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Total Commitment to Christ

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IN THE FIRST CHAPTER OF COLOSSIANS we read that Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him. (1:15-19)

Then in Ephesians, the first chapter, Paul says that God's power was exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. (1:20-23)

Now before we talk about our union with Christ and our conscious and volitional attachment to Christ in total commitment, we must look at who Christ is and what His relation is to the redeemed company we call the Church. In the passages I have quoted, you will find this truth set forth, which I may imperfectly condense into three words: centrality, basicality, preeminence.

Within the Church, Jesus Christ the Lord is **central**. The old writers used to say that Christ is to the Church what the soul is to the body—it is that which gives it life. Once the soul flees the body there is nothing that can keep the body alive. When the soul is gone the embalmer takes over. In the Church of Christ—any church anywhere, of any denomination—as long as Christ is there imparting life, being the life of that redeemed company, you have a Church; for Christ is central in His Church. He holds it together.

Then there is the next word, basicality. Jesus Christ is **basic** to the Church. He's underneath it—the whole redeemed company rests down upon the Lord Jesus Christ. I know this sounds like a string of religious clichés, but I'd like to

say it at least in such a tone of voice that the cliché element will go out of it and you will hear it as though you are hearing it for the first time: The whole Church of God rests down upon the shoulders of His Son. I think we might be able to go around the world and simply cry "Christ is enough!" Jesus Christ is enough.

There is a weakness among us in evangelical circles—we put a plus sign after Christ: Christ plus something else. It is always the pluses that ruin our spiritual lives personally, and it is always the additions that weaken the Church. God has declared that Christ, His Son, is sufficient. He is the way, the truth and the life. He is wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. He is the wisdom of God and the power of God and He gathers up in Himself all things and in Him all things consist. So we do not want Jesus Christ plus something else.

> "Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the LORD has spoken" (Isaiah 1:2). And what He has said is, "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" (Mark 9:7). So the Lord Jesus Christ is enough. We of the evangelical faith should not preach Christ plus science, or Christ plus philosophy, or Christ plus psychology, or Christ plus education, or Christ plus civilization, but Christ alone and Christ enough. These other things may have their place and fit in and be used. But we are not leaning on any of them; we are resting down on Him who is basic to the faith of our fathers.

Then there is the word **preeminent**. Christ is preeminent. He is above all things and underneath all things and outside of all things and inside of all things. As the old bishop said, "He is above all things but not pushed up, and He is beneath all, upholding; and outside all, embracing and inside of all, filling."

Now our relation to Him is all that really matters. A true Christian faith is an attachment to the Person of Christ. The attachment of the individual person to Jesus Christ is intellectual and volitional and exclusive and irrevocable.

Intellectual Attachment

To follow Christ in complete and total commitment means that there must be an *intellectual attachment* to Christ. That is, we cannot run on our feelings or on wisps of poetic notions about Christ. There are a great many bogus Christs among us these days, and we must show them for what they are and then point to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. John Owen, the old Puritan, warned people in his day: "You have an imaginary Christ, and if you are satisfied with an imaginary Christ you must be satisfied with imaginary

salvation.” In finality there is only one Christ, and the truly saved man has an attachment to Christ that is intellectual in that he knows who Christ is theologically. For you know there is the romantic Christ of the romance novelist and there is the sentimental Christ of the half-converted cowboy and there is the philosophical Christ of the academic egghead and there is the cozy Christ of the effeminate poet and there is the muscular Christ of the all-American halfback. But there is only one true Christ, and God has said that He is His Son.

I like what they say of Him in the creeds—that He is God of the substance of His Father, begotten before all ages; Man of the substance of His mother, born in the world; perfect God and perfect Man of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting; equal to His Father as touching His Godhead, less than His Father as touching His manhood; who although He be God and Man, yet He is not two, but one Christ; for us the reasonable soul and flesh are one man, so God and Man are one Christ. This is the Christ we adore, and we must have this knowledge of Him. That is, we must have the Christ of Christian theology and we must have an intellectual attachment to Christ, We must believe in the Christ of God, that He is what God says He is.

