

A Passion for Christ



David Wilkerson November 14, 2011

What does the word "passion" mean to you as a Christian? I think passion at its truest and deepest level cannot be defined by any dictionary. Let me show you from Scripture what I believe it means to have a passion for Christ.

As I read the Bible, I see passion for Jesus as an ever-increasing obedience to his Word. Most of us think of obedience as personal, individual compliance to God's commands. Yet obedience to his Word has implications far beyond this. It isn't merely a personal pursuit but a fervent desire for the sake of the Lord's body.

Under the Old Covenant, passion for God was mostly an individual pursuit. In every dark and evil age a person rose up with a fervent desire to obey the Lord's Word and fulfill his work. God raised up Abraham during such a time. Abraham pursued the Lord in the face of hostile nations, and his fervent faith made him the father of nations.

I think also of Noah. When the Lord could no longer endure man's wickedness and violence, Noah obeyed God's Word with unwavering fervency. He stood for the things of God in a wanton age, boldly preaching righteousness. The same was true of Enoch, who walked with the Lord all his days. In other dark times there was an Isaac or a Jacob.

Later, when truth had fallen in Israel, Samuel pursued the Lord fervently. There was also David, whose passion for God showed in his reverence for the commandments. In every backslidden generation there were godly prophets who pursued God fervently and spoke his Word. I think of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and all the minor prophets.

Yet throughout those ages passion for God remained mostly an individual pursuit. Why? There wasn't yet a body of believers with a ruling Head in glory. Christ hadn't come. He hadn't yet "set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him" (1 Corinthians 12:18). This happened only after Jesus' death and resurrection. Paul states, "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (12:27).

Under the New Covenant, God is looking for more than an individual pursuit of Christ. It is not enough for us to remove ourselves from a backslidden religious system, declaring, "I'm going to have a passion for him like no one else." I know many Christians and ministers who share such godly ambitions. Every true lover of Jesus wants to maintain a red-hot love for him.

Yet our pursuit of Christ can't be for our edification only. God isn't interested in having just one Christ-filled man, or one Spirit-governed woman, or one fully surrendered shepherd in a compromised church. That is not according to his Word.

Paul forbids us even to imply, "I am not of the body" (1 Corinthians 12:15). He states, "The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you" (12:21). Paul is saying, in essence, "Everything you do — good or bad, suffering or blessed — affects the whole body. Your sin is no longer just a personal matter. How you live and what you pursue matters now to every member."

We can't separate our individual passion for Christ from a genuine burden and passion for the whole body.

You may pray and agonize over your sins and failures, crying out, "Lord, remove my compromise. Deliver me from these habits." But do you also pray and agonize over the sin and compromise in God's church?

Our lives are blessed as a result of our individual passion; with such zeal comes God's peace, rest and favor. But are you satisfied to be an island of rejoicing? Are you happy just to pursue Jesus, while all around you the body of Christ is suffering?

The deep cry in your soul for a holier walk didn't come from any holy thing in you. The Lord put that hunger in you. His Spirit awakened you and stirred your heart. And he did it for this purpose: "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12). God's Spirit sets us aflame to spark others! Our passion is meant to ignite those around us.

True passion for the Lord begins with one thing: obedience. John sums up the matter very plainly: "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments" (1 John 5:3). It is impossible to have passion for Jesus without a corresponding obedience to his commands. We can generate all kinds of emotions in trying to live out a fiery love for Christ. But we can't truly have passion for him if we don't obey his revealed Word.

As I sought the Lord about this issue of increasing our passion for Christ, the Spirit directed me to two areas.

1. We need to look at Christ's teaching on humility.

"Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted" (Matthew 23:12). Jesus directed this statement to the masses, particularly to his own disciples. His message is clear: The self-exalting person is incapable of true passion for him.

Jesus first explains the self-exalting believer and then upbraids him: "The scribes and the Pharisees... (do) all their works they do for to be seen of men: they...love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.... He that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted" (23:1, 5-7, 11-12).

Jesus says the self-exalting person is dishonest, saying he sits "in Moses' seat" — meaning he has authority in God's Word. This person knows what the Scriptures say about a pure, holy walk and is accurate in interpreting that Word to the masses. But his own life doesn't measure up to what he teaches. Jesus says of such people, "Do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not" (23:3). In other words: "Don't follow their example. They're living a lie."

Such men practice the worst kind of self-exaltation by placing themselves above the law. They don't hesitate to lay grievous burdens of sacrifice on God's people. But they personally won't lift a finger to obey those same laws.

If we're all honest before God we would have to admit related sins. At times even the most diligent among us doesn't practice what he preaches. As Jesus points out, "You say, but you don't do."

Paul asks, "Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?" (Romans 2:21). He's saying, in short, "You do well to preach against these sins. But you're not dealing with them in your own heart."

The Holy Spirit won't let me gloss over these words of Christ. He's telling me, "David, do you truly want a passion for Jesus? Then let me go deep down into your heart. I need to show you your dishonesty in all the areas you need to deal with. I want you to measure your life and your ministry by this Word."

