

THE LOYAL SERVANT

Some time ago, I watched a very good movie, which I would recommend to everybody, in all age groups, at least from the teen years and older. It was called, “Mrs. Brown.” This movie depicted a fierce loyalty, and a loving devotion of a Scotsman, by the name of John Brown, who was the personal servant of Queen Victoria of England.

Although John Brown was regarded, from a royal perspective, as a “low-born commoner,” his loyalty to Queen Victoria was so remarkable that she actually commissioned a portrait of him, which is still to this day displayed in Balmoral Castle – the summer home of the British royal family in north-east Scotland. Queen Victoria also had two special medals struck especially for John Brown. One was the “Faithful Servant” medal, and the other was the “Devoted Service” medal. Upon Brown’s untimely death at age fifty-six, which also ultimately came as a result of his untiring service to his Queen, she gave a eulogy at his funeral. Yes, the queen and empress of the empire upon which, at that date, the sun never set, gave a heart-felt tribute at the funeral of a “commoner.” Victoria had the words of her eulogy carved into the base of a statue that she had commissioned and erected in a special place of honour on the grounds of Balmoral Castle. Here is what the eulogy says:

‘FRIEND MORE THAN SERVANT,
LOYAL, TRUTHFUL, BRAVE;
SELF LESS THAN DUTY.
EVEN TO THE GRAVE’

I was inspired by the loyal service of John Brown to Queen Victoria, so much so that it induced me to briefly cover the subject of *our* loyal service – to God and to His people.

Firstly, I would like to give you some definitions. Just what is loyalty? What does the word “loyal” mean? Webster’s Dictionary tells us that the origin of the word is from an old French word “leial” or “leel.” This may be unconnected, but Numbers 3:24 ,mentions a Levite by the name of Lael, meaning “Belonging to God.”

The modern word “loyal” comes from the Latin word meaning “legal.” This is interesting, because this means that loyalty is like a legal contract. It is like a covenant between God and His people – a two sided agreement in which each side promises “I will do this, if you will do that.”

The modern word “loyal” means: Unswerving and faithful, in allegiance to a lawful sovereign or government, or to a private person to whom fidelity is due; faithful to an ideal, a custom, an institution or a product.

The primary synonym of “loyalty” is the word “fidelity.” The origin of this word is interesting too. It comes from either of two Latin words, “fides” and “fidere,” both of which mean “faith” and “trust.” Fidelity is a quality or state of being faithful; accuracy, even in the details, and exactness. More synonyms of the word “fidelity” are allegiance; fealty; devotion; piety. All of these words mean faithfulness to something to which one is bound by a pledge or by duty.

You might be surprised that the word “loyalty” does not actually appear in the King James Version of the Bible – neither the words ‘loyalty’ or ‘loyal.’ There are lots of mentions of the words ‘faithful,’ ‘faithfulness,’ and other related words; but I would like to home in today on this idea of “fidelity” and ‘loyalty.’ The King James Version contains only one instance of the word ‘fidelity,’ the primary synonym of the word ‘loyalty,’ and here it is:

Titus 2:9-10:

Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again; not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

The Greek word that Paul used here for ‘fidelity’ can also mean assurance; faithfulness; conviction respecting man’s relationship to God and divine things; belief, with the predominant idea of trust or confidence; character of a person who can be relied on.

It is true that these verses that we just read from the apostle Paul to Timothy are directed at domestic servants. John Brown, you will remember, *was* just that – a domestic servant. This is what I would like to put the accent on in this article. All of God’s children must be loyal servants. We must be loyal, first of all – not to the Queen of England – but to our Supreme Sovereign – God the Father. To His holy Son too? Yes! Secondly, to Jesus Christ. Here is what He said in this regard:

John 12:26:

If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.

So, we can see that we certainly *are* to be loyal servants to Jesus Christ too.

But who else? The third set of people that we need to be loyal to are our brethren. We are commanded by Jesus Christ to be servants to our brethren:

Mark 9:35:

And He sat down, and called the twelve, and said unto them, “If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.”

Mark 10:44:

And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.

