

This World: Playground or Battleground?

By A. W. Tozer

THINGS ARE FOR US NOT ONLY what they are – they are what we hold them to be. That is to say, our attitude toward things is likely in the long run to be more important than the things themselves. This is a common coin of knowledge, like an old dime worn smooth by use, yet it bears upon it the stamp of truth and must not be rejected simply because it is familiar.

It is strange how a fact may remain fixed, while our interpretation of the fact changes with the generations and the years. One such fact is the world in which we live. It is here and has been here through the centuries. It is a stable fact, quite unchanged by the passage of time, but how different is modern man's view of it from the view our fathers held! Here we see plainly how great is the power of interpretation. The world is for all of us not only what it is – it is what we believe it to be. And a tremendous load of woe or weal rides on the soundness of our interpretation.

Going back no further than the times of the founding and early development of our country, we are able to see the wide gulf between our modern attitudes and those of our fathers. In the early days, when Christianity exercised a dominant influence over American thinking, men conceived the world to be a battleground. Our fathers believed in sin and the devil and hell as constituting one force, and they believed in God and righteousness and heaven as the other. By their very nature, these forces were opposed to each other forever in deep, grave, irreconcilable hostility. Man, our fathers held, had to choose sides – he could not be neutral. For him it must be life or death, heaven or hell, and if he chooses to come out on God's side, he could expect open war with God's enemies. The fight would be real and deadly and would last as long as life continued here below. Men looked forward to heaven as a return from the wars, a laying down of the sword to enjoy in peace the home prepared for them.

Sermons and songs in those days often had a martial quality about them, or perhaps a trace of homesickness. The Christian soldier thought of home and rest and reunion, and his voice grew plaintive as he sang of battle ended and victory won. But whether he was charging into enemy guns or dreaming of war's end and the Father's welcome home, he never forgot what kind of world he lived in – it was a battleground, and many were wounded and slain.

That view is unquestionably scriptural. Allowing for the figures and metaphors with which the Scriptures abound, it is still a solid Bible doctrine that tremendous spiritual forces are present in the world. Man, because of his spiritual nature, is caught in the middle. The evil powers are bent upon destroying him, while Christ is present to save him through the power of the gospel. To obtain deliverance he must come out on God's side in faith and obedience. That in brief is what our fathers thought, and that, we believe, is what the Bible teaches.

How different today. The fact remains the same, but the interpretation has changed completely. Men think of the world not as a battleground, but as a playground. We are not here to fight; we are here to frolic. We are not in a foreign land; we are at home. We are not getting ready to live, but we are already living, and the best we can do is rid ourselves of our inhibitions and our frustrations and live this life to the full. His, we believe, is a fair summary of the religious philosophy of modern man, openly professed by millions and tacitly held by many more millions who live out that philosophy without having given it verbal expression.

This changed attitude toward the world has had and is having its effect upon Christians, even gospel Christians who profess the faith of the Bible. By a curious juggling of the figures, they manage to add up the column wrong and yet claim to have the right answer. It sounds fantastic, but it is true.

The idea that this world is a playground instead of a battleground has now been accepted in practice by the vast majority of fundamentalist Christians. They might hedge around the question if they were asked bluntly to declare their position, but their conduct gives them away. They are facing both ways, enjoying Christ "and the world, gleefully telling everyone that accepting Jesus does not require them to give up their fun – Christianity is just the jolliest thing imaginable. The "worship" growing out of such a view of life is as far off center as the view itself – a sort of sanctified nightclub without the champagne and the dressed-up drunks.

This whole thing has grown to be so serious that it is now the bound duty of all Christians to reexamine their spiritual philosophy in the light of the Bible. Having discovered the scriptural way, they must follow it, even if to do so, they must separate themselves from much that they had accepted as real, but which now in the light of truth is seen to be false.

A right view of God and the world to come requires that we have a right view of the world in which we live and of our relationship to it. So much depends upon this that we cannot afford to be careless about it.

(Article taken from the book [This World: Playground or Battleground?](#), Chapter 1)