

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

True Commitment, Part 1

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 1230

Now, we've been talking about commitment in relationship to the study of the Apostle Paul, and we've been hitting it from all different angles, and...and I wanna just kinda sum up some passages that we've used in the past and pull together some loose ends maybe, and just present to you what I believe to be the basic principles of commitment. Certainly, as we've studied the Book of Acts, we've become very much aware of the nature of the commitment of the Apostle Paul. The man was a totally dedicated man. He stands for all time as the perfect example of a man sold out to something that he believed in. And I wanna just kind of use that as a...just a beginning contact point for your past study of the Book of Acts, and just go from there.

One of the students in Denver this week probed my own personal viewpoint a little bit more than the others, perhaps, and...and he asked me to explain to him the difference between an effective servant of God, whose life is really blessed and whose ministry is fruitful, and one whose is not. He said, "What is the difference? What makes one man's ministry God blessed and fruitful, and another man's not?" And I said, "It's very easy question to answer. One man is committed and dedicated to Biblical excellence in all things, and the other is willing to compromise. That's the difference." The same thing is true in the Christian's life. What makes the difference between a Christian who is blessed and fruitful and effective and one who is not, and the difference is one is totally committed to Biblical excellence in everything. The other is willing to compromise. It's that simple. One is satisfied with God's best and nothing less. The other will settle for less.

We talked this week to this particular student and to others a lot about Biblical integrity. Some people are totally committed to doing everything according to the Word of God. Some are willing to give in and do some things according to the Word of God and other things just to kind of pass the Word of God by or ignore it. That's the difference. One individual functions solely on Biblical principles. The other mixes in worldly wisdom. In the ministry, you ask, "What makes the difference between an effective church...and by this I mean effectively as God measures it...and one that is not effective in terms of producing disciples, in terms of God's measurement. And the difference is one functions biblically. The other is willing compromise for some effect that they wanna get. You see, the Christian life in terms of its successes or in terms of its excellences or in terms of its fruitfulness, is simply a question of whether or not you're totally committed to the principles that are in this Book...If there is one thing that I would strive for in the church here, it is integrity. That is, consistency with the Word of God. And if there's one thing I would strive for in my life, it's the very same thing. He even probed deeper, the student did. He said this, "How can you make yourself study five to six hours a

day? How can you push yourself to do that? How can you force yourself to study that much?" He said, "Don't you think that most ministers float?" Well, if you've been in athletics, you know what the term float means. It's like pacing yourself. You only crank it up when you have to. You sort of just take it easy until the crisis comes, and then you get it on.

"Don't you think most ministers float?" he said. Well, that's a very interesting question, and I probably would say, "Yeah, I imagine most do." "But how do you discipline yourself to study so much and to commit yourself to these things?" Well, I simply said this, "That's also easy to answer, and it boils down to this. Do I care more about myself or about God's honor? Do I care more about my own comfort and my own ease, or do I care more about the maturity of the people God has given me? Am I concerned with my own life, or am I concerned with perfecting the saints? Am I concerned with the prestige of being the under-shepherd, or do I really care about the flock?" That's really where it boils down. I mean you go into the office, you can sit there, and, frankly, nobody tells me what to do. Believe it or not. I mean I arrive on...on Monday, and I just about do what I want all week, and it's very easy to just say to yourself, "You know, it sure is a nice day today. I just don't feel like studying at all. And I think I'll just go and take my golf clubs and dust them off and, you know, spend a day or two doing that." And then you think to yourself, "But now wait a minute. There's gonna be a flock of people there, and they're gonna say, 'Feed me,' and you make a decision, don't you?" It's the same thing in the Christian life. It's just a question of what are you committed to? It all boils down to that. There is always a price to pay for effectiveness. Remember, so many times hearing my football coach in college saying, "Men, if you're going to win, you have to pay the price." And the price was daily pain for five days to win on the sixth day. Pain and more pain. He used to put signs up, "Enjoy pain."...There was a price to pay, and you did enjoy it. When you made a good hit in a football game, you paid a price, pain. You always think that only the guy who goes down hard hurts. No, the other guy hurts, maybe as badly, only the psychological factor of having hurt somebody else helps you overcome it.

It's the same in the Christian's life. There will be a price to pay for commitment. You have to discipline yourself. You have to say no to the things that your flesh would say yes to. You have to endure some suffering, some persecution, some rejection, being ostracized. But commitment is wanting God's honor, God's glory, and Biblical integrity at any price. That's commitment. And you're willing to pay that price, you're on the wavelength that Paul was on, who said, "Hey, I know that when I get to Jerusalem, bonds and afflictions await me. But none of these things...what?...move me. Neither count I my life dear unto myself so that I may finish the course, that I may complete the ministry the Lord Jesus has given to me."

