

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

True Commitment, Part 2

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 1231

Last Lord's Day we were teaching on the subject of commitment, and I just thought, "Well, maybe we oughta just cover the basics." So last Lord's Day morning we just talked about the basics of true commitment, of surrender to Jesus Christ. And maybe the Lord has a very real purpose in...in just ministering to our hearts on some of these foundational things that are just kind of cornerstone to our Christian life. In John chapter 13 is a jumping off point. We have a very good illustration of this. That surrender or dedication or commitment or loyalty or whatever you wanna call it to Christ is not just something that is verbalized. It is something that must be actualized. It isn't what we say. It's what we are that is the real issue. And, you know, we make those kind of commitments. They come and go, I suppose, from time to time whenever you get under real stress and you're hurting. You got a lotta guilt or something. You say, "Lord, if You'll deliver me from this deal, I'll commit my life," you know. Or you've all been to camp and you've gone through the camp commitment thing. And we've all done that. Maybe we get into terrible trouble, you know, and everything goes badly, and we say, "Lord, just deliver me from this and I'll commit everything to You." The verbalizations come, and they come pretty freewheeling and...and fairly often to some of us.

But I notice here an illustration in John 13:36 of a man who was real freewheeling with the verbalizations, but never could support 'em with his life. He wanted, in a sense, to be everything that he should've been, but he just really never followed the needed patterns so that he could be. And the desire, you know, without fulfilling the pattern doesn't mean anything. I mean if a guy wants to be a great anything, the want is here. The being is here. In the middle is a tremendous amount of discipline, right? I don't care what it is. If a man wants to be a good doctor, he says, "I'd like to be a doctor." Here's being a doctor. There's a lotta things in between the want and the fulfillment. Doesn't matter what it is, that's how it is.

Well, there's a lotta Christians standing saying, "I want to be..." And here's the objective and all the stuff in the middle is just really what stymies them, 'cause the discipline isn't there. And that was Peter. Notice 36, "Simon Peter said to Him...of course, Jesus is announcing here that He was going to leave, and He was referring to His death...Peter says to Him, 'Lord, where are You going?' And Jesus answered him, 'Where I go thou canst not follow Me now, but thou shalt follow Me afterwards. Peter, you can't go where I'm going. You can't go through crucifixion and death now. You will later on.' Peter said unto Him, 'Lord, why can't I follow You now? I will lay down my life for Thy sake.'" Well, that sounds good, doesn't it? I mean he's saying, "I will do anything for You, even if it means death."

"Jesus answered him, 'Will you lay down your life for My sake? Truly, truly I say to you, the cock shall not crow till you have denied Me three times.'...On the contrary, Peter, your commitment is strictly verbalizing. Boasting in that commitment without any substantiation. Peter, you won't cut it. Oh, there are a lotta people who are making the boast, but they never fulfill the commitment.

You know, I like a verse in 1 Kings 20:11. It's a little bit obscure; but, boy, it's one you really oughta mark down somewhere. It's a tremendously helpful proverb, 1 Kings 20:11, listen to this. "Let not him that puts on his armor boast himself as he that puts it off." Did you get that? In farm language, "Don't count your chickens before they're hatched." In Notre Dame vernacular, "Don't celebrate the victory at halftime." I mean that's the greatest illustration of 1 Kings 20:11 I ever saw in my life. "Let not him that girds on his armor boast himself as he that puts it off." Just don't count the victory till it's over. And that's really a very important principle and commitment. You know, it's easy, and it's cheap to be able to boast before you've gone through it. Commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ is not some wishful thinking. It's not some idle boast. For Peter, the boasting came easy. The commitment, just really tough.

Lemme show you why. Luke 22, and here in Luke 22 we have a parallel passage to John 13, which follows up his boast, and we get some insights into why he messed up. Nobody could ever fault Peter's wants. They just could fault his submission to the principles that would bring them about. Luke 22 gives us three reasons why Peter failed to be able to carry out his commitment. He made a verbal commitment. He couldn't carry it out for three reasons. Number one, number one is verse 39. Follow as I read. "After Peter had just made his boast...says...and He came out and went, as He was accustomed to the Mount of Olives; and His disciples followed Him." Christ goes to the Mount of Olives after the time in the upper room there before His death. "And He was at the place, He said to them, 'Pray that you enter not into temptation.'" You know, He was saying that, "Things are going to be very difficult when I'm captured, and you better pray that you not fail to be able to handle the pressure that's gonna come through temptation. You better spend some time praying."

"And He went away about a stone's cast, kneeled down and prayed, saying, 'Father if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me, nevertheless not My will, but Thine be done.' And there appeared an angel unto Him from Heaven, strengthening Him. Being in agony, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." A beautiful thing to notice Jesus praying. If He needed to pray, beloved, how do we need to pray? "And when He rose up from prayer and was come to His disciples, He found them praying." Is that what it said? Found them what? Sleeping. Oh, that's bad news. "And He said to them, 'Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray, lest you enter into temptation.'"

Now, you see, the first failure on the part of Peter in carrying out his commitment was the failure to pray. He slept instead of praying. Deadly to commitment. You know, and it's very easy to be so

smug and so boastful and so self-confident about your commitment because of what you know and because of the things that have...you've done in terms of maybe service to the Lord, that you just kind of feel your commitment is rock solid on the basis of your self-confidence. And, boy, the props just get knocked out from under you unless you lean on divine strength. That's what prayer is.

