



“The Biblical Pattern of Life”

Committed to Christ, the Body of Christ,
and the work of Christ.



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YOU’VE PLAYED THAT GAME, “Who Am I?” haven’t you? You ask a person to say who he is in three short sentences. A person who is aware of his role as a father will probably say something like “I am a father; I am a man; and I am a breadwinner.” Or a person committed to Christ might say, “I am a Christian; I am a Christian woman or man; and I am a witness.”

Well, let’s ask us as a church, “Who are we? Who are we together?” Let me answer how I hope you will be able to answer: we are a people committed first to the Lord Jesus Christ. We are a people committed to one another in Christ, second. And third, we are committed to the work of Christ in the world.

This is Lake Avenue Congregational Church. This is what every church should be. Today I want to summarize our three top priorities. I want us to help get our identity very clear. And here are three “handles” on the Christian life that you as an individual Christian can hold on to. Live these out, and your own life will get direction. They are simple. There is an order to them. And best of all, they are biblical.

PAUL DISPLAYS THREE PRIORITIES

Paul is in prison as he writes this letter to the Philippians, and in prison – these priorities work for Paul. Certainly they ought to be our lifestyle as well. What changed my life as a Christian more than anything else is when I gave myself to verbalize these and set them as the priorities of my own life. Now I’ve been committed this way for a long time; perhaps you have, too. But to verbalize, to put them down, and to commit yourself in this way has an effect upon you.

It gives you focus: I commit myself to Jesus Christ; I commit myself to the body of Christ; and I commit myself to the work of Christ in the world, - in that order. This ought to be a basic lifestyle for you, for me, and for our church. Let’s review these again. Let’s summarize who we are as a people.

Paul said that he was committed to Jesus Christ, and he expressed it in two ways. One we see in the first verse of his letter: “Paul a slave of Christ Jesus.” And secondly, verse 21: “For to me to live is Christ...”

He called himself a “slave” of Christ, a willing captive. In the days of Paul, prisoners of war were made slaves. When the Roman government took prisoners,

they brought them home and chained them together and used them to build their roads, propel their ships, and so on. Paul says, "I've been captured by Jesus Christ. I've been taken in the battle that He waged at the cross. It was on the road to Damascus that Jesus met me. And I asked Him, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus Whom you are persecuting." Then I said, "What will You have me to do?" At that moment he became a slave.

And for you, friend, when you ask these two questions, at that moment, a commitment begins. "Who are You, Lord? What will You have me to do?"

THE IMPLICATIONS OF SLAVERY

A slave in Roman days had no rights to himself. What his master said to do, he did. What his master said not to do, he did not do. Paul said, "Christ is absolute Master; He is primary; He is first in my life."

But then, he was also a permanent slave. Every Jew including Paul knew about the Jewish tradition of the year of Jubilee, every fiftieth year, when all the slaves were set free. But sometimes a slave had a master who was particularly good to him. He had found fulfillment in being part of his household. He'd found that he was a wise master, and he wanted to serve him forever. He was better off under him than under himself, as free. So he would ask that he might become a permanent slave. For this ritual he would go to the door of the tabernacle, and there the priest would bore a hole in his ear. And by this hole in his ear, he was marked forever as a permanent slave – a willing, volunteer slave. As Francis Havergal wrote in his hymn:

*"I love, I love my Master;
I will not go out free,
For He is my Redeemer;
He paid the price for me.*

*I would not leave His service,
It is so sweet and blest;
And in the weariest moments
He gives the truest rest."*

You must put Christ first. You must become His slave. If you will no longer own yourself, you can become His slave. But if you want to own yourself, you cannot.

BEING AND DOING

Now, it isn't enough to not own yourself, but it's also that you must never live for yourself. "For to me," he says in verse 21, "to live is Christ. My life, my energies, my plans, my thoughts are all going to go to the service of Jesus Christ." Christ is first if you can say, "To me, to live is Christ." Put that sentence in your mind, now: "To me to live is _____" and fill in that blank. What would you honestly put in there? What do you think about most? What do you crave most? "To me to live is business success." Then Christ isn't first in your life. Every man and woman who is in business ought to want to serve well in his or her job, of course; but that should never be first. "To me to live is... to get all A's." No, if you put anything in there except Christ, you don't know the Lordship of Christ yet in your life.