Now, let's look for a minute at Ephesians 6:14 as kind of a springboard, and just to show you a principle of commitment to begin with. You have here the armor of the Christian, and in Ephesians 6:14, you have particularly one piece of armor that really isn't armor. It's more dress than armor. But it begins this discussion. Ephesians 6:14 says, "Stand therefore, having your loins girted about with

truth." Now the first piece of equipment that a Christian soldier puts on is the girdle or the belt of truth. I think you'll recognize that this is a warfare with Satan that we're talking about in the passage. And if Satan primarily attacks in the area of false doctrine, which he does, then it is important for the Christian to be equipped with truth if he's gonna counteract false doctrine. Now a Roman soldier always wore a belt, because his tunic would just flap around in the breeze. And if he was out in the battle and his thing was flying in the air, somebody could pull it over his head and that would be it, see. So you...and you didn't wanna try to fight a battle with your dress blowing around, so you made sure you got your belt on. They'd strap the belt very tight, take the four corners of the tunic, pull it up through the belt, and turn it into kind of a mini-tunic in order that they might be mobile and flexible and not be encumbered at all. Now, the belt, then, was that which got everything together. It pulled up everything. It cinched up everything. The weapon was attached to the belt. The metals were attached to the belt. The belt was kinda the coordinator of the whole outfit. Now, if you look at the word "truth" here, a better way to translate that word would be truthfulness. He is saying, "You need to be belted together with truthfulness." Now, that concept is sincerity or integrity or commitment. Real love for the truth is what he's saying. A truthful commitment. In other words, you can't go into battle unless you've gotten it together, and you get it together when you cinch yourself up with a commitment to victory. When the soldier got his...his belt on and pulled the corners of his tunic in...inside that belt and strapped that thing tight and hooked on his sword, he was saying, "I am now ready to fight the battle." The belt of truthfulness. Truthfulness means sincerity, real love for the truth, total heart, soul, mind commitment to what is right. And if it is right to defeat Satan, that's what I'm committed to.

Frankly, people, I feel that most Christians lose in the Christian life, because they don't care about winning that much. It's a question of desire. It's carnality, and, of course, it's selfishness when you don't care. But when you do, that's desire, and that's the basis of commitment. Now, it's for sure that there's a lot of misunderstanding about commitment. When we say we get committed to something, I wonder, sometimes we think that means a mental institution. That...that word is used. But certainly not in a Biblical context. But there are other strange ideas about commitment. You know, some people think that commitment is sort of a feeling you get. That you sort of feel. You go to a...a service and you're moved, you know, by some...some real power-packed high...high impact kind of sermon. And you feel sort of spiritual goose bumps and...and then you say, "Oh, I dedicate my life." Or you get rededicated, re-consecrated. It goes on and on and on, you know. And it...it's just a pattern of life for many people.

In fact, it...I was in a church this week in Denver where they have altars in front of the church. They had altars, huge altars stretching as far as this building. Then more of 'em in the back, just a massive, gigantic altar. And they say, usually, at every service, there are at least 150 people down there getting rededicated. Well, I'm not sure they understand what that means if they have to go down there all the time at that altar. There's a lot of things that we don't understand about dedication. I always think about the kid at camp who came up and...and said, "I wanna dedicate my

time to the Lord," and threw his watch in the fire. It was one of those services where you throw a stick in, and that was a nice gesture, but, you know, you gotta buy a new watch. Let's face it. It's poor stewardship. He didn't really understand what dedication was. You know, and he had tears in his eyes when he did it.

You know, there's a lotta misunderstanding about what dedication is. Or what commitment is. Commitment is not a feeling. A commitment is not the act of going down the row and stopping at the front. There may be times when that kind of an action is helpful. What is commitment? Lemme give you some principles. And these are things that'll be fresh in your mind today after we've reviewed them a little bit. One, commitment begins with a commitment to love the Lord Jesus Christ. Dedication in the Christian's life, integrity in the Christian's life, girding up with a belt of commitment begins with loving the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, I invite you to turn to John 21 for a minute, and I wanna show you some things in that chapter that are very, very basic...

Commitment to love the Lord Jesus Christ is illustrated here in this chapter. Just to give you a little bit of a background, and the chapter is really an important chapter, because it's post-resurrection chapter, and it discusses an interview that Jesus had with Peter after He rose from the dead. And so it's a great confirmation chapter for the living Christ, the resurrected Christ. Now, just to give you an idea of what happened, prior to chapter 21, Jesus had appeared to the apostles together at least twice in the upper room. Once Thomas was there and once he was not. Just to help you remember the two times. And so He had appeared to them on two occasions. They had seen Jesus Christ risen from the dead. Then He had sent this group of disciples up to Galilee, which, of course, was to the north of Jerusalem where they had seen Him. And He said, "You go in the mountain and wait for Me there." The Gospels tell us this, other than John. "And you wait in the mountain until I come and manifest myself to you and give you the directions for the future operation."

Now, they knew that they had been commissioned, in a sense, to proclaim the resurrection of Christ. They knew that He was alive, and they knew that there were going to be...they were gonna be empowered with the Holy Spirit, because Jesus had told them that. And so they're now told to wait in the mountain until He gets there. But, of course, Peter up there just can't hardly wait for anything. He was impetuous. He always had sort of an itchy tunic or whatever. He was a in a hurry. He's standing up there on the side of the mountain looking at his sundial about every ten minutes, and...and saying, "Wait a minute, you know, we've been here a long time. I don't understand what's going on. Where is Jesus?" And he begins to reflect on his own life, apparently, and he begins to remember that every time he has ever faced a crisis, he has always failed. And he begins to talk himself out of the capability of ministering for the Lord.

