

COMMITMENT

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Commitment is a word that our society, it seems, either throws around lightly when it is convenient, but rarely carries through on, or further, disdains out-rightly. Yet the Word of God takes it very seriously. God made a commitment to mankind by sending Jesus to die for our sins, and those of us who are born-again are glad He kept His word. Jesus made a commitment to be the propitiation for our sins and we are counting upon that for eternity. Yet, when it comes to making a commitment to Him in return, or worse yet, to other people, few of us can truly be counted upon to keep our word.

In the military, the number one most important thing that is drilled into a soldier is this very concept. One man must know he can rely 100% on the men around him when in battle. Well, brothers and sisters in Christ, we are also in the military and our battle is of eternal consequence, therefore it is all the more important for each of us to understand this word called 'commitment' and learn how to follow through on its purpose for our lives.

Commitment means to pledge oneself to a position or issue, a pledge or promise to do something. It also means dedication to a long-term course of action; engagement or involvement.

For example, when my wife and I shared our wedding vows publicly, we made a commitment to one another. We knew that we would now be responsible for carrying through upon those words with our actions for the rest of our lives. This was no short-term-until-we-feel-like-quitting kind of commitment. This meant it was for-good, the whole-ball-of-wax, never-turn-back kind of action we were taking. This is the kind of commitment God speaks of in His Word that is for all believers to practice in every area of our lives.

We must understand that when we say something it is as though we are throwing ourselves over the bar, so to speak, like a high jumper. When a high jumper is preparing for a jump, they picture what they are going to do and see themselves jumping over that bar before they take one step. Then they put what they see into action.

Thus, when you speak a commitment publicly, you are committing yourself to jump over the bar. Then you carry out that word and fulfill your vow.

Unfortunately, there are a lot of people who say words of commitment, but their word means nothing. They flippantly say, "Oh, I'm going to do this; I promise to do that." But they have no follow-through. They don't keep their word. This is what the Bible calls breaking covenant.

Yet today, more than ever, Jesus is calling His church to commitment. In Acts chapter 2, verse 41 says, "*Those who gladly, (even with great emotion), were baptized, and there were about three thousand souls added to them. And they continued steadfastly...*". Those are two

key words; continued, and steadfastly. "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, in breaking of bread and prayers; and fear came upon every soul and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now those who believed had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods and divided them among all, and as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."

One thing necessary for a marriage to be successful; one thing necessary for a church to be successful, is to have people who are committed to that church.

Today there are "cruisematics" in the Body of Christ. Have you ever heard of that? They cruise over here and they cruise over there. They cruise from one church to another, taking what they want and going on to the next. "Well he ticked me off, so I'll go on over there".

While it sometimes is God's will for people to change churches or locations. There is a time and place for that as the Lord leads. There is nothing flaky about that. But there is something powerful in staying and being committed to one place. It says in this passage that they got baptized, received the Word, and continued steadfastly.

The word "continued" means to establish a thing; to cause it to stand in the presence of others. In other words these people were committed. They made a public stand before the Pharisees to proclaim 'This is our church, this is our fellowship'. And they continued steadfastly in that proclamation.

The word "steadfast" means to attend continually; to give oneself continually; to wait on; to wait on continually; to adhere to; to be devoted to. There is power in making a commitment and continuing in it. Miracles were poured out when they devoted themselves to the fellowship. Favor was poured out when they devoted themselves to the fellowship.

I've got good news for you, the same attitude still holds true for today. Signs and wonders happen in a church when people are committed to that fellowship. They're hooked in. They're saying "that's *my* church." They are taking ownership of it. There is something very powerful in that. You drive by there and you see that sign up there, and you say, "Bless God, that's *my* church. I'm committed to *that* church. I'm committed to *that* group of people, praise God." There is power released when a group of people has that kind of commitment.

Back in Acts chapter 2 we read, "*there was great fear came on every soul, great signs and wonders when they continued steadfastly.*"

It's important for a pastor to know that people are committed to a church, because churches are built upon people. If no one came to the services, we wouldn't have a church. Sure, there would be a building, but a building isn't a church. There is power released when you commit yourself, in each of your lives individually and in the church as a whole.