There was another thing that made Peter fail. Not only a lack of prayer, but he had a problem with self-will. He just never really learned how to submit to the Lord's will. He was pushy. Verse 50, you know, the soldiers came, and the...the priests and the high priests and the scribes and everybody came to take Jesus there in the Garden, and Peter grabbed his sword, and one of them standing by, whose name was Malchus according to the Matthew account and others, was the term of the high priest. It says, "Then Peter cut off his right ear, and Jesus said, 'Just let this happen as it is. Peter, put that sword away.'" Of course the other account tells us. You live by the sword, you'll die by it. "He touched his ear and healed him."

Now, here you see stupid Peter, got a sword in his hand, and he's gonna chop up the people who are gonna capture Christ. That wasn't the point. Jesus says, "Will you put that thing away?" You see, instead of submitting to the will of God, he was so confident, he was so strong in his own verbal commitment, that he was just gonna go sailing away in his own stupidity. I mean if you look at your own life, I look at mine, and I wonder, "How many times, without really careful prayer and knowing God's will, have I bulldozed into some deal, and the Lord comes along and says, "Excuse him, folks." It's a little out of order.

Well, that was part of Peter's problem. You know, one thing about commitment, if you're gonna commit yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ, you better wait to see what He wants you to do. Another problem that Peter had was he was a coward. And cowardice and commitment don't go along very well. Verse 54, "They took Him, led Him, brought Him to the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off." Now, that's the first mistake that he made in terms of really revealing his cowardice. He followed afar off. He didn't have the courage, he didn't have the guts, if you will, to stand near Jesus. All this verbal commitment, "I'll die for You," and he wouldn't even follow Him. He wouldn't even walk with Him. He wouldn't even claim to belong to Jesus Christ. And right away, bang, bang, bang, he denies Christ on three occasions.

Yeah, commitment is great, but I'm telling you, if you're gonna drift far off from Jesus Christ, if you're afraid to be identified with Him, if you don't want anybody to know you're really a Christian, if you don't wanna stick out in the world and be somebody different, if you're not willing to count the cost and be what a Christian is, then, frankly, your commitment isn't worth anything. You see, Peter failed because of a lack of prayer, because of the positive direction of his own self-will, and because of cowardice. He wasn't willing to stand up and be counted for Jesus Christ, and so his commitment was ashes in his mouth.

Now, what is commitment? I mean just making the verbal statement here, and then down the road seeing the fulfillment of it involves something in the middle. There are some principles that get me from the statement to the actual commitment. What are those principles? Lemme give them to you. I gave you three last time. We'll just review 'em very quickly, and I'll give you a couple more. And...and these are just very simple, basic milk-type concepts. One, commitment begins with a commitment to love the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, friends, you must remember that this does not mean a sentimental attachment. Because Peter had that, didn't he? Peter definitely felt sentimental toward Christ. He definitely in his heart felt emotion toward Christ. But the way the Bible defines this love is self-sacrificing obedience. Remember from John 21? "Do you love Me? Do you love Me? Do you love Me? Feed My sheep. Feed My sheep. Feed My lambs."

"Do you love Me? Then you're gonna get crucified for Me. Do you love Me. Follow Me." All the way down the line, Jesus defined love as self-sacrificing obedience. "If you love Me, keep...what?...My commandments." And, you see, to begin with, commitment means to love the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is not loving Him in the sense of an emotion or a sentiment. It is loving Him in the sense of obedience. That's loving Him.

Now, I want you to look at Matthew 22. I wanna give you a little insight here. Matthew 22 is a very helpful portion, because it helps us to see the most important thing there is in the world for human beings. Matthew 22:34. Pharisees, of course, and the Sadducees are doing all they can to upset Jesus and try to trap Him. And so the Pharisees followed the Sadducees, who had been flattened by His answers. And one of them, verse 35, says, "A lawyer asked Jesus a question, testing Him...This is his question... 'Master, which is the great commandment in the law?' Jesus said unto him, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.'" The whole Old Testament is build on these two principles. Love God and love each other.

Now notice this, the incident here is interesting because, you see, the Jews had a problem with this concept of the greatest commandment. In the first place, there were some commandments in the Bible. In the second place, the traditions of the rabbis kept stacking up more and more commandments. Till the time of Christ, you got 600 commands, 600 little specific things that they had to do. There was no human way to be able to crank out all 600 of those things all the time. So, since they couldn't do that all the time, the rabbis had to accommodate. I mean if...if the only way you could stay right with God was to keep the law...and there were so many rules that you couldn't keep 'em, you were really in a bad place. So the rabbis came along and divided the laws into the light laws and the heavy laws. And they said, "The heavy laws are, you know, just that. They're heavy. They're binding. The lights, ahhhhh, you can give a little on those." Some rabbis even went further than that, and some rabbis taught that if a man selected just one great precept to observe, he could disregard

all the rest.

Now, you see, they did that because of the absolute hopelessness of the legal system. God was trying to show them its hopelessness. But instead of accepting its hopelessness and turning to faith in God as the only hope of salvation, they just eliminated all the necessity of the law down to any one that might wanna keep. And, of course, that made an argument about which one they'd have to keep. Which was the great one? And if they kept the great one, they could let the rest flop. Which was the one thing that, if God had a choice, He would want them to keep and not others? And so the question comes in verse 36. "Which is the great commandment?" And Jesus said, "Here it is. Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. The second is like it, Love thy neighbor as thyself." You can imagine the reaction of the lawyer. "Ooooooh. That's a small thing."

