

How Deep is Your Commitment?

Rick Railston

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It's no secret that Al Qaeda is committed to the destruction of all infidels, if you have been following their terrorist activities, to the point that men and children and even women strap bombs to themselves and go off and commit murder/suicide. And this is a religious commitment that is about as committed as you can get. It's misguided obviously. Will be straightened out at some point in the future, but that is commitment.

And with that in mind, if people are willing to do for their religious beliefs, the question comes, "What about our religious commitment these days?"

In years past, if you came into the Church in the fifties or the sixties or in the seventies—and for those of you that have come in since that time—we were really, really committed.

Those who came in in the fifties and sixties, particularly when you had the draft for the young men, had to be very committed because you were facing going to jail if you didn't go into the military. People lost jobs over the Sabbath or the Holy Days. Some have given up complete careers for the Church. I've known several who've gone to jail, to military prisons, because they kept the Sabbath while in uniform and they were court-martialed and then sent to prison for several years. Some, back in the early days before the change in D and R, had to give up mates, had to split their family apart. And that is commitment! The Church was our whole life back then. Should be today, but it certainly was back then.

But then things began to change in the 1980's and accelerated into the 1990's, as we all know. We saw church leaders set poor examples. They led some people astray. Many of them went back into the world. And those who have stayed, some of them had their foundation shaken. And then, as we know, in the late 1990's, mid 1990's, an exodus occurred.

And as a result of all that, some people have dropped out. Some people have returned to their former religions, but many have stayed—thousands, maybe twenty, twenty-five thousand possibly, maybe more than that around the world. Many have stayed, but because of all that I've just described some are confused and sometimes they shop churches and go from one group to another group to another group just like a smorgasbord almost and sample a little bit of this and a little bit of that. Or if somebody says something you don't like, you're free to go somewhere else. And so, shopping for ministers or shopping for churches is all too common these days. Or some people float from group to group with no commitment at all.

And as a result of all of this, it's my perception that many have slacked off in their commitment to God. Many have slacked off in prayer; many have slacked off in Bible study, slacked off in fasting. I hate to say it but my guess is many only fast once a year. And many have slacked off in tithing—just don't feel it's necessary these days. And because of all that has happened, and I'm speaking in the greater Church now, many are not as committed as they used to be, as they once were.

So the question becomes today:

*How Deep is My Commitment?
How deep is my Commitment to God and to Christ?
And to the Body of Christ?*

So the title is:

How Deep is My Commitment?

So by way of beginning we need to understand what the word *commitment* means. If you were asked, how would you define *commitment*? Well Webster's says the word *commit* is a verb. It means to "turn over to someone for safekeeping." Like you would maybe commit a valuable piece of jewelry that you have to someone to keep it safe while you were gone or something like that. Another definition from Webster's is "to perform or do something." You commit that I'm going to be here at a certain time or do a certain thing. Or it could be a pledge to do something. Not that we take vows, but that you commit to perform some act. That's what *commitment* means.

Let's go to 1 Timothy 1 and verse 18, and see Paul committed a charge unto Timothy. We have all received charges if we read the Bible. You can't read the Bible and not come away with the fact that we have received charges. We have a commitment to do certain things. 1 Timothy 1 verse 18, Paul is saying:

1 Timothy 1:18. This charge I [referring to himself] commit to [you, referring obviously to Timothy], son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on [you], that [you] by them [might] war a good warfare; (KJV)

Now the Greek word for *commit* there is Strong's 3908, and it means very similar to Webster's, "commit the keeping of or to set before."

Paul is saying to Timothy, "I commit you to keep what you have learned, to keep the Commandments of God." There's a commitment there. So let's understand what it means to commit, a pledge to do something or perform something. And the Bible is full of things that we need to pledge to do or to perform.

Now the next logical question would be:

What should we as Christians be committed to?

What is our commitment? Where should it be focused? In what areas? So that we don't get confused and get kinda fuzzy headed about it but with laser like precision we're focused on what we should be committed to.

The first thing we need to be committed to is:

To God and Christ with all our being.

We have to put Them first! To be committed to God and our Savior Jesus Christ with everything we have, all our being!

Let's go to 1 Peter 4 and verse 19 and Peter says it all in one verse! 1 Peter 4 and verse 19, I'll read it out of the New International. It's a little clearer. And Peter is very concise when he makes this statement. 1 Peter 4:19:

1 Peter 1:19. So then, those who suffer according to God's will (NIV)

And there are many of us, many people who are suffering these days:

1 Peter 1:19. So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good. (NIV)

Commit themselves to God who is faithful! God is faithful to us, to take care of us, to watch out over us, to inspire us, to correct us when necessary. But we should commit ourselves to God and then continue to do good which means to do His will. That is what we have to commit ourselves to do. We have to commit to love Him and love Him only—first above all!

Look at Mark 12 and 30, a core Scripture. And this should be just burned into our brains because this has to come first before anything. In many cases in years past, decades ago we used to focus on the physical. And yes, we tithe and clean and unclean meats, and we put leavening out our houses during the Days of Unleavened Bread, but in many cases we put those in front of this very Scripture, Mark 12 verse 30:

Mark 12:30. And [you shall] love the Lord [your] God with all [of your] heart, (KJV)

That means your innermost being!

Mark 12:30b. and with all [of your] soul, (KJV)

That means your life, everything about your life!

Mark 12:30 continued. and with all [your] mind, and with all [your] strength: this *is* the first commandment. (KJV)

This is what we have to be committed to is:

To love God and to love Jesus Christ with all of our being, with all of our heart!

And we have to do that every minute of every day! It's not a part-time thing! It's not we skip a day here or there and not do that. We have to have this at the forefront of our mind every day.

