

The Household Of God And Loyalty

Commitment to God, the Family, and the Brethren

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According to recent religious statistics in the United States, in 1900 there were 27 churches for every 10,000 Americans. By 1950, there were only 17 churches. And by 1985, this number had split to just 12 churches for every 10,000 people. In the year 2000, it was about 10 churches per 10,000 in the United States. So the trend is obvious.

Part of the decline is due to the significant increases in population from other cultures. As a nation, we are not starting new churches as fast as the population is growing. But another reason is the fact that over 4,000 churches die and go out of business each year. In addition, 85% of existing churches plateau or decline. What a grim look that is at this nation's religious state, at least from the point of view of loyalty and faithfulness to what they believe in.

Similar disintegration is happening within the greater Church of God. The Worldwide Church of God had roughly 140,000 members in the 1980s. (I know that is a round figure.) Count up all the members left in Worldwide and all of the splinter groups combined since then, and you will come up with less than half. Where did they all go?

Count up all the brethren in all the groups again who followed 90% or more of the same doctrines that the Worldwide Church of God had under Herbert Armstrong, and you may come up with a tenth of the 140,000 from the 1980s. That's roughly 14,000. Using rough numbers, 140,000 minus 14,000 gives you 126,000 people who did not remain faithful to God's church and who are not loyal to God. Of course, I'm speaking in very general terms; but that translates into 90% who are disloyal. Those are very, very sad figures from that standpoint.

Let me ask some direct questions. Are **you** loyal to God? Most of us—probably all of us—of course would say, "Yes." Are you loyal to your family? Are you loyal to the household of God? Are you willing to defend and protect the honor of others in the household of God? More pointedly, are **you** a loyal individual? And **what** are you loyal to? These are tougher questions than appear on the surface. Some may only be loyal to themselves. But, hopefully, that's no one, or hardly any one.

Especially over the last three decades in the Church of God, Christian loyalty has been tested over and over again. It's interesting that this recent period of **disloyalty**, by those left in the fellowship coincides with what we believe to be the Laodicean era of God's

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church. That is, if we follow the assumption that Herbert Armstrong made—that he saw evidence of the Laodicean era as early as 1969. Look at the description of the Laodiceans in Revelation 3:15-17.

Revelation 3:15-17 "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing.'"

What image forms in your mind of someone making moral and spiritual decisions who is neither cold or hot? A person who is faithful to his own humanly reasoned desires! What picture comes to view of someone who has need of nothing? Maybe a person who is smug, doesn't need others, and who is loyal only to himself. Of course, these are the extreme cases that would fall under the Laodicean attitude.

The *New World Dictionary of American English* defines **a loyal person** as one who is faithful to those persons, ideals, etc. that one is under obligation to defend, support, or be loyal to. It defines **loyalty** as the quality, state, or instance of being loyal; faithfulness or faithful adherence to a person, government, cause, duty, and so on and so forth.

Let's look for a moment at the tribe of Judah to see a faithful adherence to a cause. The walls of Jerusalem, having been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, remained in ruins for almost a century and a half—despite abortive attempts to rebuild them, which you'll find in Ezra 4:6-23. By about 440-430 BBC, such a helpless situation made Jerusalem vulnerable to her numerous enemies. But from a mixture of apathy and fear, the Jews failed to rectify this glaring deficiency. The leaders and the people had evidently become reconciled to this state of affairs for their families and their tribe. Then God sent them the dynamic catalyst of the loyal leader—Nehemiah. We'll read Nehemiah 4:1-14 to get the full impact of the context. Nehemiah is the narrator here.

Nehemiah 4:1-13 But it so happened, when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant, and mocked the Jews. And he spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they complete it in a day? Will they revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish—stones that are burned?" Now Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, "Whatever they build, if even a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall." Hear, O our God, for we are despised; turn their reproach on their own heads, and give them as

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plunder to a land of captivity! Do not cover their iniquity, and do not let their sin be blotted out from before You; for they have provoked You to anger before the builders. So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half its height, for the people had a mind to work. Now it happened, when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored and the gaps were beginning to be closed, that they became very angry, and all of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion. Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night. Then Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is failing, and there is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall." And our adversaries said, "They will neither know nor see anything till we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work to cease." So it was, when the Jews who dwelt near them came, that they told us ten times, "From whatever place you turn, they will be upon us." Therefore I positioned men behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings; and I set the people according to their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows.

