

'Confidence'

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the importance of maintaining confidence and faith in the Christian journey amidst challenges and comparisons.

Scripture: Philippians 3:12

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Confidence in Christ"

Description

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the importance of maintaining confidence in our Christian journey, highlighting that the Christian life is a progression towards God despite the obstacles posed by Satan. He encourages believers to hold fast to their faith and rejoice in hope, reminding them that growth in Christ requires patience and steadfastness. Tozer warns against the dangers of comparing ourselves to others and the pitfalls of both liberalism and zealous evangelicalism, urging Christians to recognize their unique paths and contributions to the body of Christ. He concludes by affirming that while we may not be perfect, we should celebrate the progress we have made and continue to strive towards Christ-likeness.

Transcript

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Whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule. And let us mind the same thing. And another passage is in Hebrews, two passages in Hebrews, the third chapter, verse six, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope, firm unto the end. And in the tenth chapter of Hebrews, verses thirty-five and thirty-six, cast not away therefore your confidence which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.

Now, there are about three things taught in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament that I want to mention to start off here. One is, that the Christian life is a progression. That it is a journey of the redeemed soul toward God. Not only has the redeemed soul found God, but he is also on a journey toward God and there's no contradiction. That is one thing that's taught in the Bible. The other thing is that Satan stands to resist every step of that Christian's way. He is shrewd and skillful in laying his roadblocks

and his traps to stop the progression of the soul toward God and God-likeness. But another is, that to advance against this opposition requires faith and steadfast courage. And the apostle calls it-confidence.

Now that's what I wanted to talk about today, that we Christians are maturing, growing up in God, if we're obedient and faithful. We're progressing on a very important journey from where we started up into the fullness of God. We're being hindered by the skillful and powerful contrivings of the devil, and that we must exercise faith and courage, and hold on to our confidence.

Now, a little exposition of those two texts which I chose. The Hebrew Christians were losing heart. And the man of God, whoever he was, wrote them a letter in which he sought to encourage them to go on with God, and uses these words, hold fast, have your confidence, rejoice, and to hope because there is a great reward. Cast not away he said. Hold your confidence and rejoice in hope to the end.

And then Paul, in the third chapter of Philippians said in effect, I'll not read it again. But he says in effect, the whole chapter, that he's not a perfect man yet and God isn't finished with him. There is yet a good deal to be done on him before he's ready for the presence of the Lord in fullness. Anybody's ready for heaven who's converted, who's justified, but Paul thought about something bigger and grander than that. He thought about a conformity to Christ's death and resurrection, conformity to Christ likeness, and the knowledge of Christ greatly increased and intensified and elevated. He thought about all that and said that he wasn't yet, hadn't reached that yet and wasn't yet perfect. And then he turned around and with a fine disregard for consistency says in the text which I read, 3:16, let us therefore as many as be perfect, continue on and abide and go ahead from here.

Now, there are two opposite errors here which I thought I might point out to you though it's not too important a part of the sermon. One is made by the liberal and the other is made by the careless evangelical, or by the zealous evangelical. The first one is the pastor, the liberal pastor, receives into his church people who've never been converted and then proceeds to exhort them to continue in the Christian way, forgetting that you can't continue in a way that you have never entered. And urges them to grow in grace, forgetting that you cannot grow when you have not been born. And that life cannot be developed when there is no life there. The error is assuming divine life to be in a man or woman, because he sits in a pew or joins a church. That's error number one. It's a very serious error, because to continue to assume that a divine work has been done within the soul when it hasn't, is to place that soul in grave jeopardy and all but guarantee its final ruin.