Let's go to Matthew chapter 10. Christ said something astounding to the people back then, but this is so true. Matthew 10 we're going to read verses 37 through 39. Christ is very specific here that we have to love God and we love Christ first. Matthew 10 verse 37:

Matthew 10:37. He that [loves] father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: (KJV)

Now that's a strong statement! We love our parents. We love our children. But He says if we love our father or mother more than Him, we're not worthy of Him.

Matthew 10:37b. and he that [loves] son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (KJV)

We can't put anything in front of our love for God and Jesus Christ. So we have to commit to love Him first with all our being!

The second thing we have to do, as we're talking in Point Number One here—committed to God and Christ with all our Being—we have to commit to serve God first. We're not just here to receive, but we actually have to serve God and do His will.

Look at Matthew chapter 4 and verse 10, back a few pages. We serve God and put God's will first above all! Matthew 4 verse 10:

Matthew 4:10. Then [said] Jesus [Christ to] him, (KJV)

This was after He told them—I mentioned at the last sermon I gave I think—that this is the account where Christ told him that He was going to be crucified; He was going to die; He was going to be resurrected; and Peter shook Him and said, "No You're not. That's not going to happen!" And then Christ said, "Get you behind Me, Satan. Get from here, Satan, for it is written" and Christ is reaffirming this:

Matthew 4:10b. [You shall] worship the Lord [your] God, and him only [shall you] serve. (KJV)

We don't serve ourselves. We don't serve the world. We don't serve a human government. We don't serve a church government. We serve God and Christ first above all! God and Christ only are the ones that we serve. As we're going to see down the road that if we serve Him, then we serve one another also.

So we commit to love Him only. We commit to serve Him only. And we need to commit to do His will. His will—not our will! Not the will of men, not the will of any human being, but the will of God!

Look at Hebrews chapter 13 and we're going to read verses 20 and 21. Notice what we're told! Hebrews 13 and verse 20, we must do His will.

And one thing I've learned in the Church, especially over the last few years, is that my will doesn't count for a thing. My will means nothing. And we can concoct things we'd like to have happen or like to do or whatever and it means nothing at all! God's will has to come first for each one of us. And if His will contradicts what we want, then so be it! If we're in harmony with God, that's all that counts! If we do His will, that is all that counts!

Hebrews 13 verse 20:

Hebrews 13:20. Now the God of peace, (KJV)

And then we go on a little bit of a digression here.

Hebrews 13:20b. that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, [That God of peace] 21) Make you perfect in every good work (KJV)

But notice this!

Hebrews 13:21b. [Make you] to do his will, working in you that which is [well-pleasing] in his sight, (KJV)

We want, as any children want, we should want to please our Dad. We should want to please our Father, be in harmony and unity with our Father and Jesus Christ. And to not get a cross purposes with God because we're trying to push our agenda or we want our will to be done! And so when you put these two Scriptures together, it says, "The God of peace" in verse 20; then in verse 21, "Make you to do His will." And that's what we want. We need to pray, fast, study to find out what God's will is and have Him reveal it to us and then set about the task of doing it. Not the will of a man.

So here in this First Point what we should be committed to is:

We need to be committed to God and Christ with all our being,
to love Him only, God only and Christ obviously.
To serve God only and to do God's will.

The Second Area that we should focus on in our commitment is:

To be committed to God's Truth and God's Law.

As I said, the elders have been working on this Statement of Beliefs. And it's serious business because we want to get to the core. And when we issue a Statement of Beliefs, we want it to be what God wants. We want to get it right. And then just with all humility, obey God.

Look at 2 Timothy 2 and verse 2. Paul is talking to Timothy and encouraging him to follow the Truth, to follow the Law, and, obviously, to follow Christ's example and Paul's example. 2 Timothy 2 and verse 2, notice what he says!

2 Timothy 2:2. And the things that [you have] heard of me (KJV)

Now, here we have DVD's that we can send all over the world. So you can hear somebody talk directly. They didn't have that back then. And so, much of what was transmitted to outlying Churches and outlying members came from word of mouth. Somebody would go visit where Paul was and then that person would travel and tell other congregations what he saw Paul do or what he heard Paul say.

And so he's saying:

2 Timothy 2:2. And the things that [you have] heard of me [or about me] among many witnesses, [He says, those] same [things] commit [you] to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. (KJV)

So you get to the Truth. And in Paul's case, Paul followed the Truth obviously. "And you watch that example as I follow Christ." We read the Scriptures and then we are committed to follow that. Follow good examples. Follow what is written in the Scripture. Follow Christ's example.

And so our congregation should consist of a group of faithful people who are committed to the Truth of God. Absolutely committed to God's Truth! Not myth, not false ideas or traditions of men, but to the Truth of God.

And we need to understand in this time, this Laodicean Era, we have an Adversary that wants to get us off the track. And we need to realize that there is a spirit of Truth and that's what we want, but also that there's a spirit of error out there. There is a spirit that wants to lead us into error.

Let' go to 1 John 4 and verse 6. The apostle John knew that and he knew that spirit of error in his day. All the other apostles were dead. And he was writing and he saw that spirit of error creep into the Church.

We saw that spirit of error creep into the Worldwide Church of God. It didn't come in over night. It came over in little, bite size chunks over years. And we need to be very careful that doesn't happen to us.

1 John 4 verse 6, the apostle John says:

1 John 4:6. We are of God: he that [knows] God [hears] us; (KJV)

Meaning: John says, "I'm an apostle of God. I've seen Jesus Christ. I have sat beside Him. I preach what He preaches. And if you're of God, then you're going to agree with what I say and it's going to click in your head. You're going to be in sync with that."

I John 4:6. We are of God: he that [knows] God [hears] us; he that is not of God [hears] not us. (KJV)

And there were those that opposed John. There were those that were kicking people out of the Church that John had to deal with.

Notice this last sentence!