So we see Nehemiah putting together a defense beginning with the individual households, the individual families—because he knew that the loyalty and dedication began there.

Nehemiah 4:14 And I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses."

Nehemiah was calling upon them to base their loyalty to their families and brethren on **faithfulness** — the faith that God would be faithful to His covenant promises, and the faith that their prayer to Him would result in protection. The Jews were willing to faithfully guard their compatriots and families because of their loyalty to each other. Their loyalty for one another was based on the fact that they all had the same goal to fight for, and they had the desire to work together to pursue that goal.

They were *family* and they were *brethren*, and Nehemiah said "*Fight for your brethren!*" This is the attitude we should have in our relationship with our brethren in God's church. The Hebrew word translated into the English as **fight**, here in verse 14, is a much fiercer

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word than it seems. According to *Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies*, the word means "to eat, to consume; to war against; to eat up, to devour, [It] seems to have been a very early mode of expressing the violence of enemies in war, and their determination to conquer, as Joshua says to the Canaanites, 'they are bread for us,' Numbers 14:9."

The significance of Nehemiah's admonishment was that they were to fight *for* their families and their brethren **with their all**, with the totality of their being. Their loyalty to God and each other was to be total—even to death.

We very well remember that Jesus Christ said, "Greater love has no one that this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." **Loyalty** is associated especially with **friendship**. The friendship of David and Jonathan, recorded in I Samuel 20, is the classic example of friendship and loyalty in the Bible. The book of Proverbs says things about a friend who sticks closer than a brother. You'll find that in Proverbs 18:24. Also, a friend who keeps secrets—in Proverbs 11:13. And one who criticizes in the best interest of a person—in Proverbs 27:6. With regard to our relationships with each other, an expression of the ideal is the proverb that we desire loyalty in a person.

Proverbs 19:22 (RSV) What is desired in a man is loyalty.

That word **loyalty** in the Revised Standard Version is translated "*kindness*" in the New King James and the King James versions of the Bible, and "*unfailing love*" in the NIV. So you are getting a feel of what friendship truly entails whenever there is true loyalty involved. Loyalty is an issue of faithfulness.

Loyalty is a relational term. While one can be faithful to an ideal, a duty, or a vow—one is loyal to a person. In most cases where "faithfulness" is mentioned in the Bible, there is an element of loyalty that is understood to be there. In a general sense, *loyalty*, *faithfulness*, and *trustworthiness* are used interchangeably in both our English speech as well as in the Bible.

Loyalty indicates **enduring commitment** to a person over a long period of time, often with the implication of the commitment persisting in the face of obstacles that threaten such endurance. Loyalty to a person doesn't come easy. Many times there are obstacles that come up to thwart that. Sometimes there are personality problems. Sometimes there are offenses. Sometimes there are others outside of the relationship that try to destroy the loyalty within a friendship.

Loyalty is the trust and faithfulness that people pledge to—and expect from—each other

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in a relationship between relatives, friends, brethren, master and subject, employer and employee, or nation and citizen. These relationships vary in their degrees of friendship. A loyal friend sticks by and proves reliable, even in adverse circumstances. He is also faithful and loyal in his dealings.

Biblically, **loyalty** points beyond human relationships to the relationship of God with His people—a relationship based on covenant, and that expresses a permanent love from which no saint can ever be severed.

Romans 8:35-39 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Because of God's loyalty to us and our loyalty to Him, nothing can separate us from our intimate loving relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ. These obstacles that we just saw are also obstacles that come up in our relationships with each other as brethren. True loyalty requires *humility* and *outgoing concern* for others. The result of this is that, as the household of God, nothing should be able to separate us—as brethren—from being **loyal to one another**.

We are not talking about blind loyalty. We are talking about loyalty based on truth. Not on speculation, and not on assumptions—but truth, and the Word of God! Our **integrity** is manifest in our loyal treatment of others in word and action. Our families and our brethren yearn for our loyalty. We all want friendships with each other based on faithfulness. We all want to believe our friend will stand by us through thick and thin, and that our friend is trustworthy and has our best interest at heart. What is desired in a person is **loyalty**. And what we desire as brethren—from each other—is **loyalty**.

There are two main categories of biblical images of loyalty. They are *human* and *godly*. On a human level, loyalty is a prime virtue, without which human relationships become undependable and the fabric of society loses its stability. In Genesis 21:22-27, when Abimelech wished to reach an agreement with Abraham, he appealed to their ideal mutual loyalty as a basis of their agreement. They couldn't have agreed unless there was a certain amount of loyalty between them.