This was a public thing. Everybody knew it; that was *their* church. For we read, "*They continued house to house and temple to temple.*" This means in the church *and* in the homes.

I've been working with a lot of new believers and have been challenging them in relation to commitment. One guy told me, "I want to be involved in Bible study." So I encouraged him to be a part and his response was, "Well I'll try to be there."

Do you know what it means when people use the word "try?" That means they're won't be there.

So my response is, "Don't tell me you're going to try, either say you are going to do it or you are not going to do it."

"You want me to commit?" Yes, that is what I want. That is what every pastor wants, because that is what God wants, for each of us to commit to a body and stick to it. That is exactly what a Pastor wants and exactly what God is commanding of His people.

One of the reasons people don't commit is because then they're obligated to do what they said they were going to do. For example, when you buy a car and you sign on the dotted line, you are in essence, making a commitment to make each of those payments, in full and on time.

For when a person commits themselves, there is a power released. Commitment is when you say 'THIS is my church.' And you back up those words by your actions. Instead of hopping from one church to another every few weeks or months, you get involved in a body where you can be accountable and where others can rely upon you as you do them.

So, how do you choose a church? First, you must get rid of your shopping list. "Well if you've got this, if you've got that; if you do this, if you do that; if the pastor has his hair combed just the right way, and he's a certain height, and a certain this, and a certain that, then that will be our church."

No, that's not the way to pick a church. First Corinthians 12:18 tells us how. "But now *God* has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as *He* pleased." Isn't that good news?

Believers must learn to ask? "Where do you want me planted, God?" Now, of course, when He tells you, you need to heed his words and not make excuses for your disobedience, because that church does not meet all or your personal preferences or qualifications.

Where did God set you? Remember, it is *He* who places the members in the body where *He* desires. *He* wants to place you. In this country today, we have a lot of AWOL Christians. Those who are absent without leave from the churches He has set them in. God calls His people an army, therefore we, as His soldiers need to heed the Commanding Officers orders and be at the post He has put us in. A person doesn't need to visit 100 churches to find out where they should be. We just need to ask, listen and obey, and truly follow God.

The next thing you need to do, after committing to a church, is to commit yourself to a pastor.

Now, a pastor is not supposed to run your life and make your every decision for you, but rather to be a covering of protection for you and to lead, advise, council and pray for you, especially in major decisions.

First Samuel 10, verse 26, tells us that when Saul was anointed king over Israel, he was by himself; just by himself. There was no one following him. Then, *after* he was anointed king, it says, "and Saul went home to Gibeah; and valiant men went with him." Men, "whose heart God had touched."

When we started this church, we started just by ourselves. Then, God put it upon different people's hearts that they were to be a part. We heard those exact words, "We want to be a part." God had touched their hearts, we came home to Gibeah, amen, Folsom, California and God had touched peoples hearts.

Another couple told us that when they heard we were going to start a work here that they prayed about it and God told them, "That preacher needs help, let's go." God had touched their heart, and they responded, "We need to help that couple."

After we got out of Bible college, we were worn out. We found a church and were attending regularly, but we weren't really committed. We were part of the church, but never really involved. Then the church went through a transition and a change in pastors, and the Lord put it upon our heart that we needed to be a more of a part of the work there; to hook up with the vision and get involved. The Spirit of God put that upon our heart. So we went to the pastor and said, "We haven't really been a part, but we want you to know we're committed to helping you out, we're going to see you through this transition, God has put it upon our heart and we're committing ourselves to you."

I'll tell you, there's power when you come up to a man of God and say that to him. When I heard those words especially when we first began, it was a great encouragement. When a man or woman says with commitment and sincerity, "You're my pastor", the power of heaven becomes tangible! There's power, when you tell a man of God, "You're my pastor".

One problem people have today is what I call "conditional commitment." They stay "committed" until the pastor or someone else says or does something to offend them. Yet, there is great victory in having a pastor. When you are submitted and accountable to a pastor, instead of being an open target, you have a covering of protection from the fiery darts the world and the enemy throw at you.

