

A Gospel of Loyalty (7 & 8)

Series: A Gospel of Loyalty

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A Gospel of Loyalty (7)

In Romans 7 we continue to see the gospel presented against the backdrop of loyalty. Right out of the box, Paul gives us a primer on marriage. “By law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive....” (Romans 7:2) Paul is using the marriage law to illustrate the old relationship of law versus our new relationship with God through Jesus. In Jesus’ death he accomplished our release from the law, the need we feel to try to justify ourselves through keeping law. Before we could be released from this “bridge to nowhere,” just like in marriage, someone had to die.

When Jesus died, and we died with him (Romans 6:3-5), we were released from our marriage to a system of law, and free to marry another, Jesus. We now “belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.” (Romans 7:4) Just as in marriage, having a relationship with two people at the same time, one your spouse and one who is not, constitutes adultery; so in Christ we could not have a new marriage with Christ until we were released from the old relationship to the law.

Loyalty to someone new means severing loyalty to someone old. We cannot say, “I do not want to live under law anymore” and just walk away. A way had to be provided for

this to happen. Jesus had to arrange for our release through his death. Death severs us from the old relationship. Praise God that we are now under grace and not under law (Romans 6:14)!

This points out a very important principle of the gospel. In order for us to change a relationship, whether in marriage or in Christ, there has to be some means that makes that possible. The question is who establishes the means? Man or God? When God joins two people together in marriage (Matt.19:6), that marriage must remain intact until God releases the parties from the contract. It is not for man to separate. Only God can define the means by which men can be released from their obligation to one another. Marriage is a three-way contract.

In Christ we see a similar principle at work. God joins us first together to himself (Romans 5:10-11) and then with all others who are in Christ. God controls the relationships, not us. We remain in relationship with him until he releases us (Romans 1:24, 26, 28; Heb.10:26ff). Who in their right mind would want to be released from their relationship with God? God also is the only one who can release us from our relationship with one another in Christ. We are the building being “joined together” by God (Eph.2:21) and the body being “joined and held together” (Eph.4:16) by him. If it is Jesus who is building his church (Matt.16:18), then where do we get the authority to do anything other than to cooperate with him in edifying; i.e., building up one another?

This “new way of the Spirit” versus the “old way of the written code” (Romans 7:6) is characterized by the “unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” (Eph.4:3) Paul will

say more on this in Romans 8. The Spirit is about binding us together, not about pulling us apart. It was the law that divided people, creating a wall of hostility that Jesus tore down. (Eph.2:14ff). The Spirit is about life, the law was about death. (Romans 7:5) Paul wrote the second part of this chapter to show that, when we attempt to live in this new relationship with Christ in the same way we lived in the old relationship with the law, we will be very miserable.

It would be good to read this section (Romans 7:7-25) before I go on. Are you done? Let's see if we can capture the essence of what Paul is saying. For the purposes of this article on loyalty, there is only one aspect I want to focus on in this section: When one tries to maintain a relationship with God through keeping of law one is involved in a miserable, self-defeating and wretched cycle that creates despair and constant division within the heart. We try to be good, but sin is right there with us. We try to be obedient, but we fail. We know what is right, but we do not always do all we know to do. "In my inner being I delight in God's law" (Romans 7:22); but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members." (Romans 7:22-23) This cycle leads to wretchedness.

Notice clearly that the conflict this person has in his mind and heart is manifested in the members of his body. Stay with me here. Jesus is the Head of the body of which we are members. (Romans 12:4, 5; 1 Cor.12; Eph.4:11ff) When the Head is truly directing the body, then there can be no conflict between the members of the body. They work in perfect harmony with one another and carry out the will of the Head. Can you imagine

Jesus saying, “What a wretched man I am!” because his members sin? Can you imagine Jesus severing his arm or leg every time one of them messes up? No, because the Head does not merely dispense instructions to be obeyed but also the grace to compensate for the mistakes and sins of the body.

