

Commitment Is a Decision

Carl H. Stevens Jr. is pastor of Greater Grace World Outreach located in Baltimore, Maryland. Pastor Stevens is also chancellor of Maryland Bible College & Seminary and host of the international Christian radio program "The Grace Hour." This booklet was created from a message preached by Pastor Stevens.

Pastor Stevens can be seen weekly on cable television stations throughout the United States. Call us for information regarding programming in your area.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

GRACE PUBLICATIONS

P.O. BOX 18715

BALTIMORE, MD 21206

Printed in Baltimore, Maryland, U.S.A.

Copyright © 2004

Grace Publications is a ministry of
Greater Grace World Outreach, Inc.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 5

Chapter 1 7

SURRENDER YOURSELF TO GOD

Chapter 2 12

COMPELLED BY LOVE

Chapter 3 15

*KEPT BY THE POWER OF THE WORD AND THE
SPIRIT*

CONCLUSION 19

INTRODUCTION

In Ecclesiastes, chapters 11 and 12, Solomon deals with a vital yet misunderstood subject: God's call for us to make a decision and to stand by it with a decisive practice of obedience. I have been meditating and pondering on the need for making proper decisions. In businesses, families, relationships—whatever the situation, people need to make godly decisions. To do that, however, we need to operate with the mind of Christ.

King Solomon experienced many great exploits in his life, yet he found no happiness in them whatsoever. He could have any woman in the world, and he had them—thousands of them, from every nation in the world. He possessed vast quantities of gold, silver, and ivory. Everything he could possibly want, he got. Second Chronicles 9 reveals that he was, perhaps, the greatest businessman who ever lived upon the earth. But, none of those experiences helped

him; rather, they left him sad, sorrowful, and incomplete.

Now his life was coming to a close, and he had very little to show for his efforts. This once extremely handsome man now walked stooped over, and he had just a few teeth left in his mouth. There was no osteopathic doctor or chiropractor to fix him up, no orthodontist to fix his teeth. There was no exercise program that could make him straight again. Imagine it! Here was a guy with all the money in the world, but he was basically miserable, with a bad back and nearly toothless.

In this context, Solomon began to write about the importance of decisions and precise obedience. This booklet examines what the book of Ecclesiastes teaches about the importance of making a decision to commit our ways to the Lord.

Chapter One

SURRENDER YOURSELF TO GOD

“Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.

“Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.

“If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.

“He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.

“As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all” (Ecclesiastes 11:1-5).

The fourth verse in this passage concerns how we as Christians have a tremendous call to fill our lives with faith and ventures of faith.

Here, Solomon begins to get into the subject of commitment. A relationship without a commitment is like a spiritual gift without an anointing. I am dogmatically certain that the problems with the human race in the Christian community develop when people have a relationship with God through salvation but they lack a commitment to truth and the Body of Christ. Therefore, when trials come to a church, they flee. They have a relationship; they are saved people; but, they never make a commitment to the Body of Christ and God's Word.

Those commitments also affect marriages and businesses. When you have performed as many marriage ceremonies as I have, I can remember looking into some couple's eyes and wondering if they really, truly have ever made a heart commitment in truth to each other.

Taken Hostage by the Grace of God

"[Christ], when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Peter 2:23).

Commitment is very unusual because it involves literally surrendering to be God's hostage. In 1 Peter 2:23, the Greek word *paradidomi*

speaks of commitment as giving one's self into another's hands. It is a commitment that represents my decision to give myself completely over, regardless of risk or consequence.

What am I giving myself over to? The grace of God (see Acts 14:26).

In the plan and purpose of God, committing myself wholeheartedly to someone—to my business, to a church, to a pastor, to a wife, or to a husband—is something beautiful. Solomon showed us what commitment is and what it is not. With all of his waywardness and capricious activities, he described his realization of the effects of what he did not do and then what he did do.

Solomon did not make precise decisions with commitment to the Word of God, which his father, David, and his mother, Bathsheba, taught him. Proverbs reveals beautiful teaching—lessons that came especially from David, but also from Bathsheba. She was an excellent teacher to her child and among the best mothers represented in the Word of God.

First, Take Up Your Cross

Whatever we do, we must take our time and decide whether we truly wish to enter into a

particular commitment. Many Christians commit to things without taking up their cross. They do not understand that taking up their cross involves becoming someone who lives as one raised from the dead in spiritual resurrection (Romans 6:13) because he has identified with Christ.

Before entering into a relationship and making a commitment at the marriage altar, people should first understand what it means to take up their cross daily. Otherwise, after a number of years, the struggles, the strife, and the warfare will begin to diminish their capacities to fulfill what they sincerely desire to have in their relationship. The issue is not what you have but what you are willing to lose (Mark 10:21-22). A capacity for life comes by taking up the cross and following Christ.

Taking up our cross is really a motivational issue. It isn't about suffering; it is about taking the cross of Christ where we were crucified in Him. We died with Him and we were buried with Him. Since we were buried with Him, we have also risen from the grave with Him. Our cross has nothing to do with suffering. It has everything to do with living on the resurrection side of His death.

