

Not A Fan: Becoming A Completely Committed Follower of Jesus

By kyle idleman

Reviewed by Pastor J. O. Hosler, Th.D.

What a great title for a book. I have often said that I would rather play football all season and lose every game than to sit in the grandstands and watch. This is why I immediately connected with Kyle's statement on p. 25: *My concern is that many of our churches in America have gone from being sanctuaries to becoming stadiums.* How true! I found nothing but positive reviews on the internet and the endorsements of Max Lucado and Lee Strobel persuaded me to purchase the book. I suspected the sincere humility of the author on the front cover when I noticed that the first letters in his first and last names were not capitalized. I also am concerned that many believers serve themselves first and cannot be counted on to sacrificially give to and serve Christ in the local church. I am a desperate man! I want people to become committed disciples of Christ so bad that I would crawl through mud and eat dirt to make it happen. HOWEVER! I will never be so desperate that I will change the gospel to make this happen. So I began to read the book.

P. 20: Kyle uses Matt. 7 to illustrate that this is the occasion where *everyone who has ever lived will stand before God.* I'm not going to fuss here but this is the Great White Throne judgment and these people will have been brought up from burning hell still believing that their good works entitled them to heaven. Christians will have already been judged at the Judgment Seat of Christ where some will have been shamefully found to have been only believers and not totally committed followers of Christ (I Cor. 3:15). These people in Matt. 7:22 will submit a resume of their faithfulness to good works and their fight against evil spirits. The gospel of works is so powerful and intimidating that even after perhaps hundreds of years in hell these people will still argue for their worthiness of heaven. But Kyle would conclude they were not committed enough and thus Jesus will cast them into the lake of fire for their unworthiness. However, these people will not so much be missing good works. What is lacking is profession of belief that Christ paid for their sins by His death on the cross. In Matt. 7:13 when Jesus speaks of entering through the narrow gate rather than the wide gate, we must not jump to conclusions. If the whole gospel of John is to be interpreted coherently, the narrow gate is the "will of the Father" that we believe solely in the finished work of Christ on the cross for deliverance from God's condemnation. The wide gate is looking for salvation any other way. But Kyle believes that Jesus will have never known them because they failed to follow Him in complete surrender and commitment. P. 21 *What if all of life comes down to this one question? What if there really is a heaven and there really is a hell, and where I spend eternity comes down to this one question.*

Kyle believes that we are not saved until we are living a totally committed life of works and obedience and uses Nicodemus as an example. P. 31: *Nicodemus had made a decision about Jesus, but that's not the same as following him. Jesus would not accept a relationship with Nicodemus where he simply believed.* P. 32: *Many have made a decision to believe in Jesus without making a commitment to follow Jesus. The Gospel allows for no such distinction...Jesus never offered such an option. When we decide to believe in Jesus without making a commitment*

to follow him, we become nothing more than fans. Here lies the theme of the entire book. People who are less than totally committed to Jesus in obedience to all the commands of the Great Commission will be in Hell rather than Heaven. On p. 32 biblical belief is defined as *a commitment to follow.* P. 34: *Following Jesus...It's a twenty-four-hour-a-day commitment that will interfere with your life.*

When evangelizing, I dare not take the sinner's eyes off of Christ's surrender to the cross and His death on the cross and place their eyes on the sinner's own death, surrender and level of commitment. Kyle says on P. 35: *Let me be clear...There is no salvation without surrender. There is no life without death. There is no believing without committing.*

Chapter 3 is entitled: *knowledge about him or intimacy with him?* At this point I caution the reader. No one can "know" Him without first knowing that nothing but the finished work of Christ on the cross can purchase eternity for a lost soul and that this can be received only as a free gift before a life of commitment can ever transpire. I must never claim to know Him intimately without knowing the most important thing about Him. My salvation is measured by the sole object of my faith-- the finished work of the cross. The degree of my intimacy with Him is measured by my regular use of I Jn. 1:9 and my level of commitment to Him.

As I have stated, I am desperate to see committed disciples. Undoubtedly, that would require commitment, obedience, sacrifice, endurance, humility and selflessness on the part of saints. However, I must never present the terms of discipleship as the price for salvation that the believer must pay or go to Hell. In Chapter 4 Kyle clearly equivocates the terms of the cost of discipleship with the cost of eternal life.

In Chapter 6, Kyle defines being filled with the Spirit and power as essential to salvation. When evangelizing and making disciples, I must guard myself against equating the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the filling of the Holy Spirit. We get all of the Holy Spirit we are going to get when we are born again. The fullness of the Spirit is not how much of Him we have but how much of us He has. This is true at many different levels with all Christians. As long as we have our flesh and Adamic natures, we will never be totally emptied of ourselves. If we could, we would be sinlessly perfect. P. 95: *The only way to be filled with the Spirit is to empty myself of me. When I empty me of me, it provides space for the Holy Spirit to fill me.* In my life, I never claim to be totally emptied of me. I claim to seek to be more emptied today than I was yesterday and I claim a desire that the Holy Spirit would have more of me tomorrow than He does today. Am I a humble man? I will only admit that I am not humble enough and I desire to be more humble and I know that God will find it necessary to bring disappointments into my life to humble me further. Sometimes God will have to humiliate me in order to lead me to rely more upon Him.