In the body of Christ, our relationship to each other is member to member. You and I are not the Head. We are equally members together in one body. So how do we react when a fellow member messes up? Does the left arm cut off the right arm? Does the ear sever the eye? It is my opinion that, just as Paul describes the conflict within his own life when he cannot carry out the law, the same phenomenon exists within local churches. If we are law-based, then when we observe others within the church not being obedient to the law (whatever the rules may be), then we will pull away. Granted, we are selective as to what will cause us to pull away, but pull away we shall.

If I believe the law says “don’t clap in church” and you clap, then I have a reason to be in conflict and have a basis to pull away from the clapper. The possibilities are endless as to why I am allowed to grumble, complain, leave, and be upset. It all depends on what my “law” includes. However, if the church is grace-based, then disagreements and conflicts are merely opportunities to work together to discover God’s will.

If ever we needed to be rescued from this body of death by Jesus, it is now! (Romans 7:24-25) Grace is not an excuse to accept sin, but it does release me from the vicious cycle of trying to be justified by law and of trying to maintain unity with my brothers and sisters on the basis of law-keeping.

The fault is not in the law of God. It is good. The fault is our making it our Savior and Lord. We have one Lord, one Head, and one Savior. He, through his Spirit, is the only one who can maintain our unity. When unity fails you can be sure it is because someone is not cooperating with Jesus and the Spirit.

Loyalty to one another in the local body should express the truths we have seen from Romans 7. The gospel is not merely meant to be understood, it is meant to be lived out in practical ways so that the world may know that we are his disciples.

Rod Myers

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A Gospel of Loyalty (8)

In Romans 8, could there be any clearer statement of common loyalty than the possession of the Spirit of Christ? This “new way of the Spirit” (Romans 7:6) operates under the “law of the Spirit of life.” (Romans 8:2) This is a new ballgame. It is different than “the old way of the written code” (Romans 7:6) that operates under the “law of sin and death.” (Romans 8:2) These are two very different and contradictory principles. Marriage and the local church have as their operating system one of these two principles. Oh for eyes to see under which one we live!

The system of the Spirit begins with “no condemnation.” (Romans 8:1) It is about freedom. (Romans 8:2) It is about power. (Romans 8:3) It is about righteousness. (Romans 8:4) Each and every one of these should characterize our marriages and local churches. The opposite is condemnation, fear, weakness, and unrighteousness. Christ came to eradicate all of these from our lives.

We believe that when we were baptized into Christ, we received the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38) Those in Christ have the Spirit in two senses. First, we have him individually within our body, his personal temple. (1 Cor.6:16) We also possess the Spirit in Christ’s corporate body, the church, his temple. (1 Cor.3:16; Eph.2:21, 22) The Spirit binds us together. He operates within each of us for the common good. He promotes loyalty to the Father and loyalty to one another. In a sense, in a Christian marriage and

in a local church, we all share a common heart. Our hearts through his Spirit beat together in unity and purpose.

However, as Romans 8 makes us aware, there is another force at work within and among us. That force is called *the flesh*. It is what the NIV calls *the sinful nature*. Even in Christ we have a choice as to which nature we will follow. These two natures correspond to the two ways I mentioned in paragraph one. They are contradictory. Notice carefully in our text the types of words used to describe this fleshly side of ourselves. The flesh looks like death and hostility. The flesh is not submissive to God, does not try to please God and does not belong to God. Notice in contrast the words that describe the Spirit-directed person. The Spirit causes us to possess life and peace, a submissive attitude, a desire to please and a sense of belonging. Which kind of church do you want to live in, a church of flesh or a church of Spirit? Which kind of marriage do you want to live in, a marriage of flesh or one of Spirit?

When Paul wrote to the church in Corinth with all its division he called these Christians *carnal* and said they were acting like children. (1 Cor.3:1ff) Before this, in 1 Cor.2:12, Paul writes, “We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.” Those who are driven by the flesh or their carnal nature seek to take what God is not giving or to hold on to what God has not given. The church is constantly receiving from God gifts, insights, and nutrition for growth. The Spirit is given to help each of us understand these wonderful gifts. However, in many churches and marriages we are very busy pressing the fleshly agenda. We are focused on what **I** want, instead of on what he is giving me. Instead of being

satisfied and content with what God is providing we are focused on what we think He or others should provide.

