

WHAT COMMITMENT LOOKS LIKE – 2 CORINTHIANS 11:21B-30

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²¹ Whatever anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about. ²² Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I. ²³ Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. ²⁷ I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. ²⁸ Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? ³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

It happens every so often at my house. I’m talking on the phone to my parents, or to a friend, I hang up, and Kristin asks me what we talked about. She wants the details of the conversation, and when I can’t recall them, or say we didn’t talk about details, she is astounded. This is just one example of the characteristic differences between men and women. It’s perhaps because there is such a difference between men and women that so many books have been written and jokes told describing these differences. One of my favorite descriptions about the difference between men and women is “A tale of two brains” by Mark Gungor. To summarize: men’s brains are full of boxes – a box for the car, for the house, for the wife, for the kids, and the boxes can never touch. A woman’s brain is a ball of wire – everything is connected to everything else, and it’s driven by emotion. These are some of the characteristic differences between men and women.

Now I wonder if as Christians, we tend to have more male-functioning brains. What I mean by that is this: It can be very easy to compartmentalize our lives into different areas. Sunday morning is a time for God and church, Sunday afternoon and evening is a time for family, Monday morning a time for work, etc. And so often what we may have learned or considered on Sunday morning has little to no effect on the rest of our week. It’s almost as if we give God a time slot or two (or if you’re really good three or four) a week and call it good, as if that’s what makes us a good Christian. But the apostle Paul has something different to say about what it means to be a Christian. He shows us WHAT COMMITMENT LOOKS LIKE.



He begins in a rather unusual way, with a long list filled with boasts. We must understand the context of the letter in order to see why Paul begins this section in this way. Paul was writing to the Christian church in Corinth, a city in Greece where he stopped on one of his missionary journeys. He built this congregation up from scratch, and so it was very near and dear to his heart. But unfortunately teachers had followed in Paul's footsteps claiming to be superior to Paul in every way, and since they were superior, the Corinthians should listen to them.

Now this wouldn't have been so bad if it wasn't for these "super-teachers" teaching things that were in conflict with God's Word. Oh I'm sure they thought they were teaching the right thing, but even if they were, they were teaching it with impure motives, motives that sought to puff themselves up, to line their pockets with cash. One way these teachers were influencing others was by relying on their heritage as Hebrews, as Israelites, as if somehow this made them superior to others.

And so Paul addresses the problem in this section of the letter. If the other "teachers" were to boast, then Paul would boast as well (although he gives the parenthetical "I'm speaking as a fool"). "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I, are they Abraham's descendants? So am I!" Paul was not inferior to these teachers in any way shape or form. But he goes beyond that. He doesn't say "I'm equal to them" but "I'm superior to them in every way." He then goes on to list all of the hardships he has born on account of being a minister of Christ – in prison, flogged by the Jews, beaten by the Romans, stoned, shipwrecked. On his journeys he had faced challenges – from the weather, from bandits, from his own countrymen from false believers. He forsook every human comfort of sleep, food, appropriate clothing.

Paul is asking these super-teachers how much they have gone through as a minister of Christ. Have they endured anything close to what Paul was going through? Or was it all about being as comfortable as possible. And yet Paul says these physical burdens are minor compared to the burden of caring for the welfare of the congregations he has started. He bears the burdens of the Corinthian congregation personally. When he hears of their sins, his heart aches for the damage they are doing to themselves, and against God. This is what causes Paul to inwardly burn. How much of this have these super teachers gone through? WHAT HAS THEIR COMMITMENT LOOKED LIKE?

I very much doubt that these super teachers could hold a candle to the commitment that Paul had as a minister of the gospel. Paul gave his entire life and focus to the gospel, and he suffered for it. This was in fact what God had planned for him from the beginning. After his miraculous conversion God spoke about him thus: "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." But then again, when you are committed to one thing, other things in your life could suffer.

Just think about those individuals who are committed to their craft – professional athletes, musicians, CEO's of companies. The successful ones have spent their whole lives perfecting their craft – doing drills, practicing, putting in long hours. And we admire the people who succeed in America.

America is considered the land of opportunity, where we have the freedom to pursue our passions and our dreams. Now I'm sure there's been a time in your life where you've had a dream, had a passion of where you wanted to be, what you wanted to do, maybe you're on your way to achieving that dream, maybe you've achieved it, or maybe you didn't. But you had that dream.

