

THE POWER OF COMMITMENT

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Part I

The Basics of Commitment

The Uncommitted Society

(I Pet 2:9) But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

The fear of commitment is epidemic in the western world. The root is just plain selfishness. The malady of self-centeredness permeates our affluent Western society.

Among Christian, non-commitment takes on subtle forms. Activities, church attendance, and right doctrine can easily mask a lack of deep commitment of the whole person.

Its easy to be a Christian in our society today. It takes so little in the way of commitment to be totally accepted in the world and in the church.

There is more than ease of living. It is a creeping worldliness, a desire to be a Christian, but live like a non-Christian - not so much in the blatantly immoral areas, but in lifestyle.

Many make strong commitments to the wrong things. their intensity of commitment leaves no room for the more significant commitments to God. They opt for lesser commitments.

Why the absurdly incompatible choice? For most it is simply that the cost of true Christian commitment is too high. Every commitment has a cost something - money, time energy - some cost one's family or life.

Though some commitments are obvious, others are made silently as w give ourselves to a way of life or a way of thinking. We trap ourselves in the step-by-step decisions of days past and find ourselves so far into a system that we cannot back out.

Many look back .. only to find they have committed their lives to the wrong things.

Early choices set the course of life - often small choices that seem insignificant at the time.

If Christians really understand commitment from God's viewpoint, many will respond with godly fervor.

Biblical Commitment

God wants us all, and he will not rest till he gets us all. No part of the man will do. A.W. TOZER

Many young Christians are confused by calls for commitment and dedication .. wanting to commit themselves to God, but not seeing how to practically do it.

Commitment is more than intellectual assent. Words like sanctification, lordship, surrender are specific terms with vague meanings

Commitment is not a concise biblical doctrine. It is a summary word embodying several concepts of the Christian life. Its primary meaning is "to entrust something to another". Synonyms are: to vow, to pledge, to decide, to swear, to choose, to promise. These are actions of commitment, each with a different shade of meaning

Commitment must have meaning and substance to be valid.

Various categories:

- ◆ An unconditional commitment on God's part in giving us something (didomi); eg. Eph 3:7
- ◆ A God initiated action to extend something to a person who must respond in faithfulness. (pisteuo - Grk. root word for faith .. classically it means a trusting, a bond by a treaty, or a contractual relation or trust)
- ◆ A person entrusting something to god or to another person (paratithemi - classically .. a commercial term meaning to commit, to deposit, to entrust)
- ◆ A pledge or a promise to do. (this can be positive or negative)

The focus of commitment

True commitment focuses on three essential parts of a person's life - the mind, heart, and will. It must involve all three to be valid

The mind is the seat of intellect and knowledge resulting in theology.

The heart is the seat of belief and affection resulting in a desire for God.

The will is the seat o decision and obedience resulting in a holy life.

What happens when something is missing?

Mind only leads to intellectual theology devoid of real life.

Heart only leads to unstable emotionalism without true biblical basis and without the life of obedience to accompany it.

Will only leads to legalism without knowledge of the word and without depth in the life.
Mind and heart only lead to commitment that never gets applied to the real issue of life.
Mind and will only lack the joy of relationship and loving service to God.
Heart and will only lead to aberration of commitment without biblical basis.

Commitment and Lordship

(Lk 6:46) "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?"

Whether we call it consecration, surrender, commitment, repentance, or revival, I see the subsequent - and sometimes frequent - decisions beyond salvation are biblical and necessary. Daily obedience is never automatic. Its a conscious decision - in fact, a decision of lordship ..

The apostle Peter struggled with this growth process.

Lordship and commitment are intimately related. Most spiritual commitments involve some aspect of the lordship of Christ. Three facts of Lordship stand out: 1 - Jesus Christ is Lord 2 - We acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord 3 - We commit ourselves to his lordship

Commitment, Conversion, and Emotion

(Lk 6:49) "But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great."