And so, as he goes through this problem, he decides that he's gonna forget the whole thing and return to this former profession, which was what? Fishing. So watch what happens. Verse 1, "After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias...that's Galilee...and

in this manner showed He Himself: There were together Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee...that'd be James and John...two others...would be Andrew and Philip, most likely...Simon Peter said to them, 'I'm going fishing. I am returning to what I used to do.'" And, you know, it had to be the result of a just waiting and waiting and waiting and then talking himself into the fact that he just wasn't adequate, that he was always a failure, that he had promised so many things to Jesus and failed every time. And even though he had already had a personal interview with Christ post-resurrection, according to 1 Corinthians 15, apparently, it didn't confirm him in his own confidence.

So Peter says, "I'm going fishing." Well, he was a leader, right? So when he said that, all the rest of the guys said, "We're going, too." And like a buncha little rubber ducks, they all waddled down the hill to the boat, without any thinking on their own part, just in submission to the leadership and the dynamic of Peter. And, of course, you remember the story. The Lord rerouted all the fish in the Sea of Galilee. None of them went near the boat. And you can imagine that Peter was saying, "Well, there's one thing I know how to do, and that's fish. I'm going fishing." Went back, and nothing. All night. And, of course, to make it worse, in verse 4, "In the morning, Jesus arrived on the shore and said, 'Have you caught anything?'" You know, which is like sticking the knife in and turning it. "Jesus said unto them, 'Children, have you any food?' And they answered, 'No.'" We don't know what else they may have said under their breath, but the word "no" is recorded. "He said, 'Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you shall find.'" They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fish." The Lord gave a supernatural whistle, and the fish just attacked the right side of the boat. They couldn't even get 'em in.

Well, finally, they got to shore, John said, "It is the Lord." And Peter couldn't wait, dove in the water, and swam while the rest of the people tried to get the fish and the boat in. And the Lord had made breakfast. They sat down. In verse 12, "Jesus said, 'Come and have breakfast.' And so they ate." When they had finished breakfast, Jesus confronts Peter. And you can imagine Peter now sitting at that breakfast on the shore, a breakfast made by the Lord Jesus Christ. I've told you, you know how the Lord makes breakfast? Breakfast. And, you know, He had created it right there on the spot, probably, and here they were. And here's Peter sitting there with the Lord of glory eating breakfast. You know what's gotta be in his mind? "Peter, you stupid clod. You...you disobedient, inadequate person." He's failed again. He just does not seem to be able to succeed in obeying the Lord at all. He always fails every test that he's given. And there must have been tears in his eyes and in his heart and grief and pain as he looked at Jesus.

Verse 15, "When they had had breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of Jonah...called him by his old name, 'cause he was acting like his old self...lovest thou Me more than these?' He says, 'Peter, you love me more than these?'" More than these what? Well, maybe more than these things: the boat, the fish, the nets, the sea, the whole fishing thing. "Do you love Me more than those things?" Or maybe He's saying, "Do you love Me more than these disciples love Me?" Because

Peter had claimed that he did. "Peter, do you really love Me?" And He uses the word agapao, which is a kind of a supreme love. The highest kind of love. Jesus says, "Peter, do you really love Me? Do you super-love Me?" You see, this is very basic. At the commissioning of any man of God, for any service, it must be established that he loves the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what I'm trying to say. Jesus wants to know one thing out of Peter. "Do you love Me, Peter?"

John Calvin said, "No man will steadily persevere in the discharge of his ministry unless the love of Christ shall reign in his heart." End quote. That's nothing but saying what Paul said. In 2 Corinthians 5:14, "For the love of Christ does...what?...constrains us." Loving the Lord Jesus Christ is basic, and I believe very tearfully, in verse 15, Peter replied. "He said unto Him, 'Yes, Lord, You know that I love You.' He said unto him, 'Feed My lambs.'" And Peter, you know, didn't use agapao. He didn't use Jesus' word. Listen to this. Peter used filleo. Jesus said, "Do you super-love Me?" Peter said, tearfully, "I like You a lot. I like You a lot." Now I believe Peter felt that his love was the superior love. I believe, in his heart, he felt that his love was supreme, but, you see, he couldn't claim that kind of love because of his disobedience. It would've been ridiculous for him to say, "Lord, I supremely love You, beyond everything, agapayin its fullest sense, I love You." And then the Lord would've said, "Yeah, right, sure, and that's why you disobey Me all the time."

I always remember talking to a little five-year-old kid here, and I said, "How could you show your parents that you love 'em?" And he says, "I could obey 'em." He's right...Don't claim that kinda love if there's no obedience in your life. So Peter doesn't. Peter is saying, "I admit I'm far from loving You as I oughta love You, and as You're worthy to be loved. I can't claim the highest, the noblest, the purest love, although I feel it. I can't claim it. I do love You, if not perfectly, truly." And Jesus will settle for that. And He says, "All right, feed My lambs." Now what is it that Jesus wanted Peter to do? He wanted him to feed his lambs, right? But before He could ever commission him to feed His lambs, He had to determine that Peter what? Loved Him. You know, you're not gonna serve the Lord Jesus Christ with any kind of commitment until you love Him. So He calls Peter to the ministry of feeding the lambs. That is the ministry. Notice whose lambs he feeds. My lambs. Christ's lambs. You know, one of the reasons that I'm so committed to teaching you people is because you're not mine, you're His. And I've been given a stewardship. I told this to the young men this week. "When you get a glimpse of the fact that the flock in your congregation isn't yours, but it's the one which the Lord has purchased with His own blood, it'll give you a new commitment to teach them, to feed them."