Now the second then is the opposite completely; for while liberalism assumes that life is present when it is not. Sometimes zealous evangelicals deny that life is present when it is. It is the error of the other side. And the more zealous we are and as keener we are for revival, the more likely we are to cut down the corn along with the weeds, and to insist that every baby be born full grown, and that every pilgrim reach his destination the day he starts. Now, that's a great mistake. It's a mistake. I tend toward myself because of my temperament, because of my impatience with the sluggish, plodding feet, dragging Christians. But I've got to correct myself and I've got to be scriptural, even if it means to cut against my own temperament. And I would this morning remind you my friends, that there comes a time when a Christian must make a positive affirmation of faith. There comes a time when a Christian must say, now, I am not yet perfect, but I thank God that I am not where I used to be and that I do see evidences of change life and old things have passed away, and lo, everything has become new.

I'm not as wise as Solomon, but I thank God I'm wise enough so that I own Jesus Christ as my Savior. I don't know everything yet, but I know Whom I have believed. I don't have the gifts of Isaiah or John or Paul, but I have at least the ability to appreciate those men and to learn from them. And I haven't gone as far as St. Francis yet, but I thank God I'm on the same road headed in the same direction. There comes a time when we've got to do that, when we've got to thank God for everything that we've had up to now.

Now, there's grave danger that there shall be ingratitude in our hearts about all this. For instance, we read the life of a great saint and after reading it, we find that we intend to compare ourselves with that great Christian. And of course, compare ourselves unfavorably. There are two or three reasons for that. One is we probably aren't up to them yet, and the second is, we saw only the good parts of their lives.

I got this morning, it was left in the mail yesterday I presume, a package of books from a publisher with the lives of two great Christians, Dr. R.A. Torrey and Reverend William Christie. Well now, those were great men, one of them still living, one gone to heaven. They were great men. And I got here early this morning. I usually get around eight o'clock. So, I had little time and I sketched through both of those books and I didn't find anything wrong with either one of them. I found only the best side of it. I found that their friends had written them up, and even Paul would feel a little discouraged after reading those biographies, because these two men are just too wonderful for this world. And now they weren't that great. They were good, godly, wonderful men, men that I couldn't come up to their knees I suppose, or you. At least we don't think we could, but we didn't know everything about them and we didn't know their weaknesses, and we didn't know where the spots where they might have been blind. We only saw them in the light of a glowing devotee, through the eyes of those that love them.

Now, there's danger that we read the lives of the great and conclude that we don't amount to anything at all and become despondent. I urge you to hold fast and rejoice and hope, and thank God for everything He's done up to now. I sometimes say that if the Lord never answered another prayer for me, it will take me at least 20,000 years to thank Him for the ones He's answered up to now. If He never opens a new list of spiritual sight to me, I'll have eternity to thank Him for all the panoramas and all the spiritual landscapes that have been open to my gaze over the past years. And if He never whispers another time to my heart, I'm glad for all the times He has whispered. And if I can't pray as well as George Mueller, I thank God at least He inclineth His ear unto me and heareth my cry. And anybody can say that, who really knows God, and I can say it. So, I'm not going to be knocked over by these very burning fellows. They come make a comment and they burn everything to cinders that within any reasonably close distance of them.

The other day, oh, it was a long time ago now, I waited a long time for I dared mentioned it, but I sat listening to a preacher somewhere on this terrestrial ball. And he was preaching in a church where he was a total stranger. He only knew two or three people in the church. And he hadn't any way whatsoever of appraising the people in that church or of discovering what kind of people they were. He didn't know them at all. But I sat and listened to him while he discounted and reproached and scolded and disparaged and chided and unchurched people to whom he was a complete stranger and they to him.

And I began to ask myself some questions. And I wrote them down in a notebook and I waited a long time for them to ripen and see whether I just reacted unpleasantly or whether there was really some truth in it. And here they are. Nobody's ever answered these questions for me. Maybe you can help me. What I asked myself was this. Why do some ministers, in order to take us on in the Christian life, first have to prove we've never started yet? Now, I need a lot of help from God. There's no question about that, but I can't be helped by the man who makes me admit to start with that I've never been converted. He can't

help me, because he's making me lie to begin with and that bad. So, I'm asking the question, why in order to take us on, do some of our blazing revivalists insist that we have never started at all?

