

# Devotion Demanded!

## (Ephesians 5:1–7)

When asked to identify the most important commandment that should be obeyed, our Lord instantly spoke of personal devotion: “. . . ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind’” (Matthew 22:37). Christ observed that when one demonstrates overwhelming devotion in reverence to God and service to fellow man, then following the other teachings of the Scriptures is a natural outgrowth of that devotion (Matthew 22:40).

A letter sent to a young woman from her fiancé illustrates the degree of devotion that is required of Christians in their faith. This young man had been “converted” to the Communist philosophy, and so devoted to the party was this man that he wrote to break off the relationship and devote himself wholly to his new cause. Sense the great degree of devotion demonstrated in the young man’s words:

We communists have a high casualty rate. We are the ones who get shot and hung and ridiculed and fired from our jobs and in every other way made as uncomfortable as possible. A certain percentage of us get killed or imprisoned. We live in virtual poverty. We turn back to the party every penny we make above what is absolutely necessary to keep us alive.

We communists do not have the time or the money for many movies or concerts or T-bone steaks or decent homes or new cars. We’ve been described as fanatics. We are fanatics. Our lives are dominated by one great, overshadowing factor: the struggle for world communism. We have a philosophy of life which no amount of money could buy. We have a cause to fight for, a definite purpose in life. We subordinate our petty personal selves into a

great movement of humanity; and if our personal lives seem hard or our egos appear to suffer through subordination to the party, then we are adequately compensated by the thought that each of us, in his small way, is contributing to something new and true and better for mankind.

There is one thing in which I am in dead earnest about, and that is the communist cause. It is my life, my business, my religion, my hobby, my sweetheart, my wife, . . . my bread and meat. I work at it in the daytime and dream of it at night. Its hold on me grows, not lessens, as time goes on; therefore, I cannot carry on a friendship . . . or even a conversation without relating it to this force which both drives and guides my life. I evaluate people, looks, ideas, and actions according to how they affect the communist cause, and by their attitude toward it. I’ve already been in jail because of my ideals, and if necessary, I’m ready to go before a firing squad.<sup>1</sup>

This kind of devotion is an obsession! The Christian’s life may seem like an obsession to those around him. Everything in his life is focused through the lens of devotion. He finds great satisfaction in living his Christianity. This obsessive devotion is not to be an extreme that dictates life without choices. Rather, devotion is the basis for the choices in life. It is because of devotion to the Lord that the Christian lives, chooses, acts, and loves as he does! Numerous illustrations of this compelling devotion are given throughout the Scriptures. The widow’s giving her last two mites illustrates the extent to which she was devoted to God (Mark 12:42–44).

<sup>1</sup>Charles R. Swindoll, *The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart and 1,501 Other Stories* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), 96.

Epaphroditus is forever known as having been controlled by his devotion to help brethren (Philippians 2:25–30). In the Old Testament is the story of Ittai the Gittite, who, in his devotion to King David, said, “Wherever my lord the king may be, whether for death or for life, there also your servant will be” (2 Samuel 15:21). Who can forget Caleb’s devotion? This godly man is still known by the Lord’s commendation, in which He called him “My servant Caleb.” Why was Caleb so distinguished? God’s own words answer: “Because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully” (Numbers 14:24).

Since you are now a Christian, you are living a life devoted to God! It is a sanctified life, a consecrated life. It is a life totally different from the way you lived before you decided to believe and obey God’s commands. The life of devotion is blessed with spiritual riches!

Ephesians 5:1–7 explains the Christian’s devotion. Paul had just explained how the lifestyle of one in Christ is drastically different from the way those in the world live (4:17–32). Immediately following that explanation, Paul said, “Therefore . . .,” indicating that the difference in lifestyle is the consequence of the change in devotion. The Christian is devoted to the standards of God, not those of the world. He has “died” to sin and the world and is “alive to God” (Romans 6:11). Look closely at this passage of Scripture to see how the Christian’s devotion is centered upon God instead of the world. You will be devoted to something in life. Many are devoted to some political cause, financial objective, or humanitarian project. As a Christian, you are to demonstrate devotion to God’s service!

