

A.W. TOZER

*Compiled and Edited by James L. Snyder*

THE  
DANGERS  
OF A  
SHALLOW  
FAITH

AWAKENING FROM SPIRITUAL LETHARGY



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# FOREWORD

The message from A. W. Tozer that you are about to read is one that so many in today's Church need to hear. God has called us in to a deep walk with Him, but many of us are just touching the surface. Not only does this book identify some of the issues that may be limiting our life in Christ, but it also encourages us to know God more fully. The truth of Tozer's words will encourage us to not be comfortable with our current understanding of God. There is a fire that God wants to ignite and rekindle in us to search out the mystery of His will (see Eph. 3:9), which He has promised to reveal to those who seek Him.

Every time I ordain a minister or pastor to plant churches, I read these words that A. W. Tozer prayed on his ordination day:

*I am Thy servant to do Thy will, and that will is sweeter to me than position or riches or fame and I choose it above all things on earth or in heaven. Though I am chosen of Thee and honored by a high and holy calling, let me never forget that I am but a man of dust and ashes, a man with all the natural faults and passions that plague the race of men. I pray Thee therefore, my Lord and Redeemer, save me from myself and from all the injuries I may do myself while trying to be a blessing to others. Fill me with thy power by the Holy Spirit, and I will go in Thy strength and tell of Thy righteousness, even Thine only. I will spread abroad the message of redeeming love while my normal powers endure.*

Even this small portion of Tozer's prayer expresses the humility with which he approached his calling. There is no greater

tone to set a venturing out in ministry than the sober yet faith-filled depths of Tozer. Very few men of God in history have been able to so explore the depths of God while enjoying the heights of His love.

Tozer's writings, however, are not only for ministers. I would recommend this book to anyone who has a heart after God. Reverend James Snyder has done a masterful job of compiling these works to clearly express the depths and heights of Tozer's writings, and I am thankful that he has put these works into a form that can be preserved for generations to come. These are words that shouldn't be lost in the archives of history but should continue to declare the relevant truth in our contemporary Church.

I pray that you will be blessed and challenged to grasp the very depths of Christ as you read this book.

With you in Christ,

Pastor Gary Wilkerson

President, World Challenge, Inc.

Lead Pastor, The Springs Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado

## INTRODUCTION

# A TRUE PROPHET OF THE CHURCH

Throughout history, the Church has been inundated with self-proclaimed prophets. Whenever I hear of such people, I can't help but think of God's command to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 18:22: "When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him."

It is a dangerous thing for someone to claim to be a prophet. Of all the ministries set forth in Scripture, it is easiest to discern when a person is not speaking a true prophetic word from God. Perhaps Paul had this in mind when he wrote, "Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints" (1 Cor. 14:29-33).

Unfortunately, today it seems that many in the Church will accept *any* person who calls himself or herself a prophet. They hang on the individual's every word, regardless of whether what he or she says ever materializes. It is the oratory of the moment that matters. The prophets we find in Scripture, however, spoke

words that actually came to pass. In the Old Testament, the prophets told of things to come; while in the New Testament they served as a form of troubleshooter for the Church, pointing out errors and heresies and then offering the solution in a way that pointed the group of believers back to Christ. They saw clearly, spoke sharply, and were rarely if ever appreciated for it. As Jesus said so eloquently, “A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house” (Matt. 13:57).

When it comes to this kind of a prophet, A. W. Tozer stands out among the rest. He begins this book by stating that he will “go out on a limb a little bit and prophesy.” He relates that he can envision a time coming when those in the Church will desert evangelicalism—a time when “the house will be left desolate and there will not be a man of God, a man in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, left among them.” It is safe to say that we have lived to see the beginning of this prophecy being fulfilled. And, unfortunately, like the true prophets of old, the evangelical church has heard Tozer but not listened to him.

Tozer’s criticism of the Church was never based on malice but rather on a deep love for the body of believers in Jesus Christ. He had a long view of the Church that was deeply rooted in biblical truth—a truth that does not change over time—and he understood that many of the problems the Church were facing were ones his forefathers had faced several generations back. The old preacher in Ecclesiastes was right when he said, “The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun” (Eccles. 1:9).