I John 4:6b. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error. (KJV)

And we have to be careful, always vigilant that we don't let the spirit of error creep into the Church or into anybody's mind. And so we must be constantly vigilant to always follow the way of Truth and never allow ourselves to be led into error.

That is one of the problems of going off by oneself. And that's where "iron sharpening iron" comes in. And that's where elders get together there's give and take and back and forth. And it's harder to get a group off track than it is an individual off track. And so, let's all be careful. We need to assemble together. That's one of the most important reasons that we don't get off, isolated, by ourselves and we get off track doctrinally.

So the Second Commitment we have to make is:

To God's Truth and God's Law.

The Third is:

We need to be committed and focused to be members of the Body of Christ, to be part of the Body of Christ.

We have to understand that. We're here in Moses Lake as a group and we come here to services primarily to worship God as a body. And I know those of you who will see or hear this, many of you are by yourselves through no fault of your own. And I know all of you wish you could be with a bigger group or physically be with the body on the Sabbath. And we grieve that that's not the case. And we do our best to try to serve all the scattered Brethren. And that was the prime reason Mr. Gaetzman was hired is to serve the scattered Brethren.

And, so, we have to have a commitment whether we have a congregation or don't have a congregation to be members of the Body of Christ, to be participants in the Body of Christ. We can't do that if we separate ourselves. We simply cannot do that.

Notice Hebrews chapter 10. Paul talks about what is commonly referred to as *the unpardonable sin* or *the sin that will not be pardoned*. And then immediately after that, notice what he gets into! And I believe firmly there is a connection. Hebrews chapter 10, we're going to read verses 23 through 26. We're told:

Hebrews 10:23. Let us hold fast the profession of *our* faith without wavering; (for he *is* faithful that promised;) (KJV)

Absolutely! Verse 24:

Hebrews 10:24. And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: (KJV)

Now how can you consider somebody or inspire or provoke somebody to do good works if you don't associate with other people? If you're not together?

Now that togetherness for people who are isolated, our scattered Brethren, can occur over the phone, or it can occur with e-mail, or cards or letters, or whatever. We're so blessed in this society to be able to have that level of communication.

But he said:

Hebrews 10:24b. [We have] to consider one another to provoke unto love and good works: (NKJ)

And then verse 25 is following the same theme.

Hebrews 10:25. Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; (NKJ)

So even back then there were those who just wanted to go off and be by themselves. And you can get doctrinally off the track. You can get confused. You can become unbalanced when we get off by ourselves. And he says, "Don't forsake the assembling together." He says:

Hebrews 10:25b. but [rather, he says,] exhorting *one another*: (KJV)

You can't do that unless you're in contact with other Brethren!

Hebrews 10:25 continued. and so much the more, as [you] see the day approaching. (KJV)

Well, this was written a couple of thousand years ago! How much closer are we to that day? And how much more should be assembling together? And not forsaking that today?

Verse 26:

Hebrews 10:26. For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there [remains] no more sacrifice for [our] sins, (KJV)

Now why would he put that immediately after encouraging people to be together and not forsake one another? Could it be there's a tie-in between verse 25 and 26? I think so. So it's incumbent on us to be part of the Body of Christ, to be committed to be part of the Body of Christ.

Many have separated themselves and have gone astray as a result. And it's so easy to become spiritually unbalanced when you're isolated. Satan can work in the mind. Satan can work with the emotions if we're off by ourselves.

Look at Proverbs 27 and verse 17. We talked about this a second ago. This is true for the ministry. It's true for all of us—every one of us! It's something we all need. And we can't be an island unto ourselves. Proverbs 27 verse 17, we're told:

Proverbs 27:17. Iron [sharpens] iron; (KJV)

Something that is hard needs something else that's hard to make it sharper. He says, "Given that"—that's an analogy:

Proverbs 27:17b. so a man [or a woman sharpens] the countenance of his [or her] friend. (KJV)

Now the word *countenance* is Strong's 6440. It can mean two things. It can mean the *sight* of a friend. One friend sharpens the *sight* of another friend. Meaning: your vision. It can give you the right vision. It can give you the right focus by talking back and forth. A second meaning means *the state of a friend* or *the condition of a friend*. So iron sharpening iron helps your friend in their spiritual condition by encouragement, by sometimes correction, by advice, by communication back and forth. The point is if we isolate ourselves none of that happens. And iron can't sharpen iron.

Notice Acts 2 and verse 42, a final Scripture under this Third Point about being committed to be members of the Body of Christ, committed to that Body. Acts 2 and verse 42, notice what the apostles and the Brethren who were just new in the Church, newly being called, notice what they did—very important! Acts 2 verse 42:

Acts 2:42. And they [The Brethren, it's talking about. They] continued [steadfastly] (KJV)

Not occasionally. Not whenever they felt like it. But:

Acts 2:42b. [steadfastly]in the apostles' doctrine (KJV)

But notice this!

Acts 2:42 continued. and fellowship, (KJV)

Fellowship to the point that:

Acts 2:42 continued. [They broke] bread, and [It says,] in prayers. (KJV)

That tells me that they prayed together as a group. And I know in the early days in the Church, fleeing from Protestantism as we did, there's nothing wrong with getting a group of people together and praying. And I've done that several times when we've had a health problem or a crisis in the Church. There is nothing wrong with that. In fact, it's very good.

But we need to continue steadfastly in the apostles' fellowship and the breaking of bread and in praying for one another and with one another. We must recommit to be with the Body of Christ. That's the Third Point.

That leads us to the Fourth.

We need to be committed to love and serve the Body of Christ.

As I said in the beginning, when we put God first, we come quickly to understand that we need to take His mind, His love, His patience and kindness and goodness and all the fruits of God's spirit to serve others. Not just to keep them for ourselves, but to serve other people. Now to serve the Body of Christ it falls into three parts actually.

