

Commitment

Is a Four Letter Word

by Evangelist Dea Warford

"I hope this marriage works out". I could hardly believe my ears as I stood listening to the groom speaking these words to his best man as we waited in the ante room before I performed the wedding ceremony. Granted, his first marriage had failed, but was he now going into this marriage with no more assurance, love and commitment than to "hope" everything worked out? Of course, with his attitude, it didn't work out. And 50%-60% of marriages today don't last!

Commitment isn't the American way anymore. And, tragically, it isn't the "Church" way anymore either. Probably 20% to 35% of Sunday morning worshippers attend the mid week service. Call me old fashioned, but I am quite sure that the first 20 years of my Christianity, I didn't miss more than one service a year, unless I was extremely sick or on vacation. Today, I hear pastors gently encourage their people to come out to a service, but they don't dare use their pastoral authority to insist it (Heb. 13:17). I almost never hear church membership mentioned from the pulpit anymore.

Church membership today is viewed with suspicion. One church used this hook in its advertising: "The church you can't join". People don't want to join anything, because that might mean they have to be committed. Young people today sleep together, then live together outside of marriage-fearful to make a life-long commitment. When Kathy and I got married, we made a pledge up front that we would never consider or discuss divorce! (Murder maybe, but never divorce! Ha, ha!). We made a "till death do us part" promise and our marriage has lasted 36 years through hail and high water! But, that's because, we're committed.

In today's America, commitment is a 4 letter word! Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty or give me death" is replaced by "Give me my entitlements"; Celebrities go through marriages like some kid goes through Baskin & Robbin's 31 flavors; Politicians switch political party loyalties after elections; Soldiers go AWOL to keep from fighting in some "debatable" conflict; Christians switch churches for better music: Where is the commitment today? It's gone. But, it isn't gone forever, at least not in Christ's church. It will be renewed one day soon. It has to be, or many so called "Christians" will simply be a part of the "Great falling away" (II Thess. 2:3). It seems we have been "conformed to the image of the world" which we were warned against in Romans 12:1, 2. How can we stop this downward spiral away from Godly commitment and escape compromise, confusion, complacency and conformation` to the world's non-committal ways?

To help us understand how, we first need to clearly understand what commitment is and what the Bible teaches on the subject. According to Webster, commitment is: 1) an act of committing to a charge or trust; 2) a pledge to do something in the future; 3) something pledged; and 4) being obligated or emotionally impelled. One other meaning is "consignment to a penal or mental institution". Now, that says it best! Groucho Marx once said, "They say marriage is a wonderful institution. But, who wants to be in an institution!" Well, of course, nobody wants to be committed to a prison or mental institution. But, sometimes they have to be committed there. In marriage

"things are often discovered about one's mate and circumstances can develop which naturally make one question whether they made the right choice. But, that is exactly why we give nuptial vows: "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do us part." Many Christians don't want to be committed either, but when they gave their heart to Christ, they willingly accepted that obligation. In the last days, terrible attacks from Hell will be unleashed upon the earth. Many will want to give up the spiritual battle, but we are promised, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life," (Rev. 2:10). Commitment=faithful until death!

People are willing to be involved today, but would rather not be committed. But, there is a big difference. That difference is best illustrated in a Ham & Egg breakfast. In the Ham and Egg breakfast, the chicken was involved. But, the pig was committed! Yes, the pig was "faithful unto death". What are you being faithful too? What are you committed to? What in your life will last "until death?"

One thing I have committed myself to: to not commit adultery against my wife! "Thou shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14) is the first Biblical usage of the word "commit", which is the root-word of commitment. It is very interesting that "commit" is used in conjunction with the act of adultery because it is the greatest violation of the commitment to marriage. Similarly, Lev. 20:5 says it is to "commit whoredom" by worshipping the god Molech. "Thou shalt have no other God's before me" is the first commandment (Exodus 20:3). Commitment to the Lord means not committing adultery with other gods. James 4:4 brings it up to date for Americans: "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."

Commitment, as a Christian, means loyalty to Christ alone and separation and distinction from the world. And, we do this through our commitment to Christ, to His church, to the Word, to practicing what we preach, and to living a holy life. "He that commits sin is the servant of sin." (John 8:34) and "He that commits sin is of the devil" (1 Jo. 3:8) shows that any ongoing loyalty to sin proves our commitment to Satan and lack of commitment to the savior.

To best understand commitment, we need only look at some of the finest examples in history-those taken from the very pages of the Bible. In Ruth 1:16, 17, when Ruth's husband died, she committed herself to follow her mother-in-law with these words, "Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die." My sister, Elaine, waited for many years to commit herself to the right, god-fearing man. At 36 years of age, she quoted Ruth's very words to her husband at their marriage ceremony, which I presided over. These past decades, they have raised a family, pastored churches and endured great tests and trials. To me, my sister and her husband, Tom, are the greatest examples of God's faithfulness and provision of any Christians I know. But, it wasn't without great difficulties. Her commitment at the wedding altar stood fast through it all!

