



The Reflector

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Is Unrestricted Loyalty a Virtue?

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

To our Country! In her intercourse with foreign nations, may she always be in the right, but our country, right or wrong” – a famous toast by Commodore Stephen Decatur.

Loyalty to and support of one’s country, friends, family or brethren can be a noble thing. In fact, there is far too little of it in our “me first” society. It is a wonderful feeling to have someone who will stick with you through thick and thin. One that you can count on being there in hard times as well as good. Over the years, I have been blessed with family, friends and brethren who have demonstrated such loyalty. For this I am eternally grateful.

However, to the Christian, loyalty to any person or institution on earth must have its limitations. Jesus made that crystal clear when he said, “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” (Matt. 10:37).

If there is anything that I have learned in over 50 years of preaching, it is that people, institutions and even congregations change. I have also learned that some people are going to be loyal to certain people, schools, papers, and congregations – no matter what. They will standby and support them no matter what they may be teaching or doing. It is “to my (people, school, paper or congregation) . . . may (they) always be right, but my (people, school, paper or congregation), right or wrong.”

In the early years of my preaching, I witnessed my alma mater become more and more liberal. It was not long until I had to face reality – we had little in common any more. I saw the content of

“old reliable” (Gospel Advocate) become slanted more and more in favor of church supported human institutions without allowing any opposing views to appear on its pages. I vividly remember the “quarantine.” I saw congregation after congregation depart from the “old paths.” I saw preacher after preacher send in “confessions” to the Gospel Advocate to avoid the quarantine. Many more who did not send in confessions jumped on the more liberal bandwagon. I also saw many brethren, out of a sense of loyalty, continue to encourage and support all of these. Many said, “I do not necessarily agree with their stance, but . . .” Because of this, many of us had to remind ourselves often that our loyalty had to be to the Lord – no matter what anyone said or did.

My generation was not the first, nor will it be the last, that had to remind itself of this basic fact. Misplaced or extreme loyalty to any person or institution is never good. Institutions are made up of people and people are subject to error. Each individual must guard against being a “partaker of other men’s sins.” (1 Tim. 5:22).

No person or group of persons (an institution) is perfect. It would be hard to find any with whom we would perfectly agree on every subject. I think we all recognize this. But, sometimes both individuals and institutions adopt practices and policies that are so egregious that we just cannot afford to support and/or encourage their efforts. In such cases a loyal friend would want to do anything that he or she might rightfully do to try to get them to reverse course, but if they will not, they no longer deserve the loyalty of the faithful.

Loyalty to a person or group has caused many, like Saul, to play the fool and err exceedingly (cf. 1 Sam. 26:21). How many have there been that have allowed their loyalty to a family member to cause them to defend the indefensible on various Bible subjects concerning the home? How many are there whose loyalty to a school or paper has led to them to either bury their heads in the sand, or even worse, to defend the institution regardless of what its practices or policies may have become? How many have stayed for years with a congregation that practiced unscriptural innovations, out of loyalty to that congregation, its preacher and its people? Yet, all the while claiming that they do not necessarily agree with the practices that have been introduced?

If I should not be unconditionally loyal to a congregation, how much more should I not be to a human institution, even if it is run by brethren. I read somewhere that the late Foy Wallace, Jr. once remarked, "With some brethren, you can criticize the Lord's church as much as you please, but woe be unto you if you criticize a school or other institution run by brethren." This may not be the exact quote, but it is the gist of it as I remember it. I think I have seen this to be true for a long time now.

I am persuaded that the heartache and division that my generation experienced in the decades following World War II can be traced to a misplaced and excessive loyalty to men. When beloved preachers, papers, schools and congregations departed from the Lord's way, many could not bring themselves to break with them – because of strong loyalty and friendship.

My fervent prayer is that this present generation, and generations to follow, will be wiser and understand where their loyalty must be – to the Lord.

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"Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." (Matthew 4:10 KJV)

The Role of the Mother in the Home

Irven Lee

The mother has a special place of responsibility in the home. *Aged women are to teach "the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discrete, chaste, **keepers at home**, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed" (Tit. 2:4, 5).* This one passage does a wonderful job of outlining the role of the mother in the home.

Let us think of that mature woman who still has a responsibility to her daughters even though they may also be homemakers. The training should have started early while the daughters were young, but the teaching may continue because there are many important lessons that need to be deeply implanted in these young women. One way the older women may teach the young is by their own example of chastity, modesty, and good judgment in clothing, and in behavior. If there were more mothers with strong convictions, there would be more daughters with strong characters.