In chapter 7, Kyle uses Matt. 7:21-23 to prove that faith without works and total commitment is a watered down gospel that will not save. P. 101: *I am jealous for you to discover that now and not waste another day living with some sort of watered-down and diluted form of Christianity...I believe eternity hangs in the balance.* Actually, the opposite is true. Anything we pour into the finished work of Christ is water that dilutes the pure gospel. Good works plus the Cross equals no saving gospel. Good works because of the completed work of the Cross brings blessings in

this life, reward, inheritance, and crowns in heaven. Good works for any other reason will bring no eternal reward and will definitely not result in salvation.

In chapter 8, Kyle seeks to demonstrate that John 3:16 by itself does not explain the gospel. P. 116: *There is no John 3:16 without Luke 9:23...The truth is that John 3:16 and Luke 9:23 have to go together in order for there to be an accurate understanding of the gospel's invitation... "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."* When I am teaching the gospels I must be careful to point out that John 3:16 is a challenge to unbelievers to believe. Luke 9 is another story. The disciples were already saved when Jesus asked: (vs. 20) *Who do you say that I am?* Peter gave Him the right answer and in response Jesus said to Him: (Matt. 16:17-19) *"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in Heaven And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church...I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven..."* Now! It was to Peter and these saved disciples that Jesus said to "them" the words of Luke 9:23. The "Them" were disciples. Thus, a disciple is not necessarily someone who has forsaken all to take up his cross and follow Jesus. So, these disciples already had the truth of John 3:16 before Jesus uttered the words of Luke 9:23. Hummm! There must be different degrees of discipleship. Would Jesus give the keys to the kingdom to someone who was not yet saved? It is the cross of Christ alone that saves and it is the cross that I take up that will determine my reward for faithfulness at the Bema Seat of Christ. I must never take people's eyes off the finished work of Christ's cross and tell them that it is the cross that they choose to bear that will save their souls for eternity.

In Chapter 10 Kyle fails to distinguish between an unconditional covenant and a conditional covenant. In an unconditional covenant all of the obligations are met by the covenant giver and not by the receiver (i.e. The Abrahamic Cov.). In a conditional covenant such as God's Mosaic land contract with Israel, there were conditions on both parties. When making following Jesus to the ultimate/total degree a condition of salvation Kyle says on P. 143 that in following Jesus *a casual no-strings-attached arrangement isn't a possibility...The idea here is that you do not even acknowledge or recognize your own existence.* On P. 148: *Instead of approaching their faith with a spirit of denial that says, "What can I do for Jesus?" they have a consumer mentality that says, "What can Jesus do for me?"* When I preach the gospel to the lost it is ONLY what Jesus did for them on the cross that can provide forgiveness and eternal life. The sinner is not a "consumer" because he is not buying anything. He has nothing with which to purchase. He is in the welfare line to receive grace and mercy. A Christian who loves Jesus more and more each day will ask: "What can I do for Him?" He is motivated by Christ's love for him and his desire for eternal rewards and crowns to cast at Jesus' feet. But, if his motive is to save himself by his own self-denial, there will be no salvation for this and no reward for this.

Chapter 11 is crucial to the point of the book and is entitled *take up your cross daily—an everyday death*. Kyle believes that the slogan "Die Daily" (p. 166) is a symbol of the cross where Jesus died. Jesus carried His cross on a path called *The Via Dolorosa*. On p. 163 Kyle says: *Jesus makes it clear that the road you take when you follow him is called The Via Dolorosa.* First of all, I will never teach that Jesus saved us by the distance He carried His cross but rather by His shed blood and death upon the cross on Mt. Calvary. Someone sent me a cartoon recently showing many people carrying crosses. One man felt his cross to be too heavy and burdensome so he cut several inches off the tail end. This was much better. But then this

became too burdensome also, so he cut several more inches off. This continued. Then suddenly everyone comes to a great precipice with a deep chasm below leading to a burning hell, the other side of which was heaven and eternal life. People began laying their crosses across the precipice and using them as bridges to heaven. When the man who cut inches off the end of his tried the same, it would not reach across and he was doomed. The all-sufficient death of Christ on His cross was nowhere depicted in this cartoon. I must never present the gospel in this way. God wants me to take up my cross but it is the cross of Christ that saves me and no other cross. I must never see myself as partnering with Christ to die for my sins. Christ did this alone on His cross once-for-all. Christ has asked for my partnership in preaching the gospel to the lost world but the only thing that I contribute to His cross is my sins that he died for there. And, I didn't even contribute my sins—He just took them without asking.

