

## The Loyal Servant

### To Whom Do We Give Loyalty?

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A few weeks ago, I watched a very good movie, which I would recommend to all age groups. It was called, "Mrs. Brown." This movie depicted the fierce loyalty, and the 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 a "low-born commoner," from a royal perspective, his loyalty to Queen Victoria, was so remarkable that she actually commissioned a portrait of him. This portrait is still displayed in Balmoral castle—the summer home of the British Royal family in North Eastern Scotland. Queen Victoria also had two special medals created especially for John Brown. One was the "Faithful Servant" medal, and the other one, was the "Devoted Service" medal. Then, upon John Brown's untimely death, at age 56, which came because of his untiring service to Queen Victoria, she gave a eulogy at his funeral—yes, at the funeral of a commoner! She had the words of the eulogy carved into the base of a statue that she had commissioned and erected in a special place of honor on the grounds of Balmoral castle. Here is what the eulogy said:

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

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

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 is from an old French word "*leial or leel*". In Numbers 3: 24, there was a Levite, by the name of Lael—and this may be completely unconnected—but this man's name means "Belonging to God." Also, the word stems from the Latin word meaning "legal." This is interesting because this means that loyalty is like a legal contract. It is like the covenant between God and His people, which are two-sided agreements 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, to a private person to whom fidelity is due; faithful to an ideal, a custom, an institution or a product.

The main synonym of "loyalty" is the word "*fidelity*," and the origin of that word is interesting, too. It comes from two Latin words, "*fides and fidere*," which mean faith and trust. Fidelity means a quality or state of being faithful. It means exactness and accuracy—even in the details. More synonyms of the word "*fidelity*" are allegiance, fealty, devotion, and piety. All of these

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 does the word '*loyal*.' There is only one instance in the King James Version of its main synonym "*fidelity*." There are lots of mentions of the word "faithful," but I would like to home in on this idea of "*fidelity*" and "*loyalty*."

Titus 2:9-10 Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again; [That means not answering back.] 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, belief, faithfulness, conviction respecting man's relationship to God and divine things. It can mean belief, with the predominant idea of trust or confidence. Can you see where I am going with this, brethren? It can mean character of the person who can be relied on. It is true that these verses, from the apostle Paul to Timothy, are directed specifically at domestic servants. John Brown was a domestic servant. This is what I would like to put the accent on today. All of us—all of God's children, must be loyal servants. We must be loyal, first, to our supreme sovereign—not the Queen of England—but God the Father. I ask the question, "And to His Holy Son, too?" Yes! Second, we must be loyal to Jesus Christ.

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.

We can see that, certainly, we are to be loyal servants to Jesus Christ, too. Who else? The third set of people to be loyal to is 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 saith 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.

And, also commanded by the apostle Paul:

Galatians 5:13 For, brethren, ye 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 practiced what they

preached. They were loyal servants to God's children. Here is the example of our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ:

Luke 22:27 For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? Is not he that sitteth at meat? But I am among you as he that serves. [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 serving attitude be in you. Jesus Christ took upon Himself the form of a servant. Let us look at the examples of the apostle Paul, and other apostles, too:

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.

Jesus Christ voluntarily became a servant, and so did the apostle Paul.

II Corinthians 4:5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

He is talking about himself—and his fellow apostles. Again, every one of us—not just the ministers—must follow these commands and these examples of Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul and the apostles. We must be devoted servants to God and to our brethren.