Abraham's servant, in a quest to find a wife for Isaac, made a similar appeal for loyal dealing with Rebekah's family. Jacob, in his request to Joseph that he be buried in Canaan rather than Egypt, also made an appeal for loyal dealing. So when we rely on friendships, there has to be **loyalty** involved in it. When we rely on a friend to do something for us, there has to be loyalty involved in it. In all of these instances, loyalty is regarded as the ultimate 'court of appeal' for people to **act with integrity** in personal dealings.

Ruth is a byword for *loyalty*. Her relationship to her mother-in-law can be seen as a combining of friendship and family ties. Her loyalty is unforgettably expressed:

Ruth 1:16-17 But Ruth said, "Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The LOORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me."

This is a similar attitude as what we should have in our marriages as well, between husband and wife. After all, what does the marriage promise say? "*Till death do us part...*" When Boaz first expressed his interest in Ruth, it was Ruth's reputation for loyalty that he mentioned. He said, "It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband." That was one of the things that caught his attention.

The ultimate disgrace for a covenant people is to be disloyal. The descendants of Israel were a people with whom God desired covenant-loyalty with, but they were disloyal. In Hosea 4, God's words to Israel regarding **disloyalty** explain an aspect of the principle in regard to parents who are as **careless** with their children as they are in their own lives concerning faithfulness and loyalty to God. But they still long that their children would NOT be as themselves.

God will work with a child who has a tender heart. He doesn't say, "*I will forget you*"—but "*I will forget those nearest to your heart.*" That is, "*I will forget your children.*" God is said to *forget* when He acts as if His creatures are no longer in His mind, when they are no longer the objects of His blessing and loyalty.

Hosea 4:1-6 Hear the word of the LOORD, you children of Israel, for the LOORD brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: "There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, killing and

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stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint, with bloodshed upon bloodshed. Therefore the land will mourn; and everyone who dwells there will waste away with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air; even the fish of the sea will be taken away. Now let no man contend, or rebuke another; for your people are like those who contend with the priest [or, the minister]. Therefore you shall stumble in the day; the prophet also shall stumble with you in the night; and I will destroy your mother. My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten [that is, been unfaithful and disloyal to] the law of your God, I also will forget your children."

That phrase, "I also will forget your children," is literally, "I will forget your children, I too." God is saying, "*I too*" or "*Me also*." God is emphasizing that His acts followed on their action of faithlessness and disloyalty. They [acted] first. Then He said, "*I too*." ***He responded to their actions in a just way.***

Religion today reflects this disloyal attitude. Religious commitment throughout the entire society of the Western world is increasingly rare. While 95% of Americans claim to believe that God exists, only 70% claim to belong to some specific religion. Out of that 70% that claim to belong to some religion, only 40% attend regularly. That means there are 25% out there who believe that God exists but go absolutely nowhere. This is holding true even after the terrorists' attacks on the World Trade Center. Things have almost gotten back to 'business as usual' when it comes to God "interfering" in people's lives, as they look at it.

Much **disloyalty** has been exposed when brethren leave a Church of God organization under the dishonest banner of "doctrinal differences." Most of these doctrinal differences have been based on speculation and personal preferences rather than truth and conviction. Many times, they are used as an excuse to abandon the fellowship with others in God's church.

If there is a problem of **loyalty among brethren**, it is because there is a problem with their relationship with God. The household of God is a *loyal Body* — both to God and to other members. In sharp contrast to the world's disloyalty and to each other is God's faithfulness and loyalty to His covenant and to His people.

Overshadowing biblical images of human loyalty are references that link loyalty to God's covenant-relationship with His people. On one side is **the loyalty of God**, who is the

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faithful God who maintains covenant-loyalty with those who love Him and keep His commandments. That is, with the household of God. The response that God desires is people who respond by being loyal to Him based on the premise stated in the Revised Standard Version of Psalms 18:25.

Psalm 18:25 (RSV) With the loyal You [God] do show yourself loyal.

The faithfulness of God can be defined as His determined loyalty to a gracious covenant-relationship with His people. First of all, this is disclosed by the relation of faithfulness to "loving kindness." That is, love conforming to the covenant. In Scripture, **faithfulness** is frequently linked to "*loving kindness*."

Psalm 40:10 I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart; I have declared Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your lovingkindness and Your truth from the great assembly.

