

733 *What Is Total Commitment?*

Phil Sanders

God's Answers to Life's Questions

Occasionally we hear people say about Christianity that it is a total commitment. Does that mean I have to give myself up completely to God? Can I not be a Christian and still live my life the way I please? Well, many people think so; but we always ask the question, "What does the Bible say?" The Christian life is the noblest and happiest life that a man can live, but it is a battle from that day until you die. Paul said in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ." He did not say, "I have determined to imitate Jesus Christ," or, "I will try to follow Him." But what Paul said was "I have been identified with Him in His death." When I became a Christian, I died with Jesus. What does he mean? He was not there; he did not hang on the cross. What does he mean when he says, "I am crucified?"

Crucifixion was a means of death. It was cruel and ugly. It was a slow and painful death, designed to make the agony last as long as possible. Crucifixions were usually done in public to shame the offender and to keep others from committing a crime. Our crucifixion with Christ is also a public identification with Him. We are united to Him in His death, burial and resurrection. Our old man of sin has died, and we have become new people freed from that old way of life in sin. If we are crucified with Christ, we are dead to sin, to the old life, to the old lusts, to the old self, and to the old ambitions. Christ is now living in us. Paul said in Galatians 5:24, "those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." In being crucified with Him, we take a stand with Christ. We say to the sinful and worldly things "So far as you are concerned I am dead. You have no more power over me than you have over a dead body." Paul wrote to the Romans in Romans 8:12-13, "So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." Our eternal welfare is dependent on what we follow, either the flesh or the Spirit. Christians who leave what is right and follow after sin can lose their souls.

But Christians don't want to do that. They want to live in such a way that pleases God. Paul said in Romans 6:8-11, "Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." Christians are willing to give up that old way of life, so they can show their love for Christ. Paul is saying a great thing here. He did not reach that standard in a day or a month. It was a long, hard process for him, and it will be a challenge for us too. When we are crucified with Christ, that means that we change our behavior and our thinking. This change gets specific, and I want to talk a little about those specifics. For instance, Jesus' feet were crucified. They crossed His feet upon the upright beam of the cross and drove the long spike into them. That driven nail tore through the flesh and blood—just imagine the agony. Our feet should be crucified, too. What do we mean by "crucified feet?" Well, we must be careful where they take us and never let them lead us into a place that will dishonor Him. Peter said in 1 Peter 2:21, "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps." Being "crucified with Christ" means that we die to the old life and follow Him daily. He is our Lord and Savior, and we give Him first place in our lives.

Because our feet belong to Him, we go wherever He sends us. I think of the prophet Isaiah. God had a task for him. Isaiah 6:8 says: Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!" We need that "Here am I; send me" attitude in our lives. Some people live their whole lives selfishly. They never give a thought to how they may serve others. The greatest thing anyone can do is to take the saving message of the gospel to people who are lost. Jesus said in Mark 16:15-16, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." There are people lost and dying in sin, because no one ever told them about Jesus. Will you tell your friends about Jesus?

They not only nailed His feet, Jesus' hands were also crucified. They were stretched out upon the crossbeam of that cruel Cross and in agony and blood they were nailed to the tree. They nailed his hands down. For the rest of his earthly life, his hands remained fastened to the cross. Our hands are crucified too. They are not nailed down, but we are not to use them any way we wish. If our hands are crucified, we will be careful what we handle. They should never handle anything that will stain them with sin or wrong. The hands of Jesus were laid upon suffering human beings to bless them, but can you imagine Jesus holding anything sinful in those hands? If you want to be like Him, you must be careful what your hands handle. Paul said in 1 Timothy 2:8, "Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension." People in the early church used to lift their hands up to God when they prayed. Paul was telling them that when you approach God, you need to pray to Him with holy hands, not filthy ones. Don't lift your hands up to God if you are full of anger at your brother or fussing with him. God has never accepted worship from people who have sin in their hearts. Isaiah wrote by inspiration of God in Isaiah 1:15-17: "When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause." God wants our behavior to change if we expect to come near Him. There is an old story about a Saxon warrior who wanted to become a Christian. He came forward to be baptized. He told the minister to immerse every part of him except one hand. But he was told that the whole body was to be "buried with Christ," "No," said the warrior. "I want to keep this hand free to battle my enemies. I do not want it given to Christ." My friend, when you choose to follow Christ, you can't be selective about what you will give to Him and what you will keep for yourself. You must give your whole self, body, soul, and spirit, to the Lord. Our hands also must belong to Christ. Use your hands for good and serve the Lord. Paul said in Galatians 6:10, "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith." We serve the Lord by doing good to others.

