

Explore the Bible Series for June 29: Paul: Total commitment

June 20, 2008

• Acts 9:15-22, 26-30

Commitment. It is what turns young ball players into professional athletes. It is what transforms a local business into large corporation. It is what keeps families together and strengthens communities.

We all know and admire deep commitment whenever we see it. We all understand that real commitment is more than merely a verbally expressed promise. It is something lived through action.

Yet for many believers, their commitment to Christ consists of a memory of the day they surrendered their life to him. Their commitment consists of little more than attending and giving a few dollars to the church. It is largely a matter of having their eternal place in heaven secured.

While God certainly desires that all people surrender to his lordship, our commitment to him never should end there. God is looking for believers to totally commit all areas of their life to him. It is hard to find a clearer example of someone who understood this in the Bible than Paul. From the beginning of his Christian walk, Paul lived a life of total commitment.

Make a faith commitment (Acts 9:15-19)

Paul began his life as Saul, a young man trained in the strict regimen of pharisaical Judaism. He was trained to seek out any who would stray from

the path of narrow adherence to Torah.

Saul apparently rose through the ranks and quickly became highly trusted among the leading Pharisees. Acts 8:1 states Saul was not only present at the execution of Stephen, but gave the event official approval.

Shortly afterward, Saul was given orders to go to Damascus and arrest anyone professing belief in Jesus. On the way to carry out this mission, however, Saul had an encounter with Jesus that dramatically altered the rest of his life. By the time Saul arrived in Damascus, he was professing belief in Jesus and was welcomed by Ananias as a new believer.

This experience points to the first step in total commitment. While our relationship to Jesus is a highly personal matter, it also must be made known publically. We must come to accept the gospel by faith and openly commit to submitting to God.

Demonstrate commitment (Acts 9:19-21)

While our initial profession of Jesus does secure our eternal place in heaven, it must go deeper. We simply cannot make a statement of commitment and continue to think and act like we always have. Accepting God's new life means rejecting previously held beliefs and past behaviors. It means that we abandon some old habits and replace them with new ones.

For Saul, his trip to Damascus initially had been for the purpose of seeking to shut down the new church, but became one in which he arrived proclaiming the message he had come to town to oppose. From that day forward, Paul never ceased preaching the gospel. Everywhere he went, his first act was to locate the local group of believers and join them in proclaiming the message. In towns where no church existed, Paul started one.

Our commitment becomes real as we demonstrate it through turning from our old lives and sharing God's message through word and deed.

Grow in commitment (Acts 9:22)

Not only does total commitment call us to go beyond mere profession to demonstration, it also leads us into a continually deeper understanding of God's word. As we see how God works in, through and around us as we demonstrate our commitment, we find our commitment grows.

The more Saul preached, the more determined he became to continue preaching and the more powerful his preaching became. As he demonstrated his commitment to Jesus and his calling, his commitment grew stronger. Answers to the questions of his opponents became more convincing. Any concern about possible negative reactions by his listeners faded.

The same is true today as we come to understand God's word more through experiencing it as we follow through with our commitment to live life surrendered to him. We also may find ourselves talking openly about God's word more frequently than before. We find we are able to talk about the deeper issues of life in light of God's word and to apply that word in new ways. We no longer worry about how others may respond because our overriding concern is living out our commitment. True commitment always leads to deeper commitment.

Show intense commitment (Acts 9:26-30)

In any area of life, there is perhaps no greater sign of total commitment to a cause than to remain faithful to it in the face of death. Saul knew well

that the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem were committed to arresting all who professed belief in Jesus. These were the same men who had carried out the execution of Stephen. They were the same men who had sent Saul on his mission to Damascus to arrest believers. Indeed, some had apparently come to Damascus in order to try and kill Saul once they learned of his conversion (Acts 9:23-25).

He could have “played it safe” and not gone to Jerusalem. There were likely those around him who tried to discourage him from going (Acts 21:12). Yet Saul apparently felt he needed to meet with the disciples in Jerusalem. Given his reputation, he could not be certain how the disciples would respond. Thus despite possible rejection by the disciples and arrest or execution by the religious authorities, Saul demonstrated intense commitment in going to Jerusalem.

It is easy for some today to look at this story and say, “Yes, but that was Paul, the great church planting evangelist.” But nowhere does the Bible differentiate between levels of commitment. All believers are called to the same depth of commitment demonstrated in sharing the gospel in all circumstances regardless of possible reactions. God desires all of his followers to live a life of intense commitment.