## **DEVOTED TO LOVE (5:1)**

When Paul spoke of “beloved children,” he was referring to the members of Christ’s body, those who have heard the gospel and responded in obedience (John 14:15). It is only because God loves the world that His children are able to love Him and one another (1 John 4:19). The convert understands that God’s love is more devoted than a parent’s love for a child. When one understands how much God loves him, he naturally loves God in return. This love offers security and contentment to those who are

struggling in the world! Because you have come to understand just how much God loves you, you now express love to God (Galatians 2:20).

The passage under study reveals that the devotion to love compels Christians to grow in certain ways. *Christians desire to “be” like God.* The term “be” in this verse is from a Greek term that communicates a gradual developing. The Christian is one who is becoming an imitator of God. He is devoted to the consuming passion of being like God. This does not occur instantly; it requires time. As a new Christian, you have begun this process! In order for you to achieve the objective, you must give attention to the goal!

*Christians are “imitators” of God.* The term “imitators” is derived from the Greek term μιμητής (*mimetes*), the root word from which we get the English verb “mimic.” The term means “to behave so as to copy another.” The Christian is able to mimic God by following His example and obeying His commands. Small children often mimic the behavior of their parents. It is not unusual for a son to be told that he is exactly like his father or for a daughter to hear that she is just like her mother. In the same way, Christians are to be imitators of the heavenly Father. Over time, we are to become like Him. Those who are just beginning the Christian walk ought to be excited about starting a process of being transformed into imitators of God!

*Christians are known as God’s “beloved children.”* The devotion of the Christian to the heavenly Father is like that of a child to his earthly father. The child looks with great respect and love to the father and takes a special pride in being known as “the son [or daughter] of \_\_\_\_\_.” This pride is intensified when the child understands that the father loves him with such a strong love! As a new Christian, you now have this relationship with your heavenly Father. What a wonderful blessing you possess in being assured that you are God’s beloved child!

Christians are devoted to God. This devotion is not demonstrated by grudging submission to rules and regulations. Following a rigid spiritual discipline or numbering the times you pray cannot maintain this devotion. Neither will keeping a list of all the sins you have confessed assure this devotion. Rather, you must maintain your devotion by keeping your focus upon God

and upon the Son of His love, who “loved you and gave Himself up for us,” as is stated in the next verse.

## DEVOTED TO SERVICE

(5:2)

Your love for God prompts you to serve Him (John 14:15). You do good deeds because of a desire to glorify your Father in heaven. To have this response is to “walk in love.” Everything in your life expresses your love for God! Paul explained this service by using the example of Jesus Christ. You are to “walk in love,” “just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us.” This is the standard for Christians. Do not be a servant simply because someone else is doing so or because you will feel guilty if you do not. Rather, do good works because you love God and want to please the heavenly Father.

You will delight in serving God! You will have an eagerness and an excitement about serving. Further, you will gain a wonderful contentment from being a Christlike servant. These blessings result because you are offering a consecrated devotion to the Lord.

Paul mentioned two specific features of Christ’s devoted service in 5:2. *Christ presented Himself as an offering.* The word “offering” refers to the *attitude* of devotion. The term is used in the Old Testament to designate the attitude of those approaching God in worship (see Leviticus 1:2). The worshiper was required to approach God with humility and willing compliance to the Lord’s regulations. The attitude was complete submission to God. The offering was given to God to express love, appreciation, and commitment. Each offering was to honor God. *Christ also presented Himself as a sacrifice.* The word “sacrifice” refers to the *action* of devotion. God regulated sacrifices and blessed those who followed the specified rules for making sacrifices. Paul described this same action in Christ, who “gave Himself” because He “loved you.” The Christian is required to do “just as” Christ did, and obedience brings blessings!

As one involved in good works, you are offering yourself as a “sacrifice.” God views the service you render as a blessed “offering.” There is no limit to your sacrifice because, like Christ, you are devoted to love! Why should a Christian be involved, even obsessed, with the works of

the church? Because he is devoted to service just as Christ was!

## DEVOTED TO RESPECTABILITY

(5:3–7)

The love and the service of Christians result in respectable actions. For a convert, all things become new (see 2 Corinthians 5:17). This “newness of life” (Romans 6:4) is visible in the everyday activities of the church. As a member of God’s family, you will live as your heavenly Father wishes for you to live. Choosing to live the Christian lifestyle is not always comfortable or convenient. However, as an imitator of God, you should choose to live as God your Father expects you to live. In verses 3 through 7, Paul stated some specific ways to live with respectable behavior.