We see there a link between faithfulness and lovingkindness. Loyalty to a gracious covenant- relationship with His people is pointed to by other words to which **faithfulness** is sometimes joined or paralleled. Faithfulness is joined to the words: uprightness, justice, and righteousness. It parallels the terms "Your wonders" and "upright." This interpretation of faithfulness is confirmed in Hosea 2, where God promises to betroth His unfaithful people forever—in righteousness, in justice, in loving kindness, in mercy, and in faithfulness.

Hosea 2:19-20 I will betroth you to Me forever. Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in loving kindness and mercy. I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the LOORD.

This close association of words itself points to **God's determined loyalty to a gracious covenant**. But the covenant reference is *sealed* when God continues:

Hosea 2:23 Then I will sow her for Myself in the earth, and I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; then I will say to those who are not My people, "You are My people!" And they shall say, "You are my God!"

In God's mercy, He will say, "*You are My people, who I will faithfully own and bless.*" And

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they shall say, "*You are my God, whom I will loyally serve and worship.*" Deuteronomy 7:9 affirms that God is faithful and carries out His covenant and His lovingkindness.

Deuteronomy 7:6-10 For you are a holy people to the LOORD your God; the LOORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LOORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LOORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LOORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Therefore know that the LOORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face.

Because God Himself is faithful, so are all *His works* faithful and just. His works are done in faithfulness. *His judgments* have been appointed in faithfulness. *His paths* are faithfulness. Throughout the Psalms, the psalmist can even discern that **afflictions** are given in faithfulness. God gives men their recompense faithfully. *His plans* are faithful. God's faithfulness firmly establishes His loyalty to His people.

Exodus 34:4-10 So he cut two tablets of stone like the first ones. Then Moses rose early in the morning and went up Mount Sinai, as the LOORD had commanded him; and he took in his hand the two tablets of stone. Now the LOORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LOORD. And the LOORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LOORD, the LOORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation." So Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped. Then he said, "If now I have found grace in Your sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray, go among us, even though we are a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your inheritance." And He said, "Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation; and all the people among you whom you are shall see the work

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of the LOORD. For it is an awesome thing that I will do with you.

We see here God's loyalty to His people through a covenant for which He is very, very enthusiastic! And God has the same **enthusiasm** for His church, and His faithfulness to His covenant, and His loyalty to us as individuals and as the household of God.

Sometimes an appeal to God to intervene is not only based *on* God's faithfulness but is specifically an appeal *for* God's faithfulness as well. In Psalm 85, the psalmist praises God for His gracious favor in the past; and then he appeals to God to manifest His favor in the present distress. And finally, with the assurance of **hope**, he recites his vision of a time when steadfast love (or, loving kindness) and faithfulness will meet—when righteousness and peace will kiss, when truth will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky.

The New Testament reaffirms this faithfulness of God, now powerfully and finally confirmed in Jesus Christ. Paul says that the *faithful* and *loyal* God calls into the fellowship of Jesus Christ.

I Corinthians 1:4-11 I thank God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful [and you can add to that, and loyal], by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you.

Because of **loyalty**, Paul was confident that God would sustain *the elect of God*— even in temptation. In I Corinthians 10:13, he says:

I Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful [and loyal], who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make

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the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

The God who made heaven and earth can be entrusted with our souls, because He has the strength and the love **to carry** and **to care** for us. Because God is faithful and just, and because He is loyal to His gracious covenant-relationship with His people, He wants us to be loyal to Him by doing good.

I Peter 4:17-19 For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begin with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful [and loyal] Creator.

God can be trusted, or confided in, in all of His attributes and in all the relationships that He sustains—as Creator, as Redeemer, and as Judge. In these and all other aspects, we can come before Him in confidence and put unwavering trust in Him. As Creator particularly—as One who has brought us, and all creatures and things, into being—we can be sure that He will be **faithful** to the design He has in view for mankind. From that design He will never depart until He has fully accomplished it. He abandons no purpose that He has formed. And we can be assured that He will faithfully pursue it until the end.

God's people are to be faithful and loyal—dutifully responding to God. God's loyalty to His covenant demands **a response of loyalty** from His people. God is faithful, and therefore, His people are required to respond with faithfulness to His commands and with loyalty to Him. When the Israelites were finally settled in Canaan, God renewed His covenant with them. Joshua's injunction was again that they serve God in sincerity and in truth—in loyalty and in faithfulness.

