

## I Pledge Allegiance

Where Do Our Loyalties Lie?

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I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands: One nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

For Americans, and maybe for some others too, this memorable sentence (and it was crafted to be memorable) is easily identifiable as, "The Pledge of Allegiance." A form of this pledge was written way back in 1892, and it is surprising on the one hand that it was that late in America's history. But on the other hand, it is also surprising that it was written at all.

The 1892 version of the pledge was written by a man named Francis Belamy. He was from up near Boston, Massachusetts, and was a Baptist minister working for a magazine at the time. He is an interesting character because most folks do not know that he was not just a Baptist minister, but he was what is known as a Christian socialist. I do not know if you know who the Christian socialists are but one of the modern Christian socialists you might recognize was Jim Jones, the one who gave all those people the flavored drink down in Guyana, South America back in the late 1970s.

Francis Belamy, was a Christian socialist, and also a cousin to a socialist utopian novelist named Edward Belamy. So you can see that the background of this fellow was not your typical patriotic American. He was a socialist.

This makes one wonder if there is any inherent socialism in the Pledge of Allegiance itself, coming from the mind of a Christian socialist. It is, after all, a loyalty oath. Think about that! It demands allegiance to the federal government. "I pledge allegiance to the flag. . . . and to the republic for which it stands." Not to a state, or anything else; not even to the values and virtues and principles of the United States, but to the government of the United States. It does pay lip service in the last clause to liberty and justice, but if you look at it and study it closely, what it really does is to use patriotism to bind and subject free peoples to the government.

I was wondering, as I was preparing this and reading about the origins of the Pledge of Allegiance, did America's slow march to socialism begin in 1892 with the Pledge of Allegiance? I do not know. It is an interesting thought, though, because it is at that point that such a thing—this loyalty oath to the federal government—became nationwide.

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Yet another interesting point is that most people are not aware that originally the Pledge of Allegiance was supposed to be said while standing, facing the flag, not with the right hand over the heart as we do today, but with the right hand held out and up from the body with the palm facing upward. And then, because of this awkward position—holding your hand palm up (even though it is only for about 15 seconds), they changed it to right hand extended, palm downward. Do you know that this was not changed until 1942 at the entering in against the Nazis and others in the Second World War, because by that time everybody in the whole world was aware that the Nazis saluted their Chancellor, Adolf Hitler, with the same salute!

So in America at the same time as in Nazi Germany two socialist movements were taking place (one through the Pledge of Allegiance) and both using the same salute. The only reason that it was changed was because the Nazi salute was similar.

What were the Nazis? The word Nazi is an acronym for German words that mean National Socialists. Be that as it may, I am trying to get you to understand that the Pledge of Allegiance is not quite as wonderful as we might think.

Be that as it may, Belamy's original Pledge of Allegiance was first published in a popular children's magazine called, *The Youth's Companion*, which is also interesting, because Germany had their Nazi youth groups, and the Communists also had youth parties as well.

Beyond all that, it was part of a national public school celebration of—not the Fourth of July—but Columbus Day, commemorating the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary (1492-1892) of Columbus' discovery of America in 1492.

Originally, the pledge did not read quite like we know it now, being shorter. It read like this:

*I pledge allegiance to my flag and the republic for which it stands: One nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.*

Now, think about that. You probably caught what is not in there. The biggest thing that is not in there is the phrase, "under God." Is that not kind of amazing that a Baptist minister would leave out "under God"? I thought it was kind of amazing! I would think that a minister would want to include God in any sort of pledge of allegiance. But it makes you wonder whether Francis Belamy was more a Christian socialist than a Baptist minister. It is striking and odd to me that he would have left it out. But if he was a socialist, I can understand that he would ultimately not want it there.

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By the way, "under God" was not added until the Eisenhower Administration by an act of Congress in 1954, which is not really all that long ago.

Francis Belamy later wrote in his life reminisces about the circumstances surrounding the creation of the Pledge of Allegiance back in 1892. And in this essay that he wrote, he appears to be truly patriotic and sincere. I do not know if his views had changed over the years leading up to this essay, or not. But, from what he says, he seems to have been sincere. His stated goal, as well as those on the staff of the *Youth's Companion Magazine*, was to encourage the younger generation toward love of country.

