

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 8/8/93  
I Peter 4:17-19 "Whatever Happened to Commitment?"

**Intro:** Illust: Farmer with 2 calves, "The Lord's calf died..."

Q: Whatever happened to commitment?

Q: How can I tell whether my commitment level is where it should be?

Observation: Suffering reveals the condition of our commitment to Christ.

Our commitment to Christ is put to the test when we face obstacles in life.

When it's no longer convenient to live for Christ is when we find out the true nature of our commitment. When it stops being popular to follow Christ is when the depth of our commitment is unveiled.

In fact, when we face suffering, do you know what we tend to do? To shrink back, to retreat, to pull on the reins, to protect ourselves.

We're not the only ones prone to do that. The Christians to whom Peter wrote I Peter wrestled with it too. He told them there's one trait that's indispensable if we are to please God when we face opposition. Do you know what it is?

A: Look at v 19--"commit"

This morning, we have come to a timely text, a text about commitment. What does it mean to be committed? Why should I be committed? Isn't it out of style to talk about commitment? To what or whom are we to be committed?

**Proposition: God's Word informs us of 2 things about commitment, in I Peter 4:17-19.**

I. We have Cause for Commitment (17-18).

We ought to be committed because...

A. Because of what God IS doing (17).

B. Because of what God WILL do (18).

II. We have a Call to Commitment (19).

Four marks of genuine commitment...

A. Right Ambition

B. Right Attitude

C. Right Action

D. Right Awareness

**I. We have Cause for Commitment (17-18).**

Last week, we broke ground in a new section in I Peter, vv 12-19. The theme is Christian suffering. We looked at the first 5 verses. We learned that we have 3 responsibilities if we're going to handle suffering properly.

I. Expect it (12).

"Don't think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to test you." An official persecution, under the authorization of Emperor Nero, hit the Church in the

mid 60's. Peter comforted his friends who lived in Asia minor, "Don't be surprised by suffering. Expect it."

Then...

II. Explore the Opportunities (13-14).

Q: What kind of opportunities?

A. Suffering gives us opportunity to identify with Christ (13).

B. Suffering gives us opportunity to experience the ministry of the Spirit (14).

C. Suffering gives us opportunity to glorify God (16).

III. Examine the reasons (15-16).

There are illegitimate reasons for Christians to suffer.

A. The Wrong Reason to suffer (15)

B. The Right Reason to suffer (16)

Now we come to vv 17-19.

Q: What will it take if we're to survive as Christians in a non-Christian world?

A: Commitment.

Here's the first responsibility Peter addresses. We have a Cause for Commitment. Peter asks 2 rhetorical questions, which reveal two, powerful reasons we should live lives of constant commitment to Christ. What are the reasons?

A. We ought to be committed--Because of what God IS doing (17).

V 17 "For the time is come that judgement must begin..."

The first thing that strikes me is the topic of judgment. Judgment is not a very popular topic in our world. We seldom hear about it. Yet the Bible has a lot to say about judgment.

Ps 94:2 God is the "Judge of all the earth."

Heb 9:27 "It is appointed unto man once to die, and after this the judgment."

Jn 5:22 "For the Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment unto the Son."

The Bible also speaks of more than one event of judgment. We read about the judgment of angels (Mt 25:41), and the judgment of Satan (Rev 20), and the judgment of Israel (Mal 4:1). And certainly there will be the judgment of people...

The Bible is clear that in the future God will judge the Unbelieving.

Rev 20:11-12 "And I saw a great white throne...And I saw the dead stand before God"

The Bible also is clear that Christians will be judged one day.

Rom 14:10 "For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ"

II Cor 5:10 "For we must all appear before the judgment...that everyone may receive"

The fact that Judgment is coming is a sobering thought. But I want you to take another close look at v 17. Peter isn't talking about what God WILL do, but what God IS doing, in this present age.

"For the time is come that judgement must begin"

Now that's a perplexing statement. Peter says that God's judgment is beginning right now. "For the time is come."

Q: For what group of people is judgment beginning? Not the pagan world, but

A: "The House of God"

Q: Who is the House of God?

2:5 "Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood..."

Eph 2:22 "In whom ye also are built together for an habitation of God through the Spirit"

WE are the House of God. V 17 is talking to us, the Church. Notice Peter says explicitly in the next phrase--"and if it first begin at US."