Volitional Attachment

There is also the *volitional attachment* to Christ. If I am going to follow Christ in complete and total commitment I must do it by a continuous act of my will. Christians who try to live on impulse and inspiration, who hope to sail to heaven over the undulating sea of religious feeling, are making a bad mistake. Christians who live on their feelings are not living very well and are not going to last very long. The old writers used to tell us of the dark night of the soul. There’s a place where a Christian goes through darkness, where there is heaviness. God isn’t going to take us off to heaven all wrapped in cellophane, looking as if we ought to be hanging on a Christmas tree. God is going to take us there after He has purged us and disciplined us and dragged us through the fire and has made us strong and taught us that faith and feeling are not the same—although faith, thank God, brings feeling sometimes.

We used to sing, “High heaven that heard my solemn vow, that vow renewed shall daily hear.” People are afraid of that kind of thing now, but I believe that just as Daniel determined that he would not eat of the king’s meat and as Jesus set His face like a flint, and just as Paul said “one thing I do,” the true follower of Christ must be a man whose will has been sanctified. He dare not be a will-less man. I never believed that when we teach the deeper life we

should teach that God destroys our will. But God unites our will with His will and our will becomes strong in His will, and sometimes as we go on in God we hardly know whether it is our will or God's that is working at a given moment.

Exclusive Attachment

Now I go on to an *exclusive attachment*. Our attachment to the Person of Christ must exclude all that is contrary to Christ. These are the days when we are trying to be 100 percent positive. But the Scripture says of Jesus, "You love righteousness and hate wickedness" (Psalm 45:7). That was said of the very Holy Christ Himself, who is higher than the highest heavens and separate from sinners. If He had to hate in order to love, so do you and I. To be 100 percent positive would be as fatal as to inhale steadily all your life without exhaling. You can't do that.

The human body requires that you inhale to get oxygen and exhale to get rid of the poison. And so the Church of Christ has to inhale and exhale. When she inhales she must exhale. When the Church inhales the Holy Spirit she must exhale everything that is contrary to Him.

I don't believe any man can love until he's able to hate. I don't think that any man can love God unless he hates the devil. I don't think he can love righteousness unless he hates sin; for the Scripture leaves us with the belief that in order to accept there are some things you must reject. In order to affirm there are things you have to deny; in order to say yes you have to be able to say no.

For my part I have long ago come to the conclusion that I can't get along with everybody. In an effort to please everybody you will succeed in pleasing nobody. I don't want a watered-down Christianity. I want to be able to say no. I say no to the devil and no to Kruschev and no to the Pope and no to everybody who has anything to say that's contrary to the Lord. I adore Him and I am attached to Him with an intellectual attachment that is theological and with a volitional attachment that is final and with an exclusive attachment that would exclude everything that's contrary to Christ.

Inclusive Attachment

Then there is the *inclusive attachment*. What do I mean by that? Well, that's the inhaling, you see. All that Christ is and does and says and promises and commands, and all the glories that circle around His head and all the offices He holds and all the shining beauties and varied facets of His infinite nature, all that He is and all that He has said and all that He has promised—I take all that, I include all that. In addition, since I'm identified with Him, I accept His friends

as my friends. I love all the people of God and preach to them all—and some of them listen!

You know, the Lord has some old friends, really. That fellow that goes down the street with a “Jesus Only” button or a “Jesus Saves” button as big as a dinner plate, and his hair not combed too well, staring ahead—if he belongs to Jesus I’m going to own him. An old bishop once said the Lord had His treasure in earthen vessels and some of the vessels are a bit cracked. You’ve got to be willing to own the friends of the Lord wherever they are. His friends are my friends and His enemies are my enemies. This “togetherness” that everybody is talking about—I don’t like it. I want to know what you stand for: Whom do you love and what do you hate?