Joshua 24:14-15 Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD! And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

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Joshua and his household chose to loyally **serve God**. He well knew that all service that was not *free* and *voluntary* would be deceitful and hypocritical, and that God loves a cheerful giver. He therefore called upon the people to make **their choice**, because God Himself would NOT force them. If they served Him at all, they had to serve Him with all of their heart. Service to God—in sincerity and truth—can only result from a free and willing allegiance, or loyalty, of the heart.

Samuel recounted God's faithfulness, and then demanded of the people that they serve God faithfully **with all their heart**. He told them to know, respect, and reverence God—to consider Him their Lord and Master, and to consider themselves His servants. Samuel admonished them to be always honest and sincere with all their heart—to be obedient, to act not merely from a principle of duty but also from a devout, concerned, sense of obligation. Act toward your God as an affectionate child should act towards a tender and loving parent. Samuel told the Israelites to review the history of their fathers, and to review their own lives—as a reminder of the power, the mercy, and the goodness and truth God had displayed on their behalf. This is great advice to every one of us, in our relationship with God today.

I Samuel 12:22-24 For the LOORD will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake, because it has pleased the LOORD to make you His people. Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LOORD in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way. Only fear the LOORD, and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you.

Without appreciation for what another person has done for us, there can be **no dedication of loyalty to** that person. Without appreciation for what another person is going through to reach the same goals that we have, there can be no dedication of loyalty towards that person. God's faithfulness in His dealings with us *obligates us* to be freely loyal to Him. The same holds true between husband and wife, and between brethren. God's faithfulness in His dealings with us obligates us to freely be loyal to Him.

God's loyalty to us is a gracious act. Human loyalty to God is NOT a gracious act, but rather a dutiful response and obligation. The law of God is the way of faithfulness. Therefore, the commandments of God are to be performed as a faithful and loyal response. God makes His claim upon both the *character* and the *actions* of human beings, and He claims **a total response** of faithfulness and loyalty. Nehemiah 9:8 recites God's call to Abraham, and Abraham's response of faithfulness.

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Nehemiah 9:7-8 You are the LORD God, who chose Abram, and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans, and gave him the name Abraham; You found his heart faithful [and loyal] before You, and made a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, and the Girgashites—to give it to his descendants. You have performed Your words, for You are righteous.

Faithfulness and loyalty bring the fulfillment of God's promises and provide a basis of appeal before God. Psalm 26:3 records that David asked for vindication on the grounds that he had walked in faithfulness and loyalty to God.

The relationship of **faithfulness** and **loyalty** to both the law and the fulfillment of God's promises is assumed by David when he exhorts Solomon to follow God's law lest national ruin follow, and to be faithful to God so that his reign would be blessed. It is in the context of that admonition that Solomon—seeing its truth and God's blessing upon his father, David—responded by asking for wisdom. God answered Solomon's request for wisdom. But, in time, he showed himself to be a man who lacked loyalty to the One who gave him the great gifts of wisdom and wealth.

Solomon followed the same **pattern of response** that the children of Israel have almost always followed—faithlessness and disloyalty to God. Human beings, by nature, are *unfaithful* and *disloyal*. Ungodly men are *self-seeking* for the most part. God's faithfulness stands in stark contrast to the unfaithfulness of sinful human beings.

Nehemiah 9:32-35 Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and awesome God, who keeps covenant and mercy; do not let all the trouble seem small before You that has come upon us, our kings, and our princes, our priests and our prophets, our fathers and on all Your people, from the days of the kings of Assyria until this day. However You are just in all that has befallen us; for You have dealt faithfully, but we have done wickedly. Neither our kings nor our princes, our priests nor our fathers, have kept Your law, nor heeded Your commandments and Your testimonies, with which You testified against them. For they have not served You in their kingdom, or in the many good things that You gave them, or in the large and rich land which You set before them; nor did they turn from their wicked works.

Except for a few short spurts of faithfulness and loyalty during their history, the tribe of Judah rarely believed and obeyed God—despite His loyalty to them, and His

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faithfulness to His covenant. The result is easily seen in a short chronology of the history of the house of Judah. After the conquest of Judah by the Babylonians in 605 BBC, the Jews fell successively under the Persians, Alexander the Great, the Ptolemys, the Seleucids, the Romans, the Byzantines, the Arabs, the Turks, and the British. Only for about a century—from the Maccabean Revolt in 165 BBC until Pompeii's intervention in 63 BBC—did the Jews enjoy autonomy for any length of time. That is, until the establishment of the independent state of Israel in 1948. (I speak here of the largest portion of the Jews that could be seen during their history.)

