

The Meaning of Church Loyalty

I want to discuss very candidly today the place, the plan, the purpose, and the power of the church. Jesus established and loved the church. He commanded his people to be loyal to it and to always give it priority affection and faithful support.

Loyalty has a martial ring to it. We think of our country and the nation's flag. Loyalty stirs within us something high and holy. We like to think of ourselves as loyal, stalwart, and true.

The Place of Loyalty

Loyalty is the willing, practical devotion of self and substance to a person or a cause that is believed to be supremely worthwhile. It carries with it faithfulness, trust and confidence.

I would suggest that church loyalty runs much deeper: it calls for devoted allegiance to a Person and a cause. It involves decision, devotion, faithfulness, trustworthiness, and sacrifice.

Josiah Royce called loyalty "the chief of all virtues, the center of all beauty, the fulfillment of the moral law, and the very heart of religion."

An individual without loyalty is like a ship without a compass. There may be much activity and much "going about" but it will often have little purpose and be unprofitable. Loyalty gives purpose, direction and drive to life.

In any list of Christian virtues, loyalty ranks high...we recognize it in scripture as faithfulness:

(Mat 23:23) "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices--mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law--justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former."

(Gal 5:22) "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,"

(3 John 1:3) "It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth."

(Rev 13:10) "If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints."

(Rom 3:3) "What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness?"

In our daily lives, there are numerous 'loyalties' clamoring for devotion and interest. We must stand firm in our efforts to be loyal to God, to the faith, to the church, to friends and family, and to self!

Given all the problems at Corinth, where would someone begin in trying to deal with them:

- they were bothered by divisions and contentions
- the basic issue was a division over preachers
- they were calling themselves by preacher's names
- they were emphasizing which preacher had baptized them
- and Paul made it clear it was wrong!

If he couldn't settle this issue, it would have been a waste of time to discuss the others. **Christ is one!** There's no reason for His church to be divided if He is one. To point out their absurdity: He reminded them that Christ was the only one crucified for them

When forces emerge within a church which create dissensions and quarreling, the church is in trouble:

- division is unnatural, painful and sinful
- the pettier the issue capable of creating friction, the greater the danger

The Greek word for division is "schisma (skhis-mah) – "a cleft or rent in a garment."

To believe and teach anything else is in direct contrast with the Lord's prayer for unity in John 17 and breeds doubt and skepticism among those sincerely seeking to know the truth about Christ and His church.

I envy the apostles in this way...they had the great task of converting the world from Judaism: but at least they did not have over 1,000 man-made groups with which to contend!

1. They looked to Christ as the head of the church
2. They relied upon the apostles to teach them initially and then relied totally upon the Bible for their guide
3. In matters of faith, where Christ had legislated, the church obeyed without question
4. In matters of opinion, where Christ had not legislated, they were guided by the law of expediency under the oversight of the elders
5. They acknowledged Christ's authority! They sought to teach, work, and worship under that authority.

"Lord," I said, "I want to be your man, not my own. So to you I give my money, my car—even my home." Then, smug and content, I relaxed with a smile...and whispered to God, "I'll bet it's been a while since anyone has given so much, so freely?" His answer surprised me. He replied, "Not really.

"Not a day has gone by since the beginning of time, that someone hasn't offered meager nickels and dimes, golden altars and crosses, contributions and penance, stone monuments and steeples; but why not repentance? "The money, the statues, the cathedrals you've built, do you really think I need your offerings of guilt? What good is money that's meant only to salve the hurting conscience that so many of you have. "Your lips know no prayers. Your eyes, no compassion. But you will go to church (when churchgoing is in fashion). "Just give me a tear—a heart ready to mold. And I'll give you a mission, a message so bold—that a fire will be stirred where there was only death. And your heart will be flamed by my life and my breath."

I stuck my hands in my pockets and kicked at the dirt. It's tough to be corrected...I guess my feelings were hurt. But it was worth the struggle to realize the thought: that the cross isn't for sale and Christ's blood can't be bought."

We have a sacred obligation. The church is God's tool for proclaiming Christ's ideals and principles for life. It is founded on sacrifice and maintained by sacrifice. It appeals to the highest instincts of the human heart.

If our supreme loyalty is to Christ, then self and others will find their rightful place. Christ demands and deserves first place in our life.

(Mat 10:32-42) "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. {33} "But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven. {34} "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. {35} "For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; {36} "and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' {37} "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. {38} "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. {39} "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it. {40} "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. {41} "He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. {42} "And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.""

A tragedy of Christianity today is that, unlike the people in Jesus' day, the shepherd-less masses look elsewhere for a savior.

The real peril is from within:

"The compelling need of our churches is neither larger numbers, more money, nor different programs, but a fuller consecration of the lives of individual church members to Jesus Christ. "Carelessness, prayerlessness, indifference, lowering of ideals, and open inconsistency of professed Christians within the church constitutes a greater menace to the cause of our Lord than indifference, opposition, infidelity, atheism, or other issues without the church. "The neglect of the devotional life brings flabbiness, indifference and unhappiness. Church discipline seems to have been largely discarded. The standard of Christ is the demand of the times."

THE MEANS OF EXPRESSING LOYALTY: By our priority allegiance

If I truly belong as a husband and wife belong to each, or as children belong to parents, the church will have a real claim upon my personality, my powers, and my possessions.

We ought to be ashamed of ourselves when we put our children's sports, homework, or recreation activities ahead of our worship and Bible classes! We ought to be ashamed of ourselves when we work all week no matter how we feel and use a headache as an excuse to miss worship!

Loyalty to the church:

- would cause us to pray for each other
- would lead us to want to meet together and move us to make the necessary plans ahead of time to be ready to worship when we get here
- would cause us to take positive stands against those things which would interfere with our worship and work

"Christianity is more than a vision...it is a life, a power, a mission for God. It is going somewhere; it is accomplishing something; it is increasing the forces of righteousness; it is translating routine into duty; it is making drudgery divine; it is finding out God and cooperating with Him in everyday life."

The Church as the Bride of Christ

Years ago, every married couple in this room stood in front of a group of people very similar to this one and made some statements we call "vows" to each other: "Do you take this woman to be your wife? Do you promise to love her, honor her, and submit to her? Do you promise to stay with her and stand by her for as long as you both shall live?"

There were differences in the details of the vows, in the styles of weddings, etc., but we each were in circumstances that presented a strong potential:

- we repeated the right words and said "I do" in the right place
- every one of us fully believed we'd keep to promises made

(Isa 62:5) "As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you."

(2 Cor 11:2) "I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him."

What are some things that makes for a successful marriage? (Must happen in our earthly marriages and also in our marriage to Christ).

- Communication
- Accent the positive
- Don't rundown in front of others
- Faithfulness (discuss sexual purity here and what God has set in place for those who are married).

Reliving the church's vows (close the sermon by having all the members stand and they repeated after me the following vow...it was voluntary and we immediately began singing the invitations song):

"Do you, church, take Jesus to be your husband? Do you promise to love him, honor him, and submit to him? Do you promise to stay with him and stand by him for as long as you live?"