But, you see, the first great moral principle stated, not in the Ten Commandments, but implied, but stated here by our Lord Jesus Christ is to love God with all your faculties. That's basic to commitment. That's where it all begins. And, friends, the loving here, it has a sentiment to it. It is love with your heart. There is feeling. There is affection. There is understanding. But it is also loving with your soul. Then there is love with the mind, the intellect. Every dimension of man is called upon to love God. Now, how is that love manifested? We saw it before. It's manifested in self-sacrificing obedience...Self-sacrificing obedience.

You know, in Revelation 2, when Ephesus left its first love, it wasn't just the loss of sentiment. It was the loss of obedience. They ceased obeying the principles they knew to be true, and it caused the dissolution of the great church at Ephesus, founded by Paul and pastured by Timothy. Sad. Basic to commitment is to love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. And that's what Jesus wanted out of Peter, and He defined that love as sacrifice. Service to God. Obedience to God.

Second principle we mentioned last time is in the same passage. Commitment to love the brothers. The second principle of commitment is to love one another. Over and over again, the New Testament. Philippians, 1 Peter, over and over again, love each other, love each other, love each other. It becomes a recurring theme in 1 John and as well as other books. Even 1 Thessalonians says that we have been taught of God to love one another. So he says in the next verse, 1 Thessalonians 4:10, "Increase in love toward one another." Then in the 12th verse, he says, "That the outsiders may know the legitimacy of your Christianity." Loving each other is so basic. It has the purpose of evangelism. It has the purpose of...of strengthening each other, of serving each other.

Now, mark this, the second commandment is, "To love thy neighbor as thyself." Now, you remember what I told you last week? John 13, you have the illustration of Jesus loved His disciples. And He says, "As I have loved you, so love one another." And how had He loved them? He'd washed their

feet. Love, again, is not emotion. Love is service to one another. Love is serving each other's needs. That's what love is. Now, I can give you a simple illustration of that, that maybe it will help you to see what I mean. It's so easy, when you talk about loving your neighbor as yourself, to mess that up.

Lemme give you an illustration of what it means. Turn to James chapter 2. You know, I've heard so many psychologists, you know, so many sermons on that. I've heard dozens of sermons on that. I've never heard anybody really handle it what I think is Biblical. "Well," they say, "before you can love somebody, you have to love yourself." You ever heard that? Somebody asked me last Lord's Day, after I finished, "Weren't you gonna talk about the fact that before we can love anybody else we have to love ourselves?" I said, "I might talk about that since you mentioned it." So now I'm gonna talk about it. He said, "You have to love yourself before you can love anybody else. You see, you have to have a proper psychological self-image." And he goes on, "If you think you're a scum of the earth, if you think the lowest of the low, if you don't have an exalted view of yourself and see yourself for all that you really are, you'll never be able to love other people."

That's so much philosophical, psychological gobbledygook. I don't even know what they're talking about. But that isn't what the Bible's talking about. Because the Bible is not talking about sentiment. The Bible is not saying you're supposed to love yourself. You know, "Ummmmm, just, you know, you're so terrific, you know." That is not what the Bible's talking about in terms of love. It is not the sentiment that God's after. I'll show you. James 2:1, "Brethren, my brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons." In other words, if you're a Christian, don't treat people with respect and other people with indifference. Everybody's equal. "If there comes into your assembly a man with a gold ring, in fancy clothes, and there comes in a poor man in vile raiment, oh, they walk in the back door here, and you have respect to him that wears the fine clothing and say to him, 'Sit thou here in a good place.' And you say to the poor, 'Stand over there,' or 'Sit under my footstool. Get out of the way, fella.' Are you not then partial in yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren: Hath not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs to the Kingdom which He's promised to them that love Him? But you have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by which you are called? Have you forgotten that, for the most part, the rich have nothing to do with you or with Christ?"

"It's hard for a rich man to get into the Kingdom of Heaven, harder for a rich man to get in than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle."

"Do not they blaspheme that worthy name, these rich people?" Now watch verse 8. "If you fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture...what's the royal law?... 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,' you do well. But if you have respect of persons, you commit sin." Now, notice, the royal law is to love your neighbor as yourself. What it means is treat everybody as you would treat yourself. Now

watch. It means that whatever great sacrifices you make for your own comfort, you make for other peoples' comfort equally without respect of person. It has not to do with your psychological self-image. It has to do with your service toward other people. You just stop and think of the lengths you go to make sure you're comfortable. When you're uncomfortable, you go out and buy a different chair to sit in. Or you don't like the bed, you buy a different bed. And when you want some particular thing to eat, you go buy what you want, because that's what you want. Or when you're tired of your car, you go buy the kind of car you want. You buy the house you want. You do the things you want. You get up and you go through all kinds of things, and you do difficult things, and you drive yourself to get what you want.

That's what He's saying. That's the same way you should drive yourself to meet the need that somebody else has. The same way that you treat your own desires, treat somebody else's. Love them in terms of self-sacrificing service, like you'd make sacrifices for yourself. That's the point. It isn't psychological at all. It's just plain, old, practical, everyday serving each other with the same intensity that I serve myself. Are you willing to do that? Are you willing to get up off whatever it is that you're doing that makes you comfortable and be uncomfortable to make somebody else comfortable? Are you willing to sacrifice the thing that you enjoy so that somebody else can have their needs met? That is loving your neighbor as yourself. It isn't psychological. You sit down and evaluate what you do for yourself and then translate that equally to other people whether they're rich or poor, and do it for them. That's the point. Now, you see, that's loving the brothers the way the Bible says. That's commitment.

