

A Gospel of Loyalty (1 & 2)

Series: A Gospel of Loyalty

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The gospel of Jesus Christ is a gospel of loyalty. There is no more powerful statement of loyalty than the loyalty of God toward man in providing the way for us to possess eternal life. The highest act of loyalty is to die for one's friends (John 15:13). What about dying for one's enemies (Romans 5:10)? Laying down my life for my child or for my wife is natural. Exchanging places with someone who hates me is another matter. This takes loyalty to an entirely new level.

Relationships within the church are rooted and grounded in our relationship with Jesus Christ and his relationship with us. We love others because he loves us (1 John 4:7ff). "Accept one another, then, *just as* Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." (Romans 15:7) It is the phrase "**just as**" that stands out. How can we do anything "*just as*" he did? "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, *just as* Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." (Ephesians 5:1-2) "Husbands love your wives, *just as* Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...." (Ephesians 5:25)

My understanding of the gospel determines the course of my life. It informs my every decision. It sets the direction and the pace for every venture. The gospel provides the power I need for salvation (Romans 1:16). Though profound in its details, it is simple enough to be expressed in a children's song. "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible

tells me so.” And though I love its simplicity, I long to know the gospel in its detail so that I can begin to “grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge” so that I “may be filled to all the fullness of God.” (Ephesians 3:18-19)

It is my opinion that we do not love one another deeply enough in the local church because we do not fully appreciate how deeply we are loved by the one who “rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.” (Colossians 1:13) I believe we are not more loyal to one another because we do not fully understand how loyal God is to us because of his Son. The invitation of the gospel is an invitation to love God and his children unconditionally and intentionally, living this out within the reality of the local church.

When the first gospel sermon was preached in Acts 2 by Peter, it had a profound and real effect on those who embraced it, obeyed it, conformed to it, and became a part of a new community of believers. This gospel’s logical conclusion was for those changed by it to band together in community to “devote themselves to the apostles’ teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayers.” (Acts 2:42) The fact that they met regularly, publicly and from house to house, is a testimony to the power of the gospel which changed their relationship with God and put them into new relationship with others who had been changed.

When the early saints banded together, they did not do so because it seemed like a good marketing decision to get the gospel out. They did not debate methods and logistics and

systems. They were drawn together because of their common acceptance by God through the gospel. This is what we must see! **Being and staying together is a logical and natural outworking of the gospel itself.** The gospel is the glue of unity. The gospel trumps any dispute we might have. The gospel transcends any disagreement that might threaten to separate us. I can no more deny you as my brother than I can deny the one who purchased us from our slavery (Romans 14:1-8). Since one slave did not buy another slave then how can a slave say his fellow slave does not belong to the Master?

In this series I want to attempt to understand the principles of loyalty found within the gospel itself and to see how these principles, when embraced, will create an inseparable bond among all those who are truly disciples of Jesus Christ. I understand there are sociological factors that divide us. I understand there are personality factors that divide us. I understand there are hermeneutical factors that separate us. The one factor that is more powerful than all of these other factors is the gospel factor.

Now I want to be very clear at the outset of this series of articles that I do not believe that everything that is called the gospel is the gospel. Just because someone references Jesus does not mean they are Christians. The gospel is not all things to all men. The gospel does not conform to us, we conform to it (Romans 6:17). The gospel is a unified message that addresses man's deepest need for eternal life and God's unique means to provide for this need. The gospel is universal and will save anyone in any land in any century. It has not changed since it was nailed down on Calvary. It was ratified by God when he raised Jesus from the dead. It is the same as the gospel that was preached

around the world by the apostles. It is the gospel that caused the church to be planted in cities large and small in the first century. It is not a brand of gospel. It is not a flavor of gospel. It is simply the gospel.

The gospel also demands one common response to it. Since we are the ones being rescued, we do not set the terms of the gospel. God does. The demand of faith, repentance, and baptism is universal. This response is interwoven in the fabric of the gospel. To try to separate faith, repentance, and baptism from the gospel would change it and make it a non-gospel. It is for us to see how this gospel speaks loyalty to us. We must not muzzle it. We must not filter it. We must let the gospel speak for itself. We must only repeat it.

“The unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” is an outgrowth of the calling we have received (Ephesians 4:1-3). It is not ours to create. It is ours to “keep” (Eph.4:3). It can only be kept as we do so in the context of the local church where we are allowed to learn to love one another as he has loved us, without division and without grumbling.

