

# A Gospel of Loyalty (9 & 10)

Series: A Gospel of Loyalty

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## A Gospel of Loyalty (9)

Romans chapter 8 is full of loyalty teachings. In the last article we focused on the unifying work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of every believer. When we are baptized into Christ, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This Spirit dwells in us individually as Christians and in the body of Christ corporately. The individual Christian is a microcosm of the universal body of Christ, expressed most clearly in the local body of Christ.

The latter part of Romans chapter 8 continues to provide us with insight into the mind of God relative to loyalty that binds the parts of the body together. In my Bible the two concluding sections are titled **Future Glory** and **More Than Conquerors**. When you read those two headings, how do you understand them? Is Paul speaking merely of MY future glory and ME being more than a conqueror? Or does Paul have in mind our corporate glory and our corporate conquest? Paul's point is not simply that I share in God's glory or that I win, but that, together with you and other believers, we are glorified and we win. When an army or marine platoon goes into battle, each soldier must leave his personal quest for glory and victory at the door. The platoon wins together and is glorified together. Certainly there may be a time when one soldier is singled out and

given a special medal, but on the battlefield the soldiers are not in competition with one another to see who gets the most glory.

Look closer in the text of Romans 8. The physical creation is waiting for “*the sons of God to be revealed.*” (Romans 8:19) This creation will be “brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.” (Romans 8:21) Certainly there is a personal component to this. It will be our individual bodies that will be redeemed. (Romans 8:23) It is the sacrificial nature of the members of the body of Christ to want to see all the other members of the body redeemed as well. Just as the parts of my body desire for all the other parts of my body to be redeemed together (without an eye being plucked out or a hand cut off, Matt.18:7ff), so should every part of the body of Christ desire that the entire body of Christ be redeemed together. Jesus prayed in John 17:12, “While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.” Certainly glory will be more glorious when we look around and see those in our physical families and local churches are there with us.

The hope that is held out in the teachings of this section is a common hope. In the midst of differences that divide and cause people to leave one another, where is hope? And what is the basis for our hope? We hope because of what Jesus did for us. “For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for that we do not have, we wait for it patiently.” (Romans 8:24-25) The hope that binds us together is not hope in one another. It is hope in God and his plans for us. When we *lose hope* and separate, we are setting a disturbing

precedent. To what degree do we want others to lose hope in us for our failures? More importantly, to what extent do we want God to lose hope in us for our failures? The apostles who stood together on the Mount of Olives and watched Jesus ascend into the heavens stood there as flawed and dysfunctional individuals. They also stood there in a common hope that one day Jesus would return to take them, all of them, home to live together with Him.

It is a serious thing to say about a brother or sister that you have lost hope that they will ever change! Our common hope gives us the ability in our love for others to “hope all things.” (1 Cor.13:7) Because God does not lose hope in us, we do not lose hope in one another. We prove this by continuing to stand side by side cheering our brothers and sisters on to glory. This hope is made more sure because we all rely on the Spirit of Christ to intercede for us in our weakness even when we do not know what to ask.

(Rom.8:26) On whom do we rely when we have an unmet need? Do we blame our fellow Christians or our spouse for the lack we have? Do we expect the Spirit to know what we need and to appeal to the Father on our behalf? Do we leave our local church or our spouse in hope that someone else will meet that need? The hope we have for “something different” than what we have will not be met by a change of scenery but through the Spirit who searches and knows our hearts, knows the will of God, and can connect the two. (Rom.8:27)

This work of God for our good is dependent on two things if it is to be realized in our lives; i.e., our personal love for God and our conformity to the purposes of God.

(Rom.8:28) I cannot substantiate my love for God unless I love my brother. (1 John

4:20,21) True love for God is proven by the way I treat those to whom God has joined me, my family and my church. This is why God hates division and separation or divorce. (Prov.6:16-19; Malachi 2:16) This love is active, unconditional, and enduring. It is a devotion and honor. (Rom.12:10) It does no harm to one's brother. (Rom.13:10) I can attest that those who leave their spouses and their local churches violate these principles of love and do great harm.

If we expect that God will be at work in everything for our good, we should keep our expectations within the purpose of God. This purpose is to bring everything under the headship of Christ. (Eph.1:9-10) This headship is over the church and should be mirrored in a husband's headship over this wife. (Eph.1:22,23; Eph.5:22ff) What follows in Romans 8:29-30 is the grand scheme of redemption that was predestined to include conforming to the image of His Son "that He might be the firstborn among many brothers." This has important significance for our relationships in Christ. We enter a sphere where Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers. (Heb.2:11) The implication is that, if Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers, then how could we possibly be ashamed to call one another brothers? Jesus came to identify with flesh and blood beings. (Heb.2:14) He experienced temptation so he could help those who are tempted. (Heb.2:18) We too as members one of another have an obligation to encourage one another daily so we will not be deceived. (Heb.3:13) Too often we are the source of the temptation, when in marriage and the local church, we cause each other pain and discouragement. The very purposes of God are wrapped up within our families and our local churches. God has historically carried out his purposes within these two spheres.