The reason for this appears to be the emphasis on business and industry that took place after the Civil War. There was such a decline in national pride that some people felt that it needed to be revived. They felt that it was dipping precariously low, and that soon they believed they might have another civil war, because people were being too individualistic. They did not love their country anymore. They were going back to their states, and their loyalties were being divided away from the federal government.

So, they wanted to create some mechanism to instill patriotic zeal in school children. That is why they chose to make it, "I pledge allegiance to the **flag** . ." Every school in America was given the opportunity to buy a flag. They figured that they would find some sort of flagpole for themselves, and set it up, and then every morning as the flag was raised up over the school, they would give the "Pledge of Allegiance" and this would help to instill in them this patriotic zeal in school children for the flag and for what the flag represented—the republic—the federal government.

Now the idea that this *Youth's Companion Magazine* came up with was enthusiastically supported by then President Benjamin Harrison. It also happened to be an election year, and so it was also enthusiastically supported by his challenger, Grover Cleveland. And, all of Congress jumped on the bandwagon. Plus, thousands of public school superintendents, principals, and teachers all felt that this too was a wonderful idea, not to mention the fact that the national press pushed it so that everybody would be on board by the time that Columbus Day arrived.

I should mention too that this was all done very quickly. By the way they talk in the article, this started in the spring of 1892, several months before Columbus Day, and they wanted to get this done throughout the entire country by October 12. But, even though they did not have the transportation and communication systems we have today, somehow they pulled it off.

To leave Boston for Washington DC by train would take most of a day to do that. And

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then to get the President's ear, and Congress' ear would take several days to a week maybe, and then to get all these other things together would take time.

But they were able to put it all together so that the magazines were carrying it, and the newspapers were carrying it, and all the public schools had flags. All the children had memorized the pledge, and so by the time we get to October 12<sup>th</sup>, everybody was able to recite this loyalty oath to the federal government, even though it came about very quickly.

Nearly everyone since then has accepted and encouraged the recitation of the "Pledge of Allegiance." Criticism has come mainly from religious quarters, as you might expect, particularly that it violates the first amendment's two religion clauses.

Congress shall make no law respecting (1) an establishment of religion, (2) or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.

The Jehovah's Witnesses are the ones who pretty much led the charge on this, because they contend that it prohibits their free exercise of religion because of their belief that they should not swear loyalty to any power lesser than God. What they said was that the state is compelling them to divide their loyalties away from God.

Atheists are on the other side of the coin of this religious contention. They object to the phrase, "under God," which had been added in 1954, because they claimed that the state is establishing a religion for the country.

Ultimately, neither objection has made any significant legal headway, although we did have a scare a few years ago. But, the reason why that has not made much legal headway is that the pledge is supposed to be voluntary, not mandatory. Now, there were some states that required it to be recited in public schools. But, as far as I am aware, all of those state laws that required it have been struck down by the courts as being unconstitutional. Good for them, in my estimation.

Now, you will have to decide whether you will or your children should recite it. I certainly would not recite it at all if the words "under God" were removed from it, because those two words tend to put it all in the right context—that your loyalty to the state, to the country, only goes as far as the country is under God, and that you would do nothing that would go against what God says. But, some people refuse to say it because they simply believe that they are dividing their loyalties away from God if they do so.

But here we are on Independence Day, a day of patriotism and the celebration of

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American liberties, and the idea of allegiance is a good one to contemplate. We are coming into the times that Paul writes in II Timothy 3:13 which are going to be growing worse and worse—people and times would be growing worse and worse— and we need to be clear about, and sure about our allegiances. We do not want to get into the midst of tribulation, and upset, and crisis, and have to decide then where our loyalties will be. It is far better to do that now, and to know where your loyalties lie.

So the question for today is: To what or to whom should we be loyal? Where does our allegiance to country fall? Because we have many loyalties. We cannot help that. We have our loyalties to God, of course. We have loyalties to family. We have loyalties to our employer, and to this, that, and the other thing. And in this mélange of loyalties where does loyalty to country lie? Where do we stand?

Now, a sermon like this, where we are talking about a word—allegiance—begs for a clear definition of it. This is an interesting word. I love words and their etymologies. Originally, this word, "allegiance" was, "the obligation of a feudal vassal to his lord." So a serf, then, or a minor lord, would have to make an oath to his lord whether a knight, count, or duke, or to the king himself—it went all the way up the chain.

Everyone had a duty as another person's liege, or vassal. Notice that I used the word "liege" because that word is in the midst of our word today, "allegiance." Liege is the root word for allegiance. Now, liege, contrary to popular opinion, and popular usage, means, not a lord, but the vassal to a lord; a servant; a serf. It comes from the Latin word "laetus," meaning "servant."