*Respectability is shown by actions* (v. 3). You have been separated from the actions of the world (1 Peter 1:22). As a child of God, you must not take part in certain activities (2 Peter 3:14). Some actions are not to be practiced, and some objectives are not to be sought by Christians (1 Timothy 5:22). The one who has been cleansed by the blood of Christ must stop making choices that lead to deliberate sin. Even as Christians, we are imperfect and continue to sin; but that is different from being so involved in worldly activities that we are unconcerned about sin. The change of behavior after conversion is stressed by the imperative phrase “must not even be named among you.” Further emphasis is seen in the original language. In effect, the Bible commands, “Do not allow it to be mentioned even one time!” Some places are so unfit for the Christian to go that it is shameful and embarrassing even to talk of going to such places! (See Romans 6:21.) Why is such strong emphasis given here? Because some places encourage behavior that is not “proper among saints.”

*Respectability is governed by attitudes* (v. 4). Actions are the product of attitudes. The Christian’s attitude is to demonstrate purity. The Lord said that one’s words reveal the condition of his heart (Matthew 12:34–37). Paul reminded the Ephesians of this truth. The representative of Christ must be careful of the language he uses. It is not to be “filthiness” (obscene, vulgar words) or “silly talk” (senseless words used without thinking of how they will

impact those who hear). The Christian's language is in sharp contrast with the speech of those surrounding him: It emphasizes purity and "the giving of thanks." The new Christian must learn to discipline his tongue! This is a difficult task, but it can be done!

*Respectability is rewarded by assurance* (v. 5). The Christian is determined to live respectably because God assures great blessings to those who live in such a way. Those who fail to repent and change their practices of sin will realize too late that they are doomed. Unless one becomes a child of God and ceases the constant practice of sin, he will not enjoy "the inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God"! As one who has turned to Christ, you should gain great encouragement from this verse. You are trying to obey God. You are in the process of becoming an imitator of God. You have God's gracious forgiveness when you sin, and you have His firm assurance of a heavenly inheritance (Hebrews 6:18, 19).

*Respectability is encouraged by associations* (vv. 6, 7). One must associate with respectable people if he wants to be respectable! When you became a Christian, you had to turn away from sinful practices that you probably found enjoyable. Satan will continue to tempt you to return and enjoy these activities you left behind. Some of Satan's strongest attempts to lure you back into the world will come through people in your past (see 1 Corinthians 15:33). If any former association would hinder your devotion to Christ, you should sever it (see Matthew 10:34–39). You must be so devoted to Christ that you can refuse to be a part of those who reject God (2 Corinthians 6:17, 18; 1 John 2:15–17).

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The Christian is to be devoted to God in every aspect of life. Such devotion begins as one

understands the great love of God, and it is demonstrated by making a willing sacrifice of self as an "offering" to God (Romans 12:1, 2). Obsessive devotion to God makes the Christian live, speak, and choose his associates with respectability.

Being devoted to God is a difficult challenge because Satan does all he can to cause Christians to make choices, participate in activities, and form associations that compromise devotion to God. King Amaziah illustrates the tragedy of such compromise. The Bible says, "He did right in the sight of the LORD, yet not like David his father" (2 Kings 14:3a). Because of a compromised devotion, this king suffered disaster and caused the glory of God to be diminished (2 Kings 14:12–14). In order to be pleasing to God, make sure your devotion to Him is exactly like that commanded in Ephesians 5:1–7!

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## Sharing the Message

When persecution came to the early church, Christians were scattered and went everywhere preaching the Word. What do you picture when you read Acts 8:4? Do you see someone preaching to a group? That is one way that the Word can be shared, but it is not the only way. Some of the most effective evangelism occurs when one person sits down with another and tells how Christ has saved him from being lost in sin. Even if we do not think that we can teach our friends the gospel, we can provide an opportunity for someone else to teach them. We can invite them to come with us to Bible class or to worship. As we are growing, we are sharing the story of Christ—and that helps us to grow as well.

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