Turn with me to II Timothy 2. This is the history of some of the children of Israel, who had the perfect Parent—Who properly corrected and bestowed blessings upon them. Yet they still **rebelled** and could not be faithful and loyal to the perfect Parent.

II Timothy 2:10-13 Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.

Remember that with the loyal, God is loyal. But with the disloyal, God is not loyal—neither is He disloyal. Nevertheless, whether we are faithful to His covenant and plan of salvation or not, God is still faithful to them and to His covenant. It is interesting that faithfulness is most often linked with **steadfast love** and **loving kindness** WHEN God is the subject. It is linked with other terms—such as righteousness, unrighteousness, and sincerity—WHEN the human response to God is described.

Biblically, **faithfulness** is NOT joined with steadfast love when man's loyalty to God is in view; but when man's loyalty to man is considered, once again **faithfulness** as a human virtue is typically joined with steadfast love and lovingkindness. For example, it is recorded in Joshua 2:14 that the spies told Rahab that they will deal with her *kindly* and *faithfully*.

Faithfulness and loyalty are virtues required in the performances of **roles** that do good and cover evil; and their effects and conduct are what God delights in. In the Old Testament, these are virtues in a king that can be relied upon. The promised King of Isaiah 16:5 fulfills a role in faithfulness—seeking justice, and being swift to do righteousness.

Isaiah 38 records that Hezekiah was going to die and, of course, desired that God would

spare his life. He made mention to God of the former course of his life—not with ostentation or to justify his actions, but as a reason why his life should be extended. He had not lived as many of the kings of Israel had done. He had not been idolatrous. He had promoted an extensive and thorough reformation of the people. He had exerted his influence as king in the service of God, and he wanted to continue to do that. He prayed that his life would be spared in order that he could carry forward and perfect his plans for the reformation of the people and for the establishment of the worship of God. So you see an element of his **loyalty** towards the people.

Isaiah 38:1-5 In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, "Thus says the LORD: 'Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.'" Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the LORD, and said, "Remember now, O LORD, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what is good in Your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. And the word of the LORD came to Isaiah, saying, "Go and tell Hezekiah, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will add to your days fifteen years.'"

God gave Hezekiah a sign. That's where He turned the dial back ten degrees. What an amazing miracle that was. It's debated among scientists and among theologians whether the earth was actually turned back and that time was lost in history. We have no way of knowing, because the Bible doesn't give us that information.

II Kings 18 confirms Hezekiah's statement about himself, here in verse 3. It shows that his manner of life was grounded in faithfulness and loyalty to God. Because of that faithfulness, he was loyal to God. Faithfulness and loyalty are virtues for other **roles** as well—for the servant, the messenger, the witness, the priests, brethren, administrators, workmen, and teachers. Being counted faithful and loyal is reason for appointment to leadership roles in the secular world, as well as in the church.

Nehemiah 7:1-3 Then it was, when the wall was built and I had hung the doors [Keep in mind that we are continuing what Nehemiah was accomplishing with God's inspiration and divine help.], when the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, that I gave the charge of Jerusalem to my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the leader of the citadel, for he was a faithful [and loyal] man and feared God more than many. And I said to them, "Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until

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the sun is hot; and while they stand guard, let them shut and bar the doors; and appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, one at his watch station and another in front of his own house."

So you see the household being brought into it again. Nehemiah saw the second responsibility of loyalty *to one's own household*. The first **responsibility of loyalty** being, of course, *to God*; and the third responsibility of loyalty is *to the brethren*.

Nehemiah 13:10-14 I also realized that the portions for the Levites had not been given them; for each of the Levites and the singers who did the work had gone back to his field. So I contended with the rulers, and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" And I gathered them together and set them in their place. Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil to the storehouse. And I [Nehemiah] appointed as treasurers over the storehouse Shelemiah the priest, and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah; and next to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were considered faithful, and their task was to distribute to their brethren. Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for its services!

So **the brethren** and **the household** were all very important and key to what Nehemiah was trying to accomplish in rebuilding the wall and getting the people back to being loyal enough to loose their lives for each other. The treasurers were chosen for their faithfulness to God's covenant and loyalty to God. **Faithfulness** and **loyalty** are *role-relative*. The priests, for example, are faithful in keeping themselves holy.