I'm responsible to exercise a stewardship before God as one who must give an account to God, according to Hebrews 13. I must give an account to God for what stewardship I have, and you are my stewardship, and you are God's flock. You are Christ's sheep, and I am only the one who is given the responsibility of feeding you. I don't own you. But I must release that responsibility with the greatest care, 'cause you are His most precious possession.

So He says to Peter, "Feed My precious possession. My lambs." The word "feed" is bosco, and the word means...it's a durative present. It means keep on feeding. And it is not anything more than just feeding. It isn't herding or leading or anything. It's just pure feeding. The priority of the ministry is to do what? Feed. That's one thing that people say when they come to Grace Church is they usually say we came here because we were getting fed. Feeding, that's the ministry. "Feed My lambs." Durative present. It's still the same pattern.

Acts 20:28, we studied it recently, didn't we? Paul says to the Ephesian elders, "Feed the flock of God over which He has made you overseers. Feed them." Peter said it in 1 Peter 5, "Feed them." Now, notice the second thing. And Peter had denied Christ on three occasions, so the Lord gives him three times to redeem himself. Verse 16, "He says to him a second time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you super-love Me?'...agapay...He said unto him, 'Yes, Lord, You know that I like You a lot.' He said unto him, 'Feed My sheep.'" What's the difference between sheep and lambs? Well, one's mature and one's immature, right? You know, what a minister of the Gospel has to recognize? That in a congregation he's got sheep and he's also got lambs. And the word that he presents should be that which is fitting for lambs and fitting for sheep. And so we say that, in all messages that we teach, there should be some milk and some meat. Now, the word that He uses here is a little different, poimino. Poimino means to feed, but it also means to pastor. It is the word for pastor. It involves leading and caring and ministering and everything included in shepherding.

Third time, verse 17, "He said unto him the third time, 'Simon, son of Jonah...and He used Peter's word, listen...do you really like Me a lot?'" Oh, that hurt. You see, Jesus said, "Do you super-love Me? Do you super-love Me?" Peter said, "I like You a lot. I like You a lot." Jesus said, "Do you really even like Me a lot?" You know what He was doing? He was even questioning the level of that love. He was saying, "Hey, Peter, by your behavior, I'm questioning even that."

"And Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, 'Do you like Me a lot?'" He wasn't grieved 'cause He asked him three times. He was grieved because the third time He used Peter's word and questioned Peter's testimony. "And he said unto Him, 'Lord, You know all things.'" That's a great statement. He appeals to omniscience. He says, "Hey, Lord, You know everything. Don't hear what I say, look at my heart." And when I grew up as a little kid, I used to think about the doctrine of omniscience. You ever realize that God knows everything? Did you ever get that one thrown at you when you were a kid? My dad used to say, "We may not know, but God knows. He sees what you do, Johnnie." And, boy, you know, I...I remember one time when I was...my dad was an evangelist, meeting back in the Midwest. And he was preaching all week in a church, and a little kid next door to the house, we were staying in the pastor's home, and a little kid next door wanted me to go down to the school. School was out on a Saturday, and he talked me into vandalizing it. And so we turned over all the desks and all the inkwells, all over the floor, all over the desks. We dumped all the sand boxes that were in the classroom, where they were doing something on the floor. We ruined the school. Was a terrible thing we did. We climbed up the wall and cut the school bell rope at the top so

they couldn't ring the school bell.

Oh, we did awful things. You know something? My father never knew about that. I didn't tell him till I was 18...Then I was out of his control. He never knew. But, you know, the next day some people came to the door of the parsonage and said, "Oh, a terrible thing has happened. The school has been just ruined." It was a terrible thing. Well, you know something? I had been so drilled on this idea that God watched everything I did, that I went around like this for years, 'cause I knew God had seen that. Well, I used to think of the doctrine of omniscience as a terrible thing. You know, why would God wanna waste His day by just watching what I do?...Then I, of course, matured in my understanding the doctrine. You know, when I grew up, and I realized this, that I'm like Peter, and there are some days when the only way that God would ever know that I loved Him was if He was omniscient. And I realized that doctrine has a positive side. Aren't you glad for it?

Aren't you glad that in the days when your life doesn't make the testimony very clear, you can say, "Lord, I'm sorry about the way I act. Would You read my heart and know I love You?" that's what Peter did. Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." And He uses the term there for dear sheep, and He totals up the lambs and the sheep into dear sheep. "Feed my lambs, immature. Feed my sheep, mature. Feed both, My dear sheep. Since you really love Me, give your life to shepherd the sheep." Now what kind of love is He talking about? Now watch this. What is this love? Is it... is it an emotion? Is He saying, "Peter, I want you to go up to all My sheep and just love 'em." See, emotionally.

