



THE LIVING SACRIFICE

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Cover theme: *NEW BEGINNINGS* (Bree River, South Africa - R.E.D.)

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Emerson wrote, “Every great and commanding movement in the annals of the world is the triumph of enthusiasm. Nothing great was ever accomplished without it.” We would add that the enthusiasm of the greatly committed drove them to accomplish great things. That which inspires us to accomplish a desired goal, is enthusiasm coupled with commitment. It is our commitment to realize our dreams that move us to overcome all obstacles that would hinder our path to success. When we survey the word of God, and identify those great heroes of faith who overcame the impossible, we see in them a commitment to overcome regardless of their hardships.

For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword. From weakness they were made strong, became valiant in war and turned to flight foreign armies (Hb 11:32-34).

By the commitment of their faith, it was heroes as these who led others to conquer what seemed to be almost impossible obstacles in life.

And we can do the same for we have more recorded history than they upon which we can base our faith. They

walked by a faith that was founded upon a few revelations from God. But we have a whole Bible of inspiring examples, a complete library upon which we can build our faith and commitment to serve our God. Because we have this great crowd of faithful witness surrounding us, we must do as the Hebrew writer challenged us. *“Therefore, seeing we are also surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us”* (Hb 12:1). We too can be confident that *“if God is for us, who can be against us?”* (Rm 8:31). We have the documents that reveal the grace of God on the cross. We can read, *“He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not with Him also freely give us all things?”* (Rm 8:32). We believe this and are thus committed to Him who gave us all things. We can have confidence of being victorious over all obstacles that Satan will lay in our paths. *“But in all things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us”* (Rm 8:37).

Washington Irving said, “Great minds have purposes, others have wishes. Little minds are tamed and subdued by misfortune, but great minds rise above them.” Christians have the mind of Christ (1 Co 2:16). And having that mind means that they are already a success. They have already been victorious. The abundant life is truly waiting for those

individuals who have the courage and commitment, coupled with their faith in God, to be more than conquerors through Him who loved us. God is willing to draw out of us more than we believe we have to offer. Marcus Antonius said, "Look well into thyself, there is a source of strength which will always spring up if thou wilt always look there." There is light under our bushel. "Therefore, let us not sleep as others do, but let us watch and be sober" (1 Th 5:6). God has a victory for everyone who commits himself

to do His will. If you join the committed around you, you will be able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that you can imagine (See Ep 3:20,21). And how can this be? Just remember and say, "*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me*" (Ph 4:13). "*It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me*" (Gl 2:20). If Jesus is in us, then we are victorious. "*And this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith*" (1 Jn 5:4).

Chapter 1

Prophecy Of The Committed Servant

On our journey to discover the wondrous prophetic account of redemption that is recorded throughout the pages of the Holy Writ, our hearts are overwhelmed by the loving commitment of God to bring our Lord Jesus to the cross of redemption. God was committed to offer His grace to a humanity that was lost in sin and found no comfort in this world. Our obsession with the "plan of salvation" throughout the Old Testament is justified and right. But one aspect of our studies that we often forget is the struggles the Father went through in order to get His Son to Calvary. He patiently struggled with the nation of Israel. He patiently struggled with unbelief and rebellion. But because He was committed to the plan, His struggles were finally realized in the words of the Son from the cross, "It is finished."

Our understanding of the commitment of God is revealed in the steadfast-

ness of the Father and Son to bring into reality the redemption of the cross. A casual reading of the Old Testament reveals the determination of God to reconcile men again unto Himself for eternal dwelling. Enacting the plan and carrying it out was not easy. And because it was not easy, it exemplifies the love message of redemption that John recorded in John 3:16. In fact, in the final hours of accomplishing the redemptive plan, the incarnate Son of God cried out to the Father, "*Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done*" (Lk 22:42). And indeed, the Father's commitment to the redemption of man was accomplished through the commitment of Jesus to make the final sacrifice. Therefore, we must take another look at the Old Testament Scriptures in order to determine the intensity of the commitment that the Godhead maintained in order to bring the innocent sacrificial offering of the Son to the cross.

As the wonderful picture unveils itself in the Old Testament of the sacrificial Lamb to come in fulfillment of all prophecy, we often wonder how the first recipients of the words given to the early prophets were received. They spoke of a “suffering Servant” that was to come, a “bruised leader.” The image that was revealed to them at the time certainly painted a picture of commitment that excited their curiosity. They were so overcome with the nature and character of this One to come that they *“inquired and searched diligently ... searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ who was in them did signify, when He testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that would follow”* (1 Pt 1:10,11).

A. The bruised leader:

Even the first prophecy of the coming Redeemer spoke of One who would be surrounded with enmity. *“And I will put enmity between you [Satan] and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed. He will bruise your head, and you will bruise His heel”* (Gn 3:15). We seek leaders who are stalwarts of strength, unassailed by the adversity that surrounds them. Who would ever seek a “bruised heel” leader? Nevertheless, this is the first picture we see in prophecy concerning the One who would lead in taking care of our sin problem.

We naturally seek those whose lives we would emulate in our own. We crave examples of strength and courage. Because we are so bruised as His people in

a world that seems to have gone wrong, we would not naturally look for “bruised heel” leaders. And so ... maybe ... this was the way it should be. In this way our discipleship would be unquestioned. It would be sincere. Our fellowship would not be in those things that appeal to the carnal desires of those who seek after the things that encourage the pride of life. Our faith would be true and real, evidenced by the fact that the One we would follow was no mere man. And because our faith would be strong in One who would first be portrayed as bruised, through His strength we also would be able to crush the head of the adversary. And such was the hope given to some disciples who lived in a first century city that would soon become the heart of persecution against the disciples of the “bruised heel” leader. *“And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly”* (Rm 16:20).

As we cautiously gaze through the Old Testament, we are driven to bow in response to the pictorial image that the early prophets gave of the One who would command such an overwhelming following in the world. The fact is that we follow the One of whom the prophets spoke because He was more than a bruised martyr. He was more than a martyr, and because He was, our faith is not in His martyrdom, but in who He is and what He did through His sacrificial offering.

B. The suffering Servant:

The prophet of the Old Testament

who probably wondered more concerning the revelation of the One who would come was the prophet Isaiah. God used this man as a very unique vessel through whom He would reveal to His people the One in whom they must place their hope. However, the picture of the One who was to come was not beautiful. It was not a picture of a knight in shining armor. It was a picture of One who would suffer the disdain and rejection of man. It was not One for whom men would lay down their lives in order to follow, if we were thinking from strictly a human point of view.

1. His rejection: If we were thinking worldly, Isaiah 53 would not be a good picture of a leader who would encourage a following. When we venture through this masterpiece of dictated revelation, we are sure Isaiah fell to his knees in amazement concerning what God had in mind for the future. His question, as ours if we had only this portion of revelation of the One coming, would surely have been, “Father, must we have hope in such a One who is so rejected by the world?” Of course the answer to his question would have been “Yes,” since the One coming would be of such a nature that those who followed Him would be the true candidates to follow Him right into eternity.

So Isaiah begins to unveil the Divine dramatic picture of the “grieving servant” by asking, “*Who has believed our report?*” (vs 1). If this is the picture of the One coming, then certainly the very nature of His suffering would not encour-

age a following. It would not encourage us to follow Him if we were viewing Him through the eyes of the world. His beginnings in His youth would be as a “*tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground*” (vs 2). Nothing significant. He grew up in a social environment where He commanded no following. He was a common one born of the common class. Add to this the fact that He was not handsome or attractive. “*He has no form or comeliness. And when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him*” (vs 2). Who would ever want to follow an ugly leader? Certainly no women.

The coming One would not be a socialite. He would not please the carnal appetites of men. In fact, “*He is despised and rejected by men*” (vs 3). In contrast to our desire to follow those who inspire society with their social prowess, this One would incur the opposite response from society as a whole. This picture seems to be in total contrast to what we seek in our leaders. Since we want to be somewhat in society ourselves, we crave those who are such in order that we might be accepted and elevated to their social standing. Our carnal thirst for power drives us to seek those who have power and acceptance. But not so with the One in whom Israel was to have hope. This leader was to be and is all that is contrary to every book written on effective corporate leadership. He was One who dated every leadership seminar of the corporate world on how to be an effective and successful leader among men.

Add to the dim picture of the One

to come the fact that He would be “*a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*” (vs 3). It is not our desire to commit ourselves to those who are rejected by society as a whole. We want leaders who ride into town on a white horse, commanding the following of the masses who would commit themselves to their leadership. But not this One who was to come in the history of Israel. We seek no one as a leader who would be the outcast of society.

The One coming would supposedly generate feelings of rejection. Therefore, “*we hid, as it were, our faces from Him*” (vs 3). Some would be embarrassed by His presence. They would be embarrassed to be in His presence. If we were driven by earthly desires to be somewhat among men we would not commit ourselves to such a leader who was so despised by society.