We have the greater Church. That means, when we speak of the greater Church, we mean all the people all over the world who have God's holy spirit. That's the first and, obviously, that is the Body of Christ to the greatest extent.

The second is our congregations in the Pacific Church of God and all the scattered Brethren. We have several congregations but then we have dozens and dozens, one or two hundred people, that are scattered. That's the second part.

The third part is the local congregation if you have one. If you're blessed enough to have a local congregation, then that is part of the Body of Christ too.

So the greater Church, our congregations in other areas from you are, the scattered Brethren, and then, if you're blessed enough to have a local congregation, that also.

Now the fact is that we do not have any influence over the greater Church. There are tens of thousands of people out there that we have zero influence with. They have their own groups, their own nations, their own countries. And we have very little or no communication with any of them. So we have no influence in that sense. Anyone of us as an individual have no great influence over the greater Church of God.

However, we have much influence over Brethren in the Pacific Church of God, and others too that are friends, but we have much influence because there are other congregations that are associated or affiliated with us. There are groups of scattered Brethren all over. We communicate by DVD's, by CD's. We can communicate amongst ourselves with phone calls and cards and letters. Or in the case of at the Feast, and whether it's in Kellogg or in Elkhart, Indiana, we communicate with others by our examples at those gatherings. We have at least once a month we try to have combined services here in Washington, once again, to communicate, to commit to love and serve and get to know one another.

But we have the greatest influence over our local congregation or those we meet with on the Sabbath. Let's understand that because most of the Brethren with us want to be here. They don't want to be any other place. Perfectly happy to be here! But we, as a Church, are small. I mean relatively speaking we are very small. We don't even come up on the radar screen of some of the bigger groups.

And the fact is that can be a blessing because in a small group, whether it's our scattered Brethren around the world or other congregations other than where we meet or in our local group, in a small group, each member—I want you to think about this—in a small group, each member is all the more important!

If you're a member of a Church of seven hundred, if one person drops out, it'll hardly be noticed. But if you're a Church of seven and one drops out, that is huge! Or if on the Sabbath, you get together with two or three people over the telephone—scattered Brethren—and one drops out, that can be catastrophic.

And so my point is the fact that we're small indicates that each one of us has more influence. It is a blessing in that we have more influence, but it's also a responsibility that we have more influence because we have influence to do good or evil. And in a small group, one bad apple, as you know, can ruin the whole lot. One piece of leaven can leaven the whole lump. On the other hand, somebody who exhibits the fruits of God's holy spirit or you can look at that person and see Jesus Christ operating in them that uplifts the whole group!

And so, each of us, because we're so small, has a proportionally greater influence. We can promote unity or we can promote division by our attitude, by our words, by our thoughts. We can promote peace or we can promote strife. And each one of us has, as I said, more influence in a smaller group. So it is a responsibility for all of us to do good, to promote unity, and to promote peace.

Now to have a healthy Church—we're going to talk about committed to serve the Body of Christ—to have a healthy Church several things have to happen. And we need to take the responsibility, each one of us as individuals to be responsible for these things.

The first is that we all have to love each other! You can't have a Church if you don't love each other. Look at I John 3 and we're going to read verses 14 and 16. The apostle John just nails it in I, II, and III John. He just hits it on the head. And he understood at the end of his life what it was all about. I John 3 verse 14,

this is very important. We want God to say this about each one of us. I John 3 verse 14 says:

I John 3:14. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. (KJV)

Wouldn't it be wonderful for the Father or the Son to look down and say, "Joe, here, is passing from death to life. Look at his conduct." Or, "Look at her conduct." Because of what they're doing, they're passing from death to life, because they love the Brethren.

I John 3:14b. He that [loves] not *his* brother [abides] in death. (KJV)

That means we have to love all of God's people—all of God's people!

Verse 16:

I John 3:16. Hereby perceive we the love of *God*, because he laid down his life for us: (KJV)

Guess what we ought to do?

I John 3:16b. and we ought to lay *down* our lives for the brethren. (KJV)

Now Christ died for us. And maybe someday we'll be put in that position. But right now we have to live for each other. We have to dedicate our lives to serve and to give to one another.

So the first way to have a healthy Church is we all must love each another.

The second way is we all must be committed to each other. Yes, we're committed to God and Christ first. But being part of Christ's very Body, we, therefore, must be committed to one another.

And it can be local or it can be long distance. As I said, that's why we have combined services. That's why we want to get together for the Feasts so we can get to know each other. And we need to get to know one another by hook or crook. It doesn't mean if we have Brethren in Australia.

I got a call the other day from somebody in the U.S. and they just received a card from Australia. It was Vivien Schultz. And she was so happy that somebody from Australia would take the time to write her a card! That's communication.

That's wanting to be part of the Body of Christ, wanting to get to know one another. So write! Call! E-mail! And for our scattered Brethren who don't have a local congregation that's how you communicate. That's how you participate. That's how you are involved and committed to be the Body of Christ.

Look at 1 Corinthians 12. We're going to begin in verse 25. We're talking about a healthy Church. And the second point in order to have a healthy Church we

have to be committed to each other. And 1 Corinthians 12 addresses that because Paul was writing to a Church that was in shambles, divisions all over the place. Notice what he says, 1 Corinthians 12 verse 25. He says:

1 Corinthians 12:25. That there should be no schism (KJV)

That's not a word we often use today. The Greek means division or dissension.

1 Corinthians 12:25. That there should be no [division or dissension] in the body; but *that* the members should have the same care one for another. (KJV)

Now we're told we should love others as we love ourselves. That's the same care. We care about us. We should care about others to the same degree. But it also says "the same care one for another," that means we have no respects of persons. We have no discrimination. We have no classes or castes in the Church. "We've got the ones up here and the ones down here," it shouldn't exist at all! We should have the same love and the same care one for another.