Through the apostle Paul, God commanded the same thing:

Galatians 5:13:

For, brethren, you have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

Now, Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul did not just *tell* us what to do. They were not hypocrites like the Pharisees of their day (Matthew 23:1-29; Luke 12:1). They practiced what they preached. They were loyal servants to God and His children. Here is the example of our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ:

Luke 22:27:

For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves.

Yes. Jesus Christ came as a servant!

Philippians 2:5-7:

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

Let this mind – this serving attitude – be in you! And in me! Jesus Christ took upon Himself the form of a servant. Also, we can see the examples of Paul and the other apostles:

I Corinthians 9:19:

For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.

II Corinthians 4:5:

For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake.

So, Jesus Christ voluntarily became a servant, and so did the apostle Paul. Paul is writing about himself and his fellow apostles. Again, this is not just a command to the ministers. Every one of us must follow these commands and these examples of Jesus Christ and the apostles. We must be devoted servants to God and to our brethren.

I will repeat myself here, and ask again the question: To whom should we be loyal servants? To God? Yes, of course! We have seen this already. Our first and ultimate loyalty must be to God the Father and, as we have seen, consequently to Jesus Christ as well. What about secondary levels of loyalty? Secondary levels of loyalty are proper if they are firmly founded on the primary one – loyalty to God. For example, should we be loyal to our spouses and to our physical families? Of course we should! We know that we should!

How about our nations? Should we be loyal to our nations? For this one, I would offer a guarded “Yes” because I believe that, only to a limited extent should we be loyal to our nations. As God’s Word mentions in a couple of places (e.g. the loyalties of various people to King Saul, David, Israel, etc.), it is right for us to be proud of our countries in a proper way – as long as there is no conflict between this loyalty and the law of God (Acts 5:29). An example of this would be, if one of our young people loved his country so much that it led to him to sign up for the military, he would be in breach of the sixth commandment, “Thou Shalt not kill.” In writing this, I do not wish to offend people who have service men in their families; but if there is any danger, whatsoever, that any of these secondary loyalties might conflict with the primary, number-one loyalty, the secondary loyalty must be put aside. We must beware of any misuse of the concept that we should only be loyal to God. Yes, our loyalty to God must be number one; but we have to be careful. A misguided application of this belief can give birth to invalid excuses; for example, for a member to leave his spouse and his family, in order to go and pursue another “more converted” spouse. Or it might lead to somebody saying (and you have heard people say this) “I will never follow another man.” It could lead to somebody going so far as to segregate himself from other church members to become, what is called an “independent Christian.” Again, I do not want to give offence to anyone who might consider himself to be an independent Christian. But, I ask the question: “Can a totally independent Christian be a loyal servant to God and His children?” We must keep this scripture firmly in mind:

Hebrews 10:24-25:

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

If you are totally on your own as an independent Christian, how can you truly and effectively “consider one another”? How can you truly and practically “provoke unto love”? How can you truly participate in “good works”? How can you “assemble together” – if you are on your own? How can you “exhort one another” – if you are on your own?

We have seen that it is definitely right for us all to be loyal to God. What about the Church of God? Is it right – is it correct – to be loyal to the church? Yes, I believe that it is. I believe that loyalty to God and loyalty to God’s true church – let us call it “the greater Church of God” – go hand-in-hand. They are synonymous if the church is on the right track and being obedient to God.

What about our own particular “branch” of the greater Church of God? Is it right for us to be loyal to it? Are there any Bible examples of loyal service to individual “branches” of the church of God? Actually there are, and we will come to them shortly. The early church of God in the first century, as far as we know, was not separated into various corporate entities as we are today. Nevertheless, the early church was scattered into geographical branches.

Another point to consider is that we should not think of other Church of God groups as competition. I believe that we should think of them as “other temporary homes” for our fellow Christians – but again, only if those temporary homes – those other church groups – are on the right track.