So, for those people who would call a duke or a king, "My Liege," are really using a misnomer. It is actually an insult! They are saying that their lord is actually their servant! It is more correct to say, "My Liege Lord," which means, in effect, "My lord to whom I owe my loyalty."

However, this usage of "My Liege" for the king or the duke they are addressing has been used this way in the language for so many hundreds of years in this incorrect way, that it is now considered correct. Dictionaries will show you that the liege is the lord or king, and not the other way around.

That is one of those funny things about words, that over time a word's meaning can change, sometimes to be exactly the opposite for what it originally meant. I guess that is why etymology is so interesting.

However, allegiance is most often defined as, "fidelity owed by a subject or citizen to a

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sovereign or government." Of course, the subject is to the sovereign, and the citizen is to the government. If you are in England, you are a subject to the crown, but if you are an American, you are a citizen of the nation. You are not supposed to be subject in this country to anything, really. We are supposed to be, by the Declaration of Independence, free peoples able to make and unmake our government, because "We the People" are the government. We should have power over the government.

But, that is not the way that it has worked these past 233 years. Now we are *subjects* of our government—well, that is the way that our government treats us.

Fidelity owed by a subject or citizen to a sovereign or government. This is kind of how it is used in the Pledge of Allegiance. It is a voluntary pledge, promise, oath, or guarantee of loyalty, devotion, or patriotic support. That is what our Pledge of Allegiance is. More generally, as we use the term, allegiance is simply devotion or loyalty to a person, group, or cause. This is probably the easiest way to understand it.

You all know the synonyms—loyalty, commitment, dedication, faithfulness, and fealty. Fealty—we do not use that word a lot anymore. That goes back to the serfs and lords thing, but fealty is a synonym of allegiance. It is obvious here from these words that most of them have very clear spiritual connections. We use these terms all the time in our sermons—loyalty, commitment, dedication, faithfulness.

Believe it or not, the word allegiance, or any of its forms, does not appear in either the King James Version, or the New King James Version. I do not think that even the word "liege" is in there. However, some of the newer translations use it a few times. You can find it in the *Revised Standard Version*, but only three times. Some of you use the *English Standard Version*, and there it is used four times. The *Homan Christian Standard Bible*, which is the Baptist's latest version, as well as the *New American Standard Bible* both use allegiance six times. The version that uses allegiance the most is the *New English Translation* (which is found on the Internet, so it is called the 'NET Bible) where it is found 31 times.

What is interesting to me is that every one of these is in the Old Testament. There is only one Bible that I saw that used the word allegiance in the New Testament, and if I remember right it was in the book of Romans. It fit okay. It was fine. But it was one of those things where they had used the word allegiance to interpret a more literal wording in the Greek. It was one of those places in the *New King James Version* or *King James Version* that would be in italics, words inserted by the translators that are not in the original. So that is how it worked out there in the New Testament, in the 'NET Bible.

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It is interesting, though, that all these usages in the Old Testament are modern renderings of what the *King James Version* would say, "follow after other gods." And, they would interpret it as "gave their allegiance to other gods." It is basically the same idea, but just a bit more interpreted than literal.

However, the synonyms for allegiance appear a lot more in the Bible. Loyal appears 20 times; faithful without any of its variations appears 122 times. Words like steadfast, affirm, and resolve, and even committed are all there, many times, because they describe vital components of allegiance.

So as you can see, in a way, we could say that allegiance is often an invisible subject in the Bible, because it appears without being named—or being called by some other name like loyalty or faithfulness. But the idea of allegiance is there. In fact, the whole idea of entering into covenant whether we are entering into a covenant with man or entering a covenant with God concerns allegiances and loyalties.

We will see that being loyal, or being faithful is a major character trait of both God and wise men. And I should mention here to make it even more important and vital to us, allegiance is part of the image of God into which we are being formed.

**Proverbs 19:22** What is desired in a man is kindness, and a poor man is better than a liar.

Now, that does not seem to mention loyal or allegiance at all. But, it does. The fact is that this is a stupid translation. Well, maybe that is being a bit harsh, and it could be translated as kindness, but it is obvious that if you understand Hebrew parallelism, meaning that the first half of the verse is somewhat parallel to the second half of the verse, you will see that the two halves do not equate very well, because it is equating kindness with being a liar. I guess that when you lie you are not really being kind, but that is not the idea that is here in the original Hebrew.

