

Loyalty

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Well, as you know, the message that I have today is one on **Loyalty**. And I'm basically going to touch on what it means to us, our relationship with God and one another, and the way we conduct our lives because we think about **loyalty**. There are a lot of examples in the Bible. We have the story in Ruth about Ruth and Naomi, which is that wonderfully dramatic section in there where she says, "I'll go anywhere. I'll live anywhere. I'll die with you," and all that. So, there is **loyalty** there. We have the story of Jonathan and David over in 1 Samuel, that relationship. And there are a lot of principles in Proverbs that talk about **loyalty**, friendship, that kind of thing, faithfulness, which is all this relates to. [There are] many lessons there, but my purpose today is to approach this a little bit differently.

So, first of all, I'd like to look at some of the definitions of **loyalty** because **loyalty**, when you think about it, is more of a concept. It's an abstract because it's [not] something that's real concrete that we can get our hands on. It has different shades of meaning in different contexts, however it's used and however we might find it. We might say that "Someone is loyal as a friend," or "Someone is disloyal," or "loyal to a fault." We have all those different senses of that word. So, it is somewhat subjective.

But the general definition for **loyalty** is:

1. to be faithful (and these are kind of archaic, but) to be faithful to the constituted authority of one's country; and
2. faithful to those persons, ideals, etc., that one is under obligation to defend, support, or be true to; and a synonym, of course, of that is faithful;
3. then, we have the old term of a Loyalist, a person that's loyal, especially one that supports the established government of the country that you find yourself in especially in times of revolt; that would be a Loyalist, (a political term);
4. then we have the quality of **loyalty**, which is just the state or an essence of being loyal, faithfulness, or faithful adherence to a person, government, cause, duty, etc. and, again, a synonym for that is just allegiance, that type of loyalty.

The word "**loyalty**," actually comes from the Latin, the Latin word for "legalist," which is legal. It's our English term we use for legal. And the connection there [is] that the idea of legality is this that loyal originally meant to be faithful to one's legal obligations. [That] is where the term came from.

It goes on to say (This came from my Word Finder.); it goes on to say that **loyalty** implies (And again it's an abstract; can't nail it down.), it implies:

- faithfulness
- steadfastness

- commitment (That kind of goes hand-in-hand with loyalty, as we'll see as we go through here.)
- trustworthiness
- devotion
- dependability
- staunchness
- allegiance, and
- adherence

And, again, some of these meanings will come into play as we go along.

But to my mind, this whole topic of **loyalty** can kind of be summarized into two basic points. And those are: The Number One would be:

I. Personal Loyalty

And under these I'm, obviously, going to have some sub-categories. The Second One is:

II. Institutional Loyalty

And you'll recognize that one when we get to it.

But for the First One there, the **Personal Loyalty** actually has these several categories and the top of the list there on **Personal Loyalty** is going to be:

A. The loyalty that we have first and foremost to God.

And if we look at the term "God" and define that, basically God is just our English word for Deity is what that means. But we believe the Scripture tells us that there is actually a "Godhead," consisting of the Father as we understand Him. We try to put that into terms and phrases, but God is so much more than words and terms that we can come up with to try to describe Him. But that's what we humanly try to do.

And then there is the other Being. And we believe, again, that there are Two and that this other Being, the One who became the Messiah, Jesus Christ, was the God of the Old Testament. That's what we believe.

So again, we have these Two Beings and we know that we need to be loyal to Those and we can think of that in general terms, but I'm going to try to get this down, distill this down to points that we can kind of get our hands around here.

And, again, looking at the New Testament—and we know, too, that's better termed the New Covenant. We can see in the Book of Hebrews where it talks about the New Covenant and the Old Covenant. And, in fact, that's what the term "testament" means. It means Covenant.

But the New Covenant points to the opportunity that we have to have a personal relationship with this Godhead. We can do that now where in the Old Testament times

under the Old Covenant, they didn't have that opportunity. But we can look at His Son. We note the Family relationship in this Godhead and we know we can have a part in that. So, first and foremost, what I've termed **Personal Loyalty** describes a deeply personal, spiritual relationship with these Supreme Beings, with God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ.

Some religions try to emphasize One over the other. We have religions like the Jews that will recognize only the God, that figurehead of God. They won't recognize Jesus Christ. And we have other religions, evangelicals and most Protestants who will put their focus on Jesus Christ, on the other One, but we know different than that. So, we need to have our **loyalties** correct is what I'm trying to say there.

So, let's look at some Scriptures that support this particular category of **Personal Loyalty**. Let's turn over to Matthew 6. Matthew 6 and verse 24 in the New King James where it says:

Matthew 6:24. *"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. (NKJ)*

And the word "loyal" there in the New King James is "hold to" in the King James. And it's "devoted to" is the way the New American Standard translates it. And the Greek just means to adhere to, to hold firmly.

