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WHAT IS "TOTAL COMMITMENT?"

By Mark K. Lewis

We are hearing much these days in the Lord's church concerning "total commitment." And though that phrase is not verbatim in the Bible, certainly the concept is amply taught. In such passages as Matthew 10:34-39, Luke 14:26-33, and I Corinthians 7:15, we learn that Christians are to have no higher allegiance than to Jesus Christ, who is "*King of kings and Lord of lords*" (Rev. 19:16). We were crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20); our old man of sin died (Rom. 6:1-6); thus we are to present ourselves as living sacrifices to God (Rom. 12:1), *totally* committed to His will. Indeed, according to Jesus anything less than total commitment makes a Christian worthless (Luke 14:34), "*neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out*" (vs. 35). With this strong language Jesus indicates the intensity Christians should have in their service to God.

But, there is a cloud surrounding "total commitment"; just what does it involve? Let us look at this from a couple of angles and hopefully, present some clarifying thoughts.

First of all, total commitment is given to Jesus Christ, to *his* will, and not to some man-devised program. The latter is the fatal flaw in the "Crossroads" movement sweeping the church at the moment. In the Crossroads philosophy, the "leaders" organize "soul talks" and other group activities, and attendance at all functions is mandatory or the individual will be admonished and eventually shunned. Above all else, members are required to be at the group meetings; if they do not attend, they are not "totally committed." If parents or loved ones balk at the individual's constant attendance at these meetings, that individual is encouraged to leave home, splitting a family. This has happened numerous times throughout the country as this movement has swept into many churches.

Beloved, total commitment to a "group" and its activities, no matter what those activities are, is not total commitment to Christ. No one on this earth, even elders in the Lord's church, can require a Christian to conform to a man-devised program of work to the neglect of that individual's family. For example, let us suppose that the church leaders set up a program of Bible studies every night and pressured me into attendance at all of them. I came faithfully because I was told that if I did not, I was not "totally committed." But my home life (or school work, or job) suffered because of it. What am I to do? Regardless of these church leaders' pressure, one of the *Lord's* commandments is to be faithful and true in the home and take care of matters there (I Tim. 5:8; Eph. 5:25; 6:1-4). So if "church leaders" set up a program of work that conflicts and interferes with the *Lord's* commands, we stick with the Lord and abandon the man-made system. Commitment to the group is what "Crossroads" means by "total commitment"; but such is not what the Bible teaches. Whenever a home or church is split, those who do the splitting had better make absolutely sure they are doing it "*for my (Jesus') sake*" (Matt. 10:39) and not on the basis of some humanly devised system of service. We cannot set up our own system of work for the Lord, regardless of how good it may be, if that system contradicts or in some way conflicts with the Lord's will.

Secondly, total commitment is not 24 hours a day of praying and Bible reading. I heard of a man once who read his Bible while he was shaving every morning. I would certainly not say that such is wrong; but I do not believe that one has to go to such extremes in order to be "totally committed." There is one verse in the Bible that I believe, in principle, is the greatest verse in Scripture on "total commitment." That verse (and this will

surprise many) is Psalm 1:2. In speaking of the "blessed" (happy) man (who avoids sin - verse 1), the Psalmist says: "*His delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.*" That does not mean he reads his Bible 24 hours a day; it does not even mean that 24 hours a day he is thinking only of God and his Word. It does mean that God and his Word are never very far from his thoughts. But more than that, everything he does is by the authority of God. Such is truly total commitment.

The totally committed person is prayerful (I Thess. 5:17). He also frequently studies God's Word, for such is his delight (II Tim. 2:15; Psalm 1:2). He will be actively involved in the work of the church, teaching the lost (Acts 8:4), and doing good to all men at every opportunity (Gal. 6:10). But he also realizes that God has ordained recreation for man's benefit (I Tim. 4:8) and that we have God's blessing to take advantage of refreshing exercise. The totally committed individual also realizes that there is a time for rest (Mark 6:31). God does not expect us to work 24 hours a day. One committed to Christ also realizes he has family responsibilities, ordained of God, as we noted earlier. He is also concerned about his physical well-being, seeing that his body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 6:19-20). Thus, he will be concerned with cleanliness and other healthful measures. Beloved, all of these things are involved in the concept of "total commitment," of living under the authority of God. We do not sin when we occasionally watch a football game; this may be our way of relaxing or resting, as God has authorized that we may do.

The "totally committed" Christian "*meditates on the law of the Lord day and night*" - in other words, he makes sure that everything he does has God's

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I DID NOT MARRY A CHRISTIAN

(Name withheld by request)

Several months ago an article appeared entitled "I Married a Christian." I read the article with great interest and it drove home some very sobering thoughts. As I read the article I could not help but think of what a contrast my own life was, for you see, I didn't marry a Christian.

No one told me of the unhappiness I was due in marrying a non-Christian. At the time I married, my parents were not faithful and consequently neither was I. I can't put the responsibility for my actions on them. I was eighteen years old and knew what the Bible taught on marriage.

Now after having lived with a non-Christian for almost ten years, I have been made aware of how important it is for our young people to marry Christians. These ten years have not made me an expert on the subject, but they have made me realize that I should try to teach and/or discourage others from making the same mistake.

When I fell in love with my husband I could not think about those things that *could* lay ahead. The only thing I knew was that I loved him with all my heart and that no one knew or had experienced *this* kind of love. Ours was different -- I felt there was nothing that could ever come between us that we could not overcome. The love that we had for each other would always be there.

After we were married, I was soon to realize how our attitudes and thinking varied. We rented a small apartment and were soon entertaining other non-Christians in our home. The drinking and dancing were all part of the things I had been taught to abhor. And yet right here in my own home I was consenting to, *and becoming a part of*, things that a Christian has no business doing. I was getting further and further away from the church. I knew what I should be doing as a Christian and yet I was doing nothing to change. We were happy by most people's standards but I was miserable. I knew my husband did not share my love for the truth and he was not serious minded about things like that. I loved him so much and I was learning a hard, cold fact -- that love was not enough. I wanted to return to my "first love". We talked about my return

to the church and I realized another fact - he had no intention of going with me in spite of his promises (before marriage) that he would. I decided to wait about returning and try to work things out as best I could. In the meantime, we found out we were expecting our first child. I was elated! I also was made aware of the creation of God within me. I was soon to become a mother and have a life truly influenced by me. I was going to get my heart right with God again.

I repented of my sins and started trying to live the life I so wanted to live. It was hard. First, because I had no encouragement from my husband. Secondly, we still had all our non-Christian friends in and out. My Christian friends from church came by, but not too often because my husband openly did not like them. I loved them and wanted them in my home. I needed them. Somewhere about this time was when the hostility began. I was seeing and hearing a different guy from that wonderful guy I married. There was a wall building between us. We both could sense something changing, but didn't know how to handle it. Where was the love that was going to make all this right? Out of love for my husband, I again stopped attending church. I did not attend for months. I was miserable inside again. After the birth of our daughter, I wanted to get started back to church. My husband's answer was "No." He wanted me to start going to church with him where he went as a child - a denominational church that did not follow God's Word. We really had problems there. I knew the error they taught and I could not worship there. He insisted; I resisted. I then began to try to teach him the truth. He resisted. The next few years were good sometimes, bad sometimes. I was faithful for a while and then unfaithful for a while. When my faithfulness began to put a strain on my marriage, I would slack off and be unfaithful. My husband became jealous of the church and my time there. He could see no reason for attending *every* service. We began to have verbal fights every time I started getting ready for a church service. He would say mean and cruel things about the church and about people there. We were constantly "going at each other" about church related things. Before long the strain was showing in everything.

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authority. If there is a question in his conscience, he does not do that thing, for "whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Romans 14:23). Let us never let anyone convince us that unless we are working "all the time" on "church work" we are not totally committed to Christ. But let us also not forget that total commitment does involve a sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2), and putting the church first above all else (Matt. 6:33). The Lord's work in the church is first but is not the only thing. Let us use our time wisely for the benefit of the kingdom of God, all mankind and ourselves.