We live in a sensual world; we face no bigger trap than religious sensuality. If we have an ecstatic experience with Christ we are tempted to feel he is in the ecstatic experience rather than he is in all our experiences. He is in your ordinary routine just as he is in your mystical ecstasies: he is the down to earth God. Do not wait for goose bumps to reassure you that God is near. Thank him that he is near regardless of how you feel. Goose bumps are acceptable if you get them, but they really don't matter; life cannot continue a 24-hour-a-day-7-day-a-week-52-week-a-year-on-and-on-forever-goose bump. It would deny your humanity You are flesh, not glass .. Mystical sensations can be either of the Holy Spirit or of human nature, either of God or of Satan. Lots of Christians get mixed up worshiping their experiences: the idol of Christ plus their religious experiences. thank God he is with you when the goose bumps go. Beware of spiritual lust. You are learning to live by faith.

Emotions are never an accurate barometer of spiritual depth or commitment. They depend to much on circumstances. They cannot be denied, but they cannot be depended on.

Religious emotion has always been a puzzle .. we don't like the carefully choreographed services that build to an emotional pitch that leads to a decision .. nor do we approve of the cold mechanical formality. It's not an issue of balance .. but of how speaks to us .. our internal sensitivity.

God captures our attention in two general ways: through the mind and through emotions.

God pursues men in every fashion .. but there is much that must follow any conversion commitment to cause a person to grow.

The person of rational intellect who makes decisions based on fact and truth .. may need to be broken by God to bridge the gap of heart and mind.

The reality of commitment isn't found in the warm, cozy feeling .. but in being obedient in the daily grind of living, in the restless battle against sin, and in the relentless pressure of the world.

The Cost of Commitment

(Lk 9:23) Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. **(Lk 14:33)** "So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.

The current Western Christianity .. great contrast to that of the disciples. To the outside observer their is virtually difference between a Christian and his non-Christian neighbor. Christians have never worn the clothes of affluence well. Corruption often follows wealth.

Where is that first century fervor and persecution? For Christians in the West, there is so little obvious cost.

Vance Havner - "As long as the church wore scars, they made headway. When they began to wear medals, the cause languished. It was a greater day for the church when Christians were fed to the lions than when they bought season tickets to sit in the grandstands." Today public identification is easy, with little or no cost.

The scriptures haven't changed .. but few are willing to count the cost.

The key is commitment - not just big commitments, but the many smaller ones. Each commitment will exact a price.

When you buy something, you get only what you pay for. The same principal applies spiritually. there are no bargain buys. The quality of commitment is reflected in it's cost.

What is the cost? What to one is a great price may a pittance to another.

The cost is great, but so is the reward.

There is no greater fable in the Christian life than the promise of commitment without cost. the key to a joyful, victorious Christian life is costly commitment.

Part II

Commitment in Your Personal Life

Commitment in Your Spiritual Walk

(I Cor 3:1) And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.

No one is so empty as the man who has stopped walking with God and doesn't know it. He says and does the right things, but there is a hollow ring to his life.

Many suffer from spiritual anorexia nervosa .. the absence of spiritual food for the spiritual body. Food is what the body needs .. there are no substitutes.

Without the regular intake of the Word you will not grow .. I Pet 2:2.

Taking the Scriptures into your life is not a weekly gorging on Sunday .. it is the regular reading of the Word and allowing God to speak to us throughout it. The frequency of feeding on the Word is more important than the length of the reading.

This regular time with God takes commitment.

Missing a day of devotions will not sink us spiritually, but we need the decision and commitment to make us last in the long term.

No one has a deep spiritual walk who does not spend time daily with God in His Word. It's indispensable. It requires a specific commitment.

Commitment, Materialism, and Success

(Lk 12:15) And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

Wealth and success seldom wear well on Christians. Few can handle them with humility and conscientious stewardship. Pitfalls abound. Greed creeps in where once thankfulness reigned.

We live in the midst of a materialistic society. Almost unknowingly we make irreversible commitments to a materialistic way of life, and they eat us like a cancer. Families want bigger houses, so husbands and wives consume their time and energy on houses and things rather than family and outreach. Men and women push for promotion and uproot families for that marginally better job until life become a nomadic search for greener pastures. House payments, car payments, and charge card payment - all are binding commitments that lock us into a vicious cycle of life.

In *The Pursuit of God* A. W. Tozer reflects on man's penchant for materialism: "There is within the human heart a tough fibrous root of fallen life whose nature is to possess, always to possess. It covets "things" with a deep and fierce passion .. Things have become necessary to us, a development never originally intended . God's gifts now take the place of God, and the whole course of nature is upset by the monstrous substitutions."

