the infallibility of Scripture, for Rome gladly acknowledged this, rather the problem was the sufficiency of Scripture. Roman Catholicism totally rejected (and still rejects) the proposition that the Scriptures alone are sufficient. It maintains that the Church's traditions and teachings, as well as the Pope's ex cathedra ("from the chair") declarations, are equal to Scripture authority. In practical application, however, these are actually superior to the Scriptures, for if the Pope declares something that is unscriptural, it is that declaration, not the Scriptures, that is followed.

Luther, however, rejected the Roman doctrine, declaring that, "What is asserted without the Scriptures or proven revelation may be held as opinion, but need not be believed."⁽⁷⁾ While Luther unfortunately compromised on a few Church traditions, such as retaining the weak Apostle's Creed and the heretical Nicene Creed, he would not compromise on the "sure rule of God's Word:" "Now if anyone of the saintly fathers can show that his interpretation is based on Scripture, and if Scripture proves that this is the way it should be interpreted, then the interpretation is right. If this is not the case, I must not believe him."⁽⁸⁾

While it is hard for us to accept, it is nonetheless true that the situation in evangelical Christianity is much the same when it comes to the sufficiency of Scripture. Yes, we speak of the Bible's authority, but when it comes to its sufficiency, we seem to think the Bible needs a little help in "practical application." This, however, is a staggering contradiction, for if the Bible is not sufficient, then it simply cannot be authoritative.

Tozer addressed this issue pointedly. In his powerful book *Rut, Rot, or Revival*,⁽⁹⁾ Tozer writes:

In effect, say that the Bible must be interpreted in the light of new developments. A book that was written in the day when people rode donkeys must be reinterpreted to mesh with contemporary society. They say that the prophets and apostles mistook what God intended to do. The Bible is outmoded and largely irrelevant. Irrelevant means that it is not related

to anything. Outmoded means we have new modes of thinking and living now, so the Bible is out-of-date—a back-issue magazine. We must, therefore, reassess its teachings and rethink our beliefs and hopes.

I am not overstating this at all. This is what is being taught today. It gets into the newspapers, and people are saying that the Bible must be interpreted in the light of all these changes. The apostles and prophets were mistaken. They had ideas that were good and advanced for their day, but not advanced for our day. We know more about ourselves, human motivation and the nature of things than they did back then.

As in Tozer's day, do we not hear this today? After hearing Paul's teaching on women, I once heard a woman say, "Oh, Paul just didn't know what he was talking about." It's also quite common nowadays to hear Paul called a "male chauvinist," even by so-called Christian women, simply because his words don't match contemporary thought and custom. The Word of God is not ruling the Church today, rather the Church is ruling the Word of God. The world has so tainted the Church that God's Word has been rewritten. Tozer adds:

The tragedy of the century is that Protestants have accepted this as progress and actually believe it. The children of the protesters, children of the Reformation, have been brainwashed and indoctrinated by those who believe that changes have made a difference in God's plan, a difference in Christianity and a difference in Christ. We have been brainwashed to believe that we cannot read the Bible as we used to. We must now read it through glasses colored by change. We have been hypnotized by the serpent, the devil, into believing that we no longer have a trustworthy Bible, so Protestantism is no longer a moral force in the world.

Protestantism is not a force in this world because we have sold out to the brainwashers. Instead of being the sons and daughters of the protesters, we are now yes-men and yes-women. Running our Protestant world are people who talk solely about Christ but who do not mean what the Bible means. They talk about revelation and inspiration, but they do not mean what our fathers meant.

We are forced to ask at this point, where are the leaders today who remind us of Martin Luther, John Calvin, Huldrych Zwingli, John Owen, Thomas Watson, Charles Spurgeon, and other powerful men of God who have stood uncompromisingly in the face of change? There are few indeed. Oh, how this needs to change!

We need sweeping reformation. Let me give a definition of reformation as it is given in a religious dictionary: "Change by removal of faults or abuses, and a restoration to a former good estate." Now that is not so bad. I do not know how anybody who believes he or she is a Christian could ever object to changing in the direction of the removal of faults and abuse toward the restoration to a former good estate.

