

A Gospel of Loyalty (5 & 6)

Series: A Gospel of Loyalty

Rod Myers

August 15, 2021

A Gospel of Loyalty (5)

As I move into Romans 5, I notice many wonderful gospel truths that illustrate the faithfulness and loyalty of God toward us, the undeserving. What Romans 5 teaches me is that loyalty is not about equality or reciprocity. My relationship with God is more nearly like a man's relationship with a gnat, with the exception that the gnat was not made in man's image. God is all wise; I am stupid. God is all powerful; I am weak. God is all loving; I am inconsistent and incomplete in love. God is efficient in all he does; I am incompetent and sluggish in comparison. Didn't Job learn this lesson?

In Romans 5, Paul uses the words "powerless, sinners, and enemies" (5:6, 8, 10) to describe us. He identifies us with Adam through whom sin entered the world. (5:12ff) We are weak and unable to effect our own salvation. We are immoral and unholy, undeserving of a holy God. We are estranged and at war with God, yet a target of his reconciliation. We are more like our original fleshly parent in practice than we are like the Father who actually gave us existence.

Romans 5 pin-points our dire circumstances without Christ. We are devoid of justification. We are deficient in peace. We are standing on the outside, denied access to grace. We are without glory, having been defamed by sin. Our sufferings mean nothing.

We are without hope. The divine Spirit is not our internal companion. We are ungodly. No one other than Jesus would want to die for us if they could see our utter sinfulness. We are under the wrath of God, destined for hell. We are separated from God. We are under the sentence of death. We are law-breakers. We are under the same condemnation as our father Adam. We are as disobedient as Adam was. Our knowledge of the law only makes our responsibility before God for the sins we commit increase.

But Romans 5 also shows what has been introduced into our pitiful world that makes the eternal difference. We have justification through Jesus' death. We are given something to put our faith in because of Jesus' death. We have peace with God through Jesus' death. We have a hope of the glory of God through Jesus' death. Our sufferings in this present world are given meaning and purpose through Jesus' death. God's purpose is to develop our character so that we might be more like the one who died for us.

Jesus nailed the "right time" so that we could be rescued. Jesus showed us that he did not die for us because we were righteous or good, but because we were sinners in need. Jesus' death on a cross was a demonstration of God's loyal character, not a response to our deservedness. Jesus reconciled us to himself precisely because we could not reconcile ourselves to him. Jesus counteracted the entrance of sin into the world and the death that followed by giving us the gift of his own life. His grace overflowed to many just as the sin of Adam overflowed to many. Where sin once ruled, Jesus established kingdom rule in our lives. Jesus reversed the effects of disobedience through his own obedience on the cross. Jesus reversed the effects of death by providing the opportunity for eternal life.

Read the text and see if you do not find all these truths there. What does this mean for our relationship with one another? Our relationships in Christ are modeled on these truths. We do not base our dealings with one another on equality and reciprocity. Our dealings are always unequal, always unbalanced, always not fair, and always one-sided. We never get everything we think we need or want. We never respond in proportion to the grace of another. We never really deserve the kindnesses of others. We never think that every transaction is equitable. We must learn that the gospel teaches us that the way Jesus loved us, warts and all, is the same way we are to love one another.

This is why we must bring a large bag of grace to every encounter with our fellow man, including our fellow Christians. Make sure you fill that bag to the same level you want others to fill theirs as they deal with you. More importantly, make sure your bag is filled to a level comparable to the level you desire God's bag to be filled for you. Remember your bag is always too small to contain a fraction of the grace that God has for you.

Paul said in Romans 3:22b-23, "There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...." In Romans 3:19, Paul says the entire human race's standing under the law ends with every mouth being silenced and every person being held accountable to God. Do you see that? "It says, "to God." Quoting from Psalms Paul says, "There is no one righteous, not even one." (Romans 3:10) The legal charge is that all Jews and all Gentiles alike are under sin. (Romans 3:9) Again, I am not saying the gospel allows us to live as we please or to ignore the sins of our brothers and sisters, but I am arguing that the gospel constantly reminds us of the truth stated in Romans 12:3:

“For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.” Grace and faith cause us to keep our relationships in perspective.