I ask the question again: To whom should we be loyal servants? To God? Yes, of course! We have already seen that. 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 loyalty—to God. For example, should we be loyal to our spouses and to our physical families? Of course, we should! We know we should! How about our nations? Should we be loyal to our nations? For this one I would offer a guarded, "Yes." To a limited extent, we should be loyal to our nations. God's Word mentions in a couple of places the loyalties of various people to Saul, David, Israel and others. Again, it is right for us to be proud of our countries in a proper way—as long as there is no conflict with the law of God. An example of this would be if one of our young people loved his country so much that it led to him signing up for the military, then he will likely be in breach of the sixth commandment, *Thou Shalt not kill.*"

Although, I do not wish to offend people who have servicemen in their families, if there is any danger, whatsoever, of any of these secondary loyalties conflicting with the primary, number one loyalty, then 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 very careful. A misguided application of this can give birth to invalid excuses, for example, for a member to leave his spouse and his family, in order to 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 taking it upon himself to continue the fracturing and scattering of the Church of God. On the other hand, 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 any offence to anybody who considers himself an independent Christian. However, I ask the question, "Can an independent Christian be a loyal servant to God?"

Hebrews 10:24-25 And let us consider one another in order to provoke to love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

If you are an independent Christian—if you are on your own—how do you consider one another? How do you provoke unto love? How do you participate in good works? How do you assemble together? How do 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 to 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. But, only if the church is on the right track and is 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 examples in the Bible of loyal service to individual branches of the Church of God? Actually there are, and we will get to a few of them.

As far as we know, the early Church of God in the first century was not separated into various corporate entities as we are today. Nevertheless, the early Church of God was scattered into geographical branches. We should not think of other Church of God groups as competition. We should think of them as other temporary homes for our fellow Christians—but again, only if those temporary homes, those other churches, 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:

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 seem to be just opening greetings. But, Paul wrote many letters to the various congregations of God's church in the Mediterranean and Asia Minor area. Some of those congregations, as we know, were closer to

God than were others. The congregation in Thessalonica was just one congregation in the greater Church of God at that time. However, 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. That is the kind of branch of the church to which we must give our loyalty and service. We need a church 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 Phoebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea. To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen. [Written to the Romans from Corinthus, and sent by Phoebe servant of the church at Cenchrea.]

Please notice that this Phoebe was commended because she served the Church of God. But, Paul is even more specific than that. He tells us that Phoebe served the Cenchrea congregation—just one individual branch of the greater Church of God. God called this lady Phoebe into the Cenchrea congregation, and she was specifically loyal in service to that branch of His church. Most members of God's church feel that we are where we are because God put us here. I believe that, in most cases, this is so. I believe that it is so for our Victoria brethren here, and I believe it is so for all of you out there.

But, 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 to the others—at least the ones that 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 that we get in "our" church. We prefer our method of keeping the Sabbaths and the Holy Days.

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 (as we have seen) to be serving them, and to "our" group, which, I believe, has given us the most 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 they might serve us just as well. But, this is where God has put us. I ask another question: Are you happy where God has put you? If you are, please stay loyal and be a loyal servant—to God first, and secondly to the people that He has set you among.

I would like to ask a couple of questions about disloyalty. These are some things I have thought about over the past couple of years. You might have thought about some of these things, too.

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

Second: Is it wrong, or disloyal, for parents to send their children to another Church of God group's summer youth camp, or to the winter activity of another group? As an example, UCG has its Northwest Weekend going on right now, so our numbers are down a little. I believe that there is a similar gathering in the Eastern U.S. as well. But, is it disloyal for our parents to send their children to these kinds of events, especially if our own group, due to its size limitations, does not have the resources to hold our own?

Is it disloyal, or wrong, for a lonely, isolated church member to occasionally attend Sabbath or Holy Day services with another church group in order to satisfy the proper desire for true Christian fellowship? These are valid things for us to think about.

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 their own branch?

What about the case where a husband in the church prefers one Church of God group, and his wife prefers another? What do we do then? Is it wrong or disloyal for them to alternate their 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 advantage of them?

To all of these six questions, I would answer a guarded "not necessarily." The important thing is that with all of these things we have to beware. If we take these things too far, there are some real dangers that we have to be aware of.

