

## How Far Should We Go With Holy Living?

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In 1961, Walt Disney produced a film called *Greyfriars Bobby*. It was about a Skye Terrier that was a pet to a poor man in Edinburgh. When the Terrier's owner died, the little dog would go to his owner's grave every night and guard the grave for 14 years till January 14, 1872 when the little dog died. No one could keep the dog, so the whole town took care of the dog. The dog would always find a way to his owner's grave. This is a true story of a dog who was devoted to his owner till the very end. Pets can be very devoted to their owners. We hear about pets that wake their owners when there is a fire or something that can cause harm to the owner. Humans can be very devoted as well. People who buy season tickets to their favorite sports team are very devoted. Some fishermen will fish in any kind of weather because they are devoted to their hobby. Some people are devoted to a certain music group and will wait for hours online or outside of a ticket booth to get a ticket. Everybody is devoted to something. Most people are devoted to themselves which is a byproduct of pride. What or who are we devoted to?

Holy living requires us to be devoted. We have to be careful because we can become devoted to a religious program or religion to the point where we no longer have a clear focus of Jesus which will cause our Holy living to falter. We'll start to treat Holy living as a chore instead of an enjoyable way of living. Let's spend some time in looking at what it means to be devoted as a Christian or as a true follower of Jesus.

Let's turn to Acts 2: 42 – 47 where Luke states this, “<sup>42</sup> And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup> And awe<sup>[a]</sup> came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> And all who believed were together and had all things in common. <sup>45</sup> And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup> And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they

received their food with glad and generous hearts,<sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (ESV - Biblegateway.com)”

Here is Luke telling us about the beginnings of the early Church in the Book of Acts. The first item we see here is that the Church people are devoted to the apostles’ teachings and to fellowship with breaking of bread and with prayers. The Greek term for “devoted” means to join, to spend much time together (Strong’s Concordance). They spend much time together studying apostles’ teachings. The apostles’ teachings at this time would come straight from the mouths of the disciples. The letters we have today were not written yet. So, they were devoted in listening to what the disciples had to say about Jesus. Remember, the first disciples were eye witnesses to Jesus and His teachings. He was their Rabbi. The early Church was joined together in wanting to hear about the Word of God. How devoted are we today to the Word of God? Do we hunger for it? Do we feel empty if we miss one day of deep study? The early Church was devoted to the Word of God. Plus, they were devoted to Holy Communion and prayer together. In a few weeks, we’ll be taking part in Holy Communion together and it should be a special time together. Now, communion was a little different during the early Church because they did it all the time and they had a meal with it. It seems like they looked forward to these meals together with communion. I’ve preached on this before that communion is not just an empty ritual that many have turned it into. Maybe that’s why we can’t do communion every week is because we don’t have the same type of devotion as the early Church did and more on that later. John Wesley thought communion should be done often and that’s because the Methodist groups that met during his time had the right view of communion and being together. They were devoted to each other. The early Church was also devoted to praying with each other. It should feel good to pray with fellow Christians. We should look forward to each Sunday and Wednesday where we get to spend a little time in praying with each other. Are we devoted to each other as the early Church was to each other?

Since the early Church was so devoted to each other, Luke tells us in verse 43 that everyone was filled with awe or fear (depending your Bible translation)



because of this devotion to each other. Many wonders and signs were being performed by the apostles. Remember, this is right after Pentecost and the Holy Spirit was working in a powerful way inside the apostles. This awe and fear means respect and being in reverence in Greek. This was all new to the early Church. Israel never have seen or witnessed anything like this, not even in the Old Testament days. The Church had respect and was in reverent fear of what the Lord was doing through the disciples. So, because of the Church being devoted to each other, they were in awe together in what the Lord was doing through the apostles.

Then, this story goes a step further. In verse 44 we read that “all” the believers were together and had everything in common. This doesn’t mean they became carbon copies of each other. There was an old Twilight Zone show where an office worker became sick of people and he thought things would be better if everyone was like him. So, his wish was granted and everyone turned into a carbon copy of himself. After a while, he couldn’t stand himself. What Luke is telling us is that the early Church was so devoted to each other that they were united together through the Holy Spirit. They became one through the Holy Spirit because of what Jesus did at the cross. They were so unified through the Spirit that they sold property and possessions to give to anyone in need. This sounds crazy, doesn’t it? These people wanted to help each other out. I believe this is what we call loving one’s neighbor. Not only that, but they would meet “each” day together with glad and sincere hearts. While they did this, they were glad and had sincere hearts. Boy, this sounds nice, doesn’t it? Plus, they praised God and enjoyed the favor of “all” the people. Favor means the state of kindness and favor toward someone; a blessing (Strong’s Concordance). They were a blessing to each other and they praised God because of it. They knew the source of this special devotion to each other. It could only come from God. This sinful world can’t produce such devotion because of pride.

