

## CHRISTIANITY REQUIRES A COMMITMENT

By Bob Young

A friend wrote me with an idea he thought would make a good article, or possibly a book. For me, articles are the first step. Articles sometimes turn into papers and papers are more likely to turn into books. Here is what my friend wrote:

*“IT SEEMS LIKE IN THE LAST 50-60 YEARS THAT THE CHURCH’S VIEW ON COMMITMENT HAS DECLINED SHARPLY. CHRISTIANITY IS A COMMITMENT. WHEN I WAS BAPTIZED 58 YEARS AGO TODAY, THE FIRST THING THEY TOLD ME WAS THE FIVE-STEP PLAN OF SALVATION (HBRCB); AND THAT I SHOULD GO OUT AND TELL THE LOST ABOUT IT. BUT THE “C” DID NOT STAND FOR COMMITMENT. LATER, AN “L” WAS ADDED, MEANING LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE; WHICH WAS ASSUMED IN THE FIVE-STEP PLAN.”*

Despite the fact that the Christianity described in the New Testament required commitment, today the reality is that commitment is a scarce commodity in many churches. Especially in the United States, an acceptable level of church membership is often defined by attendance at least once each week, or less. Some surveys that seek to identify the number of “churched” people in our nation use the measurement of “attendance at least once each month.” Some religious groups still teach the necessity of commitment, but such groups are becoming fewer in number as time passes. Two notable examples—the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses—resemble cults. The willingness of some to stand firmly for their Christian faith—as the Coptic Christians of Syria—even in the face of death is all the more impressive against the backdrop of nominal Christianity that exists in many places.

My friend described the situation in his correspondence:

*...THE LAST ONE [THE SITUATION OF THE COPTIC CHRISTIANS—BY] ISN’T WIDELY KNOWN. YOU PROBABLY KNOW THAT ISIS IS PERFORMING GENOCIDE ON THOUSANDS OF SYRIAN CHRISTIANS BECAUSE THEY WON’T CONVERT TO ISLAM. ONE CASE IS WHERE ISIS ROUNDED UP SEVERAL FAMILIES AND TOLD THE TEENAGERS THAT THEY HAD TO RENOUNCE JESUS AND FOLLOW MOHAMMED OR DIE. NONE OF THEM WOULD DO IT SO THEY WERE BEHEADED IN FRONT OF THEIR PARENTS! NOW THAT IS COMMITMENT. HOW MANY OF OUR AMERICAN TEENS WOULD DO THAT? ARE WE TRAINING THEM THAT CHRISTIANITY IS A COMMITMENT TO THE POINT OF DEATH?*

Unless you are in a quite unusual church setting, your answer is probably the same as mine. I do not know of many Christians—adults or teens—who is thinking about Christianity as a requirement to deny self to the point of death. Many of us wonder what we would do if being a Christian became a matter of life and death!

Christianity for a long time was at the center of western culture. In recent years, it has been pushed to the periphery but is still generally accepted. Some signs suggest that the situation continues to change with more intense rejection of Christianity and increasing possibilities of persecution.

The time has come to clarify what discipleship means. The student becomes like the Master teacher. Christians who believe that cost-less Christianity will continue to be an option are misinterpreting the signs of the times! It is time to make clear what God’s people must do!

In the face of militants who want by force to subject the entire world to their false philosophical and religious system, Christ’s disciples must renew their commitment to make disciples. The time has passed where the church has the luxury of running nice programs that help people with physical needs. The time has come for evangelism that intentionally and powerfully shares the gospel. The time has passed when mission work can be content with helping with food, clothing, shelter, and the needs of this world. The time has come for mission work that intentionally makes disciples and establishes churches that will make more disciples and establish more churches.

Quoting my friend one more time: “The first century Christians who were crucified, smeared with pitch and set on fire in Nero’s garden knew about commitment. What do you think?”