I Thessalonians 1:1:

Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

II Thessalonians 1:1:

Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

There does not seem to be a lot said in these two verses. They just seem to be formal opening greetings. But, Paul wrote many letters to the various congregations of God’s church in the Mediterranean and Asia Minor area, and some of those congregations, as we know, were closer to God than others. This congregation in Thessalonica was just one congregation in the greater Church of God at that time. But twice, Paul particularly specifies that the congregation in Thessalonica was “in God the Father and in Jesus Christ.” He does not say this about any other congregation in any of his letters to them. This is the kind of branch of the church that we must give our loyalty and service to. We need to belong to a church group that is “in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

God's Word reveals other brief commendations to church members who loyally served their local congregations. Here is just one example:

Romans 16:1, 27:

I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea:... To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen. (Written to the Romans from Corinthus, and sent by Phebe servant of the church at Cenchrea.)

Please notice that Phebe was commended because she served the Church of God. But Paul is even more specific than that. He tells us that Phebe specifically served the Cenchrea congregation – just one individual branch of the greater Church of God. God called this lady, Phebe, into the Cenchrea congregation, and she was specifically loyal in service to that branch of the church.

Most members of God's church feel that we are where we are – that we are in the church group that we are in – because God put us there. I believe that, in most cases, this is so. I believe that it is generally so. However, I also believe that we have free moral agency and, because we have free moral agency, we remain in the church group that we are in because we prefer “our branch” over the others – at least the ones we are familiar with. We prefer the leadership style. We prefer the preaching style of the ministers and the other speakers. We prefer the explanations of the doctrines we receive in “our” church. We prefer “our” method of keeping God's Sabbaths and the Holy Days, believing that they are in line with His commands.

Having said all this, I ask another question. To what extent do we owe allegiance to our own particular Church of God group? I believe that we certainly *do* owe a certain amount of loyalty to our fellow brethren – to be serving them, and to our group – the “branch” that has given us the most – I believe – and continues to do so. One might argue, of course, that any other branch of the church of God might be happy to count us among their numbers, and that they might possibly serve us just as well. Are *you* happy where God has put you? If you are, then please remain a loyal servant to God and Jesus Christ first; and secondly to the people that He has set you amongst.

I would like to ask a couple of questions about disloyalty. These are things that have crossed my mind over the past couple of years; and you might have thought about some of these things too.

First of all, is it disloyal – and therefore wrong – for a young person to attend a Feast site of another Church of God branch – perhaps so that he (or she) can spend time with some good friends from whom he has been separated due to the scattering of the church? Or, perhaps, to spread his net wider, in a search for Christian friends – or for a potential spouse. Is that wrong? Is that disloyal?

Is it disloyal and wrong for parents to send their children to another Church of God group's summer youth camp or to the winter activity of another group? Is it disloyal to send our children to these kinds of events – especially if our own group does not have the resources to hold its own?

Is it disloyal and wrong for a lonely, geographically-isolated church member to occasionally attend Sabbath or Holy Day services with another church group in order to satisfy his proper desire for true Christian fellowship?

Is it wrong or disloyal for a member to attend with another Church of God group when visiting another country or another area where there are no congregations of his own branch?

What about the case where a husband in the church prefers one Church of God group, and his wife prefers another? Is it wrong and disloyal if they alternate attendance between the two?

Finally, what about other church of God groups' television programs, booklets, magazines and web-sites? Is it disloyal for us to take proper advantage of them?

To all of these six questions, I would answer a guarded “not necessarily.” However, with all of these things we must take care. If we take these things too far, there are some very real dangers that we have to be aware of.

Danger number one is becoming a “floater” who drifts from one Church of God group to another, perhaps merely looking for variety; or even worse, looking for doctrinal argument; or perhaps, as in some cases I have seen, to avoid ministerial authority. A floater might be one of those who say, “I will never follow another man” and will go from group-to-group, *getting* what he can from each, but *giving* no loyalty or service to the members of any particular church group. He does not stay with any group long enough to actually *do* anything practical or worthwhile – except perhaps to boost the attendance figures for the occasional Sabbath.

I want to concentrate next upon the concept of God's servants *doing* something worthwhile and serving the church group that we are in:

James 1:22

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

Again, I do not want to give offence to anybody out there who might be considered a “floater.” But, the attendance of a floater cannot be relied upon. He can never be given any responsibility. So, he cannot ever become a truly loyal servant which, as we have seen, is commanded for every one of God’s people.

