

A Gospel of Loyalty (3 & 4)

Series: A Gospel of Loyalty

Rod Myers

August 8, 2021

A Gospel of Loyalty (3)

Loyalty to one another begins with loyalty to God and insures loyalty to self. Sin cuts three ways. Sin is primarily an offense against God. David wrote, “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.” (Psa.51:4) Sin is also an offense to others, either directly or indirectly. In David’s case, he sinned against his wives and children, Bathsheba and Uriah, and the nation of Israel. And, sin is also against the one who sins. Didn’t Paul teach us this? (1 Cor.6:18) We hurt ourselves when we sin. Haven’t you heard, “To thy own self be true?” The violation of our conscience, our values, and our character is a self-sin.

The harmony and balance of a marriage, a family, a church, or a nation depends on the commitment of the participants to sin less and to cover whatever sins exist with love and forgiveness, as each one seeks to accept the forgiveness of God. When spouses are unconcerned with their sin, and let it loose to infect the relationship, chaos, confusion, and division results. When family members act as if they do not care about how their actions affect others, doing what is right in their own eyes, then the family is filled with chaos, confusion, and division. When members of the local body of Christ allow even

private sins to go unchecked the entire body is weakened. One cannot have an infection in their big toe without it eventually causing the entire body to become septic (as in septic tank).

The story of Achan in Joshua 7 makes the point well. At the battle of Jericho, described in Joshua 6, the people were instructed not to touch the “devoted things,” the silver, the gold and the articles of bronze and iron. (6:19) The Lord declared that destruction would come on the Israelites if these items were taken for their personal use. It is my belief that God’s intent was for this wealth to be retained for the community so that it could be used for the community’s good. However, during the attack of Jericho, Achan disobeyed God by taking a beautiful robe, some silver, and some gold, burying them in the ground. This act caused the Israelites to be defeated in the next battle, the battle of Ai.

There was “sin in the camp.” Achan was found out. He confessed. He and his family were destroyed at the valley of Achor (trouble) as God promised. The disruption of harmony, peace, and victory for God’s people was occasioned by one man among them. Could there have been any stronger message to these people that sin matters, even private sin matters?

Sin is disloyalty to God, others, and one’s self. Sin is unfaithfulness. The children of Israel in the wilderness, wandered and died over a forty year period because of their “unfaithfulness.” (Num.14:33) The southern kingdom of Judah was taken captive to Babylon because of “unfaithfulness.” (1 Chron.9:1) Ezra describes the Israelites taking foreign wives after the exile as “unfaithfulness.” (Ezra 9:2,4) Listen to Daniel’s prayer:

“Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame--the men of Judah and people of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you.” (Daniel 9:7) Daniel continued to plead with God for forgiveness. Jeremiah compares Judah’s unfaithfulness as a woman’s unfaithfulness to her husband. (Jer.3:20)

Faithfulness is a characteristic of God. Moses writes, “Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands.” (Deut.7:9) God is sinless precisely because he is absolutely faithful. He never betrays. He never lies. He is totally consistent. He can be counted on. He always acts in our best interest. Faithfulness prevents God from saying “Yes” and “No” in Christ. All his promises are “Yes” in Christ. (2 Cor.1:18ff)

However, the nature of our sin is “Yes” and “No.” We say one thing and do something else. We say we love God, will serve God, and then fail. We make commitments to one another and then fail. This is why Jesus admonished us to let our “yes’ be ‘yes’ and our ‘no’ be ‘no.’” (Matt.5:37) James calls it “double-mindedness.” (Jas.1:7) Jesus calls it hypocrisy. (Matt.23) Sin is when we act contrary to truth. Sin is transgression or lawlessness. (1 John 3:4) Sin is knowing to do good and not doing it. (Jas.4:17)

God used betrayal and disloyalty as the means by which loyalty could be established.

Slide 8 Psalm 41:9, says “Even my close friend, who I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.” When Jesus predicted his betrayal by Judas he

quoted this verse. (John 13:18) God used Judas' betrayal to establish his covenant of loyalty to his people through the death of Jesus on a cross. But, it was not merely the unfaithfulness and disloyalty of Judas that caused Jesus' death. We too kissed the cheek of Jesus sending him to his death! It was MY DISLOYALTY that sent Jesus to the cross. Slide 9 "Many a man claims to have unfailing love, but a faithful man who can find?" (Prov.20:6) Paul declared in quoting the OT, "All have turned away..." (Romans 3:12)