1 Corinthians 12:26. And [when] one member [suffers], all the members suffer with it; (KJV)

Sharon Myers is suffering tremendously right now. Karen Busse is suffering tremendously right now. And we need to suffer with them because we care about them and we love them.

1 Corinthians 12:16b. [and when] one member [is honored], all the members rejoice (KJV)

There's no jealousy. There's no resentment when somebody gets honored or receives a blessing. We're happy for them! We want them to be happy with us if we received a blessing.

Verse 27:

1 Corinthians 12:27. Now [you] are the body of Christ, and members in particular. (KJV)

We're individual members, yes! But we're part of this Body that is the very Body of Jesus Christ.

Verse 28:

1 Corinthians 12:28. And God [has] set some in the church, (KJV)

He's on a little bit of a digression here, but he says:

1 Corinthians 12:28b. some in the church, apostles, [and then] secondarily prophets, [and] thirdly teachers, [and then those can perform]

that miracles, [and] then those [who have the gift of healing], [and then helpers], (KJV)

We can all be helpers.

1 Corinthians 12:28 continued. governments, [KJV]

Those involved in administration.

1 Corinthians 12:28 continued. diversities of tongues. (KJV)

The ability to speak different languages, and he said in verse 29: "All can't be apostles. All can't be prophets. All can't be teachers. All can't work miracles." Verse 30, he says:

1 Corinthians 12:30. [Do all] Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with [different languages]? [or] interpret [different languages]? (KJV)

No! That's just not possible. Verse 31, he says:

1 Corinthians 12:31. But covet earnestly the best gifts: (KJV)

And in 1 Corinthians 12, that whole chapter is discussing spiritual gifts, but he gets to the point. He says:

1 Corinthians 12:31b. and yet [despite all these spiritual gifts] I [show] unto you a more excellent way. (KJV)

And then he begins talking about love. That is the excellent way!

And all of these gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, or love in 1 Corinthians 13, have only one purpose. That's to love God and Christ with all our being and to serve the Body of Christ by loving one another.

And the Body can only be built and can only be healthy when we have mutual love, mutual trust, mutual respect among each other. And that what we should strive for and work for. So a healthy Church has to have the commitment from every member to love one another and to be committed to one another.

The third characteristic of a healthy church is:

All of us must strive for peace and unity.

Peace and unity! And I had a conversation with a fellow this morning that was talking about somebody needs to preach on the fact that there's a lot of people who are contrarians today and a lot of people who want to criticize and a lot of people who want to point the finger. And those with God's love strive with all their might for peace and unity.

Look at 1 Corinthians 1 and verse 10. Paul is writing this letter to a divided Church. People were fighting. People had lost how to keep the Passover. People were confused about the role between men and women. People were claiming, "I'm following this guy," or "I'm following that guy." It was a mess! 1 Corinthians 1 and verse 10, Paul says:

1 Corinthians 1:10. Now I beseech you, (KJV)

And this is a strong word! "I am appealing, I am crying out to you":

1 Corinthians 1:10b. brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that [you] all speak the same thing, (KJV)

And that comes by iron sharpening iron and getting to the truth of a matter.

1 Corinthians 1:10 continued. and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* [you] be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. (KJV)

And you know how that happens? It's very simple. He said, "Let this mind be in you which was in Jesus Christ," in Philippians chapter 2 verse 5. All of us are down here, milling around. And Christ is up here. And if all of us begin to have more of the mind of Jesus Christ, His love, His kindness and gentleness, His perception, His understanding, His wisdom, if we become more like Jesus Christ, guess what? We're all going to be more like each other because we're becoming like Jesus Christ. And so the more we apply God's spirit, the more we use God's spirit, the more we appeal to God to give me Your mind, give me Your thoughts, give me Your desires, give me Your vision, then by definition the more all of us will become more alike. And then we will have peace and unity.

Remember what Christ said? We won't turn there—Matthew 5 verse 9. "Blessed *are*" what? "The peacemakers"! Peacemaking takes work. That's why He said "peacemakers". You have to make peace. Some people think, "Well, if I just relax and stop fighting, then peace is going to break out." Unh uh. It doesn't happen that way. If you relax and stop fighting, then nothing happens. Everybody keeps glaring at each other across the table. The fact is you have to go out and make peace, strive for peace, work for peace.

And for the Church to function properly and to be healthy, every member must do his or her part in having a loving, harmonious spirit of cooperation with every other member.

Because God is not going to have a contrarian in the place of safety! God is not going to have an argumentative person in the place of safety. God's not going to have somebody at the marriage supper who says, "Well, you sit over here. You go over there." God's not going to have that at the marriage supper. God's not going to have a food fight at the marriage supper. It's not going to happen. He's going to have people there who are in unity and harmony. So let's understand that.

And let's understand this Fourth Point that we have to be committed to serve and love one another.

The Fifth Point is we have to be committed—talking about what we have to be committed to in these end days:

We have to be committed to be the Bride of Christ.

We have to be absolutely committed! That is something that should motivate us every day! Let's go to Revelation 19 and verse 7. It is not anybody's responsibility except ourselves to prepare ourselves to be the Bride of Christ. Revelation 19 and verse 7, it says:

Revelation 19:7. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him [Absolutely!]: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, (KJV)

Now notice the last phrase of Revelation 19 and verse 7.

Revelation 19:7b. [for] his wife [That is the Church!] [has] made herself ready. (KJV)

And if we are members in particular, that means we have taken the time and the energy and have the commitment to make ourselves ready.

And this is the first time in the forty-five odd years I've been in the Church that I can see that the end is close. I didn't see it in '72. I just couldn't see it. I just could not believe that we were ready for the end. I couldn't see it in the '80's. And then a few years ago some people said, "Well, it's going to be 2006," or "it's going to be 2008." Never could see it!