Third principle of commitment was holiness. We talked about the fact that God desires us to be pure and holy. "Vessels fit for the Master's use," 2 Timothy 2:20 says. "This is the will of God...1 Thessalonians 4:3...even your sanctification. Stay away from sexual sin...he says...handle your body so it honors God. Don't act like the godless heathen. Don't take advantage of one another. For God had called us not to uncleanness, but to holiness." God wants holy people. Dealing with sin, confessing sin, acknowledging sin. You know, in a sense, it's a question of living up to what you are. You're holy before God. Act like it.

Now lemme get into what I wanted to share today. The fourth principle of commitment is the commitment to prayer. And this is so very important, because, you know, it's so easy as Christians, when we know a lot, to think that, because of what we know, we're all right. And we fail to pray. That's Peter's problem. I just showed you the passage. Jesus said, "Look, you guys, watch and pray lest you enter into temptation." The went to sleep. He came back and said, "Wake up, now you better watch and pray lest you enter into temptation." He said it again. Prayer under-girds commitment. It is a recognition of divine dependence. So important. So important.

Lemme take you to one verse that'll help you see it. Ephesians 6:18, and this is really a...a verse that we discussed in great detail a couple years ago, and I draw your attention to it with great anticipation,

because I think it's so important. Verse 18 of Ephesians 6 says, and this is an injunction to a Christian on the basis of his commitment, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." You notice all the always's and the all's in there? Now, this is a total commitment. Don't pray sometimes, pray always. Don't pray with some prayer, pray with all prayer. Don't pray with some perseverance, pray with all perseverance. Don't pray for some saints, pray for all saints. I mean this is total commitment. Now, the thing that makes this so important here is the context of the book. I tell people all the time when we talk about how to interpret the Scripture, how to teach. You always interpret a verse in its context, because that's what gives it its meaning. You see what it's saying. You don't just yank it outta the text. You...you lose something.

So what's the context? Well, the context is the Book of Ephesians, which is the greatest statement on the Christian's identity in the Bible. It tells you who you are. When you get done with the 6th chapter of Ephesians and the 17th verse, you think you're something unbelievable. And you are. I mean you're a new creature in Christ Jesus. You're super-unbelievable. I mean you're beyond anything that...that has ever been made. Next to God, you're the hottest commodity in the universe. I mean you've got it over the angels. Let's face it, a Christian is an unbelievable, astounding, miraculous creation...In fact, I went through the book of Ephesians just to tell you a little about what you are. Listen to this. You're super-blessed, chapter 1 verse 3. You're super-loved, 1:4 to 6. You're forgiven and redeemed to God, 1:7. You're wise, 1:8. You're rich, 1:11. You're secure, 1:13. You're alive with new life, chapter 2 verses 4 to 6. You're the object of eternal grace, chapter 2 verse 7. You're God's masterpiece, chapter 2 verse 10. You're one in the body, chapter 2 verse 13 to 18. You're in God's family, chapter 2 verse 19. You're the Spirit's habitation. You're so powerful, you're able to do exceedingly, abundantly, above all you can ask or think, according to the power that works in you, chapter 3 verse 20. You're astounding.

And you always hear Christians say, "Ohhhhh, I...I feel so inadequate." Ridiculous. You know, and he goes on. From there, you go into chapter 4. He just takes off again. You have the Holy Spirit. You're in the body. There are no missing ingredients, chapter 4 verses 4 to 6. You have the gift and the gifted men to perfect you to do the ministry, chapter 4 verses 11 to 13. You have been called to learn Christ and to walk differently, chapter 4 verse 20 to 24. You've received Christ's love so that you can walk in love, chapter 5 verse 1 and 2. You have the light indwelling you, so you can walk in light, chapter 5 verse 8. You have the wisdom and the truth of God in order that you may know what God desires and walk wisely, chapter 5 verse 15 to 17. You've received the Holy Spirit so that you can be filled with the Spirit, chapter 5 verse 18. And you have all the commands to every relationship that you want from chapter 5 verse 19 right on in chapter 6. And then he starts in chapter 6 verse 10 and says, "Not only that, you've got all the armor to win over Satan." You are something else.

By the time you get to 6:17, you're just feeling your oats. You're saying, "Wow, man, am I adequate." And like Paul said to the Colossians, you are...you're complete in Him. And Peter said you have all

things pertaining to life and godliness. And you could just pretty much fly outta chapter 6 verse 17 thinking, "Man, I got it knocked." And so the apostle just jams home 6:18, "Praying...what?...always." You know, the presentation of all this adequacy through chapter 6 verse 17 could breed what I call doctrinal egoism. Or what you might call spiritual over-confidence. "I know so much, I'm invulnerable." And just to make sure you recognize that all you are and all you've got still needs to be submitted to God, he says, "Praying always with all prayer." Listen, friend, when you...when you realize who you are in Christ and you get smug about it and indifferent about it, you're just like Peter, and you're gonna fail. When you start sleeping through prayer meeting, you're in real trouble. I don't care what you know, and I don't care what your position is, you're hurting.