Again the issue is not having wealth or success, but wanting either one. The desire corrupts.

Commitment of Your Leisure Time and Personal Privacy

(Ro 14:7-8, 12) For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. [v8] For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. [v 12] So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

The guilty feeling about wasting a few hours comes from the nagging, unspoken question of whether personal discretionary time has a purpose.

One of the most significant measures of a person's spiritual commitment is what he does with his discretionary, or leisure time.

As much as we like, even desire, our solitude, it isolates us from the needs of people. Along with a commitment of leisure time must also come a relinquishing of some of our privacy. Our time is not our own, not is our lifestyle. It all comes under the leadership of Christ and the focus that He directs.

Committed Christians open the doors of their lives to people. they allow them to invade their privacy and take their time. their schedule adjust to he needs of others. They restrain themselves in their personal liberties. They allow other to influence their choices of recreation and activity.

Commitment and Personal Discipline

(Prv 24:3-32) Through wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; By knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches. A wise man is strong, yes, a man of knowledge increases strength; For by wise counsel you will wage your own war, and in a multitude of counselors there is safety. Wisdom is too lofty for a fool; he does not open his mouth in the gate. He who plots to do evil will be called a schemer. The devising of foolishness is sin, and the scoffer is an abomination to men. If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small. Deliver those who are drawn toward death, and hold back those stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, "Surely we did not know this," does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? He who keeps your soul, does He not know it? And will He not render to each man according to his deeds? My son, eat honey because it is good, and the honeycomb which is sweet to your taste; So shall the knowledge of wisdom be to your soul; if you have found it, there is a prospect, and your hope will not be cut off. Do not lie in wait, O wicked man, against the dwelling of the righteous; do not plunder his resting place; For a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again, but the wicked shall fall by calamity. Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles; Lest the LORD see it, and it displease Him, and He turn away His wrath from him. Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the wicked; For there will be no prospect for the evil man; the lamp of the wicked will be put out. My son, fear the LORD and the king; do not associate with those given to change; For their calamity will rise suddenly, and who knows the ruin those two can bring? These things also belong to the wise: it is not good to show partiality in judgment. He who says to the wicked, "You are righteous," him the people will curse; nations will abhor him. But those who rebuke the wicked will have delight, and a good blessing will come upon them. He who gives a right answer kisses the lips. Prepare your outside work, make it fit for yourself in the field; and afterward build your house. Do not be a witness against your neighbor without cause, for would you deceive with your lips? Do not say, "I will do to him just as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work." I went by the field of the lazy man, and by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding; And there it was, all overgrown with thorns; its surface was covered with nettles; its stone wall was broken down. When I saw it, I considered it well; I looked on it and received instruction:

All the talent and ability in the world are useless without the discipline to point them in the right direction. someone has said that discipline is the refining fire by which talent become ability.

Commitment without discipline is like a luxurious car without gas: it looks great, but it goes nowhere.

Discipline is the ability to say "no" to what is sin, to say "yes" to what is right, and to say "I will" to what ought to be done.

Everyone is wholly disciplined in what he really wants to do. Young boys shoot baskets for hours. Skiers study and practice with no thought of the time spent.

Discipline focuses our abilities to God's ends. Desire focuses our abilities to our ends A life goal is to make God "oughts" into our "wants".

The word discipline makes us think of being tough, having dogged determination, joyless striving. but other biblical words describe it better: endurance, self-control, training. (Prv 25:28)

Do you have a sense of being in race? Is there a sense of urgency about your life - a goal that draws you on? Discipline must have direction.

Rules of the race:

#1: Lay aside every encumbrance. Most are entangled with the weights of the world. At some point we must decide to strip down and throw aside these weights. but that requires a specific commitment to do - not just consider. this is the "I will" of discipline.

#2: Lay aside every sin that so easily entangles. Sin, like seed, always start small. We must exercise the "no" of discipline.

#3: Run with endurance. What goes before determines whether a person can endure.

In earlier Olympic games, the preparation for the events was as important as the event itself. The competitor could be disqualified by breaking the rules of training as well as by loosing in the race itself.