For this reason, when Tozer saw things developing within a congregation that he believed was detrimental to its spiritual development, he got riled up and spoke out boldly against it. Yet he also always pointed the way out. He called the danger for what it was and then offered the group he was criticizing a biblical solu-

tion that was focused on Christ. In this book, the center of the danger that Tozer perceived was a shallow faith that led to spiritual lethargy. This spiritual condition made the Church vulnerable to an onslaught from the enemy.

The remedy Tozer proposed was as drastic as the spiritual condition of the Church warranted. One item he emphasized was the fact that the world was too much with Christians, and that believers needed to be separated from it. This idea of separation from the world is one that has been lost on this generation of Christians. The Church is so intertwined with the world around that the two are essentially one and the same. However, Tozer recognized that unless believers are separated from the world, they will succumb to spiritual lethargy.

Tozer could not accept a juvenile attitude among believers in the Church. He could not tolerate Christians who became easily bored and looked around for entertainment to relieve that sense of boredom. For Tozer, entertainment was simply the Church synchronizing with the world and succumbing to it. It was utter nonsense to him that the Church wanted to bring itself “up to speed” with the world around it. A worldly church was, in Tozer’s thinking, an oxymoron and completely anathema.

As you read this book, you will find that the problems Tozer pointed out in his day are still occurring today. We can truthfully say that the Church has been down this path before! For some reason, each generation of Christians believes they need to reinvent the spiritual wheel, but Tozer was able to see above and beyond all of this because his focus was not on the passing trends. He knew that trends come and go, and that once people acclimate to one trend it is passé, and a new one is around the corner. Like the prophets in Scripture, he saw clearly and spoke sharply, and his assessment of the Church was right on in his time—and still is today.



This book is not just a book of negatives, although it has its fair share. However, in the midst of all of the negative there is positive hope for the soul thirsty for God.

Rev. James L. Snyder

PART I



THE DANGERS  
FACING THE  
EVANGELICAL  
CHURCH

# AT THE BRINK OF APOSTASY

*Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

2 TIMOTHY 3:5-7

The evangelical church in America is facing some serious hazards that threaten to bring it to the brink of apostasy. My prayer is that it is not too late for an awakening that will lead to successful reformation.

My use of the term “evangelical” includes all churches that are fundamental, full Gospel, holiness, Anabaptist and Pentecostal—all evangelical churches that believe the Bible and proclaim Jesus Christ to be the only Savior of the world. I have nothing to say to any other church.

It is amazing to me how divided is the evangelical church in America, which reminds me of my mother’s old-fashioned apple pie. No matter how thin you slice the pie, every slice believes it is better than the rest of the pie. Even though the “pie” includes the same ingredients, goes through the same process and bakes in the same oven, each piece feels superior to the other piece.

A stanza of the hymn “Onward, Christian Soldiers” by Sabine Baring-Gould (1834–1924) says it as it ought to be:

Like a mighty army  
Moves the Church of God;  
Brothers, we are treading  
Where the Saints have trod;  
We are not divided,  
All one body we,  
One in hope and doctrine,  
One in charity.

The meaning of the words in this hymn is where God would have us stand as His Church in this generation.

Let me go out on a limb a little bit and prophesy. I see the time coming when all the holy men whose eyes have been opened by the Holy Spirit will desert worldly evangelicalism, one by one. The house will be left desolate and there will not be a man of God, a man in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, left among them.

## The Curse of Worldliness

I hear Jesus saying, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” (Matt. 23:37). As the Church stands now, the man who sees this condition of worldly evangelicalism is written off as being somewhat fanatical. But the day is coming when the house will be left desolate and there will not be a man of God left among them.

I would like to live long enough to watch this develop and see how things turn out. I would like to live to see the time when the men and women of God—holy, separated and spiritually enlightened—walk out of the evangelical church and form a group of their own; when they get off the sinking ship and let

her go down in the brackish waters of worldliness and form a new ark to ride out the storm.

The Bible has no compromise whatsoever with the world. The Bible has a message for the evangelical church, calling it back home. The Bible always sends us out into the world, but never to compromise with the world; and never to walk in the way of the world, but only to save as many as we can. That is the one direction.