We call ourselves a non-denominational, independent church. In certain practices we are, but we're not independent of anybody. We're submitted to other people. I submitted myself to Faith Christian Fellowship, Buddy Harrison and Bruce Brock - they are my pastors. I have also submitted myself to Tom Terry, a pastor up in Reno. I submitted myself to Pastor Bill Ransom up in Tahoe City and Pastor John Purcel down in Madera, as well as Pastor Gary Taylor in Willows. I have no problem submitting myself. Why? Because there is victory in

submitting yourself. We're not lone rangers here. We are interdependent upon one another. The Bible says, "*Submit yourselves one to another*", not just to the pastor, but also one to another.

Hebrews 13, verse 17, says, "*Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls*". Do you know what my job description is? Do you know what my job as pastor is? As a pastor, I watch out for the souls of those God has put under my care. I'm responsible for their souls. Your soul is your mind, your will and your emotions. We all need a pastor to watch out for our souls. We don't beat people over the head - that is not what a pastor is for. Occasionally he'll spank you, take you out to the wood shed once in awhile, so to speak, but he does it in a good way because he is responsible for your spiritual well-being, just as a father is responsible to his children's well-being.

Reading on verse 17 says, "*He watches out for your souls, as those who must give an account.*" I have a responsibility placed on me. Your pastor has a responsibility upon him for your soul too.

This verse goes on to say, "*Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.*"

This means that if we don't allow someone to pastor us with joy, but rather cause him grief, guess what? It is unprofitable for us.

Therefore, in order to make things profitable in your life, you need to have a pastor in your life. God has set up an authority structure. That structure is designed to be a shield of protection, like a huge umbrella that hangs over you when it's raining. When a satanic attack comes against your life, the Bible says, "*Submit yourself therefore to God, resist the devil and he'll flee from you*".

Then, in James 4, verses 7 and 8, it also says, "*Submit yourselves to the elders.*" Being submitted to the elders is one way we submit ourselves to God. Then we can resist the devil and make him flee from us.

Many people out there are Lone Ranger Christians. Consequently, they've opened themselves up to the attacks of the devil. Because they've not walked in submissiveness, because they've never come up to a man of God and said, "You're my pastor", they have allowed themselves to be open to his devices and wrought defeat into their lives by their own actions. Is this a control thing? No, it's a victory thing!

As a pastor, I need people who are committed to me. I need people whose hearts God has touched, people who are willing to say, "We know it's tough out there being a pastor, and you don't do it 'just because'. We want to let you know that God has touched our hearts. We're with you, and we're committed to you. We're going to stand with you, and be there for you, and work with you to raise up this church. When you get your hands dirty, we'll get our hands dirty too." There is victory in that kind of commitment. Not just for me, but for every pastor, and for your pastor too. There's victory in the lives of those in authority and there is victory in the lives of those who speak and act upon their word as well.

The Bible says in First Chronicles, chapter 12, verses 33 and 38 that Men were added unto David. *"Men whose hearts were strong"; "people who were prepared for battle"; "people who kept rank"*. These were a people who kept rank; they didn't fall out of order, but kept rank, stayed in formation and each did their part. In the military, when they line up all the soldiers, it is called 'keeping rank' and, if you fell out of rank, you would be disciplined with push-ups or some other kind of physical correction. The soldiers had to learn to be subject to orders and those in authority in order to develop a team where each man can absolutely rely upon one another. God's Word calls His people soldiers; each to do their part as a team to keep the victory over the enemy.

One little side note I want to interject here is that He also reminds us not to be double minded. In other words, we are not to have a double heart. We need to say something and stick to it. When someone says they're committed, a pastor needs to be able to trust their word. You know what that tells me when people come up to me and say, "We're committed to you, you are our pastor"? It tells me that I can pastor them. I don't have to be afraid that they're going to run off if I say something wrong, make some kind of mistake. (And we all do!)

With one man, I actually asked him directly, "Do you receive me as your pastor?" He kind of got nervous. Do you know why? Because he really wasn't committed to having a pastor in his life. What would be your response if your pastor asked you the very same question?

You've got to receive the gift of God. You must see your pastor as a gift; as God's instrument of ministry into your life.

So I'm issuing a call to duty to you today. Jesus wants you to be victorious in every area of your life. He wants you to have a pastor in your life to love you, cover you and watch out for your soul! What a blessing God has given us. All we must do is receive that gift and obey our call to arms!