Since they had this deep devotion for each other, for Jesus’ teachings, and for prayer, verse 47 tells us that the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. This was a God event. The Lord is the one who started Pentecost. The Lord is the one who started Pentecost by dying on the cross. It is also the

Lord that helps us to be devoted to each other so that real harmony can be found in the Church. This is what makes people take notice of Church. The people are different because of being devoted to each other.

Now, we have to understand being devoted to Jesus' teachings, in fellowship with each other, with communion, and with prayer is not the beginning of devotion. What I mean is there is something needed first before we can have devotion to each other. There are times when some pastors can become discouraged with ministry. There are times when no fruit is seen being produced and some ministers will have weak moments and would like to quit or find a different type of ministry. I had such a moment not too long ago. A pastor can become so devoted to a church that they lose focus on something. I had prayed to the Lord for an answer and the answer came very quickly and it came through God's Holy Word. The Lord pointed me to Ezra 7: 10 which states this, <sup>10</sup> "For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel. (NIV – Biblegateway.com). Ezra had devoted himself to the study of the law of God so he could teach it to others. Let's remember Ezra was priest during the days of Nehemiah and helped the people of Israel when they returned to the Promise land – Jerusalem. Ezra had devoted himself to studying the law of God so he could then teach it to the people who didn't know or had forgotten the law of God. Why was Ezra devoted to such a task? Ezra was a teacher of the law and he knew the Great Command of God found in Deuteronomy 6: 4 – 6, "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands I am giving you today. (NLT)" Ezra was devoted to God first and because of that, he was able to serve the people of his day. His life was shaped by his devotion to God. For us to be devoted to each other, we must first be devoted to God. This is part of Holy living. It's amazing how so much of Biblical teaching points back to the Great Command God gave us and then Jesus renewed that same command in Matthew 22 for us today.

I like what A.W. Tozer states in his book called *Total Commitment to Christ* about devotion to God, "Our relation to Him is all that really matters. A true



Christian faith is an attachment – a devotion – to the person of Christ. The attachment of the individual person to Jesus Christ is intellectual, willing, exclusive, and unchangeable. (A.W. Tozer)” In other words, devotion to God is our top priority. It’s not our pet dog or favorite sports team or favorite hobby or job or anything else. When we become devoted or commit our life to Christ, that relationship puts everything in the right perspective. It is exclusive. We don’t allow the things of this world to dilute that devotion. Apostle Paul made this statement in Colossians 3: 24-25, “Work hard and cheerfully at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. Remember that the Lord will give you an Inheritance as your reward, and the Master you are serving is Christ. (NLT)” Paul was totally devoted and committed in serving Jesus Christ. Jesus was his Master and he saw that whatever he did in this world including dealing with people as working for the Lord rather than for people. His love for God helped the Holy Spirit to change Paul’s view of living in this world. He was working for the Lord in everything he was doing. Paul was devoted or we can say he was all in for Jesus. In the American church’s’ quest to become popular with today’s society, many have turned their devotion away from God and have turned that devotion to merchandizing Jesus to increase church members. Just think what would happen if the Church in America would just become devoted to Jesus alone and love Him with everything they had. The early Church did this and God added to their number. The early church didn’t add to the number. We do the opposite today. Shame on us. Let’s focus on the right things – let’s become devoted to Jesus first and then everything else will fall into place. So, the question is how devoted to the Lord are you? Maybe we could learn a lot from that little dog called Bobby that was so devoted to his master by guarding his grave for 14 years. If only we could be so devoted to Jesus.

**95** Oh come, let us sing to the LORD;

let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

<sup>2</sup> Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;

let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

- <sup>3</sup> For the LORD is a great God,  
and a great King above all gods.
- <sup>4</sup> In his hand are the depths of the earth;  
the heights of the mountains are his also.
- <sup>5</sup> The sea is his, for he made it,  
and his hands formed the dry land.
- <sup>6</sup> Oh come, let us worship and bow down;  
let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!
- <sup>7</sup> For he is our God,  
and we are the people of his pasture,  
and the sheep of his hand. (ESV – Biblegateway.com)

*NLT Life Application Study Bible.* Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.: Wheaton, 1996

*The Strongest Strong's Concordance.* Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001.

Tozer, A.W. *Total Commitment to Christ.* Aneko Press: Abbotsford, 2020