Peter learned this truth in a dramatic way in Acts 10. God told him to go to a Gentile’s house to share the gospel. Peter did not want to go because it was a Gentile’s house. I wonder why Peter did not recall the experience in Samaria a few years earlier. (John 4) God gave him a vision of a sheet coming down from heaven filled with all manner of unclean animals. He was told to “kill and eat.” This was repulsive to Peter, but God’s message of grace was more powerful than Peter’s stomach. He did as he was told, and he witnessed the pouring out of the Spirit on Gentile sinners. Peter’s response was “So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think I could oppose God?” (Acts 10:17) What made Peter and Cornelius equal was a common “gift”; i.e., grace.

Have we really captured the essence of this gospel truth? There is a place in the body for rebuke, confrontation, correction, instruction, and even withdrawal of fellowship. (2 Tim.3:16-17; Matthew 18:15ff; 1 Cor.5) The bar of fractured fellowship or divorce, however, is set very high and has some very specific criteria. The gospel of grace demands extraordinary efforts to maintain the unity created by the gospel. Remember, unity is created by grace, not by law and not by us. We maintain it. We keep it up. I fear we go to more effort to maintain our physical houses than we do the church of God (I mean the church as our relationships in Christ. It seems we do not care as much about

the physical structures we share, bought with the Lord's money). In Ephesians 2-3 Paul describes our unity in Christ in rich terms. Take a moment to read it. Not only is this God's plan from the beginning, manifesting his great wisdom, but it was secured by the death of his own Son. Jesus died to please his Father who wanted all men to be one in Christ, to live together in peace, and to demonstrate to the world through our diverse fellowship that God's love is the most powerful force in the universe.

This is what God wants for us more than anything else in the entire world. Yet we act as if we are too good to dwell together, trashing God's dream for his people. How can we do that? Who do we think we are? "I can't put up with this or that!" we say. We should just be happy that God puts up with us! God must be repulsed that we care so little for the unity that he fought the very demons and devils of hell to give us.

Brother Marshall Keeble, beloved black preacher of the last century, would talk about us being "mud-balls." He decried the fact that we often think we are too good to embrace others. We parcel out forgiveness sparingly and grudgingly. We run, leave, remove ourselves, talk about, give up on, ignore, and write off others in the name of Jesus. Such is not the language and currency of grace through faith.

The gospel teaches us that we all began in Christ at the same place: helpless sinners and enemies. We all come into Christ the same way: through the gift. We are all sustained in Christ the same way: through his constant love. If this is true, then how then shall we live together in marriage and in the local church?

Rod Myers August 29, 2009

A Gospel of Loyalty (6)

The uniting experience of the gospel is not *placing membership* with a local church. The uniting experience of the gospel is not volunteering for the nursery. The uniting experience of the gospel is not being overseen by a common eldership. The uniting experience of the gospel is not that we eat fellowship meals together. Listen to Paul in Romans 6.

Look at the times in Romans 6 that Paul uses words that speak to the idea of being united. In verse 5 he speaks of us being “united with him like this in his death” and being “united with him in his resurrection.” In verse 8 he talks of our dying with and living with Christ. In verse 13 the parts of our bodies are commonly offered to him as instruments of righteousness. In verses 16-22 Paul speaks of a common slavery to a common master; i.e., his righteousness. The unifying principle of the Gospel is Jesus. We bear no relationship to one another without first bearing a relationship to Jesus. The reason Paul could say in Romans 12:5 “so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” is because there is an “in Christ” and he has a “body.”

The baptism of Romans 6 is the connection point. We were baptized “into Christ.” (Romans 6:3) The new life that courses through each Christians’ spiritual veins is the

same. (Romans 6:4) The old person was crucified. (Romans 6:6) Paul put it this way in Colossians 3:3: “For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.” Take note that every Christian who has “died” shares in this new life that is hidden with Christ in God. That is why Paul could say in the next verse, “When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” The common life in Christ qualifies each of us to share in a common experience of glory when Christ appears.

This future glory that comes from a common life is to be experienced together not merely individually. “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.” (Romans 8:18-19) All God’s sons will be revealed at the same time. The common life we share in Christ, traced back to our day of baptism, qualifies us to participate in this glory that is coming.