I can imagine what you're thinking. "Pastor, doesn't the Bible teach that there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1)? And didn't Jesus say that whoever possessed genuine faith possessed everlasting life, and would not face judgment (Jn 5:24)? Why then does Peter say that judgment must begin at the house of God?"

Q: Here's the question: In what sense has the time come for judgment to begin?

V 17 is a first class conditional statement. It assumes the reality of the premise. Peter is not speaking in hypothetical terms. He's stating a fact. He's saying that right now, God's judgment is taking place in His Church.

Q: What kind of judgment is it? It involves at least 2 things...

--This Judgment involves the discipline of His people.

Remember what happened to Ananias and Saphira? I'm sure Peter did. He was there! Check out Acts 5. These 2 Christians lied to the church leaders, and to God. What happened? God judged them. They fell dead at Peter's feet!

God disciplines His own. Look at Paul's instruction concerning Communion.

READ: I Cor 11:28-32 "...drinks judgment to himself...For if we would judge ourselves, we would not BE JUDGED..."

Note: I can't help but wonder if one of the reasons churches are full of frustrated, anxiety filled Christians, isn't because of this. Commitment is a foreign word to lots of us. We'll serve Christ, if it's convenient, if we don't have something else going on. But friends, God's not interested in leftovers...

Illust:

--This Judgment involves the Refinement of His people.

God allows His People to experience persecution and suffering. Why? It's obviously not a punishment for sin. All our sins were laid on Jesus. No, the suffering God allows is to refine us. It purifies our lives (see 1:6-7).

Key: When I get a handle on what God is doing right now, it'll increase my level of commitment to Jesus Christ.

Illust:

The first reason I need to exhibit a 100% commitment to Christ is because of what God is doing right now. He is judging and refining and purifying His people.

B. We ought to be committed--Because of what God WILL do (18).

Follow Peter's logic carefully. V 17 tells us what God is doing now. Notice what He will do.

V 17 "...what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God"

Then Peter quotes Prov 11:31 to substantiate his point.

V 18 "And if the righteous scarcely be saved...?"

Stop right there. What does Peter mean by "scarcely saved"? Is our salvation deficient? Are we saved by a thread which can break if we're not careful? Certainly not.

The phrase "scarcely be saved" means "saved with difficulty." It doesn't mean that God is too weak to save us. It does mean that God paid a great price to save us from our sin. What do you think will be the outcome of those who rejected His provision?

Here's the point. There are 2 groups of people in this world, two and only two. First, there are those who have acknowledged to God their sinful condition. They have admitted their guilt and deserved punishment of death. They've confessed their need of an Advocate, a Savior. They've received Jesus Christ as God's provision for their spiritual need. That's the first group. Christians.

But sadly, there's another group in this world. There are people who refuse to acknowledge their sin, and admit their need of Christ. In their pride, they choose to live in their own strength, and for their own purpose.

Listen. Some day, every skeptic, every self-made critic of Christianity will die. "And if the righteous scarcely be saved, what do you think will happen to the ungodly?"

I want to probe something. What makes a person "ungodly?" We think of atheists like Madalyn Murray O'Haire, and dictators like Hitler and Stalin, and mass murderers like Charles Manson as being ungodly. But the NT idea is much deeper. You can be religious, and still ungodly. You are ungodly if you refuse to acknowledge the TRUE God, Jesus Christ. And you are ungodly if you refuse to give Jesus Christ the place He deserves in your life.

We have a Cause for Commitment. Because of what God is doing, and what God will do.

Application: This week I read the tragic news of the death of Paul Henry. Mr. Henry was an outstanding Congressman in the State of Michigan who died this week from brain cancer. He was only 51. He was also a devout, committed Christian. His father was Carl F.H. Henry, one of the great theologians of this century. I remember when Congressman Henry came to Grand Rapids to speak in Seminary chapel. I was

impressed by his commitment to God's authority, and his ambition to reflect God's Values in his efforts as a politician. He had a brilliant political career ahead of him. I was convinced that our nation desperately needed leaders like him.

But God took him home to heaven. Did God waste a man of potential?

No. God accomplished His purpose.