You know, when I came to Grace Church, I had a hard time with that, 'cause I wanted to love the whole church. And I understood the various passages in the Bible about loving the flock as a pastor. Now I was a pastor, and this was the first place I'd ever been a pastor. And I...I wanted to love them, but I couldn't, emotionally, I couldn't love everybody, 'cause I just, you know, you're not attracted to everybody on the same level. You don't just go up to anybody and everybody and say, "Oh, you just thrill me." It just isn't that simple, you know. There are...you're a certain type of person, and they don't feel the same way toward you, either. There's just a personality thing in this. And...and, yet, I think we've tried to tell people that that's the way they have to love. But it isn't that at all. I even have times in my life when I don't just jump up and down and...and feel this warm feeling toward Christ. I mean it just isn't an emotional thing.

Now, I think for many people today in churches, all they try to do is whip up that kind of an emotion toward Jesus. That's all it is. Lemme give you a definition. Look at verse 18, and I'll show you what real love is. "Verily, verily I say unto you, when you were young, you girded yourself." He says, "Peter, now when you were young, now...now, incidentally, now that you're - you've stated your love for Me, you're not officially in the ministry and here's what's gonna happen to you. "When you were young, you put your own belt on, and you went where you wanted to go. You walked where you would. But when you shall be old, you will stretch forth your hands and another will gird you and

carry you where you would not wanna go."

Now, notice this, "This spoke He, signifying by what death he should glorify God." He says to Peter, "Peter, you've done pretty much what you wanted to do, but the day's coming when you stretch forth your hands." That is a phrase used to speak of crucifixion. "Peter, you're gonna be crucified."

"This spoke He, signifying by what death he should glorify God." Now watch this. Jesus says, "Peter, do you really love Me? Then die for Me." The first principle of love is self-sacrifice. It isn't an emotion, people. It's the willingness to make a sacrifice. You know, there are some days that I, very frankly, come into that office, and I say to myself, "I've gotta prepare today, and my computer is just weary, and I'm tired, and I'd like to do something else." And it's that point that the test of my love of the Lord Jesus Christ takes place as to whether I'm willing to make a self-sacrifice. That's a small thing. He says to Peter, "The one that you're gonna make is gonna involve your death." Now, Peter had always sworn that he could handle this. John 13:36, boy, he was just telling the Lord he could handle it. Luke 22:33. And now he's gonna get a chance. And I think the Lord told him this to give him confidence, because he was so convinced of his own failure that when the Lord said, "You're gonna die for Me," he probably went, "Oh, terrific, at last I'll make it, and I won't cop out at the end."

So the Lord defined that love in terms of sacrifice. "All right, Peter, you love Me, die for Me." You see, it's not the emotion the Lord's after. It's the sacrifice that He's after. In the meantime, He adds this, the second principle of love of obedience. Watch verse 19. "When He had spoken this, He said unto him...what?...Follow Me." There it is, obedience. The first feature of loving the Lord Jesus Christ is self-sacrifice. The second one is obedience. It isn't an emotion we're talking about, people, it's a principle...It's a principle. You know, it's kinda like marriage love. Marriage love is more than an emotion. You're commanded to love your wife. You're commanded to do that. That's a principle of serving her needs. And it's the same thing in loving the Lord Jesus Christ. It's obedience, as well as self-sacrifice.

Now, Peter, of course, heard this, "Follow Me," and so, of course, the Lord stood up and walked away, and Peter followed Him. Just literally interpreting it, walking right behind Him. Verse 20, "Peter turned around." Now, he made his first mistake. I mean he hasn't even gotten off the beach yet, and he's turning around. This guy is an incorrigible, isn't he? And the Lord, you can see, is exasperated with him. "Peter turns around and sees the disciple whom Jesus loved." Who's that? That's John. He always likes to call himself that. He gets so excited about the fact that Jesus loved Him. Nobody ever had to tell John to follow Him. He hung around. "You know, the one who leaned on His breast at supper and said, 'Lord, who is he that betrays Thee?' Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, 'Lord, and what shall this man do?'" Now, you see, he hasn't even gotten off the sand, and he's worried about John. See, Jesus said, "Peter, you're gonna die," and he looks, and, "Well, what about him?" You can just see the Lord go, "Ohhhhh."

And I love the answer. The Lord says, "If I will that he tarry till I come, so what? You follow Me. If he lives till the Rapture, it's none of your business. If he's 2,500 years old, it's none of your business." And, of course, you know what the rumor was that went around the church? "Did you hear that John will live till the Rapture?" He didn't say that. He said, "If that's His will, that's none of your business." Of course, everyone always gets things wrong. But, you see, he says to him emphatically, using the...the pronoun, "Follow thou Me."

Now, you see, Jesus offered to Peter a way to exhibit his love. He didn't say to Peter, "Do you love Me, Peter? How do you feel? Does it feel nice inside to love Me? Do you feel kinda...kinda warm and all that?" No, He says, "Do you love Me, Peter? Die for Me. And in the meantime, do...what?...obey Me." You know how you can tell if you love the Lord Jesus Christ? Whether you're willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for His will, and it's a daily thing. When you come to the crossroads of doing what He wants or what you want, if you're willing to make the sacrifice and to obey Him, you love Him. You see, Jesus offers us a cross. And in that day, those people knew what that was. You go to Matthew 10, and you can go to Matthew 16 and find out about bearing the cross and taking up your cross and following and all of that. Those people knew what that meant, because Varus, the Roman general had put down that...that insurrection in Galilee, and he had lined the roads of Galilee with crosses, and they were everywhere, and those people knew that criminals always bore their own cross. And so when Jesus said, "You're gonna carry a cross for Me," everybody knew what He meant. It meant sacrifice.