Here is the key for all of us: Are you willing to open your heart to his Word? Will you repent and turn from all dishonesty and hypocrisy? Will you ask the Spirit to convict you of any self-exaltation?

Jesus says the self-exalting man also loves recognition and honor.

"All their works they do for to be seen of men...and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi" (Matthew 23:5-7). Jesus is talking about religious leaders here. He's telling us, "These men love the spotlight. They want the prominent seats

at public meetings. And they love to be recognized on the streets."

I can't condemn any pastor or evangelist for self-exaltation because I can be as guilty as the next preacher. When someone asked my wife how many books I had written, she answered, "I think it's about twelve." I quickly jumped in, saying, "No, actually, it's thirty." When someone else asked how many people attend Times Square Church, Gwen answered, "I'm not sure, but hundreds come to the services." I pointed out, "No, honey, it's in the thousands."

Jesus warns us, "Be ye not called Rabbi [important]: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren" (Matthew 23:8). Christ is showing us again that our self-exaltation isn't just a personal, individual sin. He's pointing out, "You are all brothers and sisters. And you are only one of many, so you don't have to be important. You are all members of my body and I am your Head."

Jesus goes on to say, "He that shall humble himself shall be exalted" (Matthew 23:12). It is important not to mistake Jesus' meaning here. Humility isn't merely the opposite of self-exaltation. It is about more than practicing what we preach or taking the lowest seat in the house or doing good works in secret. Of course, these are all good and acceptable things in God's eyes, but none of them makes us humble.

First, the surest evidence that someone isn't humble is that he thinks he is. So, don't think you're being humble through your meekness, quietness, self-abasement or self-denial. You won't put on humility by ignoring praise or putting yourself down. True humility is about one thing only: total dependence on the Lord.

2. Christ's teaching on trust sums up the subject of being passionate for him.

Here is God's perspective on how we grow in our passion for Christ: We see our need for humility. And humility is, at its core, total dependence on the Lord. The word "dependence" means "trust for all things, in all things."

Only total and complete trust makes a person humble. This means having no agenda, no self-will and forfeiting all rights. It also means knowing who has power for all things and turning to him in faith for his supply. Genuine trust doesn't stop at saying, "I'm weak." It also declares, "He is strong." Such dependent trust requires humility.

Peter writes, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time" (1 Peter 5:6). How do we humble ourselves before God's mighty hand? Peter tells us in the next verse: "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (5:7). The apostle makes it plain: "Humble yourself by casting your cares upon the Lord. Humility requires trust. To be humble you have to trust God's goodness toward you."

Jesus himself set the example. "Christ Jesus...made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself" (Philippians 2:7-8). How did Jesus humble himself? "[He] became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (2:8).

Jesus is our example of a humble man. The Lord who created all things and for whom all things were made was wholly dependent on his Father. We see Christ's passion for the Father not just in his long nights of prayer or the miracles he performed, but in his total dependence. Jesus stated again and again:

"I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (John 5:30). "I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him" (8:28-29).

Here is the point of my entire message: Yes, Jesus had a passionate love for the Father. And he proved his passion by his obedient dependence on the Father. Everything Jesus did and sacrificed wasn't for himself at all. Jesus' death and resurrection had everything to do with forming his body of believers. His victory was totally for us: for you, for me, for everyone throughout the centuries who would believe.

Even a Muslim could say, "Jesus kept the law of God. He went to the wilderness and overcame temptation. He won a great personal victory over Satan. And he did good works. He loved children and he helped widows and the poor. He also healed the sick and raised the dead. And he himself was raised from the dead and went to heaven. Yes, Jesus left us a good example to follow. He achieved a great victory, worthy of paradise."

But the significance of Jesus' victory doesn't stop there. Our Lord's victory over Satan provided *our* victory over sin. The penalty he paid was for our debt, not his own. His death was our death and his resurrection was ours also. He accomplished all of these things to restore us to the Father. His purpose all along was to build a body for himself and to set every member in place as he sees fit.

Paul tells us, "As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Romans 5:19). I believe there is a principle behind Paul's statement that holds true for us as well. After all, if one Christian's bitterness can "defile many" (see Hebrews 12:15), how much more will one person's dependence on God bless and sanctify many?

Perhaps as you've read this message you have been quietly praying, "Lord, please renew my passion for Christ." If so, you need to be prepared to let God's Spirit search your heart. He wants to reveal to you any area of disobedience to his Word. And you must be willing to be governed and humbled into obedience. Moreover, you have to abandon all your own ideas about humility. Finally, you have to develop a passion to obey his Word. Until his commands are your delight, it will be impossible for you to please him.

If you want to pursue Jesus with passion, your life will become a laboratory for the whole body of Christ. God will allow you to endure things that have nothing to do with your own life but that are lessons for his church. Right now, you may wonder why you're facing certain trials that simply don't make sense. It may be that the Lord is using your example to minister to the larger body. He is constantly at work in you, conforming you to the image of his Son. And that divine work in you is meant to spark others to obedience.

Dear one, I urge you, make this your prayer: "Lord, give me a passion for your Word. And make me obedient to your will. I want others to see your work in me. Make my life a magnet, to draw many to you."

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