Years of spiritual indolence cannot be made up in moments of religious fervor. The discipline of the past produces the endurance of the present. Endurance begins with a conscious commitment to discipline and self-control.

#4: Fix your eyes on Jesus. We do not endure just endure, but for a much more noble cause. we endure for the glory of God and for the cause of Christ.

Part III

Commitment in Your Personal Relationships

Commitment and Accountability

(Prv 27:17; Eccl 4:9-10)

Prov 27:17 As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.

Eccl 4:9-10 Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up.

The glamorized American West produced the image of the macho man. He is loner - fiercely independent. The tough, capable woman is his counterpart. Advertisement paint them indelibly in our minds as accountable to no one - totally self-sufficient.

Nothing is further from the truth. Centuries of human history show that life demands accountability. Few people naturally do what is best for others. The perverse nature of man tends to sloth, not diligence.

Even our sincere spiritual commitments, privately held, often go unfulfilled. So we become discouraged - even a bit cynical - and hesitate to make new ones.

The only way to break this vicious cycle is to make ourselves accountable to another person or group. Accountability is foundational to the NT concept of fellowship, but it rarely exists in the body today. We have emaciated the meaning of fellowship in our efforts to make Christianity more appealing and acceptable to a sophisticated world.

biblical fellowship cannot exist without the elements of "stimulating one another to love and good deeds". "Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all," and "bear one another's burdens."

Paul held Peter accountable for his actions. The Jerusalem council held Paul accountable. Titus was accountable to Paul for appointing elders .. even Jesus was accountable to the Father.

We all need other people to help us keep our commitments, but only if we are serious about keeping them. God forbid that we should get into the habit of making commitments with no intention of keeping them.

We need accountability for our personal lives, our ministries, and our families. Of the three, accountability of personal life is the most crucial, since the later two are more visible.

Accountability puts teeth into commitment. And it forces you to open up an area of your life to scrutiny by another.

Commitment to Your Marriage

The marriage vow is a commitment .. and must have meaning to both husband and wife.

It seems that a series of commitments are necessary to make a marriage last.

An initial commitment or a renewing of that absolute commitment to stay in the marriage no matter what.

A commitment to remain faithful in mind and body. Sexual unfaithfulness never happens on a whim.

A commitment to love your spouse. People fall in love, but they decide to stay in love. Emotions change like the weather, but love must be a determined commitment. We must commit to love in a self-sacrificial way whether or not the love is reciprocated.

A commitment to work on your marriage. No marriage can stand neglect and still survive. Any auto mechanic will tell you that maintenance, not repair, is the key to lengthening the life of the car.

Commitment to Your Children

(Ps 127:3) Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward.

Regret describes the gut feeling of many parents as they watch their children slip away from their conscious control - regret for what they could have done, should have done, and now want to do, but it's too late.

Two basic commitments regarding our children:

1. a commitment to make time for the children
2. a commitment to personally take the responsibility for their spiritual teaching and training

Commitment to Leadership and Authority

(Hb 13:17) Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

The greatest difference between secular and spiritual authority lies in mandatory versus voluntary submission. In the secular realm, money, security, position, and law all marshal power to make authority effective. In the spiritual realm, all submission is voluntary and often erratic.

A critical turning point in the life of a growing believer comes when a deep commitment is made to place oneself under the authority of others in life and ministry. Not blind submission. The Bible has no place for that: "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the outcome of their way of life, imitate their faith."

Most do want to lead, but often want to critique how another leads.

"It's not the critic who counts. The credit actually belongs to the man in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood - who at best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at worst, if he fails at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place will never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."

Let us be among those who are in the battle, not those who criticize those who lead the battle.

Most Christians put themselves under no authority except that of the church through membership. The Church in the world engages in constant battle with the forces of darkness. No battle is ever waged by wishing. It needs people who pray, plan, and act together. There are no effective loners.

The danger for most Christians is not commitment to the wrong task or leader, but making no commitment at all, and bristling with indignation when any authority attempts to enlist them.

I believe the cause of Christ lurches along like a temperamental engine, misfiring and quitting, largely because we never know who the real soldiers are. The leader blows the trumpet and wonders who will decide to come to battle.

Many gifted men and women never learn to function under authority. They want their independence and their options.