Who will turn our immoral and unchaste generation back to purity and sobriety? It is very evident that comparatively few older women have been training the young women in the way they should go. Divorce, unfaithfulness to the marriage partner, drunkenness, and a complete lack of spirituality have come to many young women in America. *Such people are in no position to be the mothers of the next generation.* Many do not want children because they are so in love with money and with worldliness. Are there those who can get to these young women with the Bible to instill the principles their mothers should have taught them? It will not be easy. Most of the ungodly will continue to sow to the flesh and to reap of the same (Gal. 6:7, 8).

To "guide the house" as a "keeper at home" is a special assignment to young women (1 Tim. 5:14). Eunice and Lois must have done their work well at home because Timothy was given the "unfeigned faith" and knowledge of the Holy Scriptures that helped make him the great servant of the Lord that he was (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14, 15; Phil. 2:19-23). *Is there a more important and satisfying work than*

guiding and training such excellent people to be the salt of the earth? The work of a good mother is so important that nothing should hinder or turn her aside from this glorious task.

It may seem to some that young mothers will naturally love their children, but very many young children are at home by themselves in summer. Some mothers forsake their husbands and children to live with companions to whom they have no legal right. The Lord knows that young women need to be taught to love their children, and to have a proper discretion and soberness of mind to be guides for these children. Mothers and fathers are accountable to God for what they make of their homes. It would be impossible to over emphasize the importance of the role of the father and of the mother in the home. The failures that are made in this realm could hardly be more evident. Worthy and successful parents are blessed, and they deserve our congratulations.

Many children are now growing up in the homes where there is only one parent. In some cases they are with one parent a while and then with the other. It is next to impossible for a good man alone to give his children all they need in the way of guidance and training. If the mother still sleeps at home but is hardly with the child this is only one degree better than her being gone into another state. She who bears children should guide the house. Money cannot replace a mother's love, example, and companionship. Are there not many women in the labor market in the very period of life when they are so much needed at home?

The word mother was once considered to be a word with very great significance. As more women began using vulgar and blasphemous language, drinking alcohol, forsaking the home in search of money and notoriety, and becoming immodest and immoral, the special respect for women in general was lost. There are still some of the very best mothers, and their children love and honor them. We should all thank God for these virtuous women because it is the influence of His word that causes them to be so worthy of respect. ■

A gracious woman retaineth honour: and strong men retain riches. (Proverbs 11:16 KJV)

The Bible

R. J. Evans

Recently, the History Channel televised a special 10-hour mini-series on The Bible. From the reports and reviews given, it has been very popular and viewed by a large audience. I did not watch it, because I tend to be mindful of the many errors and inaccuracies in such a feature. I did, however, take a few moments occasionally to view parts of it to get an idea of what was being shown. For instance, they had three wise men coming to the stable where Jesus was born. But, when we actually go to the Bible, it doesn't tell us how many wise men came—they brought three gifts—“gold, frankincense, and myrrh” (Matt. 2:11). They did not come to the stable, as did the shepherds (Lk. 2:8-16). Mary and the young Child were in a “house” when the wise men arrived (Matt. 2:3). While the movie did have John the Baptist immersing Jesus when He was baptized (which is the scriptural meaning of baptism—from the Gk. *baptizo*—to dip or plunge under; to immerse), yet when Ananias came to Saul of Tarsus (later the Apostle Paul), the movie had him pouring water over his head instead of immersing or baptizing him. (See Acts 9:17; 22:16).

Sometimes these shows about the Bible can be interesting and informative glimpses of daily life and culture during ancient times. They help give us insight into the intense emotions of people when they were in certain situations. Some of that was clearly evident in the movie, *The PASSION of the Christ*—about the death of Jesus. But I believe there are dangers that must be taken into consideration.

We must realize that God chose words to reveal His will to man. Words are vehicles which convey ideas and thoughts. Please observe what is stated by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 3:3-5: “...how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery as I wrote before in a few words, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and

prophets.” Hence, God has not made His will known through movies, actors or plays.

We have to be careful that we do not base our knowledge and understanding of the Bible on what we have seen in movies. I wonder how many people today visualize Moses as Charlton Heston when they study the Old Testament record of how God delivered the Israelites from Egypt, parted the Red Sea, gave the Ten Commandments, etc.

This is why it is so important that the Word is studied and learned by our children. Our young people do not need to grow up with their “knowledge” based on visual images of Bible characters such as Bible Veggie Tales, cartoons, movies, plays, etc.

Nothing can take the place of God’s book—THE BIBLE. It is verbally inspired—word for word. It was not written in the form of a novel to entertain, thus, we are not to think of it in such a manner. All Scripture is inspired—“God-breathed”—so “that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Paul had just reminded Timothy “that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15).

The TV series, THE BIBLE, may give us something to discuss with our neighbors and friends. It may even open a door of opportunity to teach them the gospel—the truth. But we still must remember that our faith is based upon the Word. