

Are You Committed?

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Today we live in an age often characterized by lack of commitment. As a result, individual lives are destroyed. Needless misery, unhappiness, poverty and crime proliferate. Society is disintegrating, and the entire world is on a path to catastrophe. Both personal salvation and the survival of mankind demand the right kind of commitment. Are you committed to God and his way of life?

A widespread lack of commitment to sound values and in personal relationships in today's world is manifested in many different ways. One of the manifestations of this is that just a century ago divorce was a relatively rare phenomenon in the United States, and much of the rest of the world. Now half of all marriages in the United States end in divorce.

The percentage of children born out of wedlock has skyrocketed in a number of nations around the world in the past several decades, especially in France, the United States, Great Britain and Northwest European countries. For the past several years (2008 - 2013), the percentage of out-of-wedlock births in the United States has exceeded 40 percent, according to the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS)(1). The percentage has more than doubled since 1980, when 18 percent of births were out-of-wedlock. Fewer than 5 percent of children were born out of wedlock in the United States in 1940.

Tragically, the statistics are even worse in some other western nations. A report issued by NCHS in 2009 (2) indicated the following statistics for out-of-wedlock births in 2007 for the following countries:

Iceland 66%; Sweden 55%; Norway 54%; France 50%; Denmark 46%; United Kingdom 44%; Netherlands 40%; Ireland 33%.

Think of the lack of commitment implied in such statistics between the individuals involved in the sexual liaisons leading to pregnancy, as

well as the lack of commitment, particularly on the part of many of the fathers involved, to the children. The disintegration of the traditional family, with a married father and mother, and their children, living together as a family unit, is largely the result of a wholesale abandonment in these nations of societal values founded on Biblical principles of morality.

Lack of commitment manifests itself all too often among nominal Christians, as well as those who do not profess to be Christians. Apostasy, corrupt ministers and Churches encouraging lawlessness, discouragement, bitterness, being consumed with the affairs of this life, a corrupt educational system hostile to Biblical Christianity, hedonistic entertainment and media, along with other factors, has over the years led to a very large percentage of people abandoning their commitment to the truth of God's word, if there was any to begin with (Luke 8:12-14; 2 Timothy 3:1-5).

By Jewish tradition the book of Ruth was read at the Feast of Pentecost. The book's setting is at the time of the spring harvest of barley and wheat (Ruth 1:22; 2:23), which in Palestine corresponds with the time between the Feast of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost. The Jews perceived the theme of Ruth as *chesed*, which can be summarized as meaning "loyalty or faithfulness arising from commitment" (*Harper-Collins Study Bible*, "Ruth," p. 408). *Chesed* combines into one word the ideas of strength, steadfastness and love (*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, "Loving-Kindness," p. 142). It implies willing devotion and commitment which transcends and extends beyond legal obligations. The theme of *chesed*, faithful devotion, or commitment, runs throughout the book of Ruth. Both their husbands having died, Ruth expressed her devotion and commitment not only to her mother-in-law, Naomi, but also to the true God, the God of Israel (Ruth 1:16-17). And she remained faithful to her commitment.

This subject is particularly appropriate for the Feast of Pentecost, which, among other things, pictures the "firstfruits" of God's Kingdom being gathered in this age. One of the great lessons associated with Pentecost is that attainment of the resurrection into God's Kingdom requires commitment, or a willing devotion to God and to his worship

and service. But, of course, commitment is a subject we can focus on not just at Pentecost, but at any time.

Besides the book of Ruth there are countless other examples of commitment in the Scriptures. Think about Abraham, for example, leaving everything to go where God told him to go and do what God commanded and required of him. Joseph remained committed to God even while unjustly imprisoned in a strange land. David refused to lift his hand against Saul even though Saul was pursuing him to kill him without cause. These are just a few of many examples, the greatest being the example of Jesus Christ's commitment to his Father in heaven.

What is commitment? "To devote oneself unreservedly." Are you committed — without reservation — to God? Or is your devotion to him weak, hesitant, doubtful?

Israel in ancient times failed because she as a nation lacked commitment. Israel made an agreement, promising to obey God's word (Exodus 24:7). Time after time God blessed Israel and showed them favor, yet they persistently rebelled against him (Nehemiah 9:16-17; 28-29). They honored God with their lips but not their hearts (Isaiah 29:13). The example of ancient Israel is a lesson for us, as today's nations are headed down a similar path to destruction (1 Corinthians 10:5-11).

If you have been genuinely converted and immersed in a valid baptism, you then entered into a sacred covenant with God. You gave yourself over to God unreservedly — or should have. Christ is committed to us. He laid it all on line for us (2 Corinthians 8:9; John 10:10-15).