And "master" means the supreme authority. It means God, that Godhead. It means God the Father, Lord and Master, Jesus Christ—all of those things.

Other Scriptures tell us that we're "bondservants." We're bought with a price. We belong to God and that is talking about a slave/master relationship. The point being that it is a matter of capacity here. We just can't be spread between multiple masters. If you were a slave, you wouldn't necessarily be devoted or particularly loyal to one master over another. You would kind of have to make a choice if you were in that kind of a relationship.

But let's go down in the context here, still in Matthew 6, down to verses 6 through 15. And actually, Jesus Christ is actually pointing to this relationship in this outline for prayer that we have here. And we're going to look at it slightly different. We're in the context of **loyalty** here to these Supreme Beings. It says in verse 6 of Matthew 6, again New King James Version.

Matthew 6:6. *"But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. (NKJ)*

I like the NIV version of that where it says:

Matthew 6:6. *But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (NIV)*

But going on in verse 7, back to the New King James:

Matthew 6:7. *"And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. (NKJ)*

They don't really know who God is. Verse 8:

Matthew 6:8. *"Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.
9) "In this manner, therefore, pray: our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. (NKJ)*

We honor God's name as the One in supreme authority where our First **Loyalty** belongs. Verse 10:

Matthew 6:10. *Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. (NKJ)*

We don't seek our own will. We seek God's will. At least, that is what we should be doing.

Verse 11:

Matthew 6:11. *Give us this day our daily bread. (NKJ)*

Because we know that everything ultimately comes from this Supreme Being. We don't generate these things, anything that we have ourselves.

Verse 12:

Matthew 6:12. *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. (NKJ)*

And that's talking about the way we conduct ourselves in this relationship.

Matthew 6:13. *And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. (NKJ)*

So the whole point there, and as Christ, He points directly to the Father because He is the only One that can do any of this. He is the only One that has the power to make any of this happen for us. And that's why we pray to Him. That's why we ask these things because we can't do anything that is mentioned in this outline. We can't do it. No one else can do it. We can't accomplish that without God.

And also we know that part of this context is the famous verse 33 where it says:

Matthew 6:33. *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (NKJ)*

When we think about **loyalty**, one of the first things that will come to my mind is the account of Peter. You remember whenever Christ, just before He was going to be

arrested, tried, and then crucified? He told Peter that he was going to deny Him. And Peter said, "Well, I'll never deny you." In a sense, he was saying, "I'll be **loyal** to you, right to the death." He denied all of that.

But when it came right down to it, what did he do? He ran like the rest of them did, but then, he followed to the trial. He followed Christ at a nice safe distance because he was afraid. And then, when he was confronted by the fire—a couple of people actually recognized his dialect. They told him who he was and said, "Well, you're with Him." And he denied it, just like Christ told him that before the cock crowed, he would deny Him three times. And he did.

And then, we know that he went on later to die as a martyr, but the point is at that point in his life and his relationship with Jesus Christ, he was not converted. So, the point being that he couldn't do that without God's help. He couldn't keep his **loyalties** straight. That's an excellent example for that.

So, in this **Personal Loyalty** Category, our **First Loyalty** is to God the Father and Jesus Christ. And when we have God's holy spirit, like Peter later did, it enhances that **loyalty**. It actually makes that possible for us. And, as we'll see, that's going to spill over into the other **loyalties** that we have.

In this Second Category under **Personal Loyalty** (Again, I'm still under that First Point.) is:

B. Family Loyalty

And I've listed this one under three bullets because we have families and then we have extended families. So, the first bullet under that would be:

- **Our physical, biological families**

Just like Les mentioned, between husband and wife, but like I mentioned—I probably haven't mentioned this recently—but we live close to our granddaughters. We live right across the street. We actually have six children. We have a whole tribe of grandchildren, but we just happen to live by last son that we had and the grandchildren that we have there. Our granddaughters, they practically think we're their parents.

But the kind of relationship we have demonstrates this. I think. I'm not saying that we have an ideal family or anything like that. But one of the ways it's demonstrated between my son and I is "stuff." I always tell my son, "If it's mine, is his. And if it's his, it's mine."

He caught me rummaging around in his garage recently. He says, "Dad, what are you missing? What are you looking for?" I said, "I'm looking for our cordless drill." Actually, we have three of them, but you can never find one. You know how that goes. Even sometimes when you have your own, you can't find it. But we do everything like that is the point.

And I also told my son before we moved next door to them I said, "If there is any pain, there are problems, there are health problems, there are marital problems or anything

like that, the pain on one side of the street is going to be felt on the other side of the street," which is where we live. And we've already experienced some of that.

So, again that has to do with that relationship and it has to do with our **loyalty** and support with one another because we're fiercely **loyal** to one another. And like all close families, we rally around each other anytime we have a crisis.