The shame of disloyalty can only be taken away by a supreme act of loyalty that is absolutely undeserved. The gospel declares this. The gospel embodies this. The gospel provides the only means of reconnecting what is broken when one person is unfaithful to another. Spiritual adultery has a cure. We are made right with God and with one another through his faithfulness. Hebrews 3:6 says that Jesus is a faithful son in God's house. He is the only faithful son. But, by his faithfulness we can be called "faithful brothers." (Col.1:2)

The gospel makes the unfaithful faithful. This is our new identity in Christ. We are called to be faithful. However, just like all the words that describe our true identity in Christ, this has to be lived out in the day-to-day practice of life. Where is this tested? Surely it is tested in our marriages, our families, and in our churches. Christians are struggling today in all three areas. A lifetime of loyalty seems impossible for most. Relationships come and go. This is not how it is to be. The revolving door of relationships is made in hell, not heaven.

The apostle Paul learned the hard way what Jesus meant in John 16:1-3: "All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me." I wonder if Paul reflected on these words in the course of his life. Paul quotes Jesus' words to him as he neared Damascus on what he thought to be a mission for God. "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads." (Acts 26:14) Paul believed himself to be completely and zealously loyal to God. (Phil.3:4bff) He had great confidence in this. Yet, he learned that his so-called loyalty was really disloyalty to the one who died for him. He was destroying his own brothers and sisters in Christ in the name of God!

This shows the deceptive nature of sin. (Heb.3:13) We can believe we are doing what God wants and actually be doing the opposite How many times have I heard someone argue that God wanted them to divorce their spouse or to leave their church? We find ways to believe it is true. I know the passage that says, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." (Romans 12:18) I know the passage in 1 Corinthians 7:15 about the unbeliever who will not live with the believer and departs. We let them go.

I also know the God of Hosea. This is the God who commanded Hosea to marry Gomer, a woman of prostitution. This is the God who commanded Hosea to pursue her after she had spent herself in prostitution and was sold into slavery. This is the God who commanded Hosea to buy his wife out of slavery, court her and pledge his love in

marriage to her again. This is the God who would not cast his adulterous wife, Israel, out. Are we not thankful we serve such a wonderful God who does not allow our sin to so offend him that he will not do whatever it takes to bring us to himself, even by the death of his totally loyal Son on a cross?

Going the first, second, and third mile of the way to preserve our unity and to demonstrate to the world the unfailing love of God is the mission of God's people. How different would the world be if they had a living demonstration of loyalty in Christian homes and in our Christian churches? Sin has been dealt with. God has atoned for disloyalty so we could live in peace with one another. Praise God.

Rod Myers

August 17, 2009

A Gospel of Loyalty (4)

I believe the two key words of the gospel are *Grace* and *Faith*. They correspond to one another. God provides the grace so we can respond in faith. Grace promotes a faithful response. The goodness and mercy of God creates a climate in which we can be faithful. Imagine another word instead of grace. Imagine the word *Law*.

The gospel can only be understood properly when we properly understand the nature of law. Slide 15 “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known...” (Romans 3:21) Paul asks a critical question in Galatians 3:2, “I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?” What difference did it make? In the next verse he equates the law with human effort. The contrast could not be more striking. It is either by divine effort or human effort we are saved. Which will it be? Though the law is holy, righteous and good (Romans 7:12), it is not designed by God to save us. His good law enables us to recognize the utter sinfulness of sin. (Romans 7:13)

The great fault of the Jews was to think they held a special relationship to God because he gave them the law by Moses. (Romans 2:17ff) The law merely showed their inconsistency. Reread the scathing denunciation of the Jewish leaders by Jesus in Matthew 23. Such preaching will cause us all to flee justification by law and long for a gospel of grace. Jewish leaders established their loyalty to one another based on their perception of who was keeping the law more or less on par with them. They measured themselves by themselves. They maintained their salvation club membership based on a check list of do's and don'ts. Those outside this list were deemed "sinners," people not to be associated with. This is why Jesus' practice of socializing with sinners was not acceptable to the Jewish leaders.

The story of Luke 7 is only one among many showing Jesus being drawn to sinners who knew they were sinners, those convicted by the law. "A woman who had lived a sinful life" wet his feet with tears, wiped them with her hair, and emptied a box of perfume on them. Simon, the law-keeping Pharisee, with the smell of sweet perfume in his nostrils, started talking to himself. He reasoned that since Jesus allowed this to happen to him, Jesus was disqualified as a prophet. After telling a story to show Simon's total misunderstanding of grace, Jesus forgave the woman, noting "your faith has saved you; go in peace." (7:50) Do you see the gospel in this story? Law leads to condemnation. Grace leads to forgiveness based on faith. Jesus lived out the gospel in his ministry.