Jesus said, "Love pays a price." Sacrificial obedience, it is not an emotion, beloved, it is a principle of sacrifice. Listen to 1 John, and I think it's important to listen to this, because I think this gives us the indication that we're looking for. First John 2:5, "Whosoever keeps His Word...that's obey, the word okeep means obey...Whosoever obeys His Word, in him truly is the love of God perfected." You see, loving God, loving Christ is visible in obedience. First John 2:5, that is the essence of love, obedience...contented...sacrificial obedience. So, beloved, when you say that you love the Lord Jesus Christ, when you say that you love the Lord Jesus Christ, that's not an emotion. Now, when you give that sacrificial obedience, and when you exercise that which fulfills His will, as over against your will, then you are loving Him no matter what you feel inside.

Just to go back to my own experience. I can go into that office, and I can say, "I'm gonna do this because I know this will serve the will of the Lord Jesus Christ." And I can grit my teeth and struggle through a day of intense study. At the end of that day, the only emotion that I have felt is just the discipline of doing it, but I have loved the Lord Jesus Christ over against myself, right? 'Cause I have fulfilled that which is His will and made the sacrifice to do it. Now, mark it, your love for the Lord Jesus Christ is defined as contented, sacrificial obedience.

Take it a step further. There's a second area that commitment involves, and that is a commitment to love the brethren. Another thing that is very basic and high priority in the Word of God in the New Testament is that we not only love the Lord Jesus Christ, but that we love each other. That's basic. Oh, there's so many Scriptures on this that we don't even have time to go into all of 'em, but 1 Peter 1:22 is a start. "Seeing that you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren...listen...see that you love one another with a pure heart fervently." The word "fervent" in the Greek is ektonase. It's a medical word of stretching a muscle. Stretch out as far as you can reach to love that person out there. Stretch your love. Love the brother fervently. Same thing in 1 Peter 4:8. "Above all things, have ektonase, fervent love among yourselves. And it goes on and on like this. Verse 14 of 1 Peter 5, "Greet one another with a holy kiss, or a kiss of love." We are to love one another. This is basic. In Ephesians, we find it in chapter 5, the same thought appears in 1 and 2. "Be ye, therefore, children or followers of God as dear children, and walk in love as Christ also has loved us...now watch...and given Himself for us in offering and a sacrifice." Now watch this. "You're to love as Christ loved, who gave Himself as a...what?...sacrifice." Now watch this. Loving the brothers, friends, loving the brothers isn't an emotion either. It's, again, the word...what?...sacrifice.

I'll show you. We'll define that. Look at 1 John 3 for a minute, and we'll look at verses 13 following, 1 John 3:13, "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hates you." Sounds like John 15, doesn't it? "We know that we pass from death to life...watch this...because we love the brethren. He that loves not his brother abides in death." Boy, it's so important that that's in the singular. You say, "Well, I love the brethren. I just can't stand the individual brothers." Yeah, it's very easy to love the whole wide world, isn't it? Very easy to love the church. Very difficult to love one person in it. So He uses the singular. "If you love not your brother, you're abiding in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this, perceive we the love of God." Well, how do we know what kind of love we're supposed to have? Well, look at God's love, "Because He laid down His life for us, we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

Again, what is the definition of this love again? Sacrifice. I oughta lay my life down for you. Now, my loving you is not a question of coming up to you and patting you on the back and saying, "You are so wonderful, you irresistible thing, you." The way that I can show I love you is to make sacrifices personally to meet your needs, to serve you. Obviously, you know, in a church this size and...and many of the people ask me this, "How do you minister to individuals? How do you get personal? How do you know them individually? Or how do they know you care about them individually? The only way that can ever happen is not by me running around to everybody and expressing my love, but making sacrifices in my life for your maturity and for your instruction and for your growth spiritually, so that you'll know I care enough about you to do what is necessary in my life to bring you into conformity to Jesus Christ. That's the best way I can tell ya I love you.

And that's what it's saying here. We perceive the love of God because He lay His life for us. God has never walked up to me and said, "John MacArthur, I'm crazy about you. I love you." God has not. But God has put His Son on a cross in my behalf, and that says it, doesn't it? And I may never be able to go to every individual and tell them I love them individually, but I'll do what I can to make sacrifices to meet their needs. It may not even be death. It may be verse 17, "Whoever has this world's good and sees his brother have need and shuts up his compassion, how dwells the love of God in him?" Boy, if I see somebody who has a need, I wanna meet that need. That's loving. It's all serving. It's making a sacrifice.

I had a great joy, I wanna show you this, just because I'm sharing my heart a little bit this morning. But there was a young pastor that I met with that I've been working with. He sends me tapes of his sermons, and I listen to the tapes and I critique him and send 'em back to him. And...and I put him on good books and try to help him to grow in his ministry. He's a fantastic guy, and just learning the ministry. And, you know, he was just sharing about some personal needs with somebody, and I overheard the conversation, and I had the great joy to just whip out some money and just say, "Hey, brother, I love you," on the way out. And I just shook his hand and handed him some money. Well, that's just meeting his needs. That's the one way I can say I love him without saying I love him. I know he had a need.