We recently, at least we know locally, we had the crisis with Marie's sister. We did the memorial and everything for her last week. But during the battle that she had with the lung cancer, we supported each other through that. My wife, she did some of the caregiving. We helped anyway that we could through that with her sister's kids and all the whole family. Of course, we did the service just to honor her. And that was kind of a—some people like to call that "closure", but it never really is. What you do is you kind of dwell on the memories, the good memories that you had with that individual. And she has one other brother. So, she has no other siblings left.

But the point there, again, is we were **loyal** to one another and we support each another. And I think we should all do that as God's people.

And the second bullet under **Personal Loyalty** is:

- **Our Church family**

This may be kind of a delicate one. So, I'll handle it as sensitively as I can. We all agree that the Church of God, the *ekklesia*, is a spiritual organism. There are greater and lesser churches—the way it's been termed. But the fact is it's always made up of local congregations, lesser churches. It's always been that way.

And kind of like our physical families, we need to have that bond with one another. It's expressed in our fellowship and our service to one another. And just like any family, that relationship has to be nurtured. That bond has to be nurtured or it becomes fragile. And just over time if we don't take care of the local congregation, it just will dissolve.

I understand that in our electronic age with the internet and all of that everybody gets tapes. They get the messages. They listen to sermons from other people. And there is nothing wrong with that at all. I'm not saying that there is. Some people say, "There is something wrong with that." There are some folks out there that will actually restrict their people from listening to other people, which is nonsense—pure nonsense. We know that anything that we can do to enhance our understanding more, grow more spiritually, we should do those things.

But the point I'm making here is we need to take care of and support our local congregation or it just becomes a loosely-jointed group of people. That's all that happens. And I personally believe that God works best with cohesive groups.

An example struck me this year, this past year at the Feast. I don't think it was unique to Kellogg and it's probably true of other groups of God's people that meet around the world for the Feast. But you could actually feel God's spirit there. I don't know if everybody feels that way or not, but it seems to me that it's been a long time since that kind of an atmosphere, that kind of an environment was pervasive through the whole

Feast. It was just there. And that's just because God is dealing with us and He's there at the Feast sites with us.

And I think it's probably significant when we look at the Day of Pentecost, who did God give His spirit to when God first gave His spirit? He didn't give it to a bunch of scattered people, but people that came together there. It was a group of individuals. And the point, again I think that God's spirit enhances those relationships.

And the Third One, I have is:

- **Marriage**

I know Rick gave a sermon last week on marriage. I haven't actually seen that yet.

And this is kind of more deeply personal than the first bullet. It's basically between a husband and a wife. It's about the love, respect, the commitment and **loyalty** that we have to one another. That's essential to a successful Godly Marriage. It just has to be there.

There is a recent Associated Press article that talked about couples living together in the United States right now as a family. Only 51% (half) are married. Half are not. That doesn't bode very well for the future of our country. It really doesn't. In fact, it's not conducive to any kind of a **loyalty**.

I listen to a financial talk show a lot. And somebody was calling in the other day. A man was calling in and he lived with a woman. And he was wondering what they should do with their finances. If he should take on her debts, she should take his, etc., like a married couple would. And he [the financial consultant] says, "Don't do that." He says, "You can't do that. If you're not married, you have no legal recourse. If someone decides to leave the relationship, you may be stuck with debt and all that." He says, "You'd have no legal recourse."

Anyhow that was a good example of what can happen with that. And, of course, one of the questions he asked right away when the guy told him they weren't married, he said, "Why aren't you married?" Then he went on to tell him what was wrong with his question.

But even in marriage, a lot of times, often love, respect, and **loyalty** are missing. And that comes out in different ways. It comes out in the way we treat each other. It comes out in the way we talk about our spouses.

And I'd just like to use the example there because in my working life, I worked as a craftsman for many years. I worked construction and the conversation got pretty rough sometimes, as you can only imagine. I know that in a lot of the crafts now, an electrician, the pipe fitters, the carpenters, other people like that, there are a lot of women now, but there wasn't when I was doing that. Of course, I'm talking like ancient history for me.

Most of the time, unfortunately too many times, I've been in situations where the air was literally laced with sexual innuendos. It would make anybody feel uncomfortable. It

would certainly make any women feel uncomfortable. And, frankly, personally I was embarrassed and I was somewhat ashamed of my gender to hear that kind of thing going on. You have to wonder how people were raised, if they've forgotten to be gentlemen, if they were ever gentlemen. You just don't do that kind of thing. But I've heard mostly from women—I'm sorry—from men (from women too) sometimes where they'll belittle, make coarse remarks about their spouse, be very disrespectful, frankly disloyal in a lot of ways and sometimes just inappropriately crude.

