

A Growing Commitment

For those of us who decided to become a Christian by being convinced of the truth of the gospel, we made a decision to commit ourselves to Jesus and the truth (Ephesians 1:13; Colossians 1:5-6; 1 Peter 1:22).

For an athlete to be able to compete at the top of his game he must always keep himself in top condition. He cannot afford for one moment to slack off in his commitment to his training. The same is true for the Christian. Commitment to the cause of Christ is something that must be maintained and nurtured. In this lesson we will suggest three ways in which we can begin to develop a deeper commitment.

First of all, we must make a commitment to Jesus and the interests of the Kingdom of Christ.

Jesus called men to follow Him. Why? Because He is the source of eternal life that men seek. Here are some passages from the *Gospel of John* that bear this out:

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes on Him should not perish, but have eternal life. He that eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life: and I will raise him up at the last day.”

“Simon Peter answered Him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.’”

“ . . . and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. . . . even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He should give eternal life. And this is life eternal, that they should know You the only true God, and Him Whom You did send, even Jesus Christ.” (John 3:16; John 6:54; John 6:68; John 10:28; John 17:2-3)

Jesus taught the people of His day that He was the fulfillment of all prophecy regarding the coming Messiah, and that the Scriptures bore this out:

“Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfill. You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of Me. . . .” (Matthew 5:17; John 5:39)

Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). Through Moses came the law, but through Jesus came grace and truth (John 1:17).

Only those who are in Christ may receive the spiritual blessings of Christ (Ephesians 1:3). These spiritual blessings are redemption (Romans 3:23), freedom from

condemnation (Romans 8:1), freedom from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2), sanctification (1 Corinthians 1:2), we are given spiritual life (1 Corinthians 15:22), we become a new creature (2 Corinthians 5:17), and we achieve true equality (Galatians 3:28).

As disciples of Christ, Jesus must come first in our lives. Jesus said in Mark 12:30, Matthew 6:24, and Luke 9:62,

“ . . . you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God.”

Jesus must come before our worldly affairs.

“Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave commandments to depart unto the other side. And there came a scribe, and said unto Him, ‘Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go.’

“And Jesus said unto him, ‘The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.’

“And another of the disciples said unto Him, ‘Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.’

“But Jesus said unto him, ‘Follow Me; and leave the dead to bury their own dead.’” (Matthew 8:18-22)

Jesus must be our first love. Jesus said in Luke 14:26:

“If any man comes unto Me, and hates not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.”

And as we read previously Jesus must be our only Master (Matthew 6:24).

The concerns of the Kingdom, which is the church, must come first. Jesus said in Matthew 6:33,

“But seek you first His Kingdom, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

As Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:5, He wants you to be born again (John 3:5). So before you seek to save others make sure to save yourself through Jesus Christ first.

When Jesus began calling the apostles to follow Him, He said He would make them fishers of men (Mark 1:17). He still needs fisherman today, which means He needs you.

This means that Jesus wants you to put the concerns of the Kingdom above worldly concerns (Luke 9:59-62).

Secondly, what steps can I take to deepen my commitment?

First of all, constantly remind yourself of the motive for your commitment. Remind yourself of what it is exactly that God has done for you:

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." (1 John 4:10; Romans 5:8; John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8)

Read, study, and pray on a regular basis. Stick to a daily reading plan as we suggested at the beginning of this year. Paul reminds us of the importance of studying God's word when he wrote,

" . . . how that by revelation was made known unto me the mystery, as I wrote before in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ. . . . And that from a babe you have known the sacred writings which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness." (Ephesians 3:3-4; 2 Timothy 3:15-16)

Devote time each day to study and research of a particular Bible subject so that you can increase your own expertise on that subject. Be as the noble Bereans were of Acts 17:11:

"Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of the mind, examining the scriptures daily, whether these things were so."

Do not let your understanding be unduly persuaded and fall prey to those you hear on the TV or radio who may not have your best interest at heart, but are really more concerned with and interested in lining their own pocketbooks.

Reading and studying God's word will only increase our faith. The apostles understood that Jesus could increase their faith in Luke 17:5, and Paul wrote in Romans 10:17,

“So belief comes of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”

For those with families, have a gathering or devotional in the morning or in the evening.

Remember, those of us in Christ are members of His body, and "members" in particular. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:27-28,

“Now you are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God has set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.”