But now things are different. The economy, the Muslim World and what they're doing, this oil crisis! Look how fragile economies are, lives are! And if you look at all the indices of population growth, food production decline, what the effects of genetically modified foods could be, you look at the stability or instability of governments financially or otherwise, and all those curves come together 2012, 2013, somewhere in there—maybe 2011. And I am telling you—it's just my personal feeling—that it could come together very quickly. I've never said that before because I didn't believe it. But now I believe it!

And we have to be committed to be the Bride of Christ. And what if we only have a year, maybe two, maybe three?

Some guy sent me an e-mail the other day and said that he knows when Christ is going to return. It's 2026. He knew it absolutely and thinks he can prove it. Well, I don't believe it because Christ said, "Nobody knows except God the Father." So that tells me whatever date this guy's picked, that isn't it—can't be it. And it also tells us it's going to be "cut short."

So the point I'm making is:

What if we had two years?

You look inside yourself and you say, "If I've got two years to be like Jesus Christ, is that enough?" Or, "Maybe I should turn on my afterburner and get going here—get up to warp nine spiritually because I've got a lot of ground to cover between now and a year from now or two years from now." We better keep that in mind.

And so what do we have to do to make ourselves ready? What do we have to do? I'll just give you two points under committed to be the Bride of Christ.

We, as I said earlier, we have to be committed to be like Christ every day! To be like Christ in the words we say! But even more importantly, to be like Christ in the thoughts we think! We need to clean out our minds. If we have one wrong thought, we need to repent of it. If a word pops into our head that's a four-letter-word or worse, we need to repent of it. If a vision comes into our mind that is not clean or pure, we need to repent of it. We need to wipe it away.

Look at 2 Corinthians 4 and we're going to read verses 10 and 11. This is what we have to do. We have to transform our mind, our words, our thoughts, our deeds. 2 Corinthians 4 verse 10, Paul says:

2 Corinthians 4:10. Always bearing about in the body the dying of [our] Lord Jesus, (KJV)

We bear in our minds why Christ had to die. He had to die because of my sins!

He says:

2 Corinthians 4:10b. that the life also of Jesus [Christ] might be made manifest [or apparent] in our body. (KJV)

So what our goal should be is when we interact with God's people, or we interact with even strangers, that certainly with God's people, they say, "You know I see Jesus Christ in her." "Or the words they just told me, that could have come from Jesus Christ." That's where we need to be! Notice verse 11.

2 Corinthians 4:11. For we which live are always delivered unto death for [Christ's] sake, [Why?] that the life also of Jesus [Christ] might be made manifest in our ... flesh. (KJV)

And all of us, whether we're here in Moses Lake or we're scattered all over the world, our goal should be to have Christ living inside us all the time inspiring our thoughts, our mental pictures, our words and our deeds and how we treat other people. And, frankly, this is where we fall short.

We have to start doing the difficult things. Matthew 5, what did Christ say? We won't turn there. The difficult things are loving your enemies. Christ said, "You ought to do that." Do we? Do we really love our enemies? Or do we just put up with them? Or sometimes do we hate them?

And Christ said, "Do good to those that hate you." That is strong medicine. I mean to do good to somebody that hates you! Well are we going to do it or are we not? He says, "Pray for those who spitefully use you?" And so do we every day get down on our knees and pray for that individual that might hate us or might be against us or might think wrong things about us? Do we do that?

Paul said in Romans 12, he said, "Feed your enemy." Wow! This is where the rubber meets the road. "Feed your enemy." He says, "Return evil with good." If somebody does something bad, says something hateful, you don't join the fight! And I'll tell you I've joined the fight in years past. I joined the fight not so long ago. And I'm ashamed of it!

But the fact is that we have to get to the point when somebody does us evil, we do good to them in return. We have to get to that point because when Christ is being spit on and they slammed the crown of thorns on His head and when they were scourging Him, He said, "Father, they don't know what they're doing. Forgive them."

And in 1 Corinthians chapter 6, Paul was chiding people about going to the law, suing each other. And he says, "Rather than do that, why don't you just take the wrong? Why don't you just suffer the indignity—rather than to take somebody to court?"

So these are the difficult things that we have to do and we have to be committed to be Christ-like. This is what Christ plainly said we should be doing. And so, if we only have a year or two left, we better start doing it! We better get it in gear because we don't have much time left. And since most of us are older anyway, we don't have much time left anyhow! No matter how you cut it.

Okay, the second thing that we should be committed to here in being committed to be the Bride of Christ is that we have to be a living sacrifice for each other. As I said, we can't be an island unto ourselves. We can't be "just have everybody serve us and we don't serve others."

I know of people to this day that float from Church to Church. And they go for the purpose of maybe hearing somebody speak. And that's kind of selfish. They go to have a potluck and have somebody else serve them food. That's kind of selfish. And they go to have time of—you know it's their social hour. And that's kind of selfish. No obligations, no responsibilities, no commitments, just float from place to place to place.

And how can you be a living sacrifice if you do that? You can't! Look at Romans 12 and verse 1. This is where Paul says it very succinctly because this is our job! This isn't a suggestion. This is what we should be dedicated or committed to doing. Romans 12 verse 1, Paul says:

Romans 12:1. I beseech you (KJV)

He uses that word again. That's a strong word! He says, "I'm crying out to you."

Romans 12:1b. therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that [you] present your bodies a living sacrifice, (KJV)

Not doing what we want. Not being selfish. Not being egotistical. But present our:

Romans 12:1b. bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, (KJV)

That means pleasing to God!

Romans 12:1 continued. *which is* your reasonable service. (KJV)

Or: your reasonable commitment, or your reasonable job.