But “*He was despised and we did not esteem Him*” (vs 3). Those of the world did not esteem Him as a leader because He was despised by society as a whole. Our only conclusion would be that those who truly committed themselves to Him understood something about Him that was so needed by the committed. When we call on those to be leaders among us who are despised by those around us, then we begin to understand that there had to be something unique about this One about whom Isaiah was painting an inglorious portrait. Our discipleship to this One should thus generate at least curiosity in the minds of those who would naturally despise such a One as this (See 1 Pt 3:15). The joy of

those who would commit all to Him who had committed all to them, was that His disciples were not seeking worldly fame. They were seeking spiritual gain.

2. His mission: Isaiah continued to clarify the picture of the coming One by changing his revelation to the ministry of the “despised and rejected” One. We are overwhelmed by what he reveals. The picture of the despised and rejected One is not pretty. It is dismal and does not command that He would be one with whom we would seek to associate. It is a picture of one who is treated so disdainfully by society that we would turn away from Him in disgust. But because His mission was not for Himself, but for others ... for us, we stop to take another look in order to somehow comprehend what was His true mission to man.

He bore “*our griefs and carried our sorrows*” (vs 4). He was rejected by society because He was received by us who were suffering under the burden of a wicked world and our own sin. The “bruised leader” incurred the rejection of the worldly society for the sake of the rejected ones. In order to accomplish His destiny, He was not one to be protected by God from the injury of a world gone wrong. He was stricken and smitten because God sent Him into a world of degradation that wanted nothing to do with God or Him. If He were to be our leader, then Isaiah certainly wondered why God would allow Him to suffer so unmercifully on our behalf.

And so the Spirit continued to explain to Isaiah. “*But he was wounded*

for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities” (vs 5). At this point in the Spirit’s revelation to Isaiah, we would imagine that the heart of Isaiah started to throb in excitement, for he too suffered the frustration of sin and the rejection of a wicked society that had given itself over to idolatrous gods. He sought a closer relationship with the one true and living God in order to escape the burden of the society in which he lived.

We too seek a close relationship with our God. But we know that in the futility of our feeble efforts to be obedient to His law, we continue to mess up. We are all lawbreakers (Rm 3:23). We are dead in our imperfect performance of the will of our God. Add to this the fact that God would not receive any good works we presumptuously offered for the atonement of our own inability to perform perfectly according to His will. But this suffering Servant that Isaiah pictured was committed to be “wounded” and “bruised” for our imperfections. *“The chastisement of our peace was upon Him”* (vs 5).

He came for us to restore peace between us and our God, and yet, He had to endure the chastisement of the world in order to accomplish the redemption deed. *“And with His stripes we are healed”* (vs 5). At His time of chastisement, *“they kept on striking Him with their hands”* (Jn 19:3). Every strike He received was a blow for our sins. Yes, He was the willing suffering Servant who was committed to do for us that which we could not do for ourselves. We needed healing, but the healing came at

the pain of every strike that was laid against His incarnate body. From His very mouth He proclaimed, *“Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends”* (Jn 15:13). He committed Himself to His friends. He committed Himself to death for His friends. And it was that commitment that drew out of His friends an amazing thing. It drew the same commitment with which He committed Himself to His friends. Because He died for His friends, His friends returned the love with the total sacrifice of their own lives. They too would die for Him. It was the magic of loving reciprocity.

Though those first followers fled “like sheep” at the time Isaiah’s picture was finally played out, and they *“turned everyone to his own way,”* the rejected Servant continued committed to His mission to deal with the sin problem of the fleeing sheep. Only God does things as this because of His great love for us (Jn 3:16). When we did not want the offering of His Servant, God gave it anyway. *“But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Rm 5:8).

And now we should be ashamed. God took care of the sin problem of His friends even though His friends felt they had no problem. *“But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved”* (Ep 2:4,5). Thank you, Jesus! How much greater can a friend be than when he gives us that which we so desperately need

even when we do not expect it?

Yes, “*the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all*” (vs 6). He was innocent of sin. He was falsely accused. He suffered the injustice of a twisted court and fell at the hands of a vehement mob. And yet, His mission was so necessary for us, so essential to bring His creation into the eternal presence of God. It was so necessary that He said nothing during all the suffering He had to endure in order to accomplish the deed of redemption and reconciliation (vs 7). Because God was not willing that any one of His creatures should perish, He accomplished the offering of “iniquity bearing” for everyone (2 Pt 3:9). The suffering Servant of God unselfishly served our sin problem. He willingly was stricken for us who would be His people (vs 8). His ministry was so awesomely sacrificial for us that He was willing to make “*His grave with the wicked*” (vs 9). We are overwhelmed with thanksgiving (See 2 Co 4:15). The One the world considered a failed leader, was actually the One who would lead us into the eternal presence of God. What more out of a leader does one want than that? The One who was made an “*offering for sin,*” was the One of whom we would not be ashamed in declaring His name to the world (See Rm 1:16).

3. His conquest: Isaiah concluded His picture of the One who was coming

to bring life to all Israel. Though at first we would rebel from the social rejection of this bruised healer, God would be pleased with the suffering Servant’s reconciliation of the sheep who had all gone astray. God “*will see the labor of His life and will be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous servant will justify many, for He will bear their iniquities*” (vs 11). The One the world would reject because He offered no carnal leadership, would be the One millions would receive because He would lead them into victory over sin. The One who would bear the cross of social rejection for our sins, would be the One who would draw millions to bear their crosses for Him. Our desire to be delivered from the bondage of our sin would compel us to deliver ourselves unto Him. Isaiah concluded rightly. “*Therefore, I will divide Him a portion with the great and He will divide the plunder with the strong, because He has poured out His life to death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors*” (vs 12).

Now to what extent will one sacrifice his own life for the crucified One when he truly recognizes the suffering that was needed for him as a transgressor? **The uncommitted have no understanding of what God’s suffering Servant did at the cross.**

Chapter 2

The Mind Of The Committed

The challenge of being a Christian is in following the One who was so committed to us. The sacrificial commitment of discipleship is following the One who set the bar high for sacrificial commitment. We are tempted to water down the level of commitment for which Jesus gave us an example. We try to excuse ourselves by saying that it is not possible to so commit one's life. Paul explained Jesus' commitment to us: *"Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus, who ... made Himself of no reputation ... being made in the likeness of men ... humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"* (Ph 2:5-8). We must admit that Jesus' commitment to us as His friends was extreme. But there it is. Even if He lowers the bar, we often have difficulty in committing to Him as He committed to us. Would we as His disciples be willing to take this journey of commitment with Him? Does "having the mind of Christ" call for too much?

Psalm 22 is David's picture of the sacrificial journey of Jesus right to the cross. In prophecy, the Spirit through David revealed that the burden of Jesus' committed journey would take Him to the point of crying out to His Father, *"My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping me and from the words of my groaning?"* (vs 1). In His agony on the cross, these are the words Jesus quoted (Mt 27:46;

Mk 15:34). They were words of spiritual agony as He bore the destiny of His mission on a cross outside Jerusalem. In the suffering of the moment we would assume, as many other commentators, that His Father turned away from the ugliness of our sin that He bore there. At least, in crying out the quotation from Psalm 22 Jesus wanted everyone to rush to their Bibles and read Psalm 22.

Through Psalm 22 the Spirit revealed the life of the committed Servant. We would assume that the words of verses 7 & 8 were in reference to Jesus while on the cross. *"All those who see me laugh me to scorn. They shoot out the lip. They shake the head, saying, 'He trusted in the Lord that He would deliver him. Let Him deliver him, seeing he delighted in Him.'"* They mocked Him on the cross. *"You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."* (Mt 27:40). Even the religious leaders mocked, *"He saved others; Himself He cannot save"* (Mt 27:42).

Jesus draws us to the extremities of His conviction to fulfill His redemptive mission on behalf of us. *"They gaped on me with their mouths, as a ravening and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax. It is melted within me"* (vss 13,14). In our commitment to follow Jesus with the cross we bear, it is often as it was with Him when He went

there for us. *“My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws; and You have brought me into the dust of death”* (vs 15). As the wicked who placed Jesus on the cross for us, we are sometimes placed in similar circumstances in our task to proclaim the suffering Savior of the cross. *“For dogs have surrounded me. The assembly of the wicked have enclosed me. They pierced my hands and my feet”* (vs 16). In his own flight from the murderous hand of King Saul, David was reduced to desperation. As an historical picture of the suffering Servant on the cross, David, as Jesus, suffered from the anguish of being rejected and pursued by the wicked.

In Psalm 22 David was inscribing prophecy of the coming Servant who would commit Himself to relieve us of our sin problem. But we do not ignore David's life, that in times of great trial and flight from Saul, he too felt surrounded by the wicked. His life of suffering is the reality of the committed life. David continued, *“But You, or Lord, do not be far from me. O You my strength, hasten to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog. Save me from the*

Lion's mouth, for You have heard me from the horns of the oxen” (vss 19-21). If one would commit himself to the One who committed Himself to the cross, then he will certainly be baptized into the agony of suffering that David endured because he was so committed to serving God.