Here is where we get into Hebrew words. I have used this word a lot, because it is a very key Hebrew word in the Bible. Behind this word kindness is the Hebrew word *chesed*.

Now, when linguists were learning Hebrew, and they and Hebrew experts were comparing it to other cognate languages trying to come up with a good definition of this word, they, early on, thought that it meant "loving kindness," or "kindness," or simply "mercy."

But in the 1920s Nelson Gluck came up with an interesting approach to this word. He compared it with a lot of the other cognate languages, and looked at how it was used in the Bible, and he came up with the idea that "chesed" really means "covenant loyalty."

We can see, then, if we put that into this verse that it fits. "What is desired in a man is covenant loyalty, [or just simply loyalty itself] and a poor man is better than a liar [an oath-breaker]." So, to read it that way makes perfect sense—What is desired in a man is loyalty; and a poor man is better than an oath-breaker. Now those two phrases parallel each other very well. It would be much better to be a poor man and keep your word than to be an oath-breaker (one who does not keep his word) with riches.

Think about this: How do you think about your friends? Who do you consider to be your friends?

I am talking generally, not needing to name them. Usually our friends are people who keep their word to us. They are people who keep our secrets—people who are loyal to us. The proverb says that there is a friend who is closer than a brother. And that is what God wants with us. God wants to be our friend. Jesus says that He calls us His friends. He tells us what He is going to do. And He can call us His friends because we are loyal to Him. We follow Him.

So, what this says here is that one of the highest aspirations of a man in terms of growing in character is to be trustworthy, to be known as one who keeps his word, to be known as one who follows through on his promises. In other words, this man who is to be desired, who we would want to be our friend, is one who is faithful in his allegiances. But on the other hand, you cannot trust a person who breaks his word—someone who is a liar.

Okay, we are getting the idea here, I believe. Turn to Exodus 33 because we need to go to the One who is the most trustworthy of all—God Himself. This passage is right after the golden calf incident. Moses is kind of shaken. He wants God's assurance, and he wants to know whether God will be with him and the people of Israel, because thousands of people have just gotten killed, and God's anger was hot, and He had told the children of Israel to leave Mt. Sinai. But Moses did not want to take another step without knowing if God was with him or not.

**Exodus 33:17-23** So the LORD said to Moses, "I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name." And he said, "Please, show me Your glory." Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the



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LOORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." But He said, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live." And the LOORD said, "Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen."

**Exodus 34:5-8** 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.

You did not find loyalty or allegiance in there, did you? But, it is there! Once again, the important word is hidden by a poor English translation. In this passage, the word appears in Exodus 34:6. From what we have just read, you might think that it would be the word merciful, because we have talked about kindness, and lovingkindness and mercy being the definitions of chesed. However it is not merciful. It is the word goodness.

Notice what He actually says here. We strip off that word "goodness" and put in "covenant loyalty," or just simply, loyalty, and it reads, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in loyalty or allegiance, and truth." You see? That is what is so good about God. We can trust Him to always keep His word! We can trust Him to always be on our side. We can trust Him because He is not like a man who might repent, who might change sides; who you never can quite trust because you never know where his loyalties lay. But God is always true, always sure. And that is a wonderfully good thing!

No wonder that they translated that word as goodness. But, to make it covenant loyalty would have been so much better, because then we could really see that once God makes a covenant with us, once God takes an oath, or once God makes a promise, He is going to keep it, and that is wonderful! We can trust that all because God stands behind His word.

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So God not only has this covenant loyalty, but He is *abounding* in it! It is like it just overflows from Him! It radiates from Him. It is like He cannot even contain how much loyalty He has for His covenant toward His people.

So in a sense, we could say, if we want to make a comparison, He is so faithful to His promises to us, that our feeble attempts at faithfulness look like treachery! I mean, if all our righteousness is like filthy rags, then all our loyalty and allegiance is treachery in comparison to His.

His allegiance is exalted so far above ours. And if we think that we are loyal, what do you think that His loyalty is? We can only get a little glimpse of it. That is what was so *glorious* about God! Can you imagine what it would have been like if we would have been given the fullness of understanding of God's loyalty? It would be overwhelming to say the least.