It's a latent danger that Christians who have a knowledge of doctrine and a grip on practical principles, becomes satisfied and prayer finds no place. How often should you pray? Always. You say, "But you can't go wandering around praying, praying, "Oh, dear Lord, whyja." You'd run into things. Be like the bruised and bleeding Pharisees. A group of Pharisees living during Jesus' time, and they got that name, because they thought it was a sin to look at women. So whenever a woman came around, they closed their eyes. They kept running to walls. So we don't want you to run around running into walls. That isn't the idea.

Praying always doesn't mean carrying around a prayer book and mumbling over a little deal. Praying is communion with God. It means being open to God's presence. Jesus said in...in Luke 21:36, "Watch, therefore, and pray always." The apostles in Acts 6:4 gave themselves continually to prayer. Romans 12:12, continue diligently in prayer. Philippians 4:6, the same idea; 1 Thessalonians 5, "Pray without ceasing." Now, that doesn't mean you mumble, mumble under your breath and you can't hold a conversation with somebody. It means that you have a God-consciousness. For example, when you see something good, you thank God. When you see something bad, you ask God to make it right. When you see some trouble, you ask God to help you to teach you what you need to learn and then deliver you from it. In other words, everything that happens is related to God. You see? It's just a flow of life with a consciousness of God...This is part of commitment. Just living my life in God-consciousness oriented toward Him, sensitive to Him, so that every thought has an upward turn. Every attitude has an upward turn. Everything I see is interpreted upward toward Him.

So I'm to pray all the time. Always conscious, able to do that. And, of course, that's one area where you have to deal with sin. Because if there's sin there, man, that really blocks that, the sweet fellowship, doesn't it? That really blocks the joy of that communion. Well, how should you pray? Well, not only always, but it says with all prayer and supplication. Variety. All forms. Private, public, verbal, silent, loud, quiet, planned, spontaneous. Whatever, kneeling, standing, lifting up holy hands. Any old thing. Just pray. All kinds, all ways.

And it says watching. I love that. With all perseverance and supplication. Supplication is a specific word, dayasaos, just means specific, definite prayers. Watching and praying definitely. Boy, that's so

important to pray definitely. Notice, just to pray glibly for generalities is pointless. It just doesn't have any reason. There's no reason to pray in generalities, 'cause you never know if God answers 'em. Like God bless the missionaries, or God bless, like Marcy used to pray, God bless the whole wide world. Well, you know, that's ridiculous, because He...you're not gonna know what He's doing, see? You haven't been specific.

Watch, remember a fellow in our church who isn't here now, and I miss him, but he was a dear man. He was in our church, and he moved back east. He came to me one time after he hadn't been here long, and he had a little spiral notebook, and he said, "Do you have anything I could pray for? I'd like to pray for you some things." And I said, "Yeah," and I mentioned a couple thing. He wrote 'em down in his little notebook. I noticed he had two columns, a line down the middle, prayer request, and then he had all kinds of answers there. And he'd wrote 'em down, and a little while later, came back, and said, "I wanna check on these couple of things I've been praying about. What's happening?" And I told him. He writes down, writes, writes. You know, the whole answer. One time I went to his house, and there were 13 of those things filled. He was working on the next one. I mean he knew what he was praying for, and he saw God answer, and he believed God. When that guy left town, I was hunting for somebody with a spiral notebook to take up...take up where he left off.

Watch unto prayer. When I was at the seminary, I told the students, and it was like I had invented something new. I said, "Hey, have you ever analyzed the average prayer meeting? Mrs. so and so broke her leg. Mr. so and so's in the hospital. Mrs. Mogus needs a job. Etc., etc. All physical stuff." And they laughed, you know, like they never thought of that before. I said, "Where do we ever get to the place where we stop praying about all the physical things and start saying, 'God, do Your perfect work in the man or the woman's life.' And if the physical is part of it, that's great." I mean let's get behind the facades and the fronts, and don't pacify ourselves into thinking we have a great prayer life when we run down the hospital list...Let's start finding out what really matters. Praying about that.

And it's not wrong to pray for people who are ill. That's a wonderful thing. But let's get beyond that. And be persevering. You remember the guy in Luke 11? He wanted some bread, and he went and the store was closed? So he bangs, bangs, bangs on the door, and the guy's, "Go away, go away, the store's closed." Bang, bang, bang, and, finally after the guy was banging and banging, he came down, and he opened the door and he gave him the bread, and Jesus said he gave it to him for his much knocking, and that's how you oughta pray. Keep banging away. You say, "That's endless repetition." No, no. Vain and endless repetition is the recitation of little formulas. Importunity and perseverance is something altogether different. That's the cry of your heart.

So you...you need to watch. You need to see the things to pray for. You pray specifically, you'll see specific answers, and your faith will grow. You pray in generalities, you never know what God's doing anyway, and you...He doesn't have the opportunity to demonstrate His power in specifics. And, of course, you should always pray in the Lord's name. That means consistent with His will.

Now, who do you pray for? Look at the end of verse 18, "All saints." You pray for all saints. Most people pray for themselves most of the time. Have you ever heard yourself? "Lord, me, I, and me, and mine, and what...what." You go all the way through the thing, and all it is is you. And you know what the Bible says, "Pray for all saints." Now, God designed the body that we all pray for each other. That way, everybody has everybody else praying for them instead of all of us standing alone praying for ourselves. It's so important that we pray.