David lived the committed life. The result of his commitment to the Lord was suffering, rejection, flight for his life. But in the agony of his flight from wickedness, he never lost his trust in the Lord. *“I will declare Your name to My brethren. In the midst of the assembly I will praise You. You who fear the Lord, praise Him. All you the seed of Jacob, glorify Him, and fear Him all you seed of Israel”* (vss 22,23). Regardless of the consequences of our commitment to the Lord, we would be as David. We would be as the Son of God who did not shrink back from the agony of the cross. In the midst of great persecution, we will sing out the praises of God. We must never forget that the One to whom we have given our lives is the King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tm 6:15). David remembered, *“For the kingdom is the Lord's, and He is the governor among the nations”* (vs 28).

Chapter 3

Christ's Example Of The Committed Life

1 Peter 2:20,21 is the transitional passage that links the commitment of the suffering Servant of God who went to the cross with His call to us to be likewise committed.

For what credit is it, if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But if when you do right and suffer, you take it patiently, this is commendable with God. For to this you were

called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps.

It could not have been stated better. Throughout His ministry Jesus called for commitment from His disciples. They were to be committed to Him as He was to them for bringing eternal redemption to them. Though they did not fully understand during His ministry with them the extent to which He committed Himself to them, after His ascension they understood to the point of giving their lives for Him. The “suffering” about which Peter wrote in the preceding text was more than the hours Jesus suffered on the cross. Peter had in mind the entirety of the humbled and incarnate God who was humiliated throughout His earthly ministry that led Him to the cross. At least Paul had this in mind when he wrote, “*Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God. But He made Himself of no reputation He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*” (Ph 2:5-8). Jesus was not simply a man walking the roads of Palestine with His friends, preaching a message of religious revolution. He was the humbled and incarnate God in the flesh of man walking the roads of Palestine. “*And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*” (Jn 1:14). Jesus was committed to us to the point of giving up being as God in spirit in order to suffer in the flesh as a man to be tempted in all ways as a man (Hb 4:15).

We must confess that the extent of God coming so far to receive us who were so far away speaks of a loving commitment of God that is incomprehensible. He was committed to leaving His family in order to build a family. He went from the familiar to the foreign in order to bring back into His family an extended family of believers who were as committed as He was to adopt new sons into the fold of God. Paul's statement is precious: “*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*” (Gl 3:26,27). “*And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise*” (Gl 3:29). It doesn't get any better than that.

Now comes the hard part in reference to what Peter said in 1 Peter 2:20,21. Paul wrote, “*... and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellows heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him*” (Rm 8:17). Jesus' suffering was more than the cross. It had to be in order to be an example of lifetime suffering that His disciples would have to endure. The cross was the finality of His commitment of suffering for us. He now calls on all His disciples to likewise suffer for Him throughout their lives. He totally gave Himself for us, and thus, He expects us to commit ourselves totally to Him. It is a fair exchange.

There are no surprises here for the disciples of Jesus. After all, Jesus foretold all His friends who would follow Him that there would be great opposition. “*For everyone who does evil hates*

the light, and does not come to the light lest his deeds should be exposed" (Jn 3:20). Paul reminded Timothy, "**Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution**" (2 Tm 3:12). Jesus said that if they hate the light of godly living, then they will hate the messengers of the light. So when Jesus said to His first disciples, "*You are the light of the world,*" He was essentially saying, "Look out" (Mt 5:14). Nevertheless, He encouraged the disciples, "*Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven*" (Mt 5:16). The consequence of "light shining" for Jesus, however, is hate from the darkened world. But committed disciples know this. It is for this reason that James wrote, "*My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials*" (Js 1:2). The "various trials" we undergo for Jesus reminds us that we are living the godly life. If there were no "various trials," then one would should check his godliness. We live in an ungodly world that does not like godly living.

The hate the world dishes out to the disciples of Jesus reveals the commitment of the disciples. Jesus forewarned His disciples, "*The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its works are evil*" (Jn 7:7). Because of their commitment to Him, the disciples would live under the shadow of the hate that it unleashed on Jesus. "*If*

the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you" (Jn 15:18). If one chooses to be a committed disciple of Jesus, then he should seriously consider the cost of his discipleship, always keeping in mind the encouragement that Peter gave. "*Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this name*" (1 Pt 4:16).

Since it is a principle that the world will hate the committed disciple as it hated Jesus, then committed discipleship naturally incurs hate from the world. "*If you were of the world, the world would love its own. But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you*" (Jn 15:19). "*If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you*" (Jn 15:20). Jesus knew that all His disciples of all time would suffer the same fate of hate and persecution that He was committed to endure for the work of the cross. At the very beginning of His ministry, He encouraged them. "*Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you*" (Mt 5:11,12; see Hb 11:32-40).

It is not persecution that brings us to question our life as a disciple of Jesus, but the lack of it.

Chapter 4

Committed To Cross-Bearing

If one claims to be a committed disciple of Jesus, but really is not, then Luke 14:25-35 is a very challenging passage to study. It is challenging because it often reveals that which we do not want to hear. It generates in us questions concerning our personal commitment to Jesus. If we consider ourselves to be a true disciple of Jesus, the statements of Jesus in this text often reveal that we are not really the best of disciples. In fact, it reveals that most people cannot be disciples of Jesus at all. And those who claim they are, discover that they are sometimes worthless salt, and thus, should be spewed out as lukewarm water. All those “nominal” disciples out there may actually not be disciples at all when screened through the sieve of Jesus’ statements of Luke 14:25-35. You can be your own judge as we filter our lives through this most challenging statement of Jesus. The declaration of Jesus is easy to understand, but very difficult to live.

At the time, Jesus made the statements of Luke 14:25-35, it was a turning point in His ministry concerning His relationship with the multitudes. There were great multitudes who followed Him (vs 25). But now it was time to screen the masses by sending home the uncommitted. So as he walked along the way with the multitudes following, “*He turned and said to them ...*” (vs 25). You can imagine the picture. He simply turned around and said directly to the

multitudes, “*If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father ... mother ... wife ... children ... brothers ... sisters ... his own life, he cannot be My disciple*” (vs 26). “*And whoever does not bear his own cross ... cannot be My disciple*” (vs 27). “*Whoever of you who does not forsake all that he has, cannot be My disciple*” (vs 33). These statements were startling. After He said them, we would assume that many in the multitudes were packing their bags and heading home.

These were stunning pronouncements of Jesus that fully reveal His definition of what it means to be committed to Him. We can only imagine the gaping mouths of the multitudes. We often wonder ourselves concerning the intensity of commitment that Jesus demands in order to be His disciple. Frankly, from what Jesus pronounced in this context concerning the demands of being His disciple, there are few who are willing to pay the cost of discipleship. And this is the point. Jesus is not looking for quantity, but quality.

Because of the direct call of Jesus to the committed life, some Bible readers have attempted to explain away the total commitment for which Jesus calls from those who would follow Him. But no futile efforts on our part to water down what He said will deter the penetrating meaning that surrounds the contexts of His statements. So with excruciating honesty and self-examination, we strenu-

ously labor through His words. Of all the contexts of scriptures in the Bible, this context is probably the most revealing concerning what Jesus defines as true commitment to Him.

As we study through His statements we must somehow understand them from His point of view. Jesus was the eternal incarnate Son of God on earth. The earth He created would be only a speck of time in His existence. He came to take people back into eternity with Him. Therefore, whatever it would cost in sacrifices in order to go into eternal existence with Jesus was totally insignificant to sacrifice for eternity. Paul's statement in Romans 8:18 would be an appropriate introduction to the context of Luke 14. *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed to us."*

A. "Hating" one's own family.

"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Lk 14:26). These words get our attention! Maybe the words of Matthew are somewhat more pleasant, or at least possibly interpretive of what Jesus meant? *"He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me"* (Mt 10:37). We feel more comfortable with these words than the hyperbole of the word "hate" in the context of Luke 14:26. Nevertheless, if it would ever come to

the point in one's life of choosing between Jesus and one's own father, Jesus said that He must be first. After all, one's own father, mother, sisters and brothers are not eternal. Jesus is. One's own relatives cannot deliver eternal life. Jesus can. And it is in His presence we seek to be for eternity. Those who would sacrifice eternity with Jesus for a temporary relationship with one's own family are not candidates for heaven. Our family can never be the most important thing in our lives. If one wants to remain in the world and be destroyed with the world, then hang on to family first, and Jesus second. But if one wants to dwell with Jesus for eternity, he better reverse the order.

If one puts Jesus first, then it may come to the point in one's life as a true disciple that God blesses one with a new family if the unbelieving family forsakes the committed disciple. Jesus said of His own earthly family, *"For whoever will do the will of My Father who is in heaven, the same is My brother and sister and mother"* (Mt 12:50). When making a decision concerning the commitment that one must make in reference to putting Jesus before an unbelieving family, we must never forget the promise that Jesus made.

Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for My sake and the gospel's, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with

persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life (Mk 10:29,30).

That is a promise! Jesus was sending His disciples out into a cold world filled with sin and hate. “*Go your way,*” He cautioned them, “*Behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves*” (Lk 10:3). He continued to warn in order to prepare them for the great commitment by which they must face the world, “*But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and they will scourge you in their synagogues*” (Mt 10:17). The life of the committed disciple not only results in being forsaken by those unbelieving family members who are close, but also brings on one the persecution of the world. We must never forget what Paul said to Timothy: “*Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*” (2 Tm 3:12).

It is easy to be a Christian when we live in a fluff society wherein everyone is content with the *status quo*. It is easy to be a Christian when our Christianity is relegated to the ceremonies of churchianity, and showing up on Sunday morning to keep active one’s membership at the local “church club” is all that is required. Some thrive sitting within the sound of chapel bells, but are not willing to go forth into the mire of humanity and snatch people from the gates of hell. Jesus knew that the love for Him that would be within the hearts of His disciples would drive them out of their religious comfort zones into all the world of the lost. And that world wherein the lost exists, is a world of persecution and

hardship. He knew that in expressing their gratitude for the grace of God by which they were saved, they would be a grace-driven people (See 2 Co 4:15). They would be driven to live the crucified life as their Savior was crucified for them. Paul can only say to the driven, “*You therefore endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus*” (2 Tm 2:3).

B. Cross-bearing means crucifixion and death.

In the text of Luke 14 Jesus qualified true commitment to discipleship by stating, “*Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be My disciple*” (Lk 14:27). Many in the multitudes who heard these words surely cringed. The Romans had crucified thousands. In rebellions against the Roman Empire prior to the coming of Jesus, there were numerous occasions when Roman authorities put down such rebellions by crucifying Jews across Palestine. There were surely some in the multitudes to whom Jesus spoke these very words whose fathers, mothers, grandfathers or grandmothers had been crucified on crosses by the Roman army. Therefore, when Jesus used the word “cross,” He meant more than enduring some hard speech or ridicule that one might suffer as His disciple. In the Bible classes of our comfortable society we have found that the discussions about cross-bearing usually never reach the depth of meaning to which Jesus intended in the context of the people to whom He spoke. Many in the multitudes were followers

of Him as long as everything was comfortable and cozy. But if a cross was involved, they were going home.

To the multitudes to whom Jesus spoke this statement, the word “cross” meant death. If a disciple was not willing to die for Jesus, then Jesus’ death for him on a cross would have little value. Because most people are not willing to carry out in their lives for Jesus that which Jesus carried for them, they cannot be disciples of Jesus. It is truly few who can repeat after Paul, *“I have been crucified with Christ. And it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me”* (Gl 2:20). That is the crucified life. The true cross-bearing disciple always remembers the promise of Jesus, *“Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life”* (Rv 2:10). The committed do *“not love their lives to the death”* (Rv 12:11). Living without Jesus is not living at all. It is only a prolonged existence unto an eternal death that is coming. But dying with Jesus in this life is only a temporary moment of cross-bearing until the reality of an eternal existence with Jesus when He comes again.

C. Discipleship comes at a high price.

In turning to the multitudes on the occasion of Luke 14, Jesus challenged them with a question. *“For which one of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost ...”*

(Lk 14:28). In their minds, surely no one in the multitudes would have missed the point. Lest one be mocked by the community, he would always consider the cost before beginning to build any structure. Therefore, Jesus was challenging them that if they were thinking about being His disciple, then they should first consider how much it is going to cost them in family relationships, houses and friends.

If there is no change in the life of the one who first becomes a disciple of Jesus, then he has missed the point. If one’s life-style does not come down when he becomes a disciple, then he may have counted the cost of discipleship, but banked the capital. When the committed understand the cost of discipleship, all the money they spent on themselves to fulfill their selfish desires before they became disciples is given to the needs of others. Paul reminded the Ephesian elders of this change in life-style. *“I have showed you all things, that by laboring as this you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’”* (At 20:35). Consider this: *“But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in Him?”* (1 Jn 3:17). The committed disciple has no problem with this question. But uncommitted disciples ... well ... there might be a problem. One may discover that he has no love of God in him, and thus, he is not a committed disciple of Jesus.

Jesus pointed out the matter of go-

ing up against a king without first considering one's own forces (Lk 14:31,32). We would view what Jesus said here in the context of the first two qualifications of the committed life. Therefore, we would understand that the one who would seek to encounter King Jesus without having forsaken family relationships, lands and houses, and after counting the cost of following Jesus as a disciple, should think twice about meeting King Jesus when He comes with His mighty angels in flaming fire (See 2 Th 1:7-9). One cannot be a disciple of Jesus if he is not willing to "get his commitment in order" to meet the King. If he is not living the committed life of a disciple, then he "*will be punished with everlasting destruction away from the presence of the Lord and away from the glory of His power*" (2 Th 1:9).

One of the most difficult conclusions to which the true disciple of Jesus must come is that **most people cannot be disciples of Jesus**. They cannot because they are not willing to make the commitments about which Jesus speaks in the context of Luke 14:25-35. Jesus made these statements to the multitudes, knowing that most of them would eventually turn away from Him. Nevertheless, He still made the statements. We must consider what the statements mean to our lives as His disciples. Our lives must reflect the crucified life of Jesus who lives in us. When others witness that we have been crucified with Christ, they will see in our lives what cross-bearing demands of the committed life. The disciple is committed to bearing his own cross because of what His Savior did on the cross for his redemption.

Chapter 5

The Focus Of Commitment

David figured it right in reference to his own life. "***Commit your way to the Lord. Trust also in Him and He will bring it to pass***" (Ps 37:5). To David, commitment meant giving one's self over to the direction of the Lord through His word. "***Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of the sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night***" (Ps 1:1,2). We see a great many people today who propose that they are committed to Jesus, but care little for what Jesus said.

They proclaim a great faith in Jesus, but no faith in the Bible. The Bible seems to be an appendage to their faith. They have thus deceived themselves into assuming they have a faith that is pleasing to God, but it is not a faith that is based on the word of God (See Rm 10:17). They have been sent delusions from God because they have no love of the truth (See 2 Th 2:10-12).

We must not forget that the millions of people who have no faith in the Bible at all have faith in a god they have created after their own image. The existence of faith in the minds of men does

not necessitate any knowledge of the Bible. And herein is the curse that prevails throughout Christendom. We have millions who proclaim faith, **but it is often a faith coming from those who have no knowledge of the word of God.** And because theirs is an ignorant faith, it is a faith that is not pleasing to God (Hb 11:6).

According to any English dictionary the word “commitment” is defined as a promise or pledge. It is a promise or pledge to give one’s self to a particular person or goal. The committed, therefore, give themselves in trust to someone or to the accomplishment of some thing. They bind themselves with goals or objectives to be led to accomplish something or to follow one to whom they have entrusted their faith. This is that for which Jesus called when He said to His disciples, “*If you love Me you will keep My commandments*” (Jn 14:15). John defined this love in 1 John 5:3. “*For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.*” The point in the two statements is absolutely clear. There is no commitment to Jesus, no real faith, unless there is commitment to do His will. **And the only way one can know the will of Jesus, is to know His word. People of faith who are ignorant of the word of Jesus are not people who are committed to Jesus.** They may be committed, but it is not to the Jesus we read about in His word. No person can commit himself to Jesus without first committing himself to the word of Jesus, for it is through His word and in obedience to His commandments, that we truly have confidence that we are His disciple. Re-

member what Jesus said to His disciples? “*You are My friends, if you do whatever I command you*” (Jn 15:14). The only way we can know what He commands is to study our Bibles.

A. Erroneous commitments:

We live in a religious world wherein there are some very committed and sacrificial people. We often hear the statement, “That person is a great Christian because of what he is doing for the Lord.” But if the zealous person is not zealous for the commandments of the Lord, then certainly he has created a religiosity that is not based on the words of Jesus, but some meritorious system of identity. We must never forget what Jesus said in John 12:48. “*He who rejects Me and does not receive My words, has one who judges him. The word that I have spoken, the same will judge him in the last day.*” The words of Jesus are critical to determining discipleship, because it is in obedience to these words that determines our destiny.

Religious zeal is empty if it is not validated by the word of God. The person who is planted deeply in the word of God, upon which he meditates day and night, is like what David said, “*A tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season ...*” (Ps 1:3). It is this person who is nourished from the subterranean waters that are near the river. In dry weather he continues to thrive on the nurture of the word of God. The validation of his discipleship, therefore, is not in his good works or his emo-

tions, but in the declaration of Jesus who claims him as His friend.