But here we only see God's backside, in a sense, of His loyalty. His loyalty dimmed so we can comprehend it. He is constant and immovable once He makes a promise. He never fails. We sing that hymn, do we not? "His Mercy Never Fails" taken from Psalm 136.

We are not sure who the author is of this psalm. It could have been Asaph, or any number of other court or Levitical psalmists. There is no name given. But it was a psalm sung in the temple with one half of the choir singing the first phrase, while the other half answers with what is basically the chorus.

**Psalm 136:1** Oh, give thanks to the LOORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.

It would be almost like a contest with one side against the other. But notice that His mercy endures forever. That is the Hebrew *chesed* here. You think of mercy as kindness, compassion, and forgiveness. It is very nice to think of God in this way. He is that way. His kindness, mercy, and forgiveness endure forever. Yes they do!

But, that is not what the psalmist is trying to get us to understand here. It was not His mercy that he was trying to get us to comprehend; it was His covenant loyalty to us. God's faithfulness endures forever. His loyalty endures to us forever. His allegiance to the covenant endures forever. And it repeats this over and over again in this psalm—26 times! He put it into every line of the psalm—His covenant loyalty lasts forever—His covenant loyalty lasts forever—His covenant loyalty lasts forever—26 times! I think that

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by the end of this psalm, you should understand that God never fails!

God is always going to do what He promised in His covenant. We can take that to the bank. We can trust Him because He always does what He says that He is going to do. He is always there. He will always do what He has promised in His covenant to do.

This is summed up very nicely in Malachi 3:6, "For I am the LOORD, I do not change."

Once He makes a promise, that is it. He is steadfast and faithful. Let us go to I Corinthians 1 just to show that this continues on into the New Testament. It is the same God, who never changes.

**I Corinthians 1:9** God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

So, He was faithful to the Old Covenant, and He certainly was! He never broke the Old Covenant. He never did anything that would bring any dishonor upon that covenant. It was Israel who had the problem. The book of Hebrews says that the problem was in them, and that is the reason why God had to make a New Covenant. Because they could not keep it. They were not *loyal* to the covenant. They had no chesed. They went off and played the harlot under every green tree, and on top of every high hill, as the scripture said.

But, God, the Lord, was faithful. He was a faithful husband. He never did anything to break that marriage covenant. And the same thing happens now with all of us who have made the New Covenant. God the Father and Jesus Christ are totally committed to this, and they will not do anything to contravene the covenant at all!

Turn to another one in Psalm 103. This is another one of these hymns we sing. We know it as "Bless the Lord Eternal" from page 79 in the hymnal.

**Psalm 103:15-18** As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But the mercy of the LOORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children [Sounds like Exodus 34:6-7, does it not?], to such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them.

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Ah ha! Now, we have added something else. Very interesting. What we see is that not only is God's covenant loyalty forever—essentially eternal, and endless, it will never fail—but it is toward those who fear Him, who keep the covenant, and keep His commandments. We are starting to see that His loyalties and allegiances are not universal. It is not to all mankind, and not even to all Israelites.

He specifically is loyal to those who keep His covenant—the other party in the covenant—to those who remember His commandments to do them—commandment-keepers—and those who fear Him, those who revere Him, and respect Him truly. But notice here that this means something to us in terms of our allegiance. He says basically here that His constant unending allegiance demands our allegiance.

**Psalm 18:25** With the merciful You will show Yourself merciful; with a blameless man You will show Yourself blameless;

Now, guess what the Hebrew word merciful is here. You are probably thinking chesed. Well, it is not quite chesed this time, but it is a related word, chasid. It is actually part of the root of chesed. They have similar meanings.

This word is very interesting. It should also not have been translated merciful, because you know what this word actually means? Faithful godly one. In other words it is a loyal saint. "With those who are loyal saints, You will show yourself loyal." Is that not interesting? To those who are loyal to Him, He will be loyal to them. So now we are seeing the reciprocity of allegiance. God is loyal to us, so we should be loyal to Him, so that He can continue to be loyal to us! It is like a big mutual admiration society! He loves us, we love Him, He loves us, we love Him. It just goes round in a big circle but instead of love, we are talking loyalty. He is loyal to us, we are loyal to Him, He is loyal to us, we are loyal to Him, and on and on it goes.

What He is saying here is that He will never break off His loyalty to us and His covenant before we do. He only reluctantly turns His back on us—or in the case of the Old Covenant, upon Israel—when we, or they show continued disloyalty to Him.