Kyle is the teaching pastor of Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, KY. As I look up this church on the web I find their home page and click on “What We Believe.” Under “salvation” you will find the following statement:

We believe the Bible teaches that one receives God's grace by putting faith in Christ, repenting of sin, confessing Christ and being immersed into Christ (Romans 5:1-2 / Luke 24:45-47; Acts 3:19; 17:30; 2 Peter 3:9 / Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:9; Philippians 2:11; 1 John 4:15 / Acts 2:38, Romans 6:1-7; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12; 1 Peter 3:21

I believe that a person can be alone on a park bench and receive the grace and mercy of God, purchased by Christ's shed blood on the Cross and drop dead and wake up in heaven. Many Independent Christian Churches are part of a restoration movement that traces their roots to Alexander Campbell who argued for baptismal regeneration. In the above statement from Kyle's church we see four steps to receiving saving grace: (1) Faith in Christ; (2) turning from sin; (3) confessing with the mouth; and (4) being ritually baptized by immersion. My question is: Where does this leave all unbaptized people, infant baptized people and sprinkled people. I believe that I will see all three of these classifications of Christians in heaven if there had come a time in their lives when they trusted the death of Christ alone to provide forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Many in the Independent Christian Church movement have refined their argument to say that they do not believe in baptismal regeneration but, however, one's sins are not forgiven until ritual baptism, thus distinguishing regeneration from eternal life. I have written a book also entitled: *The Baptismal Regeneration / Believer's Baptism Debate: A Theological and Historical Overview Of The Most Contested Subject Of The Church Age*, Infinity Publishing Company <infinitypublishing.com> or www.buybooksontheweb.com or order by phone (877) **BUY BOOK**.

I am desperate to see Christians follow Jesus more closely. But in this book “Fan” is a pejorative name to label anyone as non-Christian and going to hell who is less committed than the author. How sad. But biblically, people go to hell because they are short of God's righteousness, glory, and holiness. The most spiritual Christian in the world would be totally undone if his righteousness had to come up to the righteousness of God. When I got saved, the righteousness of God was imputed to me. This is not something I did but something I was made (II Cor. 5:21). When I witness to the lost I will tell them that they are condemned already because of unbelief

and because they are sinfully beneath the glory and righteousness of Christ. I will introduce myself as a hell-deserving sinner who is not going to hell because I believe that Christ died for my sins. I will not stand before them and say I know I am committed enough, righteousness enough, humble enough, dead to self enough to be sure of my salvation but you are lost because you have fallen short of my level of commitment, righteousness, humility, and self-denial. That would make me the preacher of a gospel that could save no one. Yes! I seek to be all of these things but how can I measure when I am enough of these things to call myself a Christian. I cannot know and neither can you. But I can know when Christ suffered enough and bled enough to satisfy God's perfect justice in my behalf. When He said: *It is finished*. When I received as a free gift the price He paid in full for my salvation I passed from death unto life that moment and the very righteousness of God was imputed to me. When it is my turn to stand before God I will not give him a resume of my good works and opposition to evil spirits as the characters in Matt. 7 did. I will let the blood of Calvary and the very righteousness of God speak for me (Philippians 3:9). However, I will be ashamed if my level of commitment does not bring me reward, inheritance, and crowns to cast at Jesus' feet. I am one of the dear saved children of Jesus who does not want to be ashamed before Him at his coming. This is why I wish to continue to be a committed Christian (I Jn. 2:28).

Rat poison works because it tastes good to rats. It is mostly made of good nutritious meal and a little bit of poison. Satan wants me to take something that is good and wholesome of which every Christian should be engaged and then say: "This will save you." This is poison. There is a story of a man trying to escape an insane asylum but his window was too high from the ground. There was a closet of sheets in his room so he tied them all together into a rope. He tied one end to his bed post and lowered the rope. It was too short. If he dropped from the end of it he would break his legs. Suddenly he remembered his old lucky pajama bottoms that were thread bare. He tied one leg to his bed and the other leg to his strong rope, grabbed the rope and jumped out the window. You can guess the rest. This is what will happen if you read this book as a lost person and attempt to tie the filthy rags of your own righteousness to the perfect righteousness of God and conclude that this will save you. If you are already saved and read this book and convert to preaching this kind of a gospel, you will spend the rest of your life preaching a gospel that will save no one and there will be no reward for this at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Some people will surface read this book and positively be impacted that they need to be greater followers of Jesus without noticing that the emphasis is on entitling oneself to salvation by one's own commitment to good works and personal righteousness. Praise God. Nonetheless, I will continue to recommend books that will do this without changing the gospel message of the finished work of Christ on the cross.

Baptism is good for a Christian but it will not impart saving grace.

The Lord's Table is good for a Christian but it will not impart saving grace.

Turning from sin is good and right but one cannot turn enough for that turn to impart saving grace.

Church is good but church attendance will not impart saving grace.

Sacrificial giving is good but it will not impart saving grace.

Loving Jesus is wonderful but you can't love Him enough to entitle yourself to saving grace.

Eternals salvation in the Bible is received by grace through faith that Jesus paid 100% of the price for my forgiveness and eternal life by His solitary death on the cross of Calvary. Think on these things.