II Chronicles 31:17-18 And to the priests who were written in the genealogy according to their father's house, and to the Levites from twenty years old and up according to their work, by their divisions, and to all who were written in the genealogy—their little ones and their wives, their sons and daughters, the whole company of them—for in their faithfulness [and loyalty] they sanctified themselves in holiness.

"In their faithfulness (and loyalty) they sanctified themselves in holiness." Social expectations are attached to these roles, creating a kind of covenant and thereby creating *role obligations* that must be met out of loyalty to individuals and faithfulness to

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a covenant. The New Testament also refers to faithfulness and loyalty as human virtues relative to roles. *Role expectations* create a firm loyal bond.

In I Timothy 3:11, women are exhorted to be faithful in all things. That is, to fulfill **the role obligations** of women. Out of this comes loyalty to her husband and family. The same is true between brethren—in that our responsibility to each other is **a role** that God expects us to fulfill faithfully.

It is used in a similar way in Matthew and Luke's parable references to faithful servants and faithful stewards. There are requirements that **role** has to adhere to. "Faithful" here is very much *role-relative*. But the point of the parables is not that the Christian should allow role-expectations to determine totally his or her behavior; but that one be faithful to God and give that loyalty precedence over all others.

Faithfulness is applied to the **roles** of witness and minister, child, brother, and even perhaps the role of martyr (as in the case of Antipas in Revelation 2:13, where the role-expectation is not to deny the faith). As the reason for his appointment in his ministerial **role**, Paul gives Christ's judgment that he was faithful and loyal.

I Timothy 1:12-14 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

In these cases, such **faithfulness in a role** meshes with loyalty to Jesus Christ—as can be seen by the frequent addition of a phrase, such as "in Jesus Christ."

I'd like to qualify something in the sermon here. Let me reiterate what I said before. I have not been talking about blind loyalty to any individual or blind faith to any cause. Loyalty must be based on faithful dedication to God's commandments, statutes, and laws. Loyalty must be in accordance with—and never contradicting—the principles of God. (That's the second time I've said that in this sermon, and I want it to stick.)

It is important that the New Testament describes Jesus as **faithful**. He is called "a merciful and faithful High Priest." He fulfills that *role*, finally and ultimately, in the service of God to make expiation for the sins of the people, as Hebrews 2:17 tells us. Jesus Christ is faithful in Moses' role. He surpasses and fulfills the faithfulness and loyalty of Moses in building and ruling the house of God—the household of God, the church of

God.

Hebrews 3:1-13 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful [and loyal] to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful [and loyal] in all His house. For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end. Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways.' So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'" Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

The children of Israel continually tested God's faithfulness and loyalty, and always God was faithful to His covenant; and He was loyal to those who were loyal to Him. But they suffered from a human trait that comes out of rebellion, and that human trait is **unbelief**. Unbelief is **faithlessness**, and part of faith is loyalty. Therefore, **disloyalty** equates to unbelief.

Regarding Hebrews 3:6, *the servant* owns nothing, is heir to nothing, has no authority and no right to control anything; and he is himself wholly at the will of another. A *son*, however, is the heir of all, has a prospective right to all, and is looked up to by all with respect. The idea here is not merely that Christ is a Son. It is that, as a Son, He is placed over the whole arrangement of the household and is One to whom all is entrusted—as if it were His own.

We are part of God the Father and Jesus Christ's Family. That is where we belong. We belong to the Family over which Christ is placed, under God the Father. Jesus Christ is the consummation of God's determined loyalty to His gracious covenant-relationship with His people. Christ is faithful and loyal to the Father, and the Father to Him. We

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have **the wonderful opportunity** to be part of this faithful and loyal Family. The training grounds for it is here and now—in our own households, and in the household of God.

Loyalty means enduring commitment to a person over a long period of time—often with the implication of the commitment persisting in the face of obstacles. We certainly see the **obstacles** in members of God's church—in sickness, from principalities, from others, and from our own human nature. *Loyalty* means **enduring commitment** to a person over a long period of time —often with the implication of the commitment persisting in the face of obstacles that threaten the lasting commitment.

Let me ask you this question, and let it ring in your ears as I let it ring in mind: "*How loyal are you?*" ("*How loyal am I?*")

John 15:13-17 "Greater love has no one that this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another."

Part of that **love** is *loyalty*.