Do you know how longsuffering He was with Israel? Over hundreds of years! They kept showing their disloyalty to Him in almost every situation! And He hung on, and stayed being their God. He did not send them out of the land. He made the covenant with them initially about 1440 BC. He did not finally send them out of the land until about 585 BC. Do the math. It was almost 855 years! That is along time to bear with people who are always kicking you in the shins. Or, as He says, putting the branch in His eye. He took it

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for *that* long, before He finally said enough! "I divorce thee, I divorce thee, I divorce thee! You are no longer my people!"

But He gives them hope that they can become His people in the future. We have Romans chapters 9, 10, and 11 that tell us He still is going to save Israel. So He has not even put them totally away even now! The covenant is gone. They broke it. And so He has decided to make a New Covenant, and He has started with us with His church. That is the covenant that they can be re-grafted into, and they can finally, once again, have a relationship with Him.

That is wonderful! He did not totally shut the door on them. He still has hope. He is still loyal to them. And He is still going to be working as hard and as tirelessly as He can to bring them into His family so that they can marry Jesus Christ. I mean, it is just such an incredible loyalty He has! Even though the covenant is broken, He still wants to save them.

Turn to Romans 8. Many who believe in the doctrine of eternal security would say that I just said something that is totally bogus or false, and this passage in Romans 8, starting in verse 31 to the end of the chapter, contradicts what I have said above.

**Romans 8:31-39** What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. 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.

These are wonderful verses full of great promise! But they do not say what these people think it says. The people who believe in eternal security think that you can never lose your salvation, because we cannot be separated from the love of God, or the love of Christ as it is also put here.

But you have to really read this passage closely. And you have to think about it, because other parts of the Scriptures say differently.

Now, the two things that they miss here are (1) Yes, we are more than conquerors, and we have this unbreakable bond with God *as long as we continue to be faithful to Him*. And the other thing that most people miss is (2) It is the *love of God* and the *love of Christ* that cannot be separated from us.

We can never be separated from the love of God. This is very true in terms of outside forces working against God. Think of it this way: Are our trials, or a war, or anything else going to make God's love for us less? No. Those things are not going to make any difference. He could send a flood, or a famine, or anything like that but He is doing it out of love for us. Those things are not going to separate us from Him.

Paul is speaking about God's love, and loyalty to us. That is what we do not have to fear ever having to be severed. What Paul does *not* mention here, though, is the waning or loss of our *own* love toward God—that is that we break the covenant with Him. That will break the relationship and cause God to consign us to destruction. Nothing is going to work on God to make Him stop loving us—except us.

As long as we remain faithful to Him, He remains faithful to us. But if we show an extended period of time where we are disloyal to Him and it turns into despising Him, then problems will arise.

Notice Colossians 1, and the biggest little word in the English language appears here. And notice how this is phrased:

**Colossians 1:19-23a** For it pleased the Father that in Him [Christ] all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. And you [now it gets personal], who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled [He has already started doing this work with us] in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard.

What does Paul say here? God will work diligently and tirelessly to bring us holy and blameless into His Kingdom *if* we continue steadfastly in the faith. He will work harder

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than you would ever have imagined to make this happen. But Paul does present the possibility here that we can move away from the hope of the gospel. Our allegiance can slip and fail. In another place, Paul talks about weeping as he was writing about all those people who had fallen away.

People who say that people can come to Christ, and then are assured of entrance into His Kingdom have not read the Bible correctly, or closely. Yes, His love is forever, and everlasting. But *we* can break the covenant. We can do this in a couple of different ways—either through neglect, or willful rebellion. And this is why allegiance is such a *major* subject in the Bible. It is *critical* to our salvation. We have to be loyal to Him.

Turn to Hebrews. I can think of no better place to describe this than what is found in the book of Hebrews. The whole book revolves around this subject. You may not have ever thought of it in those words, but Paul was writing to Christians who were neglecting their salvation. In other words, their loyalties were weakening drastically. And Paul feared that they had drifted so far from God, that they needed to see how much better what God had offered is, and they needed to get back to it.

They had not quite totally regressed, but they were close. They were so close that he felt it quite urgent to write them this letter, and to buck them up, and get them back on the right track, because they were in serious danger of losing their salvation. We will only touch a few of these.

**Hebrews 2:1** Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.

**Hebrews 3:12** Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.

**Hebrews 4:1** Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.

That means being left out of God's rest! And the next is one of the strongest admonitions on this subject.