And I've never done that. I didn't do that before conversion. And I certainly don't do it now because I think God gives us some guidelines and principles along that area. If you want to be turning over to Ephesians 5, we'll look at some of that. And we'll look at it from this angle about love, respect, **loyalty** to your spouse because we have a lot of principles that address that kind of behavior, that spousal disloyalty and that bad conduct. We can look at some of this in Ephesians 5 verse 25.

We've probably been here a couple of times. I don't know if Rick was here last week or not. I'm sure that he was. Well, I'll try not to say anything that will counter. But in Ephesians 5 verse 25, it says:

Ephesians 5:25. *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, (NKJ)*

Now there are two sides to what Paul is saying here. There is a spiritual side and he's using a physical example. And then there is a physical example based on spiritual principles. So, there are actually two points here if we look at it that way.

But going on down in verse 28:

Ephesians 5:28. *So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. (NKJ)*

So, what does this have to do with men making disrespectful remarks about their wives and vice-versa (because that happens too)? Once again that's right here in the context. Let's go back up to verse 1 of chapter 5 where it says:

Ephesians 5:1. *Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. (NKJ)*

The Amplified says:

Ephesians 5:1. *... [copy Him {and} follow His example]... (AMP)*

Paul is saying in a fairly nice way, "If you're going to be a Christian, act like one in the conversations that you have, in the way you talk about one another, especially the way husbands and wives talk about one another."

Verse 2:

Ephesians 5:2. *And walk [which just means conduct your life] in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. (NKJ)*

And the context here, again, on the physical side is about our relationships and **loyalties**, if you will, first and foremost with God; secondly, with others, especially our mates, and progressively toward Brethren, our friends, other people. Then he gets into this here in verse 3. It says:

***Ephesians 5:3.** But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; (NKJ)*

This is the physical side here. It's something we do if we don't follow spiritual principles in our behaviors.

Verse 4:

***Ephesians 5:4.** neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, (NKJ)*

I think those things are pretty plain what Paul is talking about. Paul is not naïve here. He knows that men, especially, haven't changed. Human nature has not changed.

***Ephesians 5:4b.** ... which are not fitting, (NKJ)*

And what he's saying is, "It's not fitting for those claiming to be Christians to be talking like this, especially about their mates. And I've seen that so many times.

***Ephesians 5:4 continued.** ... but rather giving of thanks. (NKJ)*

Giving thanks to God for what we've been given, both spiritually and physically.

So, the point is clear there about where and how our relationships and **loyalty** should be and how we should conduct ourselves.

If we kind of boiled **loyalty** down to just a basic definition, it would be that we're true as Christians to those things and to those people that we believe in.

Okay, so we've covered the **Personal Loyalties** and their categories. And now, I'm going on to that Second Major Point there. The Second Type is:

II. Institutional Loyalty

This last one is kind of a tough one. And I'm going to be as cautious as I can so I don't give offense. I know a lot of these things have been covered before, but it's very relative to what we're talking about when we talk about **loyalties** here. And this one actually can open some old wounds. So, I'll apologize ahead of time. It's not my purpose to offend anyone. I'm just trying to make a point here.

But for the most part our experiences of things that have happened to us, things we've learned along the way have been some of the most important lessons for us as God's people, as Christians. Our past associations with religious institutions and organizations have taught us some pretty valuable lessons. I think everyone will agree. But we've suffered, we've recovered, and we've healed from that, and even healed from

a lot of the psychological damage that was done to us. And hopefully, we've gotten stronger as we've gone through that. And I know we've gotten a lot smarter.

What we've actually done, I think—and God has helped us along the way, we may not have agreed with His methods, but they're usually pretty effective—but what has happened is we've got our spiritual loyalties back in order. [That's] what we've done—maybe for the first time! And then we're moving on from there.

I kind of trust that we've recovered enough from this whole topic to even be able to discuss it, but just to get into that, I'd like to relate a personal example. And I know I've used this before, but I'd like to relate the example of living, working, surviving in a business corporation because I think there is a direct correlation between that and a church organization. As we go along here, maybe you'll see some of that.

And as I've mentioned before, I was employed at a nuclear power plant. It was required by federal law that we have a corporation. You just don't build a nuclear power plant and somebody pushes the button and you're operating. You have federal laws and everything you have to comply with. You have to do that.

And our claim to fame was that we produced enough electricity to power the City of Seattle. Well, a little hyperbole there because we actually produced enough electricity to power maybe a million homes. There were probably a few more people than that in the Seattle area I would think—at least by now. But that was one of our claims to fame.

One time we had, oh it would fluctuate anywhere from 1,500 to 2,000 employees. So that necessitated a very top heavy management system. In fact in that management structure, there was one CEO (Chief Operating Officer), and there were five (Yeah—count them!), there were five Vice Presidents. Of course, these guys were all insulation for the CEO. It's a classic hierarchy is what it was.