So total dedication means loving the Lord Jesus Christ, loving the brothers, holiness, and prayer. Lemme give you the last one. Total dedication means commitment to growth. And I really feel that this is so very important. Spiritual growth is an imperative. A Christian who is not pursuing growth and pursuing maturity is really missing it. And, you see, this is another problem. This is kinda the thing that Peter faced when he failed to obey the Lord's will. You know, people make verbal commitments. I've seen it happen hundreds and hundreds of times at conferences and places. They come forward in a great sweep of emotion. They cry real tears from a really penitent heart, and they make a great kind of verbal commitment. But they never really begin to grow, and they never really mature, so the commitment doesn't cut it. It is basic to commitment that there be spiritual maturity. That there be a growing in order to be adequate for everything. Now, you'll remember that, in 1 John 2:13 and 14, there are three levels of spiritual growth. "I write unto you, fathers, because you have known Him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because you've overcome the wicked one. You are strong. The Word of God abides in you, and you've overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because you have known the Father."

Those are the three levels of spiritual growth, little children, young men, and spiritual fathers. And the objective of every Christian is to be that spiritual father. Now, a baby is...is the one who knows the Father. He just sort of loves God. He knows God and loves Him, and it's sorta spiritual da-da, and doesn't get much passed that. That's all right. Everybody started there. But I know some people who are still there, and it's been years. They're still saying, "Goo, goo." You know? They haven't yet learned to converse in terms of God's truth and the Word of God. So you see a baby, and a baby, of course, is the one that gets ripped off by all the false systems. Children tossed to and fro and by every wind of doctrine, by the deceitfulness of Satan. Cunning craftiness. They're victimized.

The next level is young men. Young men know doctrine. Young men know the Word of God. They're not enticed by false doctrine. They're angered by it. You can tell whether you're a spiritual young man by whether false doctrine interests you or whether it makes you mad. The third level of spiritual growth is a spiritual father, and it says, "He knows Him who is from the beginning." If a young man knows doctrine, a spiritual father knows the God behind the doctrine. He's plumbed the depths of the knowledge of the One who's there. It's the difference between knowing the doctrine and knowing the God behind it. It's the difference between gnosis and epicgnosis. It's the difference between the knowledge of spiritual things and spiritual knowledge. But growth is incumbent on us.

Peter said, "As babes desire milk, pure milk, so you should desire the milk of the Word that you may grow thereby." This is basic. In 2 Peter 3:18, there's a most important passage. I just read you one verse. "But grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." If you're not learning...listen to this...if you are not learning something new, something fresh about the Lord every day, you're sinning. That's right. You're denying your growth. If every day that goes by you haven't exposed yourself to some truth about the Lord Jesus Christ, some fresh insight, you've failed that day to be responsible to the area of growth. If you have not learned some truth out of the Word of God or refreshed your soul in the Word of God so that you're stronger than you were the day before, you're denying the principle of growth, which is built into the Christian life.

Now, I don't know that everybody understands spiritual growth. Lemme define it for a minute. When I say spiritual growth, I'm not talking about your position. Because your position, you don't grow. You're perfect. What I mean by position is the fact that, in Christ, God sees you as perfect. He looks at you, and just like Colossians 2:10, you're complete in Him. In other words there's nothing lacking. You're absolutely perfect. Peter says the same thing. You have all things that pertain to life in godliness. So you don't need anything. Ecclesiastes 3:14 says, "Whatever God has made is complete, and you can't take anything from it. You can't add anything to it." And God made you a new creature, and you're total, and you don't need anything else, and you're mature in position. But your practice doesn't match your position...

You know, it's as if, I don't know how to give you a good analogy of it, but it's as if you are appointed to be the chairman of the nuclear physics department of the greatest university in the world, and you are only 11 years old, and you didn't really know how to read too good. You would have the position, but, man, you'd have a miserable, impossible task trying to live up to the position. So spiritual growth says, God says, "Here's your position. You are seated in the heavenlies. You are perfect. You are absolutely all that God can make a new creature to be. Old things have passed away. All things have become new. This is your position." And here you are down here saying, "Wow," and spiritual growth is this. You see, it's ascending to become what you are. That's important to understand it. Before God, I'm perfect. That's why I'm fit for heaven. That's why I'm fit for His love. That's why the Spirit of God can reside in my life. But I'm like an 11-year-old chairman of a nuclear physics department. I can't quite live up to my position...But I'm gonna grow into it.

And as a believer I mature, and I grow to fulfill all that the position asks of me. So, you see, when we talk about Christian growth, lemme say something. Christian growth is not advancing you in God's favor. When I say Christian growth, I don't mean that God likes you better the more spiritual you are. No, He couldn't like you better. He likes you perfectly now. He loves you perfectly. In fact, He saved you because of His own grace, not because He liked you in the beginning better than somebody else. It was all grace. He gave His love to you in total. There is no increase in God's love in your life. God isn't gonna like you better.

You know, I always think about people who say that to their children. They say, "If you do that, the Lord won't like you." That's ridiculous. God's loving you is not conditional on your behavior as a believer. God's loving you is conditional upon His sovereignty. And positionally, He sees you as perfect. You can't advance in God's favor. Lemme add this. When we say Christians grow, we also don't mean that salvation was incomplete, that salvation's a process. You sorta sneak in the front and you grow, grow, grow. Maybe if you hit the right slot, you get into heaven. No. Salvation is complete absolutely. When you received Christ, you became a new creation.