The problem is change, which disturbs many people. They have accepted the status quo as being the very tablets given by God on the mountain. Most people, if they happen to be in any church anywhere, accept the status quo without knowing or caring to inquire how it came to be. In other words, they do not ask, "Oh God, is this of You, is this divine, is this out of the Bible?" Because it was done and is being done, and because a lot of people are doing it, they assume it is all right.

Today we need people who dare to question the status quo and say, "Wait a minute here. Where do you find this in the Bible?"

Indeed we do! A phrase I have tried to make the cornerstone of my ministry is, "What saith the Scripture?" We find the phrase twice: Romans 4:3 and Galatians 4:30. In both instances, we see Paul concerned with one thing only, namely, what Scripture says on a particular subject. In the first instance (Rom. 4:3), he speaks of justification by faith and cites Abraham as the prime example. To emphasize his point, he quotes from Genesis 15:6. In the second instance (Gal. 4:30), he speaks again of justification by faith. Illustrating the principle that we are no longer under law but under grace (vs. 21-31), he again quotes from Genesis (21:10, 12).

Over and over again, we see Paul going to the Old Testament Scriptures as His authority. He uses the phrase "it is written," for example, 30 times (e.g. Rom. 1:17; 3:10; 9:13; I Cor. 1:19, 31; Gal. 3:10; etc.). Further, including all New Testament writers, we find this phrase a total of 63 times in the King James Version. Similarly, we find the words "Scripture saith" six times (Jn. 19:37; Rom. 9:17; 10:11; 11:2; I Tim. 5:18; Jas. 4:5). All this demonstrates the importance of the declarations of Scripture. Would that the phrase that characterized Christians today was, "What saith the Scripture?" Would that Christians today discern everything.

To close this chapter, I'd like to cite an illustration Tozer uses in *The Price of Neglect*. He refers to the odd instance when Moses asked an in-law named Hobab to guide the Israelites through the wilderness, since he evidently knew a lot about that desert (Num. 10:29-32). Think of it! In spite of the fact that God promised that He would protect them (Ex. 23:20) and guide them (Num. 9:15-23), Moses mistakenly thought they needed Hobab.

Tozer uses this incident to draw a parallel with the Church, in that she is to be led by God's Word alone, not the plethora of Hobabs that are running the Church today.

What need do we have of Hobab's eyes? Surely none at all. Yet the Church has a whole army of Hobabs to which it looks eagerly for guidance and leadership. That Hobab has no place in the divine plan never seems to matter at all. That Hobab is an intruder, that his eyes are not sharp enough to search out the path, that he is altogether superfluous and actually in the way is passed over by almost everyone. God seems so far away, the Bible is such an old book, faith makes such heavy demands upon our flesh, and Hobab is so near at hand and so real and easy to lean on—so we act like men of earth instead of like men of heaven, and Hobab gets the job.

Now, who is Hobab? and how can we identify him? The answer is easy. Hobab is anything gratuitously introduced into the holy work of God which does not have biblical authority for its existence. At first this new thing may seem innocent enough and even look like an improvement over the biblical pattern; and because it is new it is sure to catch on fast and spread quickly among the churches. We Christians are soon playing "follow the leader," trotting along docilely behind Hobab and justifying his presence by appealing to his popularity. Anyone as popular as Hobab cannot be wrong, no matter how far he may be from the Word of God.

Hobab is not an individual. He is whatever takes our attention from the cloud and fire; he is whatever causes us to lean less heavily upon God and look less trustfully to the guiding Spirit. Each one of us must look out for him in our own life and in our church. And when we discover him we must get rid of him right away.(10)

What is the ultimate danger in these Hobabs? As Tozer puts it, "The more they trusted to Hobab, the less they trusted in God." The Church today is trusting in countless Hobabs instead of God. She is trusting in countless methods and techniques for success in ministry instead of the Holy Spirit empowered methods outlined in Scripture. She is captivated by and follows anything new—a new ministry, a new idea, or a new program—without ever considering it Biblically, without ever testing its methodology or even its validity according to the Word of God.

Biblical authority will be a recurring theme as we continue. I thank God that A. W. Tozer was a man of God that clung uncompromisingly to the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. I thank God that he had the courage to point out that the Church in his day (and today) "quotes the Bible copiously but without one trace of authority."(11) May we admit this fact and claim *sola scriptura* as our battle cry.