The company that I worked, for you would think with all the nuclear power plants around the United States someone would have a management style that they found that was successful that they'd pass along to other places. Well, we didn't. We kind of struggled with that for years and years and years. But finally we settled on a "Value System." They called it a Value System. Of course, like any company, they have goals. They have a value system.

And we had a Statement of Beliefs. It's beginning to sound kind of familiar! It's a corporation. This is a business corporation. That's how it operated. We had a hierarchy with a Statement of Beliefs.

But this corporation came to the point where it was what we would term "a high demand corporation." It became nearly tyrannical in some of the ways that it operated. We kind of jokingly, all the employees (Of course, we never did this in front of the VPs or anybody else), but we kind of jokingly called our little—we had a little booklet that we used in the company with our code of values, goals and all that kind of thing. After a while, we kind of jokingly called that "our little red book," because it had very socialistic tendencies to it the way the company operated.

And a good example of that was that we were required as employees to once a month fill out a survey on our co-workers, on the guy that works to the left of you or the lady that works to the right of you or our secretaries or anybody. We were required to do that. And, of course, this was all electronic and it was all funneled into Human Resources. And they would go through all of this and they would actually rate all employees with a point system. And these would come up in appraisals. We did quarterly appraisals.

Somebody's shaking their head. You do that kind of stuff?

And in some cases, that would even cost someone their job. So, you're just like a socialist country. You can turn in your neighbor and get them to lose their job or maybe get their heads cut off.

All these surveys that yours truly filled out and the people I worked with got exceptional surveys (laughter). And it wasn't because I was just naturally a rebel—and I am Irish. I have a problem with that every once in a while—but the problem that I had and I was kind of quiet about it because I couldn't change anything. Can any of us in a lot of ways?

God says "to be wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove." So, when it came to those values, my position was (And I'm not saying this was a bad company at all. In fact, these were good people. Most of the nuke people I know are highly competent. And nuclear power plants are safe as far as I'm concerned—as safe as any industry can be.), but what I was doing was my position was that I had a set of values. And these values didn't come from the corporation. I came with that set of values. Those values stood me in good stead because it was my responsibility whatever environment I found myself in, whether it was work, whether it was anything, was to conduct myself as a Christian. So, that's the way I operated. I left there with the same values. I never really incorporated the company values, but I was able to work inside those parameters that they gave us.

Those people that we work with, that I worked with, that you work with, if you work, if you have a job or if you're retired or whatever, they're your neighbors. Right? It doesn't matter if they're Christians or not. They're your neighbors.

The job paid pretty well. It was something I enjoyed doing, but I think God was most interested in—I had those blessings. We had material blessings from that. It paid well—but what God was mostly interested in was the way that I treated people. And I was able to survive because I had my spiritual navigation, my **loyalties** in order. And I tried to hang onto that.

Well, you kind of ask, "Were you tested?" Yes, many, many times. A lot of times I had to pray day to day to day to be employed the next day. And I'm not boasting about that at all because I wasn't always successful at that. You can talk to my wife sometime, ask her if I'm successful Christian or if I'm perfect or not. She'll point out my faults.

So, how does all this relate to a Church corporation? And this word may get a little bit touchy because I believe we have all, to some degree, fallen into a kind of a spiritual snare where the institutional loyalty actually replaced **The Number One Loyalty** to

God. I think that affected all of us to some degree. Instead of God's—just like the corporation I found myself in—instead of God's system of belief, we adopted the corporation's system of belief and their practices.

And I think snares are a good analogy because how does a snare work? I've never actually used one, but it's a pretty simple device. It's made with a hoop of wire and when you stick your head in it, and in this case when we're using it as kind of a metaphor here, when you stick your head in it—let's say we're talking about our brain—well, when we stick our brain in it, our forward momentum will tighten it up and will eventually strangle [us]. And I think you see the comparison there spiritually. And, again, that's not a good state of mind to be in.

And here are some kinds of "snare-y" bullets. Some of the things I think that gradually got us and could get us again if we're not careful, if we're not alert. It could mix us, confuse our loyalties. And this little list of bullets I made is probably going to sound familiar. But the first bullet is:

- Exclusivism

I don't know if that's really a word. My Word Finder says it isn't, but we find that exclusivist attitude.

- Isolationism
- Sectarianism

Even cultism is part of that sectarianism, obviously. And I hope we realize that sometimes we can have cultish behaviors without being a cult in that negative sense.

And the last bullet would be a:

- Controlling church government where the physical leader is placed on a pedestal.

He's in that big guy syndrome. He has all the answers. He's the only one that has a GPS that can get us to a Place of Safety. It's sort of implied in these controlling organizations like that that the members have sort of a salvation by association. And they have other grandiose visions of themselves.