You can do that. Lemme give you a definition of this. Look at John 13. Has to be one of the most beautiful passages in all Scripture. John 13 is so beautiful, because it expresses the love of the Lord. Verse 1, "Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew His hour was come that He should depart out of the world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto perfection." Now one of the keys to this chapter then is going to be the love of Jesus, because that's what it starts out with. He loved His disciples. Now here comes illustration of it.

How do we know He loved them? Did He stand up in front of the and say, "Men, I love you. I'd like to give you a discussion of divine love and ya how it works." No, you don't need a sermon. You need some kind of an illustration, and here it comes. "Supper having begun...verse 2 is a better translation...Supper having begun, the devil put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him. Jesus, know the Father had given all things into His hands and that He was come from God and went to God, He rises from supper, laid aside His garments, took a towel, girded Himself. After He poured water into a basin, He began to wash the disciples' feet and wipe them with the towel with which He was girded." I'll stop there.

Whenever those people would come into a place to eat in that day and age, they would always have some servant at the door wash their feet. It was the job for the lowest of the low servant, foot washing. The roads were either muddy or dusty, so it was messy no matter what. They would have pots of water by the door for ceremonial purification and for the practicality of washing feet. But in

this particular occasion, Luke tells us that they were all arguing about who was the greatest in the kingdom. You see, they believed Jesus was gonna bring a kingdom, so they were all arguing. Plus, it was a big deal, you know, James and John even sent their mother to ask if they could be the chief ones in the kingdom, if you can believe that. But, anyway, they were all arguing about who's going to be the greatest in the kingdom with Jesus. And in an argument like that, nobody's gonna wash feet, right? You don't wanna demean yourself.

So they were all arguing about superiority. So finally they sat down and already had begun to eat and nobody had done that, so Jesus just got up, took of His outer garment, strapped a towel around His waist, and began to wash their feet...Well, He came to Simon Peter, of course, naturally. "Peter said, 'Lord, are You washing my feet?' Jesus answered and said unto him, 'What I do now, you know not. But you shall know hereafter.'" In other words, He said, "You don't understand My humiliation. I recognize that, Peter. You don't understand why it is that the Messiah, the Lord of glory, would do this, but it's part of the humiliation." Here Peter commands God, "Thou shalt never wash my feet." Oh, Peter. "Jesus answered him, 'If I wash thee not thou hast no part with Me.' Peter says, 'I'll take a bath. My head, my hands, and the whole thing.'" Now, He washed all their feet, and, you know, can you imagine, which was greater, a little story, a little theological lecture on love or washing feet? Washing feet.

They got the message. They got the message. And He says, "You do it to each other like I've done it to you." Now you go over to verse 34 and what do you find? John 13:34, "A new commandment I give unto you: that you love one another...now watch...as I have loved you, that you also love one another." Now how had Jesus loved them? By what? Washing their feet. Do you know what loving the brothers is? It isn't feeling emotional about 'em. It's washing their feet. That's what it is. It's playing the role of a slave. It's doing the dirty work, the distasteful thing. It's struggling. It's groveling, if need be. It's sacrificing for their sake.

Well, you know what? I have so much trouble with this. I first came here. I wanted so badly to love everybody, and I couldn't figure out how I could feel emotional about everybody. And I couldn't. And some people particularly were kind of irritating. In fact, there was a couple of people, particularly, that made it difficult when I first came, and I wanted to love them, but I didn't know how, because I was thinking of it emotionally at that time, and then I discovered the principles of John 13 and 1 John 3. And one day I went up to this particular individual, and I put my arm around him, and I said, "I want you to know something. If there's any way that I can ever serve you, I'd sure love to have the opportunity." And I had that opportunity. I never felt any different about him emotionally, but I loved him by serving him.

I don't think God sits up in heaven and looks down and say, "That John MacArthur is so wonderful. I just...I can't resist him." That borders on blasphemy...The way I know God loved me is because He made a sacrifice of service for my behalf. He sent His Son to die on a cross for me, and He...He

washes me off daily. It's the principle again, folks, of self-sacrificing service...If your brother's in sin, you...you pick him up. You hold him up. You get under his burden. You bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.

You see, loving each other is not just feeling sort of little pangs of emotion toward each other. It's serving each other. You oughta be sensitive to the needs of people, and you oughta meet those needs. Commitment, then, is not only loving the Lord Jesus Christ which is sacrificial obedience, but it's loving each other which is sacrificial service. When you are willing, listen to me, when you are willing to sacrifice what you want for the needs of another person, you love that person, no matter what your emotion. When you're willing to say, "Hey, so and so needs me, but I wanna do this." And when you choose to fill the need of so and so rather than the I wanted this, then you loved him. Then you loved him. That's loving...Sacrifice. and that's what we expect, 'cause that's what God expects. God help me if I'm never willing to make the sacrifice to study the Word of God to meet your needs. God help you if you're not willing to make the sacrifice to minister your spiritual to somebody else. God help you if you're too busy making money for yourself to help other people, too busy with your own thing, too busy with your own time, your own vacation, your own leisure, your own recreation, to get under the burdens of other people. Then you don't love 'em.