Religious zealots who do not treasure the word of God may outwardly give a pretense of righteousness, but inwardly their faith is in their faith and works. If we assure ourselves through our good works that we are right before God apart from His word, then we have deceived ourselves into believing that our faith is on solid ground. Giving one's self to the Lord on the foundation of an outward performance of good works is very deceiving. It is deceiving because we feel good because of the good works, and not because our faith is based on the word of God. Consider the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:58. *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain **in the Lord.**"* How many people are doing a great deal of good works, but works that are in vain because they have not followed the simple instructions of the Lord in Galatians 3:27? *"For as many of you as were **baptized into Christ** have put on Christ"* (See Rm 6:3). We appreciate the good works of religious zealots, but if they are not "in the Lord" while doing their good works, then their works are in vain in reference to those works that follow one into heaven (See Rv 14:13). One must be baptized into the Lord in order to be able to take his works into heaven.

*"Blessed are the dead who die **in the Lord ...**"* (Rv 14:13). Our peace of mind comes from knowing that we are in the Lord. It is not peace of mind that

is based on our good works or emotional experiences, but on knowing that we are doing good works **in the Lord**. We are *"**created in Christ Jesus** for good works, which God prepared before that we should walk in them"* (Ep 2:10). We have no problem defining the good works. The problem that many seem to have is how we are *"created in Christ Jesus."*

Giving one's self wholeheartedly to doing good works is not a guarantee that one is committed to the Lord. We are created in Christ Jesus for good works (Ep 2:10). But it is not by the good works that create us in Christ. Giving our lives to the Lord begins by giving ourselves in obedience to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (See Rm 6:3-6). And after being **baptized into the Lord**, it is then that we go to work in order to work out the salvation we have in the Lord (Ph 2:12,13).

The Macedonian disciples *"in a great trial of affliction ... abounded in the riches of their liberality"* in their contribution to the famine victims of Judea (2 Co 8:2). They were able to do this because *"they first gave themselves to the Lord"* (2 Co 8:5). When one first commits himself to the Lord, it is only then that he is blessed in his work for the Lord. He is blessed with the peace of mind that passes all understanding because he has first committed himself to be obedient to the commandments of the Lord in reference to coming into a covenant relationship with the Lord. His confidence is not in the performance of his religiosity, but in the commandments of the Lord whereby he was obedient to the teaching

of the Lord. Here is the one about whom Peter wrote. *“Therefore, let those who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to Him in doing right, as to a faithful Creator”* (1 Pt 4:19).

If one would like to understand the extent to which he should be committed to the word of God, then consult David. Here is one who wrote by inspiration of the Holy Spirit the obsession we must have with the word of God. If we claim to be committed to God, then our commitment must be manifested in our study of His word. The climax of David’s commitment to the word of the Lord is **Psalm 119**. It is a psalm we would like to challenge everyone to periodically read, just to remind ourselves how central the word of God must be to our thinking and behavior.

B. Committed to Jesus, not theologians:

As a religious group, the Pharisees were committed to the law of Moses. They were committed to the law, while at the same time, they added their host of traditional beliefs to the law in order to legally protect the law of Moses. In doing so they became very religious in keeping the traditions of the fathers, but very faithless in respecting the word of God. Jesus judged their traditional religiosity, *“For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men ...”* (See Mk 7:1-9). They were committed to Moses, but in their zealous religiosity, they elevated their traditions above the law of Moses, *“teaching as doctrines the*

commandments of men” (Mk 7:7). They were more committed to the traditions of the fathers than the word of God. Jesus thus judged their religiosity to be hypocritical. They were supposing to be committed to God, but they were more committed to their religion.

Then there were the Sadducees who were committed to the literalism of the law of Moses, while forgetting the very spirit of the law. Their ignorance of the Scriptures led them to deny the resurrection of the dead (At 4:1,2). Though both the Pharisees and Sadducees were Jews of different religious sects during the time of Jesus, they could not get along with one another because of the differences in their theology (See At 23:6-10). They were committed to their respective sects, which sects were a fabrication of various traditions and traditional interpretations that they had blended together with the word of God. In their lack of knowledge of what the word of God actually required, they were divided among themselves over their traditional religiosity. Regardless of their divisions, they were committed to their favorite religious sects.

This picture is not unlike what we see today in Christendom, a world divided into sects that are identified by those who adhere to favorite traditions and traditional beliefs. Each group champions their respective scholars, pitting one scholar against another in an endless debate that has sidetracked the adherents of each group from a central focus on Jesus. Commitment today in Christendom is more to one’s favorite religious

body. The subject of preaching is often focused on conversion to church, not Christ. And thus, the appeal of many evangelistic sermons we hear is that one be converted to a particular religious group that seeks to hover under the umbrella of Christendom by saying the name of Jesus over and over.

1. Not committed to the arrogant wise: Jesus prayed, *“I thank You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them to babes”* (Mt 11:25). The theological aristocrats of Jesus’ day (the scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees) could not understand Jesus’ message because they had long forgotten their commitment to the Source. They were self-deceived into thinking that their access to the Father was through their system of theology wherein they blended their traditions with the word of God. God knew this when He sent Jesus into the world. He thus thwarted the minds of the theologically wise of the world by their unwillingness to separate traditions from Bible in order to understand the prophecies concerning Jesus. Jesus pointed out their prejudiced interpretation of the Scriptures. *“You search the Scriptures because in them you think you have eternal life. It is these that testify of Me”* (Jn 5:39).

Paul interpreted the prophecy of Isaiah in reference to the work of God to confuse the twisted thinking of the wise. *“For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and will bring to noth-*

ing the understanding of the clever’” (1 Co 1:19; see Is 29:14). And again, *“For the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God. For it is written, ‘He catches the wise in their craftiness’”* (1 Co 3:19). Contrary to the philosophically and theologically wise of our history and time, it seems that it has been these who have found the simplicity of the word of God too hard to understand. These are *“those who are untaught and unstable,”* and thus, they *“distort to their own destruction, as they do also the other Scriptures”* (2 Pt 3:16).

We would be cautious, therefore, in referring others to a favorite theologian. God did not write the Bible to theologians and philosophers. It was written to common folks as the Ephesian brethren, who, as Paul wrote, *“when you read you can understand my knowledge of the mystery of Christ”* (Ep 3:4). We would not, therefore, footnote our message with the popular theological jargon of the misguided religious world. Neither would we refer you to some pastor through whom you must sift your understanding of the Bible. God laid the Bible into our hands, and thus it is our responsibility to take it up and read for ourselves. If one is too intellectually lazy to do this, then surely he will reap the consequences of being misled by those into whose hands he has committed his thinking. If one is fearful of standing on his own understanding of the word of God without the crutch of a favorite preacher, then his faith is not totally in God and His word. When it comes to understanding the word of God, therefore, our total commitment

is to the word of God. We must always assume that an alien sinner can pick up a copy of the New Testament in any far reaching village of the world, and without all the commentaries and comments of preachers, he can read and understand what God would require of him to be saved and live the godly life.

2. Committed to Christ and His word: Jesus taught by using many parables. He did so in order to screen out those who were puffed up in their own religiosity and theological commitments. He sought to reach the honest and open minded by sifting out those who had stopped their ears and hardened their hearts, most of whom were the religious leaders of His day. The disciples asked Jesus, “*Why do you speak to them in parables?*” (Mt 13:10). His was a simple answer. “*Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given*” (Mt 13:11).

The mysteries were not given to the hardened and arrogant because they were not receptive to who He was and what He had to say. They were not receptive simply because they had hardened their hearts against God by being committed to their traditional religions more than the commandments of God. In fact, they had rejected the word of God in order to hold to their traditions (Mt 15:1-9; Mk 7:1-9). It was these respected religious leaders who thought that they had theologically arrived, and thus, could not be taught by a common carpenter from Galilee.

But Jesus said of the honest and

open minded, “*For whoever has, to him will be given, and he will have more abundance*” (Mt 13:12). But of those who thought that they had an advantage on religion, He said, “*But whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him*” (Mt 13:12). Here is Jesus’ point: “*Therefore, I speak to them in parables because seeing they do not see and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand*” (Mt 13:13). Isaiah had prophesied of the problem. “*For the heart of this people has become calloused. Their ears are hard of hearing and they have closed their eyes*” (Mt 13:15). Christians can become as this. The Hebrew writer wrote, “*About whom we have many things to say, and hard to explain, seeing you have become dull of hearing*” (Hb 5:11).

The religious leaders of Jesus’ day rejected Him because they could not accept who He was and what He said. If He were just another Pharisee or Sadducee speaking the things that He did, then the religious leaders still would not have received Him. They would not because they did not receive one another when they spoke of earthly things. Jesus said to them, “*If I told you earthly things and you did not believe, how will you believe if I tell you of heavenly things?*” (Jn 3:12). They would not understand Jesus because He was not of this world. But their minds were of this world. He said to the religious leaders, “*And no one has ascended to heaven except He who came down from heaven, even the Son of Man*” (Jn 3:13). As God’s messenger from heaven, they could not possibly un-

derstand Him because they could not understand the earthly things that came from themselves who were of this world. Since they were committed to protecting the identity of their particular religious sects, then it was impossible for them to understand correctly what Jesus brought to them from heaven. Not for a moment would we believe that this same scenario does not exist today among the religions of Christendom. People are so zealous to protect the identity of the heritage of their particular religious group that they fail to see the unity of the one universal body of Christ for which they should be contending (See Ep 4:3).