In other words, discover your God-given talents and learn how best to use them for the edification and growth of the body. This is what Jesus spoke about in Matthew 25:14-15 when He said,

"For the Kingdom of Heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, and to another two, and to another one, to every man according to his several ability; and straightaway took his journey."

Make it your business to find out what efforts are being made, on a corporate level, to preach the gospel, and volunteer to get involved.

Our initial commitment to Christ is something that we must continue to maintain and develop. It will not just simply 'happen'.

A while ago I read a comment from an individual who had said regarding church growth, "What every church needs is a fire without having to have a fire." This individual said this because his congregation had suffered from a devastating fire to their building at one time. After this happened, the church came together in the face of this tragedy and they experienced a time of growth. Since then, however, attendance had been on the decline.

Fortunately, the Lord ***has*** provided us with a type of fire that builds and strengthens instead of damaging and destroying. It is the fire of God's love. Divine love is an infinitely powerful force. It powered the creation of the entire universe, material and spiritual; it continues to power everything that goes on in the world of nature, in the human world, and in the world within us. It is the same power that can give us the will and the strength as a congregation to reach out and invite others into our circle.

It's really very simple. Welcoming people into our church starts with that deceptively simple, yet truly radical statement of Jesus in John 13:34-35 and John 14:15:

“I give you a new commandment: that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are

My disciples, if you have love for one another. If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”

This is the membership requirement of the Lord's church, given from the Lord's own lips. There is no mention of affirming a particular set of doctrines or signing a book. We are the Lord's disciples, He tells us, when we have love for one another and keep His commandments.

And doesn't our membership in this congregation start and end with love? Not a single one of us would be here if there were not some things that we loved about this congregation. Perhaps we love the warmth of our church family; perhaps we love the inspiration and comfort of our church's teachings; perhaps we find here a place to engage in the joy of service. I believe that most of all, we love our church because it helps us to love one another – and the Lord – more fully, deeply, and joyfully. As extensive and expansive as the teachings of our church are, they all boil down to God's love in our hearts, guided by the light of God's wisdom in our minds, so that we can truly and happily serve one another.

You may be thinking to yourself, “Yes, of course, David. You say that just about every Sunday! Love and wisdom; goodness and truth; usefulness and service, etc., etc.” Those of us who are blessed with these beautiful teachings can easily take them for granted. They become the natural pathways of our minds and our lives. And like a well-worn path, at times we don't even notice the underlying presence of these spiritual pathways, keeping our lives flowing along through the inevitable struggles, pains, and disappointments of life.

And yet, for so many people in our world today, there is no such open pathway for God's love and wisdom to flow into their hearts, minds, and lives. So many people are moving through life day by day, struggling against the very same personal disasters, frustrations, and disappointments as we do, yet without the deep comfort and inspiration that comes from having a living faith in the Lord, and a supportive church family. So many people that we see around us every day are spiritually poor, emotionally brokenhearted prisoners of the secular worldview that prevails in our society and in our media. So many people do not have the wonderful power of God's love and guidance that we all too often take for granted.

This is where the power of God's love can have a wonderful effect in growing our congregation. Our goal in building up the church is not – or at least should not be – simply to enlarge our membership base and ensure the survival of our church. No! The Lord calls us to a much more powerful mission. It is a mission of the spirit, which calls us to grow in love. It is the same call that the prophet Isaiah felt when he wrote these deeply moving words in Isaiah 61:1-3:

“The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year

of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion – to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.”

Yes, the church and our Lord call us to reach out from pure love and compassion to those who are going through life without the healing balm of a living faith in God and a loving church community. We are called to guide them toward the same path of love and faith that has meant so much to us, toward the sense of satisfaction, comfort, and joy that binds us to this congregation so that we keep coming back over and over again.

Yes, it is a risky thing to do. What if they say no? What if we give them the wrong impression? What if we open our hearts and tell them how much our church means to us, only to have them pass it off as something insignificant? What if...?

There is always a risk in doing *anything* worthwhile. And since there is nothing that is worth more than giving someone the gift of a living faith in God, it makes sense that we might have to take some even greater risks than usual in offering people that faith. And of course, some of the people we ask will not be prepared to receive that gift.

Yet if even **one** person does accept the gift we offer, what we have accomplished for that person and for the Lord's kingdom is worth all the risk, and all the resistance we may have had to get through in order to give that gift.

In this lesson I have suggested three steps that we can all take to help us have a growing commitment to Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Keep the motive for your commitment in mind.

Read, study, and pray on a regular basis.

Use your talents and get involved in the work.