But commitment is not only seen when someone achieves the pinnacle of their profession, commitments can be achieved anyone. Anyone can be committed to something. Being committed to something means that you love it, you hold it dearly, and you will do whatever you can for that thing. As a student athlete, you are committed to making the varsity sports team, so you train and practice, even in the hot Tucson summers. As a newly married couple, you are committed to making this marriage work. As first time parents, you are committed to your child, wanting to do everything in your power to enable that child have a good life. As an employee you will be committed to your job, if not because you like it, because of the chance for promotion. As a sport's fan, you will be committed to your team and support them through thick and thin.

Maybe your commitments fall into one of those categories, but if not, think about one thing to which you are committed. Think about what it means for you to be committed to that one thing. And now compare that to the commitment you have shown to God. I'm sure we could come up with a list of boasts like Paul did, maybe not as long or gruesome, but it's there: We come to church on a weekly, or at least regular basis. I contribute some of my paycheck to the collection plate. I help out with the church when I have time to spare. I am kind to those in need. And there were all those times when I invited some of my friends to church.

Now whether we've actually thought about a list of boasts like this or not, I think it's fair to say that this is the way that we generally think. But we don't just like to make the list, we like to compare lists. And with this comparisons one of two things can happen. Either we can look at that list and say that we've been a pretty committed Christian. Or we can look at that list and compare it to Paul's list and say, "Wow, I really haven't been a committed Christian." This comparison complex seems to be ingrained in our nature. But when we think about commitment to Christ being dependent upon what we've done or not done, we have (maybe accidentally) lost sight of Christ. And we must understand that when we take pride in our boasting, even a little bit, we are asking God to judge them on their merits, and not on the merits of Christ.

But you might say, "Well, Paul did it, doesn't my commitment count for anything?" Paul did it to prove the point that all of this boasting was for naught. Look how he ends this section, "If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness." The world takes pride in boasting and superiority leaves no room for weakness. Sometimes the ways of the world can taint the church, when we take pride in our boasting – either as individuals or as a church. But when we minimize or deny our weaknesses, we reveal that we are not fit for the ministry of Christ.

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For the ministry of Christ is not about our boasting, but rather about our humility. Because it is only in our humility and weakness that we realize who we truly are, and in turn, realize who Christ really is. We do more than just sin, we are sin, we are committed to sin. And Christ was more than a self-help guru sent by God to show us how to live better lives. Christ is the be all and end all in our salvation, fully

committed to God. He was so committed that he swapped places with us, taking on our commitment to sin and the punishment it earned, and gave to us his commitment to God and the eternal life it earned. And so Paul with all this boasting realized he was still only a servant of Christ, he realized that it wasn't because he was in prison, it wasn't because he was constantly in danger, it wasn't because bore the burden of his churches that he was a child of God.

Rather it was tied up in a simple phrase he used early on in this section of 2 Corinthians – a child of Abraham. Abraham, you see, was considered the father of the Hebrews. God promised to Abraham that the promised Savior would come from his family. The Jews took great pride in this fact, too much pride. They began to think it was purely because they were born into the right family that they were a part of God's family. But just like we talked about the faith of Moses last week, God wants us to focus not on the lineage of Abraham, but the faith of Abraham. Paul himself writes in Galatians, "those who *believe* are children of Abraham."

**"Those who believe are children of Abraham."
(Galatians 3:7)**

And so it was not Paul's lineage, but Paul's faith that saved him, faith in the promised Messiah. It was this faith that led him to forsake all earthly comforts for the sake of the gospel message. And this is the balance for a Christian. A committed Christian believes it is through faith alone that we are saved, but a committed Christian also knows that faith is never alone. So it is with your faith. It is your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior that saves you, that makes you completely worthy and committed to heaven. But your faith in Jesus Christ is never alone, your faith in Jesus Christ leads you to respond in a committed way.

And so our Christian faith cannot be separated from the rest of our life. By definition, it must make connections to every part of your life. Instead of looking at our Christian faith through the lens of our experiences, we must look at our life experiences through the lens of our Christian faith. That doesn't mean we *must* forsake everything for the sake of the gospel message, but it should mean we should be willing to. That doesn't mean we *will* look like a Jesus freak who scares everybody off because he won't talk about anything else. But that does mean our Christian faith, and what we learn on Sunday and in our devotions *will* make an impact on our life.

I want to challenge you this week. I want to challenge you to consider what it means for you to be a COMMITTED CHRISTIAN. What are some of the ways your Christian faith leads you to act in your life? What are some of the ways you can reveal Christ's commitment to you in your commitment to others? I hope you will at least consider this challenge. Because our commitment to Christ is more than just something we think about one day a week. Because our commitment to Christ is driven by his 24/7 365 commitment to us. Amen.