Now this may at first sound silly to you, but a Christian should crucify his ears—not in the literal sense. He should put to death or give up whatever he hears that might keep him from serving Christ. If our ears are crucified, we will be careful about the things we listen to. There are voices all about us, voices that tempt us to sin; but if we are His, we will not listen to these voices. Whom we hear matters. Jesus spoke of himself as the good shepherd. In John 10:3-5 Jesus said, "To him [the good shepherd] the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When

he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” Some of these strange voices are Sunday voices. They say, “Don’t go to God’s house to worship. You have been busy all week. Have a good time instead of going to church.” That is the enemy talking. Some of these voices are weekday voices. They say, “Put yourself first. Indulge in whatever pleases you. Make more money. Forget what the Bible says. You must look out for yourself.” The devil is always interested in separating you from Christ and from the will of God. Crucified ears do not listen to such compromise. They also refuse to listen to gossip and the things which hurt others. The one who listens to gossip is as bad as the one who tells. Solomon said in Proverbs 18:8, “The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, and they go down into the innermost parts of the body.” Again he says in Proverbs 20:19, “He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, Therefore do not associate with a gossip.”

Because what we say matters, we need to put to death any speech that does not follow the will of Christ. James says some practical things about the tongue. He says the tongue is uncontrollable and cannot be tamed. Now if we use our tongues for Jesus, we will never wag them unnecessarily. We should not be glad when we hear evil things of someone else, Certainly we do not have to repeat them. They might boomerang and do us more harm than the one about whom they were said. Solomon said in Proverbs 10:11, “The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, But the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.” Peter said in 1 Peter 3:10: For, “THE ONE WHO DESIRES LIFE, TO LOVE AND SEE GOOD DAYS, MUST KEEP HIS TONGUE FROM EVIL AND HIS LIPS FROM SPEAKING DECEIT.” There are some who delight in hurting others with their words. You meet them one day and they say a little thing that stings for a week. Our words should be soothing and not like salt on a wounded back. Colossians 4:6 says, “Let your speech always be with grace, *as though* seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.”

Along with our hands, our feet, our ears, and our tongues, we must also put to death the things in our hearts that offend God. The old man of sin in our hearts must be crucified, so that we can live a new life filled with love for God. Jesus’ heart felt the full force of his crucifixion, and no wonder. He came to His own and His own received Him not. The sin of the world was upon Him. God the Father for a time forsook Him. As He died they thrust the spear into His side, and water and blood gushed out. His heart was devastated by crucifixion. Is your heart crucified? Is it dead to sin and evil? Is it a throne upon which Jesus lives? Does He have first place in your life, or is your heart divided between the world and Jesus? James 4:4 says, “You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” We are often like that. WE give part of our lives to Christ and hold back the other part. With one hand we hang onto the world and its pleasures, and

with the other hand we try to hang on to God. God sees what we are doing, however. You can’t serve God and anything else at the same time. Jesus said in Matthew 6:24, “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” I might add you can’t serve God and alcohol. You can’t serve God and drugs. You can’t serve God and sex. You can’t serve God and anything else. If we are crucified Christians, our whole heart belongs to Him. And that means the whole life belongs to Him too. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” When you become a Christian, God becomes your master, your only master; and you belong to Him not yourself. My friend, do you belong to God?

During World War I a man from Sweden came before the American Draft Board. He was told that as an alien he could claim exemption, but he replied, “No, when I came to America, I came all. If America needs me, I am ready.” As Christians we ought to say, “All of me belongs to Christ. If He needs me, I am ready.” That’s one reason why when you are baptized, they immerse all of you: your hands, your feet, your eyes and ears, your heart, and your energy. When you love the Lord and die to self, you are ready to take up your cross and follow Jesus. Do you belong to Jesus? Luke 9:23-24 says: And He was saying to *them* all, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.” How do we die to self and take up our cross? Romans 6:3-7 tells us. “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.” My friend, do you believe in Christ? Have you repented of your sins? Have you confessed the name of Christ before others, and have you been baptized into Christ? We are baptized into Christ when we are immersed in water. The result is that we receive the forgiveness of our sins, we are added to the Lord’s church, and we become a child of God. I can’t think of anything that would be more important for you to do today than to believe, repent, and be baptized. When you die and are buried with Christ in baptism, that old man of sin is crucified, and you walk in newness of life. That, my friend, is the new birth. That is what you must have to enter the kingdom and to go to heaven. Won’t you put your trust in Jesus and obey the gospel today? Won’t you die to yourself and take up your cross today?

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Concord Road Church of Christ
8221 Concord Rd., Brentwood, TN 37027
1-877-226-5747

phil@God-answers.org

www.tv.God-answers.org