We hear of many religionists today who claim to be committed to Christ, but at the same time reject some of the most simple statements of the word of Christ. We must never forget that those who are true in their commitment to Christ, are those who accept any plain statement that is commanded by Christ. Without all the theological gymnastics that are written by those who are eager to defend their heritage, the true disciple of Jesus is committed to searching and accepting everything that God speaks to him through His word. It is with the mind of Christ that we would seek to receive all that our Redeemer has directed us to believe and obey. The words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:12-16 are still relevant:

Now we have received, not the spirit of

*the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we might know the things that are freely given to us by God. Which things we also speak, not in the words that man's wisdom teaches, but what the Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual words. **But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him. Neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is judged by no one. For 'who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct?' But we have the mind of Christ.***"

We must never forget that strong actions demand strong beliefs and commitments. Nowhere in the Bible is there a teaching that speaks of those with the mind of Christ who know nothing of the mind of Christ. There is no such thing as a personal commitment to Jesus without knowing who Jesus really is. A biblically ignorant commitment is an illusion of the deceived. It is imperative that those who would commit themselves to Christ should seek to know the word of Christ, for without a Bible-based commitment, one is only standing on the foundation of his own merits or emotions. If there is no love for the truth of God's word, God will allow Satan to have his way with those who refuse to study their Bibles (See 2 Th 2:10-12).

Chapter 6

Committed Personally

David made an interesting statement in 2 Samuel 24:24. Israel had sinned nationally. He thus sought a place where he could make a burnt offering to the Lord for the sins of the people. Araunah offered a free threshing floor where David could make his offering. But unlike many today who want something for free in order to do the work of the Lord, David would have none of it. **He would make no offering that did not cost him anything.** He stated to Anaunah, “*No, but I will surely buy it from you at a price. Neither will I offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God of that which did not cost me anything.*”

When one offers himself personally to the Lord as a living sacrifice, he is not looking for a free ride. There is no such thing as bargain Christianity where others pay for one’s own responsibilities as a sacrifice to God. No one Christian can make a sacrifice that covers the sacrifice that others must make for themselves. When it comes to spiritual growth, that which costs us little, benefits little toward our spiritual growth. We must keep in mind that the more we want to grow spiritually, the greater the sacrifices we must make in order to reach our desired spiritual growth. This means that if we accept the Christ of the cross in reference to our salvation, then we must accept the cross of the Christ. We must, as Paul, be crucified with Him (Gl 2:20).

We say all this because Jesus rejects

lukewarm disciples, who, by their lukewarmness, bring shame upon His name. These are those to whom He would turn and say, “*I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth*” (Rv 3:15,16). Does this statement offend us? If so, then we need to go to work in order to discover the type of personal commitment that Jesus demands of those who would seek to follow Him. And when it comes to complaining about what sacrifices we have to make for Him, we need to remember the sacrifice the Father gave in committing His only begotten Son to the death of the cross.

A. Be converted to Jesus:

Before His trials and crucifixion, Jesus knew that His disciples would scatter. He said personally to Peter, “*Satan has desired to have you so that he may sift you as wheat*” (Lk 22:31). Jesus told Peter that He had prayed for him, for He knew that he would deny Him. So Jesus said to Peter, “*And when you are **converted**, strengthen your brethren*” (Lk 22:32). Peter fell through His denials of Jesus. The road back to Jesus was **conversion**. The fallen disciple must go through the same emotional journey that they went through on their initial repen-

tance as an alien sinner. The fallen must be converted again to following Jesus.

Peter was called by Jesus to be a world evangelist. At a time when his faith was greatly challenged, he lost sight of his Master and his own personal destiny. And so it is with many disciples today. Lukewarmness makes the church the mission field for evangelists who seek to stir it up to love and good works. Instead of being a force for missions, the lukewarm church becomes the mission field. We are not unfamiliar with Satan's game. He brings lukewarmness in among the disciples in order to hijack evangelists who should be preaching the good news to the lost. As a result, the evangelists have to spend their time with uncommitted disciples instead of the lost.

When Peter returned from his fall, Jesus wanted him to specifically look to the other disciples who had also forsaken Him in His darkest hour. Jesus wanted Peter to revive their calling to be a world force that would take the gospel to the world. He would do such only by focusing the minds of people on Jesus.

Every committed evangelist must look again at the example of Jesus when dealing with His followers. Please allow my interpretive insertions into the text of Luke 4:42-44.

Now when it was day, He departed [from the church] and went into a desert place. And the people [the church] sought Him, and came to Him. And they [the church] tried to keep Him from leaving them [the church]. Then He said to them [the church], "I must preach the kingdom of

God to other cities also, because for this purpose I was sent." And He preached in the synagogues [of the unbelievers] of Galilee.

The church must recommit herself to the lost. In order to do this, the members must let their preachers go into all the world. When uncommitted churches, who are too lazy to minister the word of God to themselves, cling to a clergy they have hired to do their sacrifices for them, the world goes unevangelized. Satan is clever. If evangelists would recommit themselves to their destiny, they must be found preaching in the religious centers of Galilee in order that everyone have a chance to hear the good news of Jesus. **It is still true in reference to the work of evangelists that no man has a right to hear the gospel twice when there is one man who has never heard it once.**

B. Entrust a deposit of commitment to God.

Paul wrote, "*I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have **committed** to Him until that day*" (2 Tm 1:12). The Greek word Paul uses for "committed" is the noun *paratheke*. It is used only three times in the New Testament (See 1 Tm 6:20; 2 Tm 1:12,14). The verb form of the word, however, is used nineteen times. The verb form means "to entrust," "to commit," or "to deposit." With the noun form of the word Paul was saying that he "entrusted" his personal commitment to God. He made a deposit of commitment that he

knew God would keep and remember. What he had entrusted to God was something personal, something that he knew God would guard for the sake of Paul.

The commitment that Paul made to God was a lifetime of sacrifice. When Jesus had explained the cost of discipleship in the context of Luke 14:25-35, He reminded those who would dare be His disciples, "... *whoever of you who does not forsake all that he has, cannot be My disciple*" (Lk 14:33). He spoke in hyperbole, knowing that if discipleship called on one to forsake everything, then the disciple should be prepared to do so. And Paul was prepared. To the Philipian disciples, Paul rehearsed all the pomp, power and purse that he forsook in order to accomplish the destiny that was personally given to him by Jesus (See Ph 3:1-6; also At 9:15). "*But what things were gain to me, **those things I have counted loss for Christ. Indeed more, I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things. I count them rubbish so that I may gain Christ***" (Ph 3:7,8) The Greek word for "rubbish" in the text is dung. It was the Holy Spirit using this word to remind us that nothing of this world (husbands, wives, children, lands, houses - Mt 10:37) is worth keeping if we forsake Jesus to the loss of our souls. Committed disciples count as dung any power, pomp or purse that would separate them

from Jesus.

Commitment is the salt that makes the disciples of Jesus valuable in preserving their communities. We remember the conclusion of the Luke 14:25-35 context. Jesus said, "*Salt is good. But if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill. **It is thrown out***" (Lk 14:34,35). The uncommitted disciple is worthless for community preservation and will be spewed out by the Lord, that is, cast out from the presence of God (Mt 25:41).

Commitment to discipleship is a total surrender of all that a person has to offer to the total demands of Jesus. The Holy Spirit, according to the words of Paul, considered as dung anything that would hinder one from total surrender to Jesus. "*But God forbid that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, **through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world***" (Gl 6:14). These are the words of a surrendered life. When we speak of commitment, therefore, we are defining to the fullest what conversion to Jesus is. If there is no total commitment to Jesus, then there is no conversion. There is no such thing as a lukewarm Christian. Think about this in view of the fact that Jesus will spew out all those who claim to be committed to Him, but actually are not.

Chapter 7

Committed To The Truth

Our commitment is not made to a systematic theology or church, but to the Lord Jesus Christ. However, this does not mean that we are not committed to the truth of God's word and His family. On the contrary, before one can claim any commitment to Jesus, he must first manifest a commitment to belief and obedience of what Jesus says. Because Jesus was *"declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead,"* we are driven to be guided in life by His word (Rm 1:4). We seek to follow the Son of God through obedience to the gospel and resurrection into eternal life with Him.

Any sincere commitment to Jesus is validated by a commitment to His word. The principle of this concept is what Jesus said at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount. *"Not every one who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven"* (Mt 7:21). If one assumes he is committed to Jesus, but not to His word, then such a commitment leads one to be carried away after his own misguided religiosity. The problem where Christianity has gone into apostasy in many places of the world is that people have been convinced that Jesus is the Son of God, **but they have been left sterile in their faith by not being grounded in the word of God.** As a result, all sort of pagan religious practices have been blended with

the truth. The ugly beast that has arisen is a doctrinal syncretism that has led to a religiosity that poses to be Christianity. It is a "Christianity" that is purported to be true because of the zealous commitment of the adherents. Such could not be further from the truth of God's word. The tragedy with this religiosity is that the misguided committed assume that all is well, when actually, their faith is in a delusion. Paul spoke of this.