And Christian growth, incidentally, doesn't make you fit for heaven. You know, even if you don't grow spiritually, you'll go to heaven, did you know that? Even crummy people like Ananias and Saphhira, who were killed by God for their sin, went to heaven. You see, heaven is secured at salvation. Salvation is complete at salvation. You are perfect in God's favor at salvation. Positionally, all that's taken care of, and that has nothing to do with growth. Growth is the practice of really living what you are. You know, there are many false standards for spiritual growth. One of 'em is time. Some people think that spiritual growth is measured by the calendar. "Well, I'm a mature Christian, 'cause I've been one for 20 years." You could be one for 80 years and not be mature, couldn't ya? There are a lotta those. Believe me.

There are churches just jammed with people who've been Christians for years...and they're infantile. Absolutely infantile. You know, like the Midwest congregation, they surveyed the 25 leading people in the church, and they had to be...they should...more than 25, but they had been saved for a minimum of 25 years. They surveyed the top echelon of the church leadership, been saved for 25 years in the church in this Midwest congregation. And out of the 25, nobody could name six of the disciples. And that was only the beginning of it.

Some of you are saying, "Let's see, there's Peter."...You and I never forget the Time Magazine test, you know, where the answers came from the people who'd been in Sunday School for all these years. They gave it to these bright, college-bound freshmen, and they...they had to be people who were in Sunday School, you know, and they...and they gave them all these Bible questions on Sodom and Gomorrah were lovers were the answers, you know. And Moses appeared on the Acropolis, and the Gospels were written by Matthew, Mark, Luther, and John. And...and Jesus was baptized by Moses. And Eve was created from an apple. And Jezebel was Ahab's jackass. That one they got right...You know, and on and on and on and on went these ridiculous answers. But, you see, some people think just because you're around for a long time, spiritual growth is measured by the months on the calendar. You'd yank off November and you've grown spiritually. Ridiculous.

Now, other people think that spiritual growth is not just a matter of time, but it's a matter of information. The more facts you have, the more you grow. Well, that's...that's important, and I think it's true to a point. But I wanna mention something about it. There's a big difference between

knowledge of spiritual things and spiritual knowledge. Because "Even if you speak with the tongues of men and angels and have not love, you are...what?...you're nothing. Sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal." You can have all the facts, but if the life doesn't live up to the facts, the facts don't mean anything.

You know, there are people who got all the doctrine pigeonholed. They just haven't figured out how to apply it to their life. You know, it's like in Ephesians, and this is an important one. Ephesians 1:18. Paul says, "I pray that the eyes of your understanding might be enlightened. That you may know what is the hope of His calling and the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." He says, "I pray that you may deep down really know the riches of what you have." It isn't just information. Now, watch this, I'm gonna give you a good statement. Unless your knowledge conforms you to Christ, it means nothing. Unless your knowledge of the Scripture conforms you to Christ, it means nothing. Listen, I have dealt with people like that, and so have you. People who have all the facts, who come to church. They learn. They go to a Bible study. Their life never changes. It just goes in their little head and one or two little things sticks, and everything goes out the ear. It just doesn't match real spiritual growth.

And I hate to say, but I...I...that's the thing that grieves me more than anything in the church. You know, if you ask me that question, that's what I'll say, probably five out of seven times. What grieves you most in the church? It is the fact that people who should know the Word of God so that it penetrates and changes their lives don't have changed lives. And, man, lemme tell you something. You are responsible when you know enough to be living in accord with God's will and you're not doing it.

Lemme give you a third thing that isn't the way to measure spiritual growth. That is activity. Some people think the ones who are really mature are the busy ones. Whoever runs around the most with the most junk under their arm that belongs to the church, that's the spiritual ones. The mature ones, you know, he's doing this and this and this and this and this and this, you know. Busy, busy, busy, busy, busy. Well, busy hasn't anything to do with maturity. Some people, you know, substitute busy for mature. Like Matthew 7, many are say, "Lord, Lord, we did this. We did that. We cast out demons in Your name. We do many wonderful works. You say, 'Depart from me...what?...I never knew you.'" Busy doesn't even mean saved, let alone mature.

And I've even heard this. Some people think that spiritual maturity is a matter of prosperity. You say, "Well, look how the Lord's blessed me. I mean I've got so much money, and I've got such a wonderful house and a nice car and a secure job. You see how God has blessed me because I've honored Him, and I've grown." Listen, don't kid yourself. You know, when you start counting your money, it may not be that God has given all of that to you. In His sovereignty He's allowed it to happen. But He has not given it to you in blessing. Maybe you've just nourished your hearts like the rich people in the book of James. Or the rich man at the end of 1 Timothy. That's no measure of

spiritual growth.

And you say, "What are the measures then?" Lemme give 'em to you. How do you know you're growing? One, increase in spiritual knowledge. That is that when you start to get behind the doctrine to the God who's behind it. You say, "Well, I don't understand what you mean by that." Well, Colossians 3:10 oughta help. Listen to this. You think Paul knew doctrine? You think he had a pretty good insight into what the truth of God was all about? I think he did. And his great prayer was this, remember this prayer? "That I may...what?...know Him." And I say, "What do you mean you may know Him. You know everything." "Yeah, but I don't wanna know facts. I wanna know the God behind the doctrine. I don't want just the doctrine. I want the deity." Well, look at Colossians 3:10. "Put on the new man that is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him." Get behind just the knowledge to the image of God. God wants us with a new man, a conformity to Christ, brought about by knowledge. Knowledge that doesn't conform me to Jesus Christ is not spiritual knowledge...This is so basic. That we are to be conformed to Jesus Christ by the knowledge that we have.