Second, why is it that some of these brethren, to emphasize the truth, assume that everyone else is ignorant of that truth and never heard about it at all? And why is it that to stir us up to more prayer, we have to first be told that we don't pray at all when we know we do. And why is it that to induce penitence in us, they have to imply by an illustration or by an outright assertion that we've had a fierce family quarrel just before church time? And why is it to convict us of sin, that they have to act mysterious and look very grave and roll their eyes modestly to the floor and suggest that there is among us, grave, secret sin? And why is it that if we are not doing their kind of work, they always have to assume that we're deadbeats and never did any work at all.

It goes like this, you know brother, you're not only going to have to keep a tender heart, but you're going to have to develop a tough hide too along the road. A tender heart is necessary and the tenderer the better, but the hide has to be a little tough. A missionary goes to the foreign field and he has to have a tender heart to love the natives and keep right with God, but he has to have a tough hide to stand the mosquitoes and the other unpleasant things.

Now it's the same on the Christian way. Keep a tender heart, but a tough hide. And I've developed quite a tough hide over the years. It hasn't hurt me any. My heart isn't as tender as it ought to be, but I'm not worried about my hide, because it's kept me from going to pieces and being preached clear out of house and home and driven to the caves in the rocks by men who tried to tell me that because I'm not doing their work, I'm not doing any work at all.

It's like this, someone who loves to work with the Jews will come and they'll give you such a burning message, and then scold and chide and abuse. If you're not doing Jewish work, you're just not doing anything at all. Somebody else will be working in the mountains of Kentucky, and when they're through with you, if you're not interested in the mountains of Kentucky, it's doubtful you've ever even been born again. Another one's doing work in say the institutions, in jails and so on, and they will wring you like a wet towel, and when you're finished, you're limp and scared and wondering what's going on. Why, you've never been to jail nor in an institution.

Why must we be like that Brethren? Why can't we see that God has workers to do all his work? And that the man who is doing Jewish work, if he's in the will of God, he's doing it because God put him there. The person who's in the Kentucky mountains, God sent him there. The person who's called to do institutional work, the Lord sent him there. The person who's on the foreign field, God put him there. And why can't we accept each other instead of making each other feel silly and small and no good because we're not doing the work that somebody else is doing.

Now, Paul, used big ball games as an illustration, why can't I? Suppose that there was a little meeting of the Cubs? No, we won't use the Cubs, let's use a major league team. Let's say the Yankees. And suppose that there's a meeting of the Yankees and one fellow who plays first base delivers a burning speech and makes everybody else wilt and feel no good because he doesn't play first base. And then some fellow pitches and by the time he's through, everybody is wilted again feeling that if you don't pitch, you don't play baseball. And so, with an outfielder and the next fellow hits home runs. And if you don't hit forty home runs, you don't play baseball well. Well brother, can't you see that each has his place on the field and each contributes his bit and each does each work and each will get his pay; and so, in the kingdom of God.

I don't have to worry because I can't do everything. Nobody can do everything. But if you can do one thing and do it well, you ought to thank God for that. But I've had to put up with an awful lot of sneers from people who thought because I wasn't doing the work they're doing. I'm not doing anything at all. I'm just sitting around twiddling. Well, I don't know why that is Brethren, but it's that way.

And then another thing and I'm finished with my seven questions that I haven't been able to answer. Why do some of the men insist upon creating invidious comparisons? I'll explain what it means. It goes like this. You talk all you want to about the deeper life. I believe in soul-winning. So, we deeper life brethren are dismissed. They believe in soul-winning, or somebody else says, you can talk all you want to about Bible study. I believe in missions. Another one says, I believe in foreign missions. That's the Lord's work. And you can talk about Jewish work all you will.