There should not be any power plays in our churches and in our marriages, because God has already determined that we are all to be controlled by the Spirit. (Romans 8:9) We should have our minds set on what the Spirit desires (Romans 8:5). Our desires are of little importance in the church and in marriage. What matters is what the Spirit desires. Since we were not smart enough nor powerful enough to save ourselves (1 Cor.1:18ff), then how do we know what we need? Even if we did, we could not supply that need. (Romans 7:13ff) When each of us individually and collectively are diligently seeking the will of the Father and the Spirit's desire, maintaining an attitude of submissiveness toward one another and the Spirit, then we will find ourselves moved along on the winds of the Spirit to where He desires to take us.

The Spirit of Christ establishes our belonging in Christ. (Romans 8:9) Paul writes in Ephesians 1:13-14, "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit, guaranteeing our inheritance, until the redemption of those who are God's possession-to the praise of his glory." Our credentials of sonship are both established by God and sustained by God through his Spirit. Human credentials matter little in the kingdom of God. One part of the body has no right in passing judgment on another part of the body as to "belonging." (1 Cor.12:14ff) Who belongs is God's business. This is why, from a human standpoint, we must be sure we have the Spirit of Christ because "if anyone does not have the Spirit of

Christ, he does not belong to Christ.” (Romans 8:9) Let us face it: this is a point of contention among the people of God.

John says “There are three that testify: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and the three are in agreement.” (1 John 5:7-8) It is my belief that, when these three come together as a reality in a person’s life, then that person belongs to Christ. The water, I believe, is baptism, the place we identify with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. (Romans 6:1ff) The blood, I believe, is Christ’s *once-for-all* death around A.D. 33. Both my baptism and his death are fixed in time and space. They are historical. I can in confidence affirm that I believe in the gospel of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus and what that means. I can also affirm that I put my faith in his sacrifice when I was baptized. At that time the Spirit came into my heart and confirms that I am a child of God. (Romans 8:16)

Why is this important in a discussion on loyalty in marriage and the local church? It is important because I am not controlling this. God creates and sustains us in Christ. God provides a way for us to identify who belongs and who does not belong; i.e., through the Spirit, the water, and the blood. Once we recognize one another in this way, then we know we have all that is necessary for life and godliness. (2 Peter 1:3ff) We simply work his program with one another, and let Jesus be Head of the church and our marriage.

One more point before we end this article. In Romans 8:10, Paul says our bodies are dead because of sin, yet our spirits are alive because of righteousness. Once we are in Christ, we exist on two levels. There is the earthly level and the spiritual level. In

Ephesians, Paul calls this second level *the heavenlies* or *the heavenly realms*. (Eph.1:3; 1:20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12) Much occurs on the first level in our daily lives that needs transformation. This is why Paul wrote in Romans 12:1-2, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is-his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

What’s the point? Our relationships with one another in Christ are lived out on two levels at all times. On the spiritual level we have the common experience of the perfection we have in Christ because of the death of his Son. We experience this in our spirit. We are righteous. On the human level we are far from perfect or perfected. We are in transformation. So on what level will our relationship with one another be sustained? The heavenly level is a gift. He alone can seat us there. The human level is the level of performance. It corresponds to works and law. Is it important? Yes, because we want to live lives pleasing and sacrificial. Our ability to do that, however, is not the glue of the kingdom. We are not called to live in the deadness of the body; we are called to live in the aliveness of the Spirit.

If the church is going to be unified and if marriages are going to be unified, it will be because we are focused on our common gift from God, who makes us who we are, instead of on our day-to-day behaviors that are in process. It is my opinion, and I think I can prove it in Scripture, that the more we focus on the heavenlies, the more God’s will on earth will be done as it is in heaven and the more mature we will behave toward one

another. There will be less conflict and more oneness. And, in all of this, God will be glorified. Rod Myers September 29, 2009