Rod Myers, August 10, 2009

A Gospel of Loyalty (2)

In about 2000 BC God made a promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:1ff) that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through his “seed.” Paul makes it clear that the “seed” which was promised was “one person, who is Christ” (Gal.3:16). “Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead--since he was about a hundred years old--and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.” (Romans 4:18-21)

The gospel of Jesus Christ is based on the Promise of God, initially made to Abraham. That Promise and its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus depended on the power and the commitment of God to mankind. Once God made the Promise, he was obligated by his own character and integrity to keep his Promise by bringing his Son into the world, ordaining his death, and facilitating his resurrection for the benefit of all those who would believe as Abraham did. God’s loyalty to his own Promise was also a demonstration of His loyalty to all mankind.

This is a God-sized Promise. Imagine from a human perspective all that seemed to work against God being able to keep his Promise. His Promise involved working with his

people, the descendants of Abraham. The Promise had both a divine and human component. The human component was lived out in 2000 years of Jewish history. To say the least, the Jewish people were not very loyal to God or to his Promise. They did not cooperate very well in his plan. They were indispensable to the plan in that Jesus had to be able to trace his lineage back to his forefather Abraham. Therefore, God's unceasing and unchanging loyalty to the Jewish race, in spite of their disloyalty to him, was based on his character.

The Hebrew writer says, "When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, 'I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.' And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised. Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf." (Heb.6:13-20a)

This explanation of God's commitment to his Promise made to Abraham is the foundation of the gospel. Without this commitment by God, we could not trust that he would do what he says he will do. Without God's "firm and secure" promise to us, we would have no basis for faith. God must be absolutely and undeniably loyal to each one

of us or our faith fails. Paul writes, “If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.” (2 Tim.2:13)

So through the wanderings in the wilderness with the Jew’s idolatry, pagan revelry, sexual immorality, and their grumbling, God remained faithful. (1 Cor.10:1-13) In this text, God’s faithfulness to provide a way out of our temptations shows that even in the midst of our sin and shame God will be near to lead us out of temptation and to deliver us from evil. He will be faithful. “He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

In the days of the Judges, when the cycle of sin, oppression, and deliverance repeated itself over and over as God raised up numerous judges (deliverers), God showed himself faithful to his Promise. In the days of the united kingdom of Israel, under Saul, David and Solomon God guided this faithless nation, and reinforced his Promise through his servant-king David. Paul preached this in Acts 13 while in Pisidian Antioch. “We tell you the good news (gospel): What God promised our fathers, he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father.’ The fact that God raised him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words: ‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.’” (13:32-34) Notice this is the “holy and sure” blessing.

In the days of the divided kingdom after Solomon’s death, God remained faithful to his Promise. When the northern kingdom of Israel became so wicked that all the Jews were threatened with extinction by their enemies, God raised up the Assyrians to bring

judgment on unfaithful Israel, but spared the southern kingdom of Judah. When Judah became so wicked that the Promise of God was in danger of being broken, God raised up the Babylonians to discipline Judah by taking them off to Babylon for 70 years, yet preserving a remnant through whom the Promise would be fulfilled. God was faithful.

God guided the Jews through the perilous times after the exile, during the days of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. He provided prophets and teachers to guide and preserve them. Then, through the long 400 years between the testaments, God worked through good and devoted men and women to keep the Jewish nation together and safe. When the calendar turned the page and became AD, God continued to watch over the fulfillment of his Promise, baby Jesus. He saved him from Herod's wrath. He watched over him through his elementary and adolescent years. He brought him to maturity, and anointed him to preach the gospel (Luke 4), protected him in the temptations of the devil in the wilderness, and guided him all the way to the cross. God was loyal to Jesus and us by not leaving Jesus in the grave. He resurrected him and ascended him back to himself, crowning him King of kings and Lord of lords.

Do you see the point? God demonstrated his loyalty through 2000 years of history (actually long before that, but I just started with Abraham). Look at what he put up with, yet he still remained loyal. Could there be any clearer example of the way we as his people are to be loyal to one another? The very integrity of the gospel rests on God's faithfulness.

Now notice Paul's reasoning in Romans 3: "What if someone did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written, 'So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge.' But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.) Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world? Someone might argue, 'If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?' Why not say--as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say--'Let us do evil that good may result'? Their condemnation is deserved." (Romans 3:3-8)

God cannot and does not make his choices to fulfill his promises based on our choices and decisions. He remains faithful to us and his will for our lives regardless of how we act. Of course, as Paul so taught, in the end this very faithfulness of God will be the very thing that qualifies him to be our judge. Since he provides us with every opportunity and blessing to be able to be saved, he will be right in his condemnation of us if we reject his grace. People will be lost because they reject God's grace, but his grace will be extended right to the very end in one form or another because God is a faithful God.

How does this apply to the church? Since it is by God's faithful grace we are saved, then "faithful grace" becomes the currency of the church. We transact our business with one another based on "faithful grace." Now this grace does not say sin is okay. "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say, 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in

this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope-the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ..." (Titus 2:11-13) The sin of division, separation, grumbling, complaining, leaving, and the like are not in line with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Grace speaks to these and says, "No."

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