Now Brethren, there's no contradiction between these works. God's doing all of these. And there's nobody going to tell me that there's any comparison to be drawn there at all. It's not exactly to see them as the previous thought, but it's close to it, because it insists upon drawing comparisons. Somebody will say, well you pray all night. Okay, you pray all night if you want to, I live the Christian life as though there was a comparison between the two and he had to choose. Tom Hare prays all night, but don't think he doesn't live the Christian life. Ed Maxey is going to the foreign field, but don't think he's going to give up his Bible to go.

You don't have to choose either this or that. You can have the whole thing and accept all the people of God and love them all, understand them all. And somebody said, you teach consecration all the time, I believe in soul winning. Well, you don't draw a distinction between consecration and soul winning; you do both, consecrate men and win souls.

Those comparisons, I'll tell you why they do it Brethren. They do it to beat us over the head and get us to the altar. And it seems that there are those who won't believe that they insist upon making you admit that you've been deceived and deluded up to now. Oh, you can't fool me like that, my friend. And somebody says I was there when it happened and I ought to know. I know what the Lord has done for my soul. That doesn't mean that I'm not pressing on. It does mean that I am not going to allow anybody to destroy my confidence and take away my affirmed faith in God.

Sometimes I've had people come to me with a message. They have been in tune with the Infinite and they came to me to straighten me out. Well up to this point, nobody's ever managed to help me in 42 years of Christian life that way. They put their arm around you usually, that's to soften the blow and get close to you and then give you the works.

Well, nobody's ever helped me that way, because I always sort of reason it out. You know Brethren, you don't need to be afraid of using your head if you use a sanctified brain; it's perfectly all right. God put it in there. It's an organ, use it. And I reason things out and I say to myself, now, wait a minute. I haven't seen it. I haven't backslidden. I haven't grieved God. God can talk to me. He was just talking to me few minutes ago. And if he has a message for me, why did He send it around Robin Hood's barn by a fellow whom I don't have too much confidence in? Why not come straight to me with it? And I think that's a good reasonable way to look at things.

A prophet used to be sent and occasionally a prophet may yet be sent to a man who is running from God to rebuke Him and say, though art the man. But, God couldn't talk to David. David had temporarily pulled the blind down. God couldn't get any light to him so he sent Nathan. But as long as David's blinds were up

and the sun was shining in and David was sitting on the roof playing the harp, it's unlikely the prophet could come and tell David anything. God could talk to David.

So, my brethren, let's thank God for everybody. Let's even thank God for those who try to insist we're not Christians when we are. You have this gift? No, well then, you're out, I'm sorry for you. Here's a ticket to hell-one way. You don't rate. Well, I don't have all the gifts in the world, but I thank God I have a few. Amen.

Now let's hold fast our confidence and let's declare our happy, joyful independence. Let's have faith. Let's not be our arrogant. Arrogance is of course a sinful thing. But Paul says, and maybe with this we might close, because I think it's good to close on a scriptural note if I haven't been scriptural up to now. At least I'll read some scripture. Now, here's what the man of God says. He says, wherefore, I give you to understand that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost. Now therefore, there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administration, but the same Lord and there are diversities of operation, but it's the same God which work is all in all.

Then another twelfth chapter, this Romans, I say through the grace given unto me to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. So, there are gifts and they vary, and they should be in the body of Christ. And we have a right to know we have them. But we're to think soberly about it all. Don't get all excited like a boy with a new toy.

And let's remember that other people have the gifts of God among them, and let us go ahead, steadfastly quietly toughening our armor against the fiery darts of the wicked, having cheerful hope and rejoicing, and thanksgiving. As we go along in the Christian way. Then we'll progress toward God which I insist is the sum and essence of the Christian life, a moral and spiritual progressing and rushing toward the image of Jesus Christ. And in that day, when we see Him as He is, we shall be like Him. That's the beatitude beyond which there is none other.

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