My advice to everyone (myself included in this): If we ever see, if we ever find ourselves back in those situations again where someone wants to displace those **loyalties** (They want **loyalty**. They want to take that **loyalty** that we should be giving to God the Father and to Jesus Christ), if they want to take those things, if we even think they're leaning in that direction, the first thing we should do is locate the first exit we see and consider it a one-way.

Because it's going to become one of those—all of those things I listed are also called high demand religions, high demand organizations, religious organizations. Compliance with the corporation and personality loyalty, that's the prime currency in those organizations. That's the gold standard in those organizations. And if you don't do that,

you're either going to be on the outside—and again, they're trying to high-jack your **loyalties**. And these organizations are wolves. They, frankly, are wolves. They will draw you in incrementally, but that will all gradually grow and develop to where eventually if you're not loyal, if you're not compliant with the organization, they'll make you think something is wrong with you.

I'll mention a couple of books here that I have in my library that talk about some of those things. In a sense, in those organizations—and I know I can admit it for myself, being honest, I can admit that I was addicted to that sort of an organization at one point in my Christian life.

And I'd just like to preface the next thing I want to say that I think God used our past associations to help us. I think God used those, I think God those. I think God used Herbert Armstrong, the Worldwide Church of God to accomplish what He wanted, what He and Jesus Christ wanted.

I think someone said one time in a sermon that Mr. Armstrong was "a helper for joy." And I can accept that. I know a lot of people don't agree with that at all. They think everything was wrong with Worldwide, but I can deal with, I can manage this approach of them being a helper. And, again, we learned the lessons that we needed to learn in those organizations in the way that happened.

And I don't think Herbert Armstrong ever thought that the organization was perfect. I never heard him say that at all. But the church government, as we know, grew into an entity and the evils and everything grew with that. I'm not going to re-plow all that ground, but I'm just reminded of a couple of Scriptures. You can turn there if you like or not. I can give them to you as a reference for later. But Psalm 118 verses 8 and 9 and this is from the [New King James] Version. Where in Psalm 118 verse 8, it says:

Psalm 118:8. *It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence... (NKJ)*

And some translations "feel secure in men."

Verse 9:

Psalm 118:9. *It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence [feel secure, again] in princes [or leaders]. (NKJ)*

As we know Scripture teaches that. And unfortunately, we did feel secure with men and an organization and leaders. Our **loyalties** were in the wrong place.

Back in those days when we started seeing some of the changes that were going on in that large corporate church, it was like a light dimmer that kept being turned up and came on. We saw more and more and more. Then we realized how subtle everything had been. We kind of saw how our **loyalties** had been twisted and misused. Certain things replaced God, frankly, and became idols.

And, again, many writers, many people that look into this, study it and analyze it, define it as a religious addiction. As we know, if we're addicted to something, we have to admit

that we have an addiction. And then we have to educate ourselves or be helped, be educated to find a way out of that, even begin the process of healing.

So, I began to collect some reading material on how things operated under religion. And one of the first things I discovered was the Church of God was not unique with these issues. Not at all! And again, the addict has to get help. So, I collected this material and I'm going to give you the names of some of this literature that I have. I'm not recommending this, any of these. Although I know I'm going to be accused of that. And it's on public record, but these are some of the things that I think are helpful. It helped me to come out of some of these things. And it also helps just to be educated so that we can, again, that we can keep our **loyalties** straight and not be trapped in these things in the future.

And I won't give the—a lot of these things are co-authored. Sometimes they have more than two authors. And, yes, they all have their own religious affiliations, but their agendas are not in these books that I can see. And one of them I have—and I have a collection of these—and I agree but one of them is Toxic Faith. And it gives some good pointers of letting you know if whatever you are involved with is toxic. In other words: if it is poisoning you spiritually.

And another one is Exposing Spiritual Abuse. And none of these are hard to find. You can look them up on Amazon. And the next one is The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse. It does happen. It happens in all kinds of organizations, religious organizations. Another one is Healing Spiritual Abuse.

Here's another one that everyone should recognize: The People's Temple: Jim Jones. That's a scary one. It's really scary. But didn't someone say one time that "If the Church told them to drink Kool-Aid that they would"? That's scary. That's really scary.

And another one I have is called—which is kind of an involved one. I could never make much sense out of it, but I'll throw it in there. It's in my library anyway—The Guru Papers Mask of Authoritarian Power. And they get into the psychology of authority.

Another that we should recognize too: Martin's Kingdom of the Cults. He doesn't like anything that isn't Protestant, but he's always listed the Church of God in there.

Another one is Releasing the Bonds. This guy has a doctorate, Steven Hassan. He actually helps with a lot of deprogramming. Back in the 70s and 80s when there were a lot of cults, parents would find their kids in cults and try to get them out of the cults.

And a couple of last ones I have: In Search of Christian Freedom and Crisis of Conscience. Both of those last two are written by ex-J.W. (Caught that one on tape.)