The principle of faith-based salvation is what Abraham discovered and is taught in Romans 4. Abraham stands as the ultimate example of faith. This chapter makes the point that Abraham's faith was based neither on circumcision nor the law of Moses.

Why? Because Abraham was declared righteous by faith (Genesis 15:6) before he was circumcised (Genesis 17) and about 400 years before the law was given (Galatians 3:15ff). This is what Abraham discovered in the matter. (Romans 4:1)

So what is my point? Faith properly understood will transform our relationship with God and transform our relationships with one another. If we stay connected to a grace-filled God by our faith, then (when we extend grace to one another) we will stay connected by faith. My premise is that we break apart from one another in marriage and in the church, for the most part, because one party concludes the other has failed in keeping some “law” and that redemption is not possible. That is a hard conclusion to come to in light of how the gospel holds out the possibility of redemption for all men.

If our relationships are based on the Law-Works model we are doomed to failure, division, separation, and disloyalty. But if our relationships are based on the Grace-Faith model we will treat one another the way we want God to treat us. Remember the writing on the wall in Daniel 5? The message was sent to King Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar’s son, who completely ignored God. He should have known how God dealt with the pride of his father (Daniel 5:18ff). The message was “You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.” (Daniel 5:27) In our relationships with one another we are constantly being weighed on the scales and found wanting. In Christ this is not the end of the matter. We extend grace because God extended grace to us when he weighed us on his scales.

If we extend grace in the face of sin and failure, then we have a greater opportunity to see others respond faithfully. If we extend judgment in the face of sin and failure we will call forth despair and disappointment. Which climate would you like to live in? Slide 22

We do not ignore the places in which we are found wanting or the places where others are found wanting, but we balance the scales with grace which calls forth greater responsibility.

What specifically do we see about faith that causes us to be faithful? Abraham is our teacher. Romans chapter 4 is our text. First, and most importantly, Abraham teaches us that the focus of faith is God himself. We learn that Abraham “is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.” (Romans 4:17) This is so significant for healthy relationships. God sees us as we can be if we come under the gravitational pull of grace. The kind of God we believe in is a God who wants to give life to the dead and wants to create things that do not exist.

Let this sink in. If our faith is to be God-like, then we also seek to infuse life into others and to bring about in their lives something that does not now exist. We do not walk by sight but by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7). We see the unseen in others. We believe. We create. We cause others to live. Separation, division, and disloyalty sap life from others and deny that others can be anything other than what they are. Marriages and churches are suffering because we are more law-based than faith-based.

Second, faithfulness breeds in the ground of fact. “Without weakening in his faith, he (Abraham) 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.” (Romans 4:19) There is nothing in faith that denies the facts of a matter. In marriage we see it as it is. In the local church we see it as it is. However, facts can change if we believe. Paul saw Corinth as it was. He had no rose-colored glasses. It was bad. But, it was redeemable. The power of faith, hope and love was called into play.

We must first face the facts. The fact of a matter begins where the gospel begins. We are sinners in need of grace, not law. We are the man in James 1 who looks at his face in a mirror. If he hears the word and does not put it into practice he turns from the mirror forgetting what he looks like. This is the faith put into action that James speaks of in his next chapter.

Third, in spite of the apparent degree of difficulty of what God promised, Abraham “did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God.” (Romans 4:20) Remember that our faith is in a God who fulfills his promises, and he does not work on our timetable. Impatience is unbelief. Abraham was fully persuaded that God could do what he promised. (Romans 4:21) Might we do well to see what promises God has made to us individually in our spiritual growth, in our growth as brothers and sisters in Christ, and in our marriages? If God has made promises that show that he will bring to completion the work he began in us (he made us a Christian, he made us one in Christ, and he made man and wife one), then should we not be patient to see his work unfold? Shouldn’t we be fully persuaded the he will do what he promised? Does not Philippians 1:6 teach us that we should have confidence in God’s ability to bring his work to completion?

Separation, leaving, grumbling, complaining, and divorcing are usually symptoms of either impatience with God's pace of work or our lack of cooperation in his work.

The gospel teaches us a Grace-Faith system. When we relate to one another based on this model, we will find ourselves working through our problems and being victorious in our relationships. Later in Romans Paul writes, "everything that does not come from faith is sin." (Romans 15:23) Think on these things.

Rod Myers August 23, 2009