Christ, like the hub of a wheel, is our connecting point. We only have relationship with one another because we are in Him. 1 John 1:1-4 makes it clear that fellowship with one another is dependent on our fellowship being with the Father and the Son. What had to happen for us to be connected to Him? From our side it was “dying to sin.” (Rom.6:2) But “dying to sin” is not possible for someone who is “dead in sin” (Eph.2:1) unless someone dies **for** our sins. Each of us was “dead in sin.” We were powerless to bring about our own resurrection. We were like spiritual zombies, the living dead. (1 Tim.5:6) Sin had us stuck in our zombieness. Christ touched each of our lives and brought about resurrection. “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions...” (Eph.2:4-5)

Sin enslaved us, making another our master. Before Christ, we all were slaves together of a common master, sin. (Romans 6:16) We each chose this slavery when we chose to obey sin. (Romans 6:16) In this we were linked together. We were chained together in sin. We all lived under a common fear of death. (Romans 6:16) We now are ashamed of our choices. (Romans 6:21) How could we have sold ourselves into slavery? How could we have decided to ignore the One who loves us, and instead indulge in a life of “impurity and ever-increasing wickedness?” (Romans 6:19) That is what we did.

Praise be to God we were rescued from this slavery. We were bought at a price. (1 Corinthians 6:20) Jesus rode onto the plantation bearing our Emancipation Proclamation, still dripping with his own blood, and set us free. And this freedom, of which we were not accustomed, had to be monitored so that we did not use it as an excuse to remain in slavery. (Romans 6:1-2) We must not “continue in sin so that grace may abound.” Why not? Because we died to it! Just as Moses led Israel out of Egypt, so God now leads his people through baptism out of bondage. (1 Corinthians 10:1ff) We are not led one by one. We are led together as God’s people. “As God has said: ‘I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.’” (2 Corinthians 6:16)

So then why do we sometimes act so independently? We often act as though Jesus’ sacrifice is only for “me.” Have we emphasized so much God’s love for the individual that we have missed his love for the church? Paul wrote, “Husbands love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her....” (Ephesians 5:25) Paul

reminded the Ephesian elders to “be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” (Acts 20:28) The church is blood bought. Contextually, here in Acts 20:28, Paul’s point is that the Ephesian church is blood bought, so shepherds treat and protect her as precious to the Lord.

Paul also teaches in Romans 6:17 that when each of us obeyed the gospel, the form of teaching (the death, burial and resurrection), we were entrusted to it. It is not just that it was entrusted to us (1 Corinthians 4:1ff), we were entrusted to the gospel. When we were slaves to sin, we were under the custody of sin. Now that we have been united to Christ in his death, burial and resurrection, we “offer ourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life.” (Romans 6:13) We are now under the mastery of grace. (Romans 6:14) This is our common mastery. When under the mastery of sin, we may have looked out for ourselves, took advantage of our brother, sold others out, ignored the needs of others, did what we needed to do to survive; but now in Christ we are “devoted to one another in brotherly love.” (Romans 12:10) We have no more “slave debt” but “the continuing debt to love one another.” (Romans 13:8)

How are we to understand this new life in Christ? What is expected of us? Do we even know how we are to live and the extent to which we must be bound together by grace? The divisions, the leavings, the grumbling, the complaining and the unwillingness to struggle through the issues of this new life together is not in line with the gospel. These are not in line with the truths and principles of the gospel because the Lord calls these actions sin, and sin is not to be our master. In the local body and in marriage, we must live responsibly with one another; and we must grow in this responsible living as we

teach, encourage and admonish one another in Christ. We must also bathe this process in the same grace we ourselves were bathed in when we were united with the Holy and Righteous Lord of the Universe.

Let me offer one test of the glue of fellowship: Since we were united with Christ in baptism as Romans 6 teaches, then how strong do you want this glue to be? At what point do you want him to divorce you? At what point do you want him to leave you? At what point do you want him to grumble against you? At what point do you want him to complain to his Father about you? At what point do you want him to refuse to struggle with you through the issues of our new life with him? At what point do you want him to sever the ties that bound you to him at our baptism?

Rod Myers

September 7, 2009