But there are all kinds of stuff out there. There is a lot of stuff that is more direct to our own Church history and we know that. There is some very negative material out there. There are some people that are totally opposed to the Church of God in every way and they've left all those beliefs, but once again you can take your **loyalties** from one place, put them in another place that is entirely wrong. But all these have, the one thing they have in common, they all somehow relate to the psychological manipulation and damage that can be done if our **loyalties** are not in the right place if they're confused.

And invariably, controlling religious organizations will evolve into some degree of exclusivism. That is, we're the only people; we're the only group that's got it right; we're the only ones that are doing what God wants us to do. And it's kind of like the self-righteous Pharisees were so much better than everybody else and the whole world is going down the tube. So, they're kind of a "No, never mind."

Christ actually kind of had to address this same thing with the disciples because the disciples fell into the same trap, and again before they were converted.

Let's go over to Mark 9. Mark 9 is one of those chapters that the commentators really struggle with because there's a lot going on in this chapter. It begins with the transfiguration. Christ took Peter, James, and John up to the mountain, whichever mountain that was and the transfiguration occurred. But they saw Christ with Moses and Elijah in that transfiguration, in that vision, whatever that actually was. It was something very real to those individuals.

And they saw these things. They told Christ, "Let us build You a temple. Let's build a temple for You. Let's build a temple for Elijah. Let's build a temple for Moses." And, of course, what's going on in their minds, their unconverted minds? "Where do we fit into this?"

So, that thread, if you keep that in mind, that thread that runs through Mark 9, because the commentators have all kinds of different ideas, but we're going to kind of jump through that. Let's just keep that in mind that that thread runs through there because later on down in Mark 9, we have the account of "Who's the greatest?" That kind of fell out of some of this.

But what Christ is doing, He's imparting some lessons to His disciples. Actually, it's going to help them throughout their entire apostleship when they're actually out there doing what they need to be doing.

But in Mark 9, let's go down to verse 36. We're actually going to read from verse 36 to verse 42. Because of all of these things that are going on, Christ is going to make some points to these disciples.

Mark 9:36. *Then He took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And when He had taken him in His arms, He said to them,
37) "Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me." (NKJ)*

The context here is about authority. And, actually, it's about the abuse of authority if we really analyze it and look into it here. He's using a little child to teach this lesson because how do you teach a little child? Do you teach a little child by browbeating and strict authority? No, you have to nurture that child and you have to love them. (I'm not saying that you can't discipline your children.) But that's what He's teaching here.

Let's go down to verse 38. It says:

Mark 9:38. Now John answered Him, saying, "Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us." (NKJ)

"It wasn't one of us. We're the special ones. Not part of us."

Mark 9:39. But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me.
40) "For he who is not against us is on our side. (NKJ)

And all the groups that think they are exclusive, they never consider Christ's words here.

Another place—it's over in Mark 12 and you can read that too. It's embedded somewhere there in the chapter. But Christ told a scribe (I believe it was.) talking to Him. And he gave a wise answer to Christ. And Christ said, "You're not far from the Kingdom of God."

What the disciples were doing, they were looking at things selfishly, looking at power and authority selfishly. And Christ was teaching them, "No. This is going to go way, way, way on into the future. Not just your lifetime. Not just what's going on now, here, and today. It's going to go on in the future." And He wants an opportunity for everybody. And it doesn't matter.

We used to think it was great sport to ridicule other religions. Christ says here, "Don't do that." He says, "Leave them alone."

Verse 41:

Mark 9:41. "For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.
42) "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, (NKJ)

And don't we realize this could include anyone? It's not just the individuals that are being called that come into God's Church. We used to think that, but it could be anyone. What Christ is teaching here is them and their conduct. And the lesson for us is us and our conduct in the same situation. Because He said:

Mark 9:42b. ... it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea. (NKJ)

And this means **before** he caused one of these little ones to stumble!

So you have to think about some of the organizations that we know of. Maybe they just should pick out a millstone and go ahead and jump in. They might be better off than doing what they're doing, because they're not doing things the way Christ wants them to.

We have to remember 1 Peter 4 verse 17.

1 Peter 4:17. ... judgment [begins] at the house of God; (NKJ)

That includes everybody, everybody. No matter what your self-styled status is. It includes everybody. God is judging that.

But let's jump down to verse 50. This is, again, the commentators really struggle through here, verse 50. And He says in verse 49 that they're actually going to be tried by fire and later on that actually happened to the disciples. But let's go down to verse 50 where Christ ends this whole discourse here. He says:

Mark 9:50. "Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another." (NKJ)

It ends with a metaphor here of salt. And, again, this gives the commentators a real hard problem. They say, "Well, salt was used in the sacrifices. Salt was used in contracts. It was used in all kinds of things."