The second danger is that it can be spiritually dangerous to continuously investigate the differences between the various Church of God groups. I hesitate to mention this because I know that some members are very defensive of the practice. It is true that some of the other Church of God groups have really excellent web sites and excellent research facilities, and it is fine to make use of them. But, I would ask you to consider the following verses:

Daniel 12:4:

But you, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.

This verse describes our frantic, Internet-paced world so very well. There is definitely a negative implication in this verse with regards to ‘running to and fro.’ We might question the running to and fro between churches of God, but it also reminds us of Satan’s negative example in the early chapters of the book of Job. God asked him, “Where have you been, Satan?” Satan impertinently replied, “I’ve been going to and fro on the face of the earth” (Job 1:7; 2:2).

We have this huge, increasingly vast bank of knowledge we call the Internet; but we have to be very careful of its like, according to Daniel. Also, through Solomon, God warns of this type of danger:

Ecclesiastes 1:18:

For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increases knowledge increases sorrow.

I have personally witnessed increased sorrow that has come from knowledge that has increased in a wrong and uncontrolled manner. I have seen it in action. I have seen it wreaking its negative, confusing, destructive work. I will give you a potential scenario of how this might happen:

A church member goes out and buys his first computer, and he signs up for an Internet account. He is really excited – absolutely astonished – by the vast array of information about the Church of God that is readily available on the Worldwide Web. But soon, because of his ongoing church comparisons, he starts getting dissatisfied with his own group. He starts trying to build a kind of made-to-measure religion of his own using bits and pieces (ones agreeable to him, of course) that he puts together from the various churches of God.

But even more dangerous is when he eventually comes to reject *all* of the Church of God groups, justifying this by saying, “None of them are perfect. None of them are correct on all points.” Although he may be right in what he is saying here, what he is actually saying is that none of them are not one hundred percent in agreement with *his* personal ideas, beliefs and preferences. A common mindset which I have seen in over-avid Church of God web-searchers is that they will ask the question, “What does this group teach on this topic?” and “What does that group teach on that topic?” then, “I reject this group because they disagree with me on such and such a topic.”

Then there is the added danger of saying, “Oooh! Look at the nasty things this website says about Armstrong.” Have you noticed, by the way, that people who get turned off with the church start calling Mr. Armstrong, “Armstrong?” Or, “Just look at the nasty things this website says about Ambassador College, the ministry, tithing, etc., etc.” Yes, there are many juicy bits of information that you can find on the Internet but beware! Many of them are bogus. Many are out-and-out lies. They are the kiss of death! Please stay away from them.

I have known more than one member who has taken comparison between the churches of God to such a dangerous extent that they have become completely confused. Some even start to include obscure, bizarre, non-Church of God groups (even anti-Church of God groups) in their armoury of “doctrinal sources.”

If we keep searching and looking for differences between the churches of God, it will not be long until we come across some group that has some different ideas from yours on some topic or doctrine. If you are not on your guard, Satan will convene a meeting with your human nature, and he will tell you how wise and how right this other group is. Then our hackles will rise when our own ministers mention this topic that we have now come to disagree with. As our so-called “search for truth” continues, we will uncover more and more “good points” of this new group and more and more “bad points” of our own group. Before you know it, your own church’s “negatives” will come to outweigh its positives. And away you’ll go.

Please beware! Please do not think that this cannot happen to you. I have seen it happen, and not just once. I would ask you to meditate, study and pray about this. Seriously examine your own preferences. Really think about them. Make a decision as to who should have your loyalty, your loyal service. When you have decided, please solidly cement it and only break the bond if and when the recipient of your loyalty breaks from the truth of God. Hopefully that day will never dawn.

I ask you, to follow the fine examples of loyal service of Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul, Phebe and John Brown. Please be a faithful and devoted servant. Loyally serve God the Father, Jesus Christ, the greater Church of God – yes, and the branch of His church where He has placed you.

Finally, let us look forward to the day when God will, once again, bring back together all His scattered children under one single organization, to which we can all merge our loyalty and our service – the one, true Church of God.

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December 8, 2010