Danger number one is becoming a "floater." We have all met the floaters. The floater drifts from one Church of God group to another, perhaps looking for variety; 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." Floaters go from group to group, getting what they can from each; but they give no loyalty to any particular church group. They do not stay with any group long enough to actually do anything practical, or worthwhile, except perhaps to boost the attendance figures on the occasional Sabbath.

I want to concentrate, right here, on doing something practical and worthwhile, 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, as we have seen is commanded for every one of God's people.

There is a second danger, and that is it can be spiritually dangerous to continually investigate the differences between the various Church of God groups. I hesitate to mention this, because I know some members are defensive of this practice. It is very true that some of the other Church of God groups have really excellent web sites and excellent research facilities. I am not knocking that at all. Nevertheless, I would ask you to consider the following verses:

Daniel 12:4 But thou, 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 Internet-paced world so very, very well. It does not say so directly, but 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 various Church of God groups, but the verse also reminds me of what Satan was doing in the early chapters of the book of Job. God asks, "What are you doing Satan?" Satan replied, "I am going to and fro on the face of the earth."

We have this huge, ever-increasing, vast bank of knowledge (of good and evil) readily available through the Internet, and we have to beware of it, according to Daniel. Also, through Solomon, God warns of such dangers:

Ecclesiastes 1:18 For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

I have seen—personally witnessed—increased sorrow that has come from increased knowledge. I have seen it in action, and I have seen it wreaking its negative, confusing, destructive work. I will give you just one scenario of one thing that can happen.

A church member goes out and buys his first computer and he signs up to the Internet. He is really excited and absolutely astonished by the vast array of information on the greater Church of God that one can find on the Internet. After a time, his extensive Internet research leads to him dissatisfaction with his own church group. Without realizing it, he starts trying to build a made-to-measure religion of his own, using bits and pieces that he puts together from the various Churches of God. The bits and pieces that are agreeable to him, of course. But, even more dangerous, he comes to reject all of the Church of God groups. He justifies this by claiming, "None of them is perfect; none of them is correct on all points." Actually, what he is saying is that none them is one hundred percent in agreement with his personal ideas, beliefs and preferences.

A common mindset I have seen in these over-avid web-searches and comparisons of Church of God groups is that the searchers will ask the question, "What does this group teach on this topic? What does that group teach on that topic? I reject this group because they disagree with me on such and such a topic." Then there is the added danger of saying, "Look at the nasty things this website is saying about Mr. Armstrong." (Have you ever noticed that people who get turned off with the church start disrespectfully calling Mr. Armstrong by his surname, "Armstrong"?) Or, "Look at the nasty things this website says about Ambassador College, about the ministry, tithing, etc." You can find many juicy bits of gossip on the Internet. Some of it is probably true; much of it is false; but all of it is the kiss of death. Please stay away from it. I have known more than one member who has taken the comparison between the Churches of God, to such a dangerous extent, that they have become completely confused. They even start to include obscure, bizarre, non-Church of God groups—and in some cases even anti-Church of God groups—in their armories of doctrinal sources.

I am just trying to give you this warning because these dangers are so very possible in this day

of increased knowledge and scattered church groups. If we keep on doing this kind of comparison, if we keep searching the greater Church of God looking for differences, then it will not be long until we come across a group that has some different ideas from our group on some topic or doctrine. If we are not on our guard, Satan the devil will convene a meeting with our human nature, and he will tell us how wise and how right this other group is. Then, our hackles will rise when our own ministers mention this topic we now disagree with. As our so-called "search for the truth" continues, we will uncover other "good points" of this new group, and more and more "bad points" of our own group; and before you know it our own church's "negatives" outweigh our own church's "positives," and away we go!

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

I ask you to follow the fine examples of loyal service of Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul, Phoebe of Cenchrea, and John Brown. Please be a faithful and devoted servant. Loyal service to God the Father, Jesus Christ, the greater Church of God, and the branch of the Church of God where He has placed you.

Finally, let us look forward to the day when God will bring 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.