But if you just look at it simply for the illustration that He is using here, because how does salt lose its flavor? There are only a couple of ways if you really think about it. You can dilute it. If you pour a little bit of salt in a little bit of water, you can still taste the salt. But if you pour a whole bunch of water in with that salt, pretty soon it's gone. You just don't have anything left.

But the point of the context here is that what He's teaching them is "You don't take all this truth, knowledge, wisdom, and understanding that God gives us and dilute it by abusing the calling God gives us, by that smug, self-awarded exclusivism that Christ never intended. He never did that. He even says here that you would be better off if you died before you did any of that.

And it's interesting, too, that part of that metaphor is the peace. So if you don't get this big-head syndrome, like far too many groups do—the disciples then, for us now, organizationally or not, collectively or not—He said you'll have peace with one another. That kind of reminds you; that might ring a bell in James 4, where it talks about the wars and fights amongst the people of God.

So, we could spend a couple of hours talking about that, about how simple, what it would be if we just did things the way Christ explains here.

Christ goes on in another place. You can be turning over to Matthew 4, if you would. There's an example here and I don't know if you've thought of it this way, but this example here where Satan is tempting Christ, what he's really doing is he's trying to deflect His [Christ's] love, His devotion, His **loyalty** to God and give it to him [Satan]. And there's a lesson here for us too. In Matthew 4 beginning in verse 1 where it says:

Matthew 4:1. Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

2) And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.

3) Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

4) But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" (NKJ)

Quoting Deuteronomy 8: 3.

Verse 5:

Matthew 4:5. Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple,

6) and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: (NKJ)

He [Satan] counters with a Scripture.

Matthew 4:6b. 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.' " (NKJ)

Quoting Psalm 91:11-12, Satan [is] doing that. And then verse 7:

Matthew 4:7. Jesus said to him, "It is written again,

Quoting Deuteronomy 6:16, He said:

Matthew 4:7b. 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" (NKJ)

8) Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. (NKJ)

I don't know what mountain that was. Was that Mount Everest? I don't know—an exceedingly high mountain, showed Him all the Kingdoms of the world. You see offering that authority, offering that power. He [Christ] just had to change His **loyalty** and devotion to God to do that.

Matthew 4:9. And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."

10) Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.'" (NKJ)

Deuteronomy 8:13 and Deuteronomy 10:20. He had His **loyalties**, His devotions, His love perfectly aligned where it should be and it never wavered—never.

Verse 11:

Matthew 4:11. Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him. (NKJ)

But something else to notice here—and I don't know if you've thought about this in this way too—in this whole discourse of this Temptation of Christ here, He never once invoked His status with the Father. Never did that. Never once said, never once used

His "I'm the Son" card. No nepotism there at all. He never said, "Look who I am." Yet, how many titles does Christ have? It's somewhere in my study papers. I didn't dig it out for this, but somewhere in my study papers I have at least two sheets of titles, offices, positions, and all of that that belong to Christ. He never invoked any of that.

He quoted those Old Testament Scriptures because He and the Father are, and always have been, in totally harmony and agreement because They're totally **loyal** to one another, both then and into the future. What an example for us!

Another way we can kind of look at the Laodiceans as an example, as a bad example of **loyalty**. Because what does Christ say? He says they're neither hot nor cold. In a sense, they're trying to serve two masters. There are just too many enticing choices for us Laodiceans. There are just too many—too many things that will actually grab your **loyalty**, if you will, if you want to put it that way!

When engineers build a building, maybe even a building like this, they'll have a starting point. And what engineers call that is the "datum point" or sometimes they refer to it as "a benchmark." It's an elevation point and the whole building is built off that. Even skyscrapers are built the same way. They start with a point.

So, the whole point I'm trying to make here on **Loyalty** is if our benchmark, if our datum point is correct, our **loyalties** are correct with God the Father and Jesus Christ in the first place and we practice Christian principles in everything that we do, all the other **loyalties** we talked about are going to fall into place. They're just going to be there. It's going to happen that way.

I'd just like to briefly look again at the definition we covered at the beginning where it talked about this quality of **Loyalty**. And, again, that quality is a state or essence of being **loyal**. It went on to say how the **Loyalty** concept implies faithfulness, steadfastness, commitment, trustworthiness, devotion, dependability, staunchness, allegiance, and adherence. All of those can be misplaced—every one of them!

So, all those qualities that we talked about, especially in a godly sense, they need to be firstly to God the Father and Jesus Christ, then by extension to our mates, to our friends, to our Brethren. All those things should be there, should be throughout our relationships. And again, if we basically wanted to put that into basic terms we would just say that we're true to all those things and all those people that we believe in, all those spiritual beliefs, all those things that we have.

And for us, as God's people, as Christians, that's the kind of **Loyalty** we want to have. And that that's the kind of **Loyalty** we don't ever want to lose again because we might have been in great danger of losing that at one time and losing our salvation in the process. So, that's the kind of **Loyalty** we want to have as God's people.