So, my Christian friend, if you are settling back, snuggling into your foam rubber chair and resting in your faith in John 3:16 and the fact that you have accepted Jesus Christ, you had better watch yourself. Take heed, lest you also be found wanting. Take heed of your own heart, lest when all is said and done, you have become tied in with the world.

In looking back over the history of Israel in the Old Testament, I cannot help but note that just about every third generation had to throw out all the previous generation's religious accouterments and get back to the original. It started with the Fathers who established their nation upon the clear Word of the Lord. The sons of the Fathers began taking that foundation for granted, adding nonessential elements while allowing crucial and fundamental essentials to slide. In the grandsons, we find a complete disregard for the grandfathers who established Israel, completely disenfranchising the entire nation of Israel from its foundation and completely disregarding the prophets' warning: "Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set" (Prov. 22:28).

They sought other gods that suited their fancy at the time. They looked with envy at the nations around them and began adopting the pagan gods of their neighbors. Soon they also adopted the culture of the nations around them, and it was difficult to tell the difference between an Israelite and a Philistine.

Then came the next generation, weary of the religious claptrap accumulated over the generations. They looked around for something original; invariably, they would stumble upon the Word of the Lord, and in a desperate move, they would clear away all of the religious paraphernalia that had been a part of the previous generation. That which was once mighty and dynamic was returned to with a great deal of anticipation by the younger generation. Today we would call it an awakening or a revival. A true revival or awakening leads to drastic reformation.

It is often the younger generation that sees through the maze of deception and corruption and longs for something original, something with substance. Not only was this true of ancient Israel, but it is also true of the Church. Church history reveals this pattern in almost every generation. When there was a move of God among a group of people, they became so plagued with holy desire that movements—we call them revivals or awakenings—began sweeping men and women into the kingdom of God.

I could point to the Waldensians, who sparked a movement in the Middle Ages; Martin Luther and the great Reformation movement of the 1500s; John and Charles Wesley, in the 1700s. Out of their fiery passion for God came a great movement known as the Methodists, which saved England from a national disaster. These great movements were not only owned by God but were surely started by God, who found hearts hungry for something only God could provide. It would be hard to fathom how many people were actually brought into the kingdom of God through these movements aflame with holy passion for God.

The pattern started with the Fathers of the Church. The sons then came along and tried to keep the movement going, tried to keep the fire burning and make sure they were replicating every-

thing their Fathers did. It only lasted a generation, and then the following generation came along and found themselves burdened with religious bric-a-brac that had absolutely no association with their spiritual roots. “Why do we do this? Why don’t we do that?” Soon the grandsons were allowing the world around them to bleed into their fellowship; and before long, there was no visible difference between the Church and the world. The culture of the world had effectively taken over the Church.

Sure, the grandsons looked like their grandfathers. Some of them even spoke in the religious dialect of their grandfathers. For all practical purposes, they were the grandsons carrying on the work of the grandfathers. However, they were not their grandfathers. That which was vital to the grandfathers became incidental to the grandsons. Instead of their religion carrying them forward in holy passion, they were trying to carry their religion, and the weight of it brought them to points of weariness and religious fatigue and final collapse. They sought relief out in the world in the form of compromise. To negotiate with the world is to forfeit the sense of God’s presence.

I would estimate that no denomination has ever survived its 100-year anniversary without a drastic overhaul from the inside out. The apostle Paul warns about having “a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof” (2 Tim. 3:5). He adds with an air of finality, “from such turn away.”

When a generation comes along dissatisfied with the status quo and has a hunger for God that cannot be quenched by ritual and tradition, most of these do not come out of the religious hierarchy, but come stomping in unceremoniously with such a passion for God that they upset everything they come in contact with and bypass religious protocol, much to the affront of the religious Pharisees and scribes in control at the time. The religious leaders condemn them and try to put them

out of “the Church.” However, they are the Church, and they inflame a new generation with a holy passion for the person of God that cannot be quenched.

This is where the evangelical church of our generation is. We are facing such jeopardy; and for the most part, nobody is enumerating those dangers. I want to share a little bit of my insight into this, and perhaps my meager efforts can stir up within the hearts of a new generation a longing and passion for that reality which only comes from an intimate and personal relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

As I look at the evangelical church today, I see several issues that need to be addressed. The first issue is the spirit of Babylon.