**Hebrews 6:4** For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit...

Now Paul is making the criteria here. He is defining it very closely—they were enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, and are partakers of the Holy Spirit. It is all basically the same thing, but he wants to look at it from these different angles so that we understand that we have become part of God's family. It has already begun in us. That is what Romans 8:14 said. Those who have the Spirit of God are the sons of God.

**Hebrews 6:5-8** ...and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.

Paul is dangling them over the Lake of Fire, and is saying, "Look, you are like herbs that are starting to bear briars and thorns, and you are near to being rejected. So shape up!"

Hebrews 10:26 is a strong admonition, and maybe even stronger than the last:

**Hebrews 10:26-31** For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

**Hebrews 12:14-17** Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.



This is the third time in the book that he says that there is a point that you can cross where one cannot come to repentance again, because our allegiances have slipped and fallen, and God cannot trust us anymore, and He cannot use the blood of Christ on us again because it only is valid once. Otherwise, we crucify Christ again. I should say that His sacrifice is effective once in our lifetime, and then for all time as long as we stay committed. But we cannot have it happen for us twice.

Paul concludes his arguments:

**Hebrews 12:25-29** See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. [Then he dangles us again over the pit.] For our God is a consuming fire.

So mind your p's and q's, as it were.

What Paul does through the entire book of Hebrews is call these Christians to endurance in the faith and faithfulness to God. He wants them to be loyal. He wants them to look at their allegiances and to understand just Who comes first.

Will they trust God to complete their sanctification and bring them to glory in His Kingdom? Or will they break their oaths and return to the world and ultimately to utter destruction? Now, this question faces us today—where do our allegiances lie? Are we torn? Are we divided in our loyalties? Are we trying to live with one foot in the world, and the other in God's Kingdom?

From Christ's own mouth we know that split allegiances like this do not work.

**Luke 11:17** But He, knowing their thoughts, said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls.

Christ is saying that your loyalties must be to God, or to this world/Satan. And even Satan has to have loyalties from his demons, or that house will not be able to do anything "worthwhile" and luckily, they are divided against themselves.

**Luke 11:23** "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters.

We have to be with the program. We have to be fully united with Him.

**Luke 14:26** "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.

One loyalty overall—the loyalty to Him.

**Luke 16:13** "No servant 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."

So, Christ makes it very plain that we must have one overall loyalty, and that must be to Him. Christians must be wholeheartedly in God's camp, dedicated to His purposes, and faithful to His instructions. In other words, we are to be in total unity with Him, and with what He is doing. To put it into very simple terms, we are to be *one* with Him.

I was going to go into a rather disturbing trend not so much in the churches of God, although it has affected the church of God, but it is particularly among the evangelicals out there who have made this country, and the founding documents almost into gods—they have become idolatrous in the way that they look at America, as if America is the promised land, or that it is God's Kingdom, or that it is what the Bible is pointing toward. Maybe I am taking that too far, but they have elevated things like patriotism to almost a form of worship. Things like voting and jury duty are sacred acts that one *must* do, and participation in state and local and national politics is, to borrow a phrase from Paul, one's reasonable service.

But, if we take this too far, it becomes idolatry. And, we need to be careful about all that.

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I do not have time to go into it today. But, there are people out there who basically treat America as their religion.

We must always remember that our citizenship is in heaven. We are fellow citizens with the saints, and we are members of the household of God. Like Abraham, we have chosen to become strangers, and pilgrims; and we now seek a homeland, a better, heavenly country; a city whose builder and maker is God—not the one we have now, but the one still in the future.

Ultimately, our allegiance is to Jesus Christ and beyond Him to God the Father. As Jesus said in Luke 14:26, any other loyalties that we may have must pale beside to our loyalty to Him so that it almost seems like that we hate these other ones. His point is that in comparison our loyalty to Him must be like love, and our loyalty to these others must be like hate. It is not quite that, but it certainly is to love these other ones quite a bit less than God and Jesus Christ.

So we have to be totally committed to Him, to His plan, and to His righteousness, and in these things endure to the very end. That is the only way that we can enter the Kingdom of God. Does He not say that only those who endure to the end shall be saved?

Let us finish in Psalm 51.

**Psalm 51:10** Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast [loyal] spirit within me.

So let us pledge our allegiance, not to a flag, not to a republic and government of men, but to God so that with *Him* we are indivisible, and with Whom there is true liberty and justice.