A good definition of a Christian is somebody who is back from the dead. I think that Paul was one of the oddest and strangest and one of the most glorious of all the Christians that have ever lived, and he gave us a little text that no contemporary editor would ever accept in a manuscript without recasting it. “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live....” Now how did he get that way? “I am crucified with Christ.” He’s dead. “Nevertheless I live.” He’s alive. Is he alive or is he dead? “And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20, KJV). See Paul contradicting himself there. And yet within all this contradiction there is the synthesis of a marvelous and glorious truth; that a Christian is one who was crucified and is alive, being joined to Jesus Christ as He joined humanity to the deity in the hypostatic union forever—the eternal God joined to the nature of man, never to be reversed.

All the members of the Body of Christ joined to His body share in some measure in that hypostatic union, so that we are united with Him. When He died on the cross we died on the cross, and when He rose from the dead we rose from the dead, and when He went to the right hand of God, we went with Him. “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God” (Colossians 3:1). And it is written that we are “seated ... in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 2:6), which means we are with Him where He is, members of His great mystical body. How wonderful!

Irrevocable Attachment

Then there is the *irrevocable attachment*. What do I mean by that? I mean that the Lord doesn’t want any experimenters about. Some movie actor wrote a

book one time called Try Jesus. I never read the book. I wouldn't be caught dead reading it. "Try Jesus." All this experimentation—I don't believe in it. I believe we ought to be suicide bombers. We ought to tie ourselves in the cockpit and dive on the deck and if we go out, we go out. Sink or swim, live or die, irrevocably attached in love and faith and devotion to Jesus Christ the Lord.

Christians ought to be those who are so totally committed that it is final. This weak looking back over your shoulder to see if there isn't something better —I can't stand it. One time a young man came to an old saint who taught the deeper life, the crucified life, and said to him, "Father, what does it mean to be crucified?" The old man thought for a moment and said, "Well, to be crucified means three things. First, the man who is crucified is facing only one direction." I like that—facing only one direction. If he hears anything behind him he can't turn around to see what's going on. He has stopped looking back. The crucified man on the cross is looking in only one direction and that is the direction of God and Christ and the Holy Ghost and the direction of the edifying of the church, the direction of sanctification and the direction of the Spirit-filled life.

And the old man scratched his scraggly gray hair and said, "One thing more, son, about a man on a cross—he's not going back." The fellow going out to die on the cross doesn't say to his wife, "Good-bye, honey. I'll be back shortly after five." When you go out to die on the cross you bid goodbye—you're not going back! If we would preach more of this and stop trying to make the Christian life so easy it's contemptible, we would have more converts that would last. Get a man converted who knows that if he joins Jesus Christ he's finished, and that while he's going to come up and live anew, as far as this world's concerned he's not going back—then you have a real Christian indeed.

The old man went on, "Another thing about the man on the cross, son; he has no further plans of his own." I like that, too. Somebody else made his plans for him, and when they nailed him up there all his plans disappeared. On the way up to the hill he didn't see a friend and say, "Well, Henry, next Saturday about three I'll come by and we'll go fishing up on the lake." He was going out to die and he had no plans at all.

Oh, what busy-beaver Christians we are with all of our plans, and some of them, even though they are done in the name of the Lord and evangelical Christianity, are as carnal as goats!

It is beautiful to say "I am crucified with Christ" and know that Christ is making your plans. I tell you, ladies and gentlemen, twenty minutes on your knees in

silence before God will sometimes teach you more than you can learn out of books and teach you more than you can ever learn in churches. And the Lord will give you your plans and lay them before you.

If the boards of the churches would only learn to spend more time with God and less time debating, they could save all those midnight meetings where everybody leans back weary from discussing things. I tell you, you can cut down your time in debating and discussing if you spend more time waiting on God. He'll give you the Holy Ghost and He'll give you and teach you His plans.

Now I think that's all I want to say. We are to be joined to Jesus Christ, intelligently joined by knowing who He is; we are to be volitionally joined and not to try to live on our feelings, though thank God there'll be a lot of feeling going on with it! And we are to be exclusively attached, excluding everything that's contrary to Him; and inclusively attached, taking in every thing that He surrounds Himself with; and irrevocably attached so we are expendable and are not going back.

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