I am His slave. He is my life. That means my time belongs to Him. If Christ is priority in my life, all day long I live for Him – all day long. I worship Him alone. I worship Him with fellow believers. I act out my priority, my commitment to Him by being obedient in my actions to Him. He asks you to do this. He calls for this kind of commitment. He says, "I want you to make Me your master. And I want you to become My slave."

A GROWING RELATIONSHIP

And the beautiful thing about this is, you never come to the place where you say, "Well, I've committed my life to Christ, and that's all. Period." No, you keep growing and growing! There was a time when I came to know Jesus, when I was about thirteen years old. But then I began to make further commitments. And what I know about the masterhood of Christ in my life this year will be different than next year, or five years from now. So when I say, "I commit myself to Christ," I'm saying that in this first priority of my life, I'm always going to be growing.

And so I like to say make a fresh commitment of your life to Jesus Christ, wherever you are right now. You can always make a commitment that is more meaningful than it's ever been before. Right now, do it again! Become His slave as never before. Your bank account, your family, your house, your lifestyle, - give Him everything.

Maybe you say, "Pastor Ray, that's a tough thing you're asking." Well, I ask it of myself also. And I know it involves some struggles, because I myself don't give in easily. But I want total commitment; deep in my soul, that's where reality is. That's where the action is: and, actually, that's not a mean thing to ask of you at all. It's the finest, happiest, safest, most pleasant act you will ever perform. It's the most worthy commitment that you'll ever make, the wisest thing you'll ever do. Jesus

said, “My yoke is easy, My burden is light.” And, “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

You see, every one of us is a slave; we all serve someone. You either serve yourself or Jesus Christ. And to serve yourself, you’re under a terrible master, a fickle master. You don’t even know where you’re going. You have no say about your future. But if Jesus Christ is your master, - He is the One Who has put life together. He cares for you most; He has the greatest longings for your life. To say “Jesus Christ is Master and I am His slave,” is a beautiful thing to do. It gives you purpose and meaning.

Christ must be first. This takes shape as you walk with Him every day, love Him, live in His presence; as you have your own quiet time; as you worship Him alone, and as you worship Him with God’s people – that’s why Sunday by Sunday, it’s no option! You’re a slave. You come to worship God with fellow slaves.

COMMITMENT TO GOD’S PEOPLE

Our second highest commitment must be that we are committed to each other. Notice again the way Paul begins his letter to the Philippians: “Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Christ Jesus.” Paul and Timothy – he’s not alone. He doesn’t even write his letters in solo. You see, when Paul was first converted, he was guided to a man whose name was Ananias. The first words of Ananias were, “Brother Saul...” And from that time on, he was among brothers and sisters in the faith. When he writes his letter, he is writing alongside a brother, Timothy. He is committed to this marvelous relationship.

Remember that they were slaves together: “Paul and Timothy, bond-slaves of Christ Jesus.” They were in the chain gang together! Bound together – what would ever separate them? Well, when a member of a Roman chain gang would die, the boss would loose him, leave him there, and go on. Death was the only means of separation. But we’ll never die! We’ll never be unbound from each other, for “to die is gain.” We’re a part of a body of believers in heaven and on earth, never to be separated again. Nothing could separate Paul and Timothy. Timothy was so precious to Paul, as Paul writes in Philippians 2:23, 23:

“You know of his proven worth, that he served me in the furtherance of the Gospel like a child serving his father. Therefore I hope to send him (to you) ...”

Fellow slaves! I’ll tell you, friend, it’s a marvelous thing to commit ourselves together to one another, after we’ve committed ourselves to Christ.

FOUR EXPRESSIONS OF PRIORITY TWO

There are four ways I believe that you can show your commitment to your brothers and sisters in Christ. One is that you love Christians. I've heard people say, "I'll never do business with Christians," or something like that. Don't ever say that. Don't blame a person's bad business practices on his being a Christian. That's a terrible thing to say about Jesus Christ's effect on a man's life. He may have been a crook before he was a Christian, and he's less a crook than he was before – I don't know! Christians don't always act like Christians, but it's because they haven't become slaves to Jesus Christ. Don't blame that on Christ! Love Christians. Never bad mouth Christians. Love the church.

Paul says in verse 8, "God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affections of Christ Jesus." As Jesus told His disciples in John 13, "A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another as I have loved you." The affections of Christ Jesus! The first way you can show you're committed to each other in Christ Jesus is to love with Calvary love. There's nothing you won't do for each other. Be specific: show your love to them specifically, tangibly, practically.