May we all be totally committed -- God's way.

CONTRIBUTIONS

INDIVIDUALS

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We fought about money, church, drinking friends, drinking, church, how to handle our daughter, church. The list could just go on and on. Here again, I stopped attending church.

Three and a half years ago I repented again and started to live the Christian life. I thank God that he spared my life and let me live long enough to get back. There is no turning back for me now. We have three children now and I want more than anything to have a Christian home for them. This presents another problem. My husband I do not agree on how to bring up the children. I say one thing, he says another. We are both pulling in different directions. He approves of daughters in swimsuits, shorts, etc. I disapprove. I believe in teaching them to put God first in their life and to be faithful. He still can see no reason to attend every service and openly overrides me when I insist the children go. Where was the love that was going to work all this out?

Our marriage has deteriorated greatly over these last few years This "church problem"; as my husband puts it, has moved into *every* aspect of our marriage. We find ourselves fighting over simple things. We both keep things bottled up inside and find that we can't talk things out anymore. I am ill with the children much too often. I know it's because things are not right between my husband and myself. There are periods of time that my husband chooses to sleep on the couch in the den -- not because I want him to, but seemingly as a form of punishment to me.

My marriage has reached a disastrous point. My husband has given an ultimatum - I have to make a choice - him or the church. Those of you who are Christians know what a rough decision I had. I, of course, have chosen the Lord. I still love my husband with all my heart and have prayed that God would open his heart to understand the truth. I know I have to remain faithful and do what God has commanded me to do. It looks so dark sometimes and yet I have *"to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."* (Phil. 3:4). I'm so weary from being torn between my husband and the Lord.

My husband and I have both realized that we made a mistake. He has said many times that if he had it to do over that he would never have married me. This hurts, but I must confess I wouldn't either.

Most couples we know where a Christian is married to a non-Christians say the same thing -- "Don't do it!"

So many times, the one who is not a Christian pulls the Christian away. In a survey I read not long ago based on 49 mixed marriages, 29 left the Lord, and 21 remained faithful. Of the faithful only 9 converted their companions, 12 have not converted their companions. Another survey stated that 25% of those who contract a mixed marriage leave the church altogether. That is frightening.

To our young people I'd like to say that God frowns on mixed marriages. II Cor. 6:14, 15 we are taught not to become unequally yoked together. The damage done is not just to yourself, but to your husband or wife and then to your children.

I know that my husband and I have not had the marriage God intended. We will always be two instead of one in soul and in spirit.

Love is wonderful, but marriage consists of everyday living together. There are enough things to contend with as newlyweds without adding a mixed marriage to the list.

My prayer is that this article may in some way make our young people, or anyone planning to marry, to marry a Christian. I can't do mine over again, but I can teach my children and others how important it is to marry a Christian and to make that home the kind the Lord intended for it to be.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The letter above is unfortunately typical of many marriages where a Christian has married a non-Christian. When selecting a mate for life, we consider many different areas, e.g., physical appearance, personality, similarity of likes and dis-likes, compatibility, mutual goals, etc. But I would like to suggest to you that while each of these areas and perhaps many others should be carefully considered, the most important area to be considered is one's spiritual relationship to God. While a strict prohibition cannot be found in God's Word preventing young people marrying for the first time, (prohibition is declared for a widow contemplating marriage, I Cor. 7: 39), there is strong inference to Christians marrying other Christians. Statistics bear this out even more vividly.

Young people, you're giving yourself the best advantage and the highest possible likelihood that your marriage will be "honorable" and fulfilling as God intended when you marry a faithful child of God. Since marriage is so important, and since life is so very short, carefully and prayerfully make the right choice of a marriage partner.
By Mike Pace

What Is This Younger Generation Coming To?