"The presence of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan with all deceiving power and signs and wonders, and with all deception of wickedness among those who perish, because they do not receive the love of the truth so that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion so that they should believe a lie, that they all might be condemned who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness" (2 Th 2:10-12).

If one has no love of the truth, God will allow Satan to come with deceiving wonders and the error of wickedness. But those who would blend the truth of God's word with the lies of Satan, will not be saved. That is what the above passage states. So for this reason the disciples of Jesus must be obsessed with the word of God. They must study their Bibles daily lest they fall victim to the delusions of Satan.

Jesus said, “*I am the way, **the truth,** and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me*” (Jn 14:6). Because there is no other way into eternal life except through Jesus (see At 4:12), Jesus was the message of the early disciples. The first thing Paul preached when he went into Corinth was Jesus Christ and His crucifixion for the sins of man (1 Co 1:23; see 15:1-4). But since Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, one cannot preach the crucified Jesus without preaching the truth that He taught. One cannot leave out the way of life that Jesus instructed His disciples to teach to all those whom they had immersed for remission of sins (Mt 28:20).

After Philip has joined with the Ethiopian eunuch on the eunuch’s return to Ethiopia, he preached Jesus to him (At 8:35). As they neared some water, the eunuch said, “*See, here is water! What hinders me from being baptized*” (At 8:36). Though the text says nothing about baptism when it reads that Philip preached Jesus, we must rightly conclude that obedience to Jesus in baptism was part of the subject of preaching Jesus since it was the eunuch who brought up baptism. This is parallel to Paul’s preaching of Jesus and Him crucified in Corinth (1 Co 1:23; 15:1-4). Since Jesus said in His final hours on earth, “*He who believes and is baptized will be saved,*” then certainly one can never claim to have fully preached Jesus without preaching what Jesus said one must do in order to be saved (See Mk 16:15).

What has become common among religious people concerning the “preach-

ing of Jesus,” is that many have moved into the realm of preaching church, not Christ. They are so committed to their particular religious group that the primary focus of their preaching is to promote their church. They forget that one is not saved by joining a particular church. As previously stated, when one obeys the gospel through baptism, **God adds that person to the family of His people** (At 2:47). Our subject of preaching, therefore, is not church, but Christ. Formulating church into a catechism of doctrine, and then making that doctrine the focus of our preaching, is surely denominational thinking at its best. Committing to the legalities of such a catechism detours our focus from Jesus Christ and Him crucified. We are detoured to an outlined catechism of church. Sometimes it is good to go through the preaching that is recorded in the book of Acts. The subject of every theme was Jesus, not church.

Jesus Christ is our Savior, not the church. The church is only the serendipity to our total commitment to Jesus. Church is the work of God who brings forth fruit from the preaching of Jesus Christ. Our total commitment to Jesus is only manifested through our obedience to the good news of His death, burial and resurrection (See Rm 6:3-6). Upon our obedience to the gospel, God adds us to His family (At 2:47). We are thus validated as members of His body, the church, only when we have manifested our obedience to His word.

“*For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*” (1 Tm 2:5). This man

Christ Jesus must be the total focus of our preaching, for it is only through Him that we access the eternal life that is in the presence of God (At 4:12). Jesus is not one of many options. **He is the only option into the presence of God.** This one truth alone should always make Jesus the primary focus of our preaching. *“There is one lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy”* (Js 4:12). If we would not be cast away from the presence of God when this lawgiver comes again (2 Th 1:6-9), then it is best that the world know who He is and what laws He has given.

“Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (Jn 1:17). Jesus was the grace of God that was revealed on the cross (Ti 2:11). All those who assume some allegiance to Christ under the umbrella of Christendom would accept this. But the statement of John 1:17 says, *“and truth.”* We cannot be committed to the person of Jesus without accepting the truth that came with Him. This truth is the final validation of all that is real and correct in this world. It is the final foundation upon which all men must base their faith (Rm 10:17). Unless one truly believes in a transcendent God who revealed His grace through His Son, and then, with this revelation gave the obedient a way of truth whereby they have the opportunity to obey the Son, then there is no salvation. The faith without truth that some people have is only the

illusion of a belief that is based only on the will of an individual to believe.

“And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (Jn 8:32). The truth is the redemptive work of God through Jesus to set men free from the bondage of ignorance. It is only this truth that will deliver men from sin and their own misguided religiosity. This is the truth of the gospel that sets men free from their own guilt. It is this truth of the gospel that continues with the disciples in order to be the foundation of their security in Christ (Gl 2:5,14). It is this truth that delivers us from our own deceptions and brings meaning to life. It gives us hope in a hopeless world. It is an anchor to our very souls. It is as the Hebrew writer stated, *“This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast and which enters within the veil where Jesus, the forerunner, has entered for us, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek”* (Hb 6:19,20).

Since one cannot ignore truth in the world in which we live, without suffering consequences, neither can one ignore the truth that comes with Jesus without suffering spiritual destruction from the presence of God. It does make a difference what one believes. Since it is truth that sets us free, then there is no freedom in error. So for this reason the disciples of Jesus must thoroughly commit themselves to the word of God.

Chapter 8

Committed To Bible Study

We have always been suspicious of those churches that have no adult Bible classes. Likewise, we have been suspicious of those preachers who stand up and say, “God gave me a word,” when they have given no time to the study of the word of God. These religious charlatans have spiritually starved the people who are growing tired of such clerical quackery. If those who presume to lead the people refuse to be led by their study of the Bible, then usually one of three things is the problem with these presumed teachers who are “*never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (2 Tm 3:7).

A. Protecting one’s heritage.

This point refers to traditional churches. These are those churches who are often afraid to offer the opportunity of the adherents to have open Bible study lest they discover something that is biblically contrary to their heritage as a unique denomination.

If we would guard ourselves from developing a party spirit, and thus dividing ourselves from other truth seekers, we must continue to study the Bible for ourselves. We must never become so arrogant as to assume that we have arrived at all the truth. We are not gods, and thus only God can know all that can be known. We are men who love the

truth. We thus continue to study our Bibles. The fact that we continue to study our Bibles is evidence that we do not know all that has been revealed to us by God. Churches that do not have open Bible study are churches that validate their existence either by their heritage, or by the misguided experiences of those who would lead them astray.

B. Lack of love for God’s word.

Some have no love of the Bible, and thus, they seem to be content to carry on religiously without ever checking their beliefs. The only way to escape the trap of falling victim to ourselves is that we must continually search the Scriptures. We must be as the Bereans. “*These were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so*” (At 17:11). The only guard against apostasy is a total commitment to the word of God. In fact, if there is a supposed commitment to Christ without a commitment to His word, then the commitment is based on something other than Christ. Commitment that is not based on the word of God is superficial. It is a delusion that will allow one to continue in error. Because true disciples of Jesus are afraid of this, they continue to be diligent students of the Bible. They

continue as Paul instructed Timothy: *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”* (2 Tm 2:15). Those churches that do not offer opportunities for open Bible study have either never read this statement, or they have read it and made a choice to ignore it. If the latter is the case, then it is time to look for another church of people. We would never be a part of a group that is fearful of having adult Bible studies where every member has a right to share his thinking.

We need to be very clear on this point. There are a great number of church groups throughout the world who have little love for the Bible. They come together for exhilarating assemblies and cry out, “Lord, Lord” (“Jesus, Jesus”), but there is little love for the word of God among the preachers and members of these churches. You ask, How do you know this? The answer is simple. Everyone knows that David was a man after God’s own heart. So why would this statement be made of David? Read again **Psalm 119** and you will have the answer. **Every verse in Psalm 119 makes some reference to the word of God.**

The word of God was something on which David meditated day and night (Ps 1:2; 119:14,16,35). **So if one would have the heart of God, his heart must be saturated daily with the word of God.** Those churches that come together without emphasis on Bible study, **do not** have the heart of God. Regardless of how much the attendees desperately cry out “Lord, Lord,” there is no heart of God in

these churches simply because the adherents are not driven to and guided by the word of God. They are not noble-minded people as the Bereans because they are not committed to searching the Scriptures every day (At 17:11). And if they cannot be committed to the Scriptures at least on Sunday, then we know that they are only “Lord, Lord” churches without the heart of God because they do not do what Jesus says. *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven”* (Mt 7:21). And in order to do the will of the Father, one must study the will of the Father. If a church is not continually studying the will of the Father (the Bible), we know that that church is not a church of Christ. It is a man-made church built around a personality that has great, dynamic speech, but no love of the word of God. If one is a member of a church group that does not continually study the Bible as a group, then he needs to look for a group that does.