## The Haunting Spirit of Babylon

I believe the spirit of Babylon is invading the Church today to the point of controlling it. Anyone who has read the Old Testament understands the significance of the term “Babylon.” If you do not know much about this, let me point out the characteristics associated with the spirit of Babylon.

### The Spirit of Entertainment

This spirit of Babylon, in the form of entertainment, has not only seeped into the Church but has also been welcomed through the front door with inviting arms and has come in like a flood. It seems so incongruent to me that a generation of Christians should so loathe the accomplishments of their forefathers and the sacrifice associated with the faith once delivered that they would court the frivolous attitude and spirit of “entertainmentism.” We are not worshiping God on the throne but have come to the point of worshiping the shadow of the throne.

The average Christian today is addicted to exterior pleasures. Can any Christian church survive today without a heavy



dose of entertainment? It is the culture of fun, fun and more fun. Performance has replaced worship. We no longer have worshipers but rather observers and spectators who sit in awe of the performance. The demand is for something that will make us feel good about ourselves and make us forget about all of our troubles.

The Church Fathers were fanatic worshipers, and their worship carried with it a heavy cost, which incidentally, they gladly and eagerly paid. The grandsons are now observers with an appetite for entertainment that has gone wild. They are addicted, with an insatiable appetite, to have one thrill followed by an even bigger thrill. They are as fanatic about entertainment as their fathers were about worship, which explains the difference.

To confuse the matter and make it even worse, we have now what I shall call a performance-oriented worship. Just because you tack the word “worship” onto a phrase does not mean that it is worship acceptable to God. We dance before God, wearing our silly little costumes and doing our silly little jingles, thinking that this in some way impresses the God Almighty, Creator of the heavens and the earth.

The Church Fathers came into the presence of God with a sense of overwhelming reverence, which captivated them and brought them before God in holy silence. What has happened to reverence today? Where are those who get caught up in the spirit of reverence before their God? Where are those who have experienced the holy hush in the presence of God?

Then we have celebrities who are leading our so-called worship today. This mirrors the culture around us. To be a leader in the Church, a man does not have to have spiritual qualifications as much as a personality and a celebrity status. The converted football player wields more influence in churches today than the man who is before God on his knees with a broken

heart for his community. Celebrities are now leading us, but they are not leading us down the same pathway the Fathers of the Church established.

### The Spirit of Lethargy

All of this has successfully created in today's evangelical church a condition of spiritual lethargy. Because the word "lethargy" is not in common use, I probably need to outline a little bit of what I mean.

By lethargy, I mean living on yesterday's momentum. That seems to explain the condition today. The Church Fathers did not look back and try to live in the past. The Church Fathers looked back to find their compass so they could go forward in the power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit.

If we do not know where we have been, how in the world are we going to determine where we are going? That is the only reason for looking back. We do not look back in order to go back. Rather, we look back so that we can make sure we are going forward in the right direction.

### The Spirit of Ease

Too many in the Church today are living on yesterday's momentum. They feel that all of the battles have been fought. They assume that all the struggles in the Church are over. They are the privileged generation that goes to heaven on flowery beds of ease.

Probably the most discouraging aspect of this is that many have grown accustomed to a static condition and have succumbed to a spirit of non-expectation. The only expectation most have is that when they die they fully expect to go to heaven. Apart from that, they are going to spend their time having fun and enjoying their religion.

The Church Fathers did not enjoy their religion. *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* shows what their religion cost them. They did not expect an easy time of it. It was Charles Wesley (1707–1788) in his marvelous hymn “Soldiers of Christ, Arise” that set the tone for his generation:

Soldiers of Christ, arise  
 And put your armor on,  
 Strong in the strength which God supplies,  
 Through His eternal Son.  
 Strong in the Lord of Hosts,  
 And in That mighty power,  
 Who in the strength of Jesus trusts  
 Is more than a conqueror.

Where are these “soldiers of Christ” today? Where are those who go forth in the “strength which God supplies”? Where are those who are willing to go forth conquering and to conquer?

The tragedy of this generation of Christians is that men have crept in unawares, as prophesied by Paul in the book of Romans, and by Jude in his epistle. We have lowered our guard, and these false prophets have so positioned themselves that they are controlling the destiny of this generation’s Christian Church.