By Mike Pace

I've heard a number of people throw up their hands and say, "What is this young generation coming to; Where have all the good young people gone?" Usually those who make such comments are the ones who do nothing to encourage these young people. They have completely forgotten Titus 2:1-8, that instructs the "aged" to teach the "younger" their responsibilities in the church. I am convinced though, that we have many, many fine young people whom we overlook. Maybe the trouble is that we classify and compare the young people in the church with those on the evening news. After being falsely accused of being "rebellions" and "disrespectful," they do indeed lose their respect for the aged. Jesus said in Matt. 7: 13-14 that many would be lost and few saved. In comparison with the rest of the world, we do have only a few good young Christians but let us thank God for them and not group them with the ungodly. To these fine young people I direct the following comments:

I am impressed with the number of times the Bible says, "And _____ rose up early in the morning." This is said of Abraham (Gen. 19:27); Jacob (Gen. 18: 18); Moses (Ex. 34:4); Joshua (Josh. 3:1; 6:12; 7:16; 8:10); Gideon (Judges 7:1); Samuel (I Sam. 15:12); David (I Sam. 17: 20; 19:11); the Israelites (II Chorn. 10:10) Hezekiah (II Chron. 19:20); Jesus (John 8:2) and the apostles (Acts 5: 21); Every time these men rose up early, it was to prepare themselves for some great thing that was to happen that day. Most of these men were preparing themselves to lead the people over whom they had charge to do some great thing for the Lord. That might tell us why these men were great heroes of faith - it was because they had prepared their hearts to accomplish the work God expected of them. The Bible says of Ezra, *"For Ezra had prepared his*
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heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (Ezra 7:10).

Young people, to live a Christian life, you must be prepared. I'm not saying that you have to get up early in the morning to live a Christian life. But what I am saying is that as the men of the Bible rose early in the morning to prepare themselves for God, even so, you must in the early days of your youth, prepare yourselves to serve God to the greatest extent possible. Paul told Timothy that, as a young man, he must prepare himself: "If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, meet for the master's use, prepared unto every good work" (II Tim. 2:21). How was he to accomplish the goal of being prepared? Paul tells him in verse 22, "But flee youthful lusts, and follow after righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." Paul told Titus to, "Put them in mind to be in subjection to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready unto every good work" (Titus 3:1).

Someone says, "How do I prepare myself to do good works?" James says, "To him therefore that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). I think James necessarily infers that doing good is something that has to be known or learned. Paul prayed that the Colossian Christians would "walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work (HOW) and increasing in the knowledge of God." (Col. 1:10). Young people, develop the habit of searching the scriptures daily so that you will be prepared to serve God as He commands.

Paul told Christians, young and old alike, "So then, as we have the opportunity, let us work that which is good toward all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10) How often I have been frustrated with myself because when an opportunity presented itself to me, I was unprepared. Young people, your life as a Christian will never be a success in the eyes of God unless you are prepared.

I know many young people that have said, "I'll live the Christian life later" or "I need more time to decide to do right". Young people, don't be deceived by Satan. When you put off serving Christ, you have already chosen whom you will serve. Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters . . ." (Matt. 6:24). I urge you to choose right while circumstances are before you!

How To Become A Christian

The most important question ever asked is: "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). Then, the **HOW** becomes equally as important. Notice the step by step process. First, we must have faith in the Author and Finisher of our faith, Jesus Christ. (Heb. 12:2). This faith comes by the hearing of the Word of God. (Rom. 10:17). "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Heb. 11:6). With the belief and trust that Jesus is the Redeemer, we must repent of sins. "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." (Acts 17:30). In repentance, we turn from sin, **STOP** serving Satan and **START** serving the Lord. (Matt. 3:8,

Luke 13:3). With this new attitude we are ready to confess our faith, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Rom. 10:9-10). Read Matthew 10:32-33. Acknowledging our faith, repentance and confession, the last step into Christ is baptism. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Gal. 3:27). Read Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38. Now that our past sins have been forgiven, the Lord has added us to His church and we are Christians. (Acts 2:47; Acts 11:26).

BECOME A CHRISTIAN

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