And so, as part of what our commitment should be in this particular point "Being the Bride of Christ," we have to commit to serve God's people, to serve your mates, to serve your children, your parents, to serve your brothers and sisters. We have to sacrifice our time, our energy, our money in the service of God and the service of our families, and in the service of the Body of Christ, which is our brothers and sisters in Christ to do His will and not ours—God's will and not ours!

So to become the Bride of Christ, we have to become like Him in deed, in thought, in mind, in spirit. And we have to be a living sacrifice to do His will and not our will. So let's understand that. We have to do His will and not ours.

And so many times, we confuse our will with God's will. And we can't do that because we're not smart enough in many cases to know what God's will is. We have to let him reveal it to us! And I'm very careful about getting up a head of steam to go here or go there because it might not be God's will. And shame on us if we go off in a wrong direction and now we're at cross-purposes with God and God's going to correct us. He's going to spank us. And we don't like that. We want to be in harmony and unity with God. And the way we do that is to become like Him and Jesus Christ and to be a living sacrifice to do His will.

Now let's ask and answer one final question about commitment. How deep does our commitment have to be? How complete does it have to be? How deep does it have to be? And we're going to have two points under this.

First is:

We must be committed no matter what our circumstances are!

We have to be committed. We say in the wedding ceremony, when a man and a woman commit to each other, they say, "In the good times and the bad times, in sickness and in health." It doesn't make any difference you have to be committed to each other.

You see it's easy to commit when things are going well. When our bellies are full or we're in good health or we have enough money in the bank, it's easy to be committed. But things change radically sometimes when we suffer or when we're going through a trial. What is our commitment when we're under duress, when we're under pressure? We can say, "Oh, I love you, God. And I'm going to follow You, God," but then when we're under pressure, what do we do?

God sometimes brings pressure upon us to see what we're going to do. Look at Mark chapter 14 and we're going to read verse 27 and then jump to verse 50. Christ is trying to tell the apostles, the disciples rather, that it's not going to end the way you think it's going to end. And that they're going to come under great pressure because He's going to be taken captive. Mark 14 verse 27:

Mark 14:27. And Jesus [said] unto them, All [of you] shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered. (KJV)

And you remember they said not long before that, "I'll follow You wherever You go. I'll do this. I'll die for You." And yet, when He was taken captive, guess what they did? Verse 50:

Mark 14:50. And they all forsook him, and fled. (KJV)

Pressure! So what did they do? What happened to their commitment? What happened to their bold statements? It disappeared. It just went away when they came under pressure.

And Christ said also that people are going to make excuses. He said that in Luke chapter 9. Let's go there. Luke chapter 9, we're going to read verses 57 through 62.

We're talking about we have to be committed no matter what the circumstances. And the disciples were committed until the pressure was ratcheted up and then that commitment just disappeared.

And Christ called out to some people and notice: Did they commit? Or did they make excuses?

Luke 9 verse 57:

Luke 9:57. And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain *man* said unto him, Lord [to Christ], I will follow [You wherever you go]. (KJV)

Boy, what an open-ended commitment! "I'll do what every it takes."

Verse 58:

Luke 9:58. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air *have* nests; but the Son of man [doesn't even know] where to lay his head. (KJV)

What He was saying was, "Understand what you're saying. I'm not wealthy. I don't have mansions. We don't have an air-conditioned motel room to go to every night. We don't have food on the table. Understand what you're committing to!"

Verse 59:

Luke 9:59. And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, (KJV)

Now Christ is saying, "Hey!" And this guy, Christ is reaching out to this man and He said, "I want to make you one of My followers." And notice what he says:

Luke 9:59b. But he said, Lord, [allow] me first to go and bury my father. (KJV)

Now that term *bury my father* is a Jewish idiom and it means, "Let me go stay with my father until he dies." In other words, he could die in a week or he could in a year. "Let me just go stay with him until he dies." And verse 60:

Luke 9:60. [Christ] said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go [you] and preach the kingdom of God. 61) And another also said, Lord, I will follow [you]; but let me first go [and say goodbye], which are at home at my house. 62) And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. (KJV)

And you remember when He encountered the disciples who were fisherman. What did they do? They just dropped their nets, walked away from the boat, and they followed Him. That's what Christ is looking for.

And once you start to follow Him, as He said here at the end in verse 62, He said, "You can't turn back. You can't turn around." It's like a dog returning to his vomit. He said, "You can't do that."

So we need to remember Matthew chapter 7. Let's go there and read verses 21 through 23. We're talking about being committed. How deep is our commitment? We have to be committed no matter what the circumstances are—sickness, health, good, bad, money, no money, whatever! Matthew 7 verse 21—very familiar Scripture—we're going to be tested. I guarantee you we're going to be tested to see where we stand. Verse 21:

Matthew 7:21. Not every one that [says] unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of [God]; (KJV)

"Oh, I'll follow You. I'll do whatever you want." He said, "Not everybody that says that is going to enter into the Kingdom of God:

Matthew 7:21b. but he that [does] the will of my Father which is in heaven. (KJV)

Not our will, not our agenda, not our program, but whatever God says! Whatever the will of Christ is! Not us. We've got to get ourselves out of the picture.

Verse 22:

Matthew 7:22. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, [haven't we] prophesied in [your] name? (KJV)

We've been on TV. We've written booklets. We've done this. We've done that."

Matthew 7:22b. and in [your] name [we've even] cast out [demons]? and in [your] name [we've] done many wonderful works? (KJV)

They say. So again, if you take this literally—which I do—it's not the number of people in the Church, it's not the number of booklets that are written, it's not the number of times somebody gets up and speaks or anything like that!

Verse 23, He says:

Matthew 7:23. And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, [you] that work iniquity. (KJV)

What we have to do is not work iniquity, which is lawlessness. We have to keep the Law. We have to do what God wants us to do.