C. **Experiential validation of faith.**

The faith of some is experientially based, and thus, the word of God has little place in their religion. It seems that the religious world has been inundated with the imaginations of those who have been carried away with their exaggerated testimonies of personal experiences. In such experiential religions, there is little room for Bible study since the adherents validate their faith by feelings instead of the truth of God’s word. **But we must keep**

in mind that feelings and emotions do not signal spiritual truth. Neither do such personal experiences validate our faith. If they did, then there are a host of non-Christian religions throughout the world from which one might choose, for they all have experiential testimonies. Simply because one can become emotionally excited does not mean that such a person is spiritual. If one uses his experiences to validate his faith, then his faith is not validated by the word of

Christ. If he assumes that what is truth is first felt, then he has rejected the statement of Paul in Romans 10:17. *“So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ.”* The one who has first validated his faith by his objective obedience to the commandments of Christ has a right to witness concerning the work of God in His life. But it is not the reverse. Nowhere in the Bible are experiences used to prove one’s salvation, or that one is believing the truth.

Chapter 9

Committed To One Another And The Lost World

Love should characterize the fellowship of the body of the Lord of love. The church is a loving fellowship of people because it is the response of the love of God for the world. *“But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Rm 5:8). This very act is the identity of the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. The church was born out of love in order to love (1 Jn 4:19). It was born out of the loving commitment of God to bring His creation into eternal dwelling. It is only natural, therefore, that those who have responded to the love of God that was manifested on the cross would love one another and the world of the lost among whom they live. If there is no commitment to love, then the church has lost its identity (See Jn 13:34,35). It is no longer the church of the God of love who was committed to redeem us from the bondage of sin.

A. Committed to one another because He is committed to us.

When Peter wrote to his readers to *“love the brotherhood,”* he was enjoining on them a commitment to one another. He had explained, *“Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently from a pure heart”* (1 Pt 1:22). Paul had earlier commended the Thessalonian disciples for their love of the brethren. *“And may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and toward all, even as we do toward you”* (1 Th 3:12).

Jesus loves His body, the church. Paul used Jesus’ love for His people to illustrate how husbands should love and commit themselves to their wives. *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it.”* (Ep 5:25). Because Christ com-

mitted Himself to the church, so should the members of the body commitment themselves to one another in love.

In 1 John 3, John, the apostle of love, was very definitive in reference to explaining the nature of the love that Christians should have for one another. He introduced his descriptive narrative by reminding his readers, “*Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God*” (1 Jn 3:1). The readers were certainly reminded of the extremity of God’s love for them through the cross. “*For God so loved*” at the cross (Jn 3:16), that Christians respond with love. “*We love because He first loved us*” (1 Jn 4:19). It is this response of love that identifies the true children of God. “*In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not from God, nor the one who does not love his brother*” (1 Jn 3:10). The message of the new commandment that was given by Jesus from the beginning was “*that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this will all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another*” (Jn 13:34,35). We know that we are truly His disciples, and thus have passed out of spiritual death into spiritual life, by our love for one another (1 Jn 3:14).

We can determine how to love from the context of 1 John 3. “*By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*” (1 Jn 3:16). If we are committed to our brethren, then we will

be willing to lay down our lives in order to serve them. This means that we do not allow one another to suffer poverty from unforeseen circumstances (1 Jn 3:17). It means helping a brother to work when there is work to be done (2 Th 3:7-10).

True love, or true commitment to one another, can never be in word only. “*Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth*” (1 Jn 3:18). If we love in deed, then we have confidence before God (1 Jn 3:21). If we fail to love in committing ourselves to the needs of our brethren, then we feel guilt. Our guilt condemns us by our knowledge that we have not done that which is good when an opportunity presented itself. Remember James 4:17: “*Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.*” It is the commandment of the Lord that “*as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially to those who are of the household of the faith*” (Gl 6:10). Our love for the brotherhood commits us to do good to the household of faith. It is in this way that the true disciples of Jesus are manifested to the world (Jn 13:34,35).

B. Committed to the lost because He committed to our lostness.

It should be that we need say nothing in reference to this point if those who call themselves disciples of Jesus felt what Paul said in Romans 1:14. “*I am a debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise. So as much as in me is, I am ready*

to preach the gospel to you also who are at Rome.” Would you call this commitment to world evangelism? And would you not agree that this should be the intensity of the commitment that all of us should have in reference to taking ownership of an unevangelized world?

Paul was a driven man. He could not make it through his letter to the Romans on the revealed grace of God until he emotionally exploded with the words, *“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they [the Jews] might be saved”* (Rm 10:1). He thus pled with the Roman disciples, *“Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service”* (Rm 12:1). In view of all that God had done for them through His grace, it was only reasonable that they present the totality of their lives in service to the commission of the One who gave all for them.

Grace moved the early Christians out of lethargy and into the mission field of the lost. They could not forget what God had done for them. *“For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God”* (2 Co 4:15). Grace had reached those in Rome. The result was that these disciples should present themselves as a living sacrifice. Grace reached those in Jerusalem and Judea. *“Therefore, those who were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word”* (At 8:4). No Christian who truly understands what God did for him in the grace that was re-

vealed on the cross can sit still. He must tell others of the indescribable gift of God’s love toward all men through the cross.

The answer to motivating Christians to be evangelistic is to instill in them a true understanding of God’s grace. If one is not moved by this greatest love story enacted in history, then he is the one who will be spewed out for being lukewarm (Rv 3:15,16). He is the one who has a dead faith (Js 2:14-26). This is the one who has no gratitude for what God had done for him.

And we wonder to what extremity one can be moved by the grace of God. In the middle of God’s book on grace to the church are these words of one who truly understood how far God had to come to get him from the bondage of the sin in which he lived. *“I say the truth in Christ, I do not lie, my conscience also bearing witness with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh”* (Rm 9:1-3). Paul was intensely committed to sowing the seed because he was excited to be about the need of giving all men an opportunity to escape the impending destruction that is coming. God’s grace in him would not allow him to remain idle (See 1 Co 15:10).

When one realizes the unending existence of eternity, the beauty of heaven, the horribleness of hell, and the extent to which God worked to bring us into Christ, he is moved. He is moved to

give others a piece of the salvational pie that we have in Christ. He feels, “*For woe is me if I do not preach the gospel*” (1 Co 9:16). If one is committed to Christ, then he will be committed to the mission of Christ to preach the good news of the cross and resurrection to the world.

Therefore, “*go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature*” (Mk 16:15). “*Going, therefore, disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ...*” (Mt 28:19).

Epilogue

In the midst of the imminent destruction of Israel and the final termination of the majority of the northern ten tribes, God embedded a promise in Isaiah 10. “***The remnant will return, even the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. For though your people Israel are as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them will return***” (Is 10:21,22). In Romans 9:27,28 Paul quoted this passage in reference to the remnant of Israel that would accept Jesus as the Messiah and Savior. The physical remnant of Israel did return after the Babylonian captivity. But the spiritual remnant, who were sons of Abraham by faith, were delivered out of the descendants of the physical remnant. It took more than being committed to the God of Israel to return from the captivity of sin. In Paul’s application of Isaiah 10, it took a commitment to bear one’s own cross because the Messiah went to the cross for them. It truly takes a committed person to respond to what God demands to wash away our sins. It takes a truly committed person to be faithful unto death.

The fact that Jesus used the metaphor that His people would be the salt of the earth explains what He expects of His disciples. Salt has value for that which

it is intended. If it loses its value by simply becoming a rock with no saltiness, then its intended purpose is gone. And if its intended purpose is gone, then it is no longer salt. It is just a useless rock.

If one who poses to be a Christian, but has lost his intended purpose, then he is no longer a Christian. We are thus determined to be “Christian” if we function within the purposes of what Jesus expected His disciples to be in their relationship with one another and the world. Otherwise, one is simply a spectator, sitting along with other spectators in assemblies whose light has long since gone out. The lampstand of Christian influence of those who are to be the light and preservation of the world has long been removed.

Commitment to God started with a lone messenger in a Palestinian wilderness who ate grasshoppers and wore camel skin clothes. We wonder why God started it this way until we learn from the voice of the one crying in the wilderness that God has no use for pompous preachers and religionists who pose to be spiritual leaders of the people (See Mt 3:7-12). God seeks for those who are willing to step away from the fine cuisine in Jerusalem in order to enjoy a plate full

of grasshoppers. He looks for those who are willing to be fashioned in camel's hair instead of Gucci. He wants those who are willing to turn in their silk-skinned suits for a ragged and rough garment that is suitable for the environment of wilderness preaching. And since the One about whom the "grasshopper preacher" spoke would have not even a fox hole in which to sleep (Mt 8:20), he called the rich to forsake all they had, if that was neces-

sary, in order to follow Him (Mk 2:14). Therefore, do not speak despairingly about the sacrificial commitment of our friend Jesus who calls on us to make the same sacrifices He made in order to bring us into His realm of existence. If God would willingly camp under trees throughout Palestine in order to bring a message of hope to the people, then the least we can do is the same in order to preach the gospel to the world.