## Overtaken by Spiritually Impotent Theologians

Another tragedy I associate with today’s evangelical church is the fact that we have been overtaken and held hostage by spiritually impotent theologians. I love the word “theology.” It simply means the study of God; and there is nothing greater to pursue in this world. Our hearts hunger for God, asking when shall we come and stand before Him?

Then, from the word “theology” comes the word “theologian.” It used to mean a person who has specialized in the study of God, but it has come to mean someone who is an expert in a slice of Christianity. In many cases that slice is rather small and disassociated from the whole.

These contemporary theologians deal with doctrinal minutia. Their expertise is in the area of rethinking doctrinal positions in light of contemporary society and culture. For some reason, they believe that because society has changed so drastically, our doctrinal positions need to change accordingly. To reexamine the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture, for example, is an exercise in futility.

By slicing and dicing doctrinal positions, we have come to a point of not knowing what we believe. Not only that, but we also need new translations of the Scripture. I am not against that at all. Every time a new translation is published, I am one of the first to purchase it.

However, a new, updated translation of the Scripture is not the answer. It is amazing that in a generation of Christians with more modern translations of the Scriptures than all the other generations put together, it is just about the weakest group of Christians we have ever seen.

It is not by reading the Scriptures in the original languages or in some contemporary version that makes us better Christians. Rather, it is getting on our knees with the Scriptures spread before us, and allowing the Spirit of God to break our hearts. Then, when we have been thoroughly broken before God Almighty, we get up off our knees, go out into the world and proclaim the glorious message of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.

Experts who know everything but what is essential in the spiritual life are now running our churches. What I want to

know is what are they expert in? It does not seem that many of them are expert in knowing God as the Fathers knew God. They do not seem to have that overwhelming awe that was predominant in the Early Church movement. What have our experts done for the Church except to push it into a rut, allowing the letter of the law to dominate and control while denying the power of the Holy Spirit? I fear that we may have become too apologetic with our apologetics, and in trying to please everyone we end up destroying the truth.

This has created a religious class system. All these learned doctors with their PhDs and their noses firmly pointed north have caused great strife in the Church of Jesus Christ. Don't they know that the devil is a better theologian than all of us put together? The Scriptures tell us that the devil even trembles before God, but he has no part in God's kingdom: "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble" (Jas. 2:19).

This only shows the tyranny of religion today. In the Early Church, everybody was part of the ministry team. Everybody was expected to go out into the world and preach the glorious redeeming message of Jesus Christ. Certainly, there were categories—such as elders and bishops and apostles. The Church ran quite efficiently by all Christians working together, each of them knowing where they belonged, and doing their part.

Now we have teams of experts who only know the letter of the law. We have people who have become religious snobs putting on a show for Christians in the hopes that the Sunday offering would be more than sufficient to subsidize a lifestyle of greed. It is not hard to see that a spirit of Babylon creating a condition of spiritual lethargy has invaded today's Church—all of this orchestrated by spiritually impotent theologians.

To minimize the danger is to jeopardize an entire generation of Christians. This is the curse of apostasy. Apostasy starts when certain men creep in unawares and replace the Holy Spirit as the guiding force of the Christian movement. The Church was never designed to be piloted by men; rather, the Holy Spirit birthed the Church on the day of Pentecost as a vehicle through which He could do His work in each generation.

Let us face the dangers by realizing just how serious the situation is. Then, in the power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit, let us break down all of these artificial divisions and all of the impotent hierarchy that denominationalism has developed. Let us get back to the kind of Christianity that was birthed on the day of Pentecost and “be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1).

## Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone

Thomas Shepherd (1665–1739)

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Must Jesus bear the cross alone  
And all the world go free?  
No, there’s a cross for everyone  
And there’s a cross for me.

How happy are the saints above  
Who once went sorrowing here!  
But now they taste unmingled love  
And joy without a tear.

The consecrated cross I’ll bear  
Till death shall set me free  
And then go home my crown to wear  
For there’s a crown for me.

Upon the crystal pavement down  
At Jesus' pierced feet  
Joyful I'll cast my golden crown  
And His dear Name repeat.

O precious cross! O glorious crown!  
O resurrection day!  
When Christ the Lord from Heav'n comes down  
And bears my soul away.