The Apostle Paul, following in Christ's footsteps, set a sterling example of devotion and commitment to God and to the people he served (2 Corinthians 11:23-28; 12:15).

God is totally committed to us, and he demands our commitment to him. At stake is eternal life (Hebrews 10:32-39). The trials that we face test our commitment. Endurance despite trials and tribulation proves

our commitment and devotion to God.

Commitment and perseverance are attributes of the Philadelphia Church of God (Revelation 3:8, 10-11). Devotion to God must come before devotion to anything or anyone else, including our own lives (Matthew 10:34-39; 16:24-27).

Serving God requires that we be faithful in handling the money God entrusts to us, and that our primary motivation is toward serving God, not getting rich (Luke. 16:10-13). An unreserved love toward God is the foundation of the law for his covenant people (Matthew 22:37-38).

We need to continually evaluate our own attitudes and conduct, and ask ourselves if they really reflect unreserved commitment to God (2 Corinthians 13:5). To the extent that we lack single-minded devotion to God, we will be unstable (James 1:5-8). Once we see what the obstacles are to the kind of commitment we should have, we need to act to remove them through repentance.

Key areas in which we both exercise and strengthen our commitment to God include Bible study, prayer, and fasting.

If you are weak in faith studying God's word can strengthen your faith (Romans 10:17). To have a genuine relationship with God we must abide in his word (John 8:31; 15:1-8). We are to be able to rightly divide, or correctly understand, God's word (2 Timothy. 2:15). You can't rightly divide the word of God, that is, properly understand it, if you are not studying it regularly and diligently, asking God for understanding and applying it in your life (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 2:1-7). We should avoid getting into fruitless arguments, but we also need to be able to give a sensible and Biblically sound answer to those who ask about our beliefs (1 Peter 3:15).

You should also examine critically your own assumptions. Are the things you believe true? Can they be proven from the Scriptures or other reliable, trustworthy sources? Have you taken into account **all** of the Scriptures on a given subject before reaching a conclusion? We should be guided in our thinking and actions by a sound and thorough understanding of God's word, not ignorance, false traditions, unsound

logic or assumptions, human “philosophy,” rumors, superstitions, and unfounded speculation. Commit yourself to studying God’s word, and that commitment will drive other aspects of your life as well to the extent that you apply what you learn (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Now let’s briefly discuss prayer. We don’t know when Christ is going to return, and for that very reason we are told to watch and pray (Mark 13:33). Prayer helps us direct our devotion to God, and avoid temptation (Mark 14:38). Scripture admonishes us to pray “without ceasing,” or daily (Psalm 55:17; Daniel 6:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Regular fasting can help us draw near to God and strengthen our commitment to him (James 4:7-10; one way we humble ourselves is through fasting, Psalm 35:13). Paul, as mentioned earlier, was a man whose life exemplifies commitment to God, and he said he fasted often (2 Corinthians 11:27).

Our commitment is also measured in part by how much our hearts are in God’s work (Luke 12:35-48). We are told to pray that God will provide open doors for the preaching of the gospel, and, to pray for those doing the preaching (Ephesians 6:18-20; Colossians 4:2-4). To pray for God to send laborers for the harvest (Matthew 9:37-38). To pray for the coming of God’s kingdom (Matthew 6:10).

Another measure of your commitment is your love of God’s way of life as opposed to that of the world, and the sense of kinship with others who are genuinely committed to God’s way of life (1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 2:15-18). Being committed to God means we’re going to love his people, and we will share a bond with them that we do not share with people not of our fellowship (1 John. 1:3). We should love all people and get along with them as well as possible, but we need to be aware the wrong kind of relationships with people can draw us away into sin (1 Corinthians 15:33). That does not mean we should be self-righteous or condescending in our treatment of others, but don’t get yourself into compromising situations where you are committed to other people in place of God (John 2:23-25).

In summary, we need to be growing toward total commitment to God and his way of life, as we prepare for His Kingdom. We can build that

commitment through faithfully studying God's word daily, daily prayer, regular fasting, applying God's word in our everyday lives, being committed to the work of the gospel, and developing a kinship with one another through our mutual fellowship with Christ and the Father. If we do this, we can be assured of being among the firstfruits harvested in the resurrection of the saints when Jesus Christ returns to establish God's Kingdom on earth.

References

1. Martin JA, Hamilton BE, Osterman MJK, et al. Births: Final data for 2013. National vital statistics reports; vol 64 no 1. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2015.
2. Ventura SJ. Changing patterns of nonmarital childbearing in the United States. NCHS data brief, no 18. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2009.

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