

RADICAL
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TO A
PASSIONATE
CHRIST

Radical Abandonment To A Passionate Christ

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The deadly truth is that there is hardly any place for radicalism¹ in the American Christian faith today. It is hardly uncommon to come across Christians whose moral sensitivity closely resembles that of our lost, depraved culture. This seems to be the norm—and it should horrify us. But the fact that so few Christians are even concerned about this reveals the depth of moral apathy into which American Christianity has sunk.

Where did we begin to believe the lie that our culture and comfort should define the reality of our faith? How closely do our lives truly resemble that of Christ, the author and example of our faith?² Should not the Word of God and the life of Christ be our standards? He, the perfect embodiment of our faith, lived a life so radical that men sought to kill him. The extreme nature of his teaching led all his disciples, except one³, into martyrdom. The reality of faith is that of the cross. It is all consuming and life transforming, pursuing the cause of Christ with unconcern—even to the point of death.

When was this reality lost? Is it possible that American Christianity became so concerned with personal comforts and rights that it has lost the passion of the cross? The cross of Christ is NOT comfortable, but it is God's passion. How can we claim to be in Christ, to be his followers, and even to love him if we are not willing to share in his suffering?

These words sound too harsh—not like the Christianity we have been led to embrace. Let me challenge, however, that these are the very intentions of the One we profess to be Savior. Jesus himself said,

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it” (Matt.16:24-26⁴, emphasis added).

Many of us know this verse by heart, but do we submit our lives to its daily consequences, following Christ's demand in our lives? But, have we have lost the impact of that statement?

We tell ourselves that we have surrendered our lives, we give ten percent of our income, we sometimes support missionaries, we go to midweek Bible studies,

¹ *American Heritage Dictionary*: 1. Arising from or going to a root or source; basic 2. Departing markedly from the usual or customary; extreme: 3. Favoring or effecting fundamental or revolutionary changes in current practices, conditions, or institutions.

² *Hebrews 12:2*

³ *The Apostle John died of old age on the island of Patmos.*

⁴ *Unless otherwise noted all scripture references are to the NIV translation.*

we even do ministry in the inner cities, and we work reasonably hard at giving up our sinful habits and desires. But that is NOT what Christ is talking about—surrendering parts of your life to his Lordship. He demands all. Denying yourself means not only surrendering your life, it means surrendering your life as if to death. Christ doesn't call for partly surrendered lives; he calls for martyrs!

Of course, this does not necessarily mean that all of us will be required to literally die for our faith. But our lives should be characterized by such radical abandonment to Christ that should we be persecuted or martyred we could say with Paul,

“I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but that I will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body whether by life or by death, for to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil.1:20-21).

If we profess to love Christ and presume to be his followers, it is crucial that we each examine ourselves. Is it true that for *me* to live is Christ? Is to die gain? If the answer “yes” does not resound in the core of your heart, you must search out the truth of where your allegiance lies. Are you holding on to your desire for comfort in this life? Are you holding onto your “rights”?

Do you consider your need for food and clothes and warmth before you consider the demands of Christ? What controls your life: earthly concerns or the desire to see Christ exalted? Does your American culture define your faith, or does your faith define how you live in that culture? This is the reality of Christ's call; there is no other option!

So often our attitude is like Peter's when he rebuked Jesus for telling the disciples

“...that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elder, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed on the third day and be raised to life” (Matthew 16:21-22).

But, who could blame Peter for rebuking the Lord? The Jewish tradition understood the Messiah to be a political leader; it was against everything Peter naturally believed that Jesus, the Messiah, would die. The problem was that Peter's response and vision for Christ, though sincerely meant, were defined by cultural values rather than the word of Christ.

Listen to Christ's response to this mistaken faith. He speaks it not only to Peter, but also to the American church when it is more concerned with its own plans and desires than Christ's. His response to such a cultural mindset is

“Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men” (Matthew 16:23).

This is the immediate context in which Jesus gives the command that

“... if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matthew.16:24).

It is no coincidence that this command follows the confrontation with Peter. In effect, Jesus says, “If you think following me is going to be easy or comfortable, you’re dead wrong. My passion is so radical that people will kill me for it. If you come after me, you must deny yourself—be willing to give up all your rights and desires for the sake of my passion. If you really follow me, you will follow me outside the city—bearing the shame and disgrace from the world.⁵ If you identify yourself with me, you identify yourself with the cross, surrendering your life to it, so that by my guidance you fill up in your flesh what is lacking in regards to my affliction.”⁶ That is what it means to follow Christ—to give our lives completely to his cause, pursuing his glory by furthering the kingdom

His passion is also displayed in the Great Commission⁷ as echoed by Paul:

“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?” (Romans 10:14-15)

True, Christ never said that doing the Great Commission would be easy, but the question is: are you willing to follow the call of your Savior? Or is your heart set on the things of man instead of the things of God.⁸

Thousands of people die each day with either a false assurance of salvation or never having heard at all. Where is our passion for Christ? For his kingdom? We have been brought up in a culture that glorifies our wants. We have begun to believe that we deserve to live comfortably, to have decent clothes, to have at least one car, to live in a place where our children will be safe, to have vacations, to have gifts on our birthdays—when around the world people are dying who have never heard and when Christ’s passion has not been realized.

As American Christians, we each need to re-evaluate the reality of our faith. Has it been founded on and defined by the Word of God? Do we truly believe God to be who he says he is? Do we truly believe in the work of Christ at the cross, in the urgency of the gospel, in the reality that people are dying in their sins every day, in the promise that

“...our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all?” (2 Corinthians 4:17)?

⁵ Hebrews 13:13

⁶ Colossians 1:24

⁷ Matthew 29:18-20

⁸ Matthew 16:23

Can we say, like Paul, that

“... I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—a righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:8-10)?

If not, we need to re-evaluate the affections of our hearts. When the Son of God looks into your life, does he see you surrendered to his Lordship? Or does he say of you,

“Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46).

We in America need to stop defining our lives by standards presented us by our society. Let it not be said of us,

“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm- neither hot nor cold, I am about to spit you out of my mouth” (Revelation 3:15-16).

No! Let it not be that we are kept from following Christ because we fear “*those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul,*” but rather, let us “*be afraid of the One who can destroy both the soul and body in hell*” (Matthew 10:28). And, in that holy fear, let us assess the authenticity of what we call faith.

Real faith is willing to surrender its comforts, its needs, and even its life. Real faith joyfully accepts persecution because it knows it has a “better and lasting possession” (Hebrews 10:34). Real faith has set its eyes, not on the fear of the moment, but on “Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:3). Real faith realizes that

“... since then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:1-2).

Real faith concludes that nothing is as we naturally think it to be and that which is most important leads to what we in America have most dreaded, namely sacrifice. In the light of his eternal presence, real faith in Christ realizes that his passion is the only thing that matters and that we must surrendered to it, in the power of his grace. It is his passion that will fill us with the joy of his pleasure, the peace of his nearness, the strength of his Spirit, the power of his blood and the hope of his promise as we surrender, in faith, to him.

With eyes on ourselves, it is impossible to surrender our comfortable mediocrity for his passion that leads to the cross. But, instead, let us see deeply and trust the final words of Jesus, “...and surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). With these words in our hearts, let us pursue a real faith that lives in radical abandonment to a passionate Christ.