He worked through the family of Abraham and David. He worked through the clans of the Jews. Today he works for our good within our local churches and our marriages.

All of this leads to victory! Victory is not individual, but corporate. Notice the plural references in Romans 8:31ff. Jesus was given up “for us all” by grace we receive all things. The trials of life are meant to be faced in community, a people with whom we do life. The list of things we all come up against are to be faced by families and local churches. We weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice.

(Rom.12:15) We share in the sufferings of others and address the needs in very specific ways as they did in the Jerusalem congregation. (Acts 6:1ff) Those things that need conquering in our lives are best fought with brothers and sisters in Christ. This is battle language. The last thing anyone needs in a battle is a deserter. To be under fire and to have a fellow soldier decide to fight somewhere else at a time when most needed, could be fatal.

The heart of the gospel is a heart of local community. God binds people together in marriage and in local churches for the purpose of providing the perfect environments in which we can grow both individually and corporately, and through which we can most effectively accomplish God’s will on this earth. We have a witness to the world that must be clear. Is our gospel powerful enough to be lived out in successful marriages and in committed local churches? Or will the world see that we are no better than they are? What will it be?

In Galatians 2 Paul writes of his experience with Peter who led a division between the Jews and the Gentiles by moving to another table so he would not be seen eating with a Gentile. When Paul saw this he was enraged. “When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, ‘You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew.’” (Gal.2:14) We must act in line with the truth of the gospel or both we and the gospel will be destroyed.

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Closing comments:

Churches and marriages could be so much more faithful if we were truly living by the gospel. The world is looking for Christians who have been changed by the gospel before they will entrust themselves to it. The persistent division within the body of Christ is more a reflection of flesh instead of Spirit. The very loose bonds among Christians within the local church is a sign of a weak understanding of the nature of the gospel. The unwillingness to forgive 70 x 7, to walk the extra mile, to turn the other cheek, to bear one another's burdens, to humble ourselves, to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and to lay down our lives for our friends is evidence that we do not understand the gospel. Our insistence that God overlook our ignorance, sin, mistakes, and failures while we will not do the same for our brothers and sisters in Christ is the height of inconsistency and a denial of the teachings of Christ. Faithfulness and loyalty in Christ cuts in all directions and touches every relationship. We have developed a case law of reasons why we cannot live together in harmony and peace and

why we believe that God actually wants us to divide and leave and dismiss and ignore others for whom Christ died. We often add that we have prayed about the matter and that makes disloyalty sanctified. These clever excuses barely cover our fleshly nature. Everyone can see through them, but most continue to wear them as if they are fully clothed in the rationale to stop going to a church and stop living with a spouse. By doing so we diminish the Biblical reasons for withdrawal of fellowship and legitimate divorce. When any reason will do, then any reason we choose is cheap. We should reserve separation for the most extreme cases of unrepentant sin in the same way God reserves separation from us eternally for the gross sin of unbelief and unrepentance. Our casual attendance in our assemblies is another symptom of subtle disloyalty. Our failure to financially support the obligations of the local church is another sign of disloyalty. Our sporadic service within the church is another way of saying we are not that committed to the success of the local Body of Christ.

When will we take seriously God's desire for radical unity? The things we often divide over are obscure theological positions or merely traditional opinions. We elevate these "bones of contention" to a level of seriousness they do not deserve. We make a mountain out of a mole hill. The true mountain is called Unity. It is a mountain worth climbing and worth holding in the name of Christ. We are to "make every effort" to maintain it. We are to sacrifice to preserve it. We are to prize it as highly as grace and truth. Jesus died for it. It was central to His plan of redemption, to bring all men together under one head, even Christ. We show what we value by what we invest in. We have proven by our actions that we value easy and self-serving solutions instead of the unity of the Spirit. Paul taught us that our true enemy is unseen, not the flesh and blood Christians who sit with us in the assembly. We have become much more skilled in battling one another

than in battling the Adversary, the devil. Surely he must laugh with glee over our petty squabbles. Every time someone walks away from their local congregation either to stay home or join with a church down the street the devil chalks up another win, and the world notes that church does not work. Every time a Christian divorces without Biblical cause, the demons rejoice that the gospel is not powerful enough to keep them together. Look at the signals we are sending. Paul told us in Eph.3:10 that the church was to be a sign of the wisdom of God to the forces of evil. Our division casts contempt on the wisdom of God. Our disloyalty makes God look stupid.

Perhaps we should end this series with a reading of John 17 lest we forget the heart of Jesus on this matter. He alone can tell us what he desires for his people.

John 17 After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. 2 For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. 3 Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. 4 I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. 5 And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

Jesus Prays for His Disciples

6 “I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. 8 For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. 9 I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. 10 All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory



has come to me through them. 11 I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. 12 While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled. 13 “I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. 14 I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. 15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. 17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. 19 For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

#### Jesus Prays for All Believers

20 “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— 23 I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. 24 “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. 25 “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. 26 I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”