People get weary and exhausted in what they do because they make commitments without taking up their cross. Solomon became bored and frustrated, even with all of his wealth and education. He was making commitments without committing himself to the Source of all the blessings he had received (1 Kings 3:7-9).

Chapter Two

COMPELLED BY LOVE

“For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:

“And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.

“Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:14-17).

A man who makes a commitment and is compelled by love is a man filled with patience, joy, peace, and longsuffering. He can suffer long in a situation and not even try to find a way out

because he made a decision in a commitment of love.

If I make a commitment to God without His love, I will never make it. Without receiving the love of the Spirit and the power and motivation of love, I am sure to backslide and fail. I must make my commitments on the basis of receiving and walking in God's love as that love is shed abroad in my heart by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5; Ephesians 5:2).

What good is any commitment I make to my wife if I do it without the motivation of love in that commitment? The love of Christ compels me, motivates me, and energizes me.

We say to God, "I am Your bond-slave. I am Yours. I am Your hostage." The commitments we make to God that are motivated by love bring us to the place where we love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. And living according to a precious New Covenant, we have a capacity to love others as we love ourselves (Mark 12:30-31).

Committed to Family and the Family of God

This is what brings everlasting commitments at the marriage altar. This is the foundation for everlasting commitments between parents and

children, children and parents, friends and friends, pastors and their people, people and their pastors, body members and body members. These commitments are decisions we have made to base our actions on God's love—the very thing that saved us from hell and took care of all our sins.

One commitment that people so easily ignore is the commitment to the local assembly. Sooner or later, conviction from the Word of God enters in—for example, when the person begins to recognize what the Word of God says about the pleasures of the world and the demons that have controlled his schedule. Some people get off in this area, because they have never made a decisive commitment to the Cross with God's love motivating them to stand in obedience to His Word.

Chapter Three

KEPT BY THE POWER OF THE WORD AND THE SPIRIT

Any commitment we make must be according to every single word of God. If I am going through something, someone can show me something from the Word of God. At that point, it is important for me to recognize that I must live by every single word of God without any private interpretation. I commit myself to God and then I purpose to rebound every time I fail.

This is how God can set a person free from drugs and alcoholism. One great baseball player in the Hall-of-Fame was asked how he stopped drinking. He told of the time when he saw a video taken of him while he was drunk. He saw it, and his children saw it, too. "My God—my kids see me like this!" he said. That moment, he stopped drinking, and he has not had a drink since then.

This man made a commitment. Eventually,

he became born again. But at that time he made a simple decision and followed through with a commitment to never take another drink. His love for his family proved greater than his love for alcohol.

The great thing about our commitments as Christians is that we have the precious Word of God to guide our steps (see Psalm 119:133). So many people I know have lived for years in obedience to a commitment. The decision to hear and receive the Word of God through the power of the Holy Spirit and to respond with faith obedience has kept them—often through very difficult times.

The Necessary Filling of the Spirit

“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;

“Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:18-19).

“For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of

the contrite ones" (Isaiah 57:15).

There is no way I can keep any commitment without the filling of the Holy Spirit. This filling gives me God's power to live in my eternal purpose. Therefore, my decision in a commitment is one that, by the grace of God, glorifies Jesus Christ and blesses the angels.

This filling of the Spirit also keeps me humble and contrite. There is no way anyone can enjoy his commitment and do it with enthusiasm and joy without brokenness and humility. These are the characteristics of God, and they are so crucial for our own lives.

God Uses Us in All Things

"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them" (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

Solomon wanted to leave some instructions in the final chapter of Ecclesiastes. "I have made a mess of my life," he is saying here. "Still, God has been so good to me. After all of my miserable failures and defeats, God never left me or forsook me."

The writing of Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon came after a journey of almost constant

failure. God took this old man, King Solomon, put an inspired pen in his hand, and told him to write his experiences as a warning and a witness, for all people on this earth to read. The devastating, self-destructive roads of failure Solomon followed did not disqualify him from God's service. This is very encouraging to all of us serving God today.

No matter where we are in life, we can make a decision to live in our commitments before God, and let Him use us in His eternal purpose and plan.

CONCLUSION

Solomon's message to us is very clear: "Remember Your Creator." God is the One who made us and bought us with the blood of His Son. We belong to Him.

Early in his life, Solomon followed the Lord. Then, success came and the test of success changed the king of Israel. He grew bored and frustrated. His real problem was simple: he forgot to decide, on purpose, to live in a commitment to the Word of God. He rejected the guidance of the Word for his life and instead went after everything he could get his hands on that the world had to offer.

In the midst of all his sin, Solomon began to hate himself—and this is why: God had put eternity in his heart (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Eternity was in his heart, but it was not controlling his thoughts and decisions. He found it difficult to live with himself in the midst of idolatry and materialism.

Decide to make and to keep commitments to God through His Word and His Spirit. Purpose to honor Him in everything you do. Then, your relationship with Him will bring you joy in your business, your marriage, and your friendships. Purpose to keep your relationships under the Source of blessing. If you do, God will let you enjoy the good things of this life because He wants to bless you. He wants you to enjoy the fruit of your labors. He wants you to be happy. He wants you to keep following after Him, knowing that everything comes from His hand, by His grace.