And, you know, the only people who are able to do this, frankly, the only people who are really able to love are humble people. Did you know that? That's right, because proud people are too involved with their own thing. You see, that's what Paul meant in Philippians 2 when he said, "Have the same love." You say, "How? How can I have the same love?"..."Let each esteem others...what?...better than yourselves." That's how. Humble, it's the only way. You can always tell a proud person. He doesn't serve other people. Now he may not be the egotistic person that we classify, but he's proud. He's self-centered.

Love is service, sacrifice. Lemme give you a quick third thing. Another principle to come out, and this...these three sum it up really. Commitment involves a commitment to holiness as well as loving the Lord Jesus Christ and loving each other. Commitment is holiness. Did you know that the Lord wants the church holy? Listen to this. And I think this is so beautiful. Paul says to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 11:1, "I would to God that you would bear with me a little in my folly. Bear with me. Look, if I seem a little strange, bear with me, will ya? I got a reason." "What's your reason?" "I'm jealous over you...with godly jealousy, for I have espoused you to one husband...that I may present you a chaste virgin to Christ."...In Ephesians 5, Paul said that, "Jesus wants His church without spot or wrinkle or blemish or any such thing. But He wants to present to Himself holy." Right? The Lord wants a holy church. Paul says, "As a minister of Christ, bear with me a little bit. Bear with me if I seem eager in these things. Bear with me if my heart breaks over your sin. Bear with me if I'm aggressive. Listen, I has espoused you to one husband. He wants you holy, and I wanna present you to him a chaste virgin."

Anybody in Christian service who has any other thing in his mind but a tremendous passion for the holiness of the people he serves has missed the boat...Paul says, "I wanna present you holy, because that's what Jesus wants. That's the kinda church He wants. That's the thing He wants for His bride to be, is holy." Paul said to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 3:17, "If anybody defiles the temple of God, him shall God destroy, for the temple of God is holy, which temple you are." And what it really says is, "He'll ruin the ruiners of the temple." He wants you holy.

Second Corinthians 7:1, "Cleanse yourselves from all filthiness of the flesh, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." God wants a holy people. And I'll tell you something, folks. Lemme just close with this thought. If you're not a holy person, you're finished in the Christian life in terms of any ministry. In the first place, you can't even approach the Bible. You know, Peter 2:2 simply says this, "As babes desire the pure milk of the Word that you may grow thereby." Remember that? But the verse before that says, "Laying aside all malice and evil and guile, evil-speaking...and so forth and so on...then you desire the milk of the Word." Listen, if the sin's all there, the Word isn't even gonna have any kind of effect. But first you have to get rid of the sin, and then the Word sinks in. So you can't even approach the Word if you're not holy.

Secondly, you'll never defeat Satan if you're not holy, 'cause if you don't have on the breastplate of what? Of righteousness, you're finished. Thirdly, you can't even evangelize. You can't even have an effective testimony unless you're holy. First Peter 2:9, "You're a chosen generation, a royal priesthood...listen...a holy nation that you should show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." The only testimony comes out of a holy testimony. You can't approach the Word, you can't defeat Satan, you can't evangelize. You certainly can't honor the Holy Spirit. Read Ephesians 4:20 to 30, and you'll find out that, if your life is characterized by all those sins that are there, you are guilty of grieving the Holy Spirit.

So instead of being filled with the Spirit, empowered by the Spirit, blessed by the Spirit, fruitful in the Spirit, you just dishonor the Spirit. Not only that, you can't even be used for anything. You're worthless. If you're not a holy person, you're absolutely worthless. You're just a Christian hanging around for the sake of hanging around. Say, "What do you mean by that?" I mean there are vessels unto honor fit for the Master's use. Right? Second Timothy 2:20 and 21, and those are holy vessels. You read it...

Well, there's some basics. Just a review kind of. What is commitment? It means to love the Lord Jesus Christ. Self-sacrificing obedience. To love the brother. Self-sacrificing service. And holiness, living a pure, godly life in order that I may study the Word, defeat Satan, reach others, honor the Holy Spirit, be used of God...

Lemme close with this. Paul came to the end of his life, and he had lived the committed life...And here's the result of a committed life. Listen. "I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I've kept the faith...listen...henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that...what?...love His appearing." Do you know what it means to love His appearing? You don't really love His appearing...unless you're committed to a life of service. 'Cause if your life is not what it oughta be, you're not real anxious for Him to come back, because He's going to have to make your works stand the test of judgment. To love His appearing means to be so committed that you're eager for Him to come, knowing reward awaits you. I hope we're committed to these basics. And if we really are, and if judgment really does begin at the house of God and take place here in this church, a committed people can have an effect on this community and this world that would be staggering. May it be.

Let's pray. Father, thank You this morning for giving us the time together, to be able to share together, to be able to recognize, again, from the Word of God principles that are basic. Principles that are...life changing. Father, even as we are Christians, even as we already have confessed to love Thee, may it be true, practically, day-to-day, that this, indeed, is exactly what others are saying...that we do love You. That we do love the brothers, that are lives are holy. May it not just be the testimony of our lip, but the testimony of everyone who sees us. That You'd be honored in our lives. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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