Our commitment has to be deep enough to remain strong no matter what the pressures are! My guess is that in the next two, couple to three years, we're going to have pressures that we have never even thought about. They're going to come in ways we can't even imagine. And we have to be prepared spiritually for those pressures so that when they come we are committed—absolutely committed! There's no doubt. There's no wavering. There's no waffling. We are committed. We're there all the way which leads to the second point about how deep our commitment has to be.

We have to be committed unto death!

We must be willing to sacrifice our life! How deep is that?

Now you remember when, even more than giving up your own life, I think the worst thing would be to give up the life of one of your children. We won't turn there, but in Genesis chapter 22 that's how Christ tested Abraham. And He said, "I want you to go sacrifice your son." You know the story. And He gave Abraham plenty of time, many hours to think about it as they made the travel to the area where God told him to go—Christ told him to go. And then when the knife was coming down, Abraham proved that his commitment was as deep as it

gets—to sacrifice your own child! We would sacrifice, I think, our own lives more than we would sacrifice one of our children. That's the deepest commitment.

And so you know what God said after that? What Christ said, "Now, I know." And people who believe this is all a game or that it's predestination or something like that, this one Scripture knocks predestination in the head. God said, "You have free moral agency. I'm going to put you into a test so that I can know your heart." And Abraham passed that test!

We have to ask that question: Am I that committed? Am I as committed as Abraham? I don't think we're going to be in the Kingdom of God if we're not as committed as Abraham was. I mean that's the litmus test!

Or as Christ said in Matthew 26 when He was kneeling down and great drops of blood He was under such stress, under such duration, distress I mean, because He knew what lay ahead. He knew He was going to be crucified. He knew He was going to be scourged. And we don't know what's going to happen tomorrow but He did! He knew what was going to happen in those next few hours and He said, "If you can let this cup pass, please let it pass. Nevertheless, not what I want, but what You want." And we have to get to that point! Am I that committed, as committed as Christ was to go ahead with this plan of salvation because if He didn't, there is no plan of salvation! It's gone. It's over with! But He did because He was committed unto death. And we have to be committed unto death.

If we are committed unto death, I mean if we really are, then today's minor problems are nothing. I mean, yes, some people have their lives on the line. And we all have to be ready to die at some point. But the little things that get our goats. You know the guy that pulls in front of us in traffic or the woman that steps up in front of us in the grocery store line. What is that compared to what Christ and Abraham went through? If our commitment is that deep, these little trials, these little troubles will not bother us. If we lose a job, we lose our home, whatever, they will not bother us if we are that committed.

And, on the other hand, if these minor problems get us all discombobulated, if they get us all off track and get us all in a snit, then we have to question our foundation. We have to question how deep our commitment really is.

Let's go to Matthew chapter 7 under this last point, last Scripture, we must be committed unto death. Matthew 7, we'll read verses 24 through 27. We were there earlier. Notice verse 24. This follows.

Matthew 7:24. Therefore whosoever [hears] these sayings of mine, and [does] them, (KJV)

That means every one of them!

Matthew 7:24b. I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: 25) And the rain descended, and the floods came, (KJV)

That means trials, tribulations, trouble.

Matthew 7:25b. the winds blew, and beat upon that house; [but it didn't fall because] it was founded upon a rock. (KJV)

If we are committed unto death, then all these trials, the winds, the waves, all of that will not deter us and will not shake us!

But verse 26:

Matthew 7:26. And every one that [hears] these sayings of mine, and [doesn't do] them, (KJV)

People who stop fasting, people who stop tithing, people who waffle on the Sabbath or kind of halfway keep the Sabbath, people who allow the world to come into their minds and a lot of their thoughts are worldly, a lot of the pictures in their mind are worldly.

Matthew 7:26. And every one that [hears] these sayings of mine, and [does] them not shall be likened unto a foolish man [or woman], which built his house upon the sand: 27) And [then when these trials and troubles came, the floods, the winds and all of that, that house] fell: [And He says,] great was the fall of it. (KJV)

Why? Because an eternal life was lost! Now think about that. What was lost? An eternal life was lost because they weren't prepared. Their commitment wasn't deep enough.

Our foundation has to be deep. It has to be stable. Our commitment has to be deep and it has to be stable for what lies ahead.

So, let's conclude. Now is the time to ask the question. We might have a little breathing space here for a year or two or three, or even five. Who knows? But now is the time to ask the question: How deeply committed am I?

We need to examine ourselves and now is the time. We have some time to strengthen that commitment. We have to strengthen our commitment to God and Christ. We have to strengthen our commitment to His Truth. We have to strengthen our commitment to be members of the Body of Christ. And we have to strengthen our commitment to love and to serve the Body of Christ. And we have to strengthen our commitment to be the Bride of Christ. Now is the time. God is giving us some time.

We passed one financial crisis a year or two ago, a little bit of a recovery although not much. That's a warning shot from God, I believe. He is trying to tell us we better get our spiritual houses in order. We better make our commitment strong. "And I'm going to give you a little breathing space before the winds and the rains and all of that fall. I'm going to give you some breathing space to do that."

Let's go to Romans 8 in closing. Romans 8 and we're going to read verses 38 and 39. This is where Paul came to regarding his commitment. Just like Abraham. Romans 8 and verse 38, he says:

Romans 8:38. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, (KJV)

Any kind of power—Satanic power, human power, doesn't make any difference!

Romans 8:38b. nor things present, nor things to come, 39) Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, (KJV)

And I'm going to substitute a few words here, just take a little liberty. He says,

Romans 8:39b. shall ... separate [me] from ... God, [and] ... Christ (KJV)

But we should say this about our commitment:

That death, life, angels, principalities, powers, things present, things to come, height, depth, or any other creature shall shake my commitment to be the Bride of Christ.

We can't let anything shake our commitment to be the Bride of Christ. So let's use the time that we have to enhance and to deepen our commitment to be the Bride of Christ.

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