In Genesis 32:26-28, Jacob wrestled with an angel of God all night long. The angel tried to leave, but Jacob held on to him saying, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Jacob was committed to receiving a blessing from God. He fought and prayed all night for it. (Reader, when is the last time today's Christians fought with the devil and prayed to God in an all-night prayer meeting?). His

extraordinary commitment paid off: his name was changed from one that meant "Supplanter" to "Prince" and he gained power with God. Commitment always pays dividends.

In II Kings 2:2-14, Elijah was preparing to go to heaven and end his earthly ministry. His protegee, Elisha, followed him around on his last day on earth. Elijah kept telling him to leave him alone, but Elisha refused, saying, "I will not leave thee" (2:2). Three times Elijah asked Elisha to leave him alone, and three times Elisha made that same declaration. Again, this commitment paid dividends – Elijah finally asked him, "Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee" (v. 9). Elisha had a goal in his commitment and made it known, "Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me" (v. 10).

Commitment is like a covenant. There are always two sides to a covenant. When you covenant with God, He covenants with you. Elisha was faithful to never leave Elijah, and God gave him a powerful anointing as a result. Uncommitted Christians are powerless Christians and the fulfillment of the prophecy that last day Christians would have a form of godliness (that is, an outward appearance of piety) but denying the power thereof (shorting out the power from their lives)." By their noncommittant religion, they are resisting the always resultant power inherent in true Biblical commitment.

There is a heavenly "electrical" current looking for low resistant transmitters of that power. But just as easily bendable rubber is resistant to an electrical flow so wishy-washy, bendable, changeable Christians are naturally resistant to God's power flowing through them. Conversely, just as iron has very little resistance to electricity and is an ideal conduit for electrical power, so too steadfast Christians with an "iron clad" commitment to God can anticipate and will welcome the transmission of his power through their lives. When George Bush was elected president, he was referred to as having a "steely" personality. He was committed to right. And, after 9/11, we saw the wisdom of God in giving us such a steadfastly committed man during that dark hour of our history. These last days will also require Christians with "steely" commitment, to conduct God's electricity to a dying world.

The greatest example of commitment in all of history is of course our Lord himself. Imagine being the eternal Son of God willingly consigned to a cruel death and 3 days in Hell. But, you see, Jesus was committed. He had come specifically to die on the cross and had obligated himself to that very purpose: "When he cometh into the world ... A body hast thou prepared me ... In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come to do thy will O God" (Heb. 10:5-7). He was obedient unto death (Phil. 2:8). And, at the very moment of death, these were his last words, "Into thy hands I commend (commit) my spirit" (Lu. 23:46).

Only those who have lived a lifetime of commitment will in faith and confidence be able to commit their spirit at the moment of death. Paul's testimony was, "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I committed unto him against that day" (II Tim. 1:12). Because of his life-long commitment he could boldly say, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain". (Phil. 1:21). Paul relished death. Most dread death. The difference? Commitment! There are some who "love his appearing" (II Tim. 4:8) and many who dread his appearing (Rev. 6:15-17). The difference? Commitment!

Webster defined commitment as "being emotionally compelled" and there are times our passion, our love, or our devotion compel us to do things: protect our marriage or family, die for our country, or work for Christ in His harvest field (Matt. 9:37). But, what about when the emotions are dead, or when you are "fed up" with your mate, your country, or your church? What if you don't feel like praying or reading the Bible? When your emotions are contrary, remember a second meaning of commitment: being obligated. Marriage, parenthood, patriotism and Christianity are not invalidated by any lack of emotional compulsion. At such times, obligation kicks in.

Commitment may have been birthed in greatly emotional times: a glorious salvation experience, a powerful spirit-baptism, a whirlwind romance, an inspiring 4th of July celebration. But, when the fireworks have fizzled out, the obligation still stands. That is what commitment is really all about. I'm committed to Kathy. I am committed to preach the gospel because "He hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." (II Cor. 5:19). To what things or to what persons is God calling you to "obligate" yourself? I am grateful that many of you have "obligated" yourself to this ministry, pledging to send so much a month to help us take "the word of reconciliation" to this nation. Yet, interestingly, only about half of those who commit to send money to this ministry actually fulfill their pledge: again, another example of Americana today.

I take commitment seriously. For 2008, I have committed myself to not sleep at night until I have read the Word and prayed The Lord's Prayer (inspired by David's, "I will not give sleep to mine eyes ... until I find out a place for the Lord" (Ps. 132:4, 5)). So far, I have fulfilled that pledge. Oh, there were days I was so tired or so discouraged that I almost gave up, and some days that I prayed a shorter Lord's prayer, (refer to earlier teachings to understand what I mean) but I did pray and did read at least 4 chapters in the Bible every day. I am committed (and obligated) to doing this all year long. It's possible 2009 may require other and even greater commitments, of us all! January is past, but it is never too late for new resolutions or a fresh commitment. Pray now and ask the Lord if there is any commitment you should make. And do it!