Challenge: There's why we need to be committed to Christ today. We don't know if we'll have a tomorrow.

Tran: We have a Cause for Commitment--because of what God IS doing, and what He WILL do.

## **II. We have a Call to Commitment (19).**

V 19 "...commit..."

"Commit" is a technical word which means "to deposit for safekeeping."

Barclay reveals that in the ancient days there were no banks and few really safe places where you could deposit your money. So often, before a person would take a long trip, he would leave his money in the safe-keeping of a trusted friend. It was a sacred trust. The friend was absolutely bound by honor to return the money intact.

What are we to do? We are to deposit our lives in God's bank.

Q: "What does commitment look like?"

Four marks of genuine commitment...

### A. Right Ambition

Genuine commitment grows out of an unalterable loyalty to the will of God.

V 19 "Wherefore let them that suffer acc to the will of God"

"According to the will of God"

If I truly am a committed Christian, I will live with the right ambition. My ambition will not be my own agenda. It will be God's.

Q: Do you have a passion to do God's will with your life?

Illust: I've been reading the runaway bestseller classic "In His Steps." Charles Sheldon first published the novel in 1897, and since then more than 8 million copies have been sold. It's a story about a church. One Sunday, the pastor asked the congregation a simple question, "What would Jesus do?" Without spectacle, he asked who in the church would be willing to live for one full year by that question, "What would Jesus do?" A group accepted the challenge, and the community was turned upside down.

Can you imagine the difference it would make if we tested every decision we made by that question, "What would Jesus do?" and then DID what Jesus would do?!

### B. Right Attitude

V 19 "commit the keeping of their SOULS"

Listen. Genuine commitment is not something that's mechanical and external. It involves your "soul" (your whole person). When a music instructor says to a pupil, "Put your soul into it," he/she means, "Don't just go through the motions. Give it 100% of your effort."

We can't live a life of commitment to Christ just one day a week. Or even 6. To be committed I must live with the attitude that ALL of me belongs to Christ, ALL the time.

### C. Right Action

V 19 "in well-doing"

True commitment will be seen in our actions.

Q: Do you know what goal drives every facet in the life of a person truly committed to Christ? It's not comfort, not convenience. It's a passion to do what's right, no matter what. A commitment to do well.

A vital mark of commitment is right action. It's our responsibility to do right no matter what the rest of the crowd does. In fact, if you resolve that you're going to do right, no matter what, you'll be a minority. But never mind that.

Illust: Lincoln's entire Cabinet opposed the Civil War and would have permitted the Confederate States to secede.

Illust: In September 1941, the US Congress buckled in terror at the Nazi threat. As hard as it is to believe now, at the time when our friends in England and Europe were in great danger, our representatives came within one vote of ending the draft, closing numerous army bases, and scaling back the military. It was Senator Jennings Randolph, then a congressman, who cast the winning vote in the House that prevented passage of the bill. And may I remind you that we were within 3 months of Pearl Harbor when those discussions took place.

Objection: "But I'm only one person! I can't make a difference! Why not go along with the crowd? Why be committed?"

Quote: James Dobson said in his March 93 newsletter, "It's not our duty to win. It is our duty to be faithful."

### D. Right Awareness

V 19 "as unto a Faithful Creator"

A person who is genuinely committed to Christ lives with this awareness. What really matters is NOT what people think, but what God knows.

People will fail us. They'll let us down. But listen. Do you know why we can commit our lives to God? Because He'll never let us down. Why not? He's a faithful Creator.

Illust: Some people view God as an impersonal force. He's like the Clockmaker who wound up the clock and let it go.

Committed people live with the right awareness that God is at work in them. Jesus Christ did (see 2:23 "...committed Himself to Him...")

**Conclusion:**

I want to ask the same question we began with...

Q: Whatever happened to commitment?

We have a Cause for commitment. We have a Call to commitment. But what about you today? Have you ever committed your life to Christ Jesus? What about now? Are you exhibiting genuine commitment in your life now?

Do you have the right ambition in life, an unwavering resolve to do the will of God? How about the right attitude? Do you exhibit right action, an uncompromising allegiance to do what's right? Are you living with the right awareness, that a Faithful God is involved in your life?

Illust:

Concluding Hymn: "I Know Whom I Have Believed"