Lemme give you a second way to measure spiritual growth. Deeper delight in spiritual things. You know, I can tell when somebody's growing by what they delight in. By what they love. David said in Psalm 119:97, "Oh, how I love Thy law." I can tell by a guy's love for the Word of God if he's growing. When I see people who don't ever carry a Bible, who very seldom read a Bible, you know, who, when you say turn to this text, can't get the pages unstuck. When you see people like that all the time, you say, "Well, there's no way those people can be delighting in spiritual things." Paul said, Colossians 3:16, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly." Richly, deep down, experiential, making a difference in your very life patterns. And so, you see, deeper delight in spiritual things is a measure of a man's maturity, and they can see it. I can see it. I can so measure a man's life by that kind of delight.

Third thing, a greater love for God. I think when a person is growing spiritually, they just have a greater love for the Lord. The things of the Lord are more wonderful to them. And that follows number two. Fourth, another way to measure spiritual growth is enlarged faith. You know, one of the things that I see in spiritual growth is a man begins to trust God more. His faith just gets bigger and bigger and bigger. He has tremendous confidence in God. Colossians gives us a little insight into this. Verse 6 of chapter 2, "As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith." How did you receive the Lord Jesus Christ? By faith. How are you to walk in Him? By faith. So that you become grounded in that.

Paul says, "I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me. And the life which I now live, I live by the...what?...the faith, the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." Spiritual maturity is measured by whether you trust God or not. The more you grow, the more you trust Him, the more you trust Him, the more you trust Him. I can remember the day in my

life, just to give you a personal illustration. I can remember the day in my life, the period in my life when I stopped fearing death. I never had a morbid fear of death, but I always had an anxiety about it. Years ago, when I'd fly on an airplane, I'd...I'd say, "You know, I hope this thing lands all right." I had a couple pretty hairy deals, so, you know, got to me a little bit. And I was one of the sweaty palms crowd. And...you know, I went through that for a while. And, you know, I could see the day in my life, in my maturity, when all of a sudden, that all changed. I can look back on that. I get onto an airplane today, and I say, "Man, are these people on this airplane lucky, because nothing's gonna happen to this airplane. I'm not finished yet."

Lord knows that, folks. I hope you appreciate this. We're going into Fort Wayne, Indiana, the plane lost an engine. We had only two engines on a little 737. That thing was going like this, and they couldn't seem to get the equilibrium on the thing. And going across the treetops, the wing was dipping down one side and dipping down the other side, and it's all kinds of strange things. The lady next to me, "It's over, oh, my life." And she was screaming and screaming. And people were panicky, see. And I was just, you know, there saying, "Well, you know," trying to quickly give her the whole plan of salvation before we landed, you know. Could see the runway. We landed the thing, you know, and it was kind of a scary thing. But my whole confidence was just there in the Lord. I figured the Lord would take care of that. My faith, I trust Him with my life. Not gonna worry about it a bit.

That's enlarged faith, and it comes with maturity. And another thing. Lemme just give you a fifth. Increase in spiritual knowledge, deeper delight in spiritual things, a greater love for God, enlarged faith. Fifthly, complete obedience. Spiritual growth means complete obedience. The more you grow, the more obedient you are. You can always tell a...a mature Christian because he's obedient. Boy, he obeys the will of God. He conforms to it. He submits to it in attitude and action alike. You say, "John, that's all really good, and I see the principles. How, then, do I grow?" You know how. How do you grow? By what? By the Word. "As babes desire milk, so you desire the Word that you may grow thereby."

"Study...2 Timothy 2:15...to show yourself approved unto God for all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for instruction, for correction, that the man of God may be perfect, mature, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." There it is. The key is the Word of God. As you study the Word of God, you're gonna grow.

What are the keys to commitment? Love the Lord Jesus Christ, love the brothers, holiness, prayer, and growth. You say, "John, you left out a biggie. What about evangelism?" Oh, I didn't leave it out. Watch now. You see, evangelism is a byproduct. You wanna know something? If you are loving the Lord Jesus Christ with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, if you are loving the brothers in self-sacrificing service, if you are holy in your life, if you are continually watching and praying, if you are continually growing in the Word, do you know what's gonna happen? I'm telling you, you will make

such an impact on the world that only God will be able to register it. Evangelism, you see, is the byproduct, the reproduction of a life that is mature, that is committed. You take care of the commitment. You know, as we've said before, you worry about the depth of your life, and God will take care of the breadth of its influence. Important. God calls for commitment. The productivity will come out of it. Let's pray.

Father, we're thankful this morning just for a time to share some basics. We thank You, Lord, for the new Christians that you've given in our midst for whom this is so important, as basic understanding for their lives. And we pray, Lord, too, that for us who've been believers for a long time, it might be a source of refreshment and encouragement to us to continue in those things we know to be true, and we know to be the principles of commitment that You have set down. Oh, God, make of us a committed people. Make of us a people who truly love You in the sense of obedience, self-sacrifice, submission. Who love each other in the sense of serving each other, even as we would serve our own needs. In the sense of being holy and set apart and pure and confessing sin and dealing with it, living righteous lives. Help us to be prayerful, constantly coming to You in prayer. Father, may we be just consumed, the desire to grow, to know more of You that we may all that You want us to be. And, therefore, as we are committed to You in these areas, productive and affecting our world for Your glory. We give You the praise in Christ's name. Amen.

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