Have you heard the story about Joe and Jim? There was nothing that Joe would not do for Jim, and there was nothing that Jim would not do for Joe, and so they spent their lives doing nothing for each other!

Obviously, you can't love every Christian in the world, or even in one church, in deep, specific ways. You must have a group of from four to eight people that you can relate with, that you love deeply and give yourself to. We call them "companies of the committed," or small groups – whatever you call them, the point is, do it! Paul was always in company with believers. Jesus had the twelve, and He was constantly with them. It's the lifestyle of the Christian; it's the very basis of the biblical way of life.

Do you know deeply four to eight Christians, and are there these who know you? They know where you are all day long; they can stop and pray for you during the day, knowing you're at class, or you're at work, or they know you're doing this at home and you've got that responsibility... You check in by phone, you meet together to love each other and share the Word of God together and your concerns... My friend, if you want to be a healthy Christian, love each other specifically. You love the church at large, but make it practical in a small fellowship group. Care and share your hearts together.

PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER

Secondly, demonstrate your commitment to the Body of Christ by praying for each other. Paul wrote in verses 3 and 4 that he thanked God for every remembrance of the Philippians, “always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all.” And not only did he pray for them, but they prayed for him. He says in verse 19, “I know that this imprisonment shall turn out for my deliverance, through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.”

If you will pray, you will find yourself committed to fellow believers. Have a prayer list with the longings of our church and the longings of special people. You have people to whom you are committed in your family, of course. You have people to whom you are committed in your small group, and you must pray for them through the day. You know especially what’s going on. Some have said, “Pastor, this is a large church. How can a church this size be so warm and friendly?” Well, warmth isn’t related to size. Small churches can be very cold! But you see, if we come out of these loving “pockets of shalom” where we’ve been cared for all week long, then we’ve been released to be God’s people and to praise Him together. That’s why there ought to be warmth and joy about our campus when we’re together, - because we see each other during the week and we’ve been praying and concerned for each other.

BE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR BROTHERS’ WELL BEING

Not only must you tangibly love and specifically pray, but thirdly, you must become responsible for each other. You must be responsible for the church at large, and also specifically for that group of four to eight.

In verse 9 that apostle says, “I pray that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment...” He’s asking them to be an excellent group of people, and he’s taking responsibility for them. He says, “I want to see excellence in your life.”

A team of us were ministering to missionaries in Columbia a couple years ago, and at the end of our conference one of the men said to the other missionaries, “I have learned that I am responsible for you. But I want you to know that I’ve also learned that you’re responsible for me – and don’t you forget it!” That’s right!

And then, you must not only be responsible for each other but accountable to each other. Somebody must know how we’re doing. The old idea of “my life is my own business and none of yours” is wrong! There is nothing Christian about it. Your life must also be somebody else’s business; and this becomes practical when, in these groups of four to eight, you pray for each other and you become

accountable to one another. You check in. No room for "Lone Ranger-ism" in the faith.

AN ALL-IMPORTANT THIRD

Then thirdly, you must commit yourself to the work of Christ in the world. Now, that's three, but it is three. By that I mean, Christ must be first; the Body of Christ must be second; but then you must participate in the work of Christ in the world. Sometimes it's been said that "you're saved to serve." No way! You're saved to worship God. You're saved to be God's people together. And then, only then, are you saved to serve. But you must serve. There's no point in having "one" and "two," without having "three."

And Paul tells them in verse 29 to be doing Christ's work:

"For to you it has been granted, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake..."

Paul was obviously suffering for Christ's sake. But as he was suffering he was ministering; and so he says in Philippians 4:21, "The brethren who are with me (in Caesar's household) greet you." You see, a church had been planted along the chain line gang because Paul had proclaimed Christ. Though Caesar had imprisoned him, he had planted a church right under the Emperor's nose! And he says, "Those in Caesar's household now, the brethren in Christ greet you." What a thrill for him to send out that message!

Paul was always in the work of Christ, always witnessing, always sharing his faith, getting to Gospel to others.

I am committed to Christ; will you be? I want to be.

I am committed to my beloved friends in Christ; will you be?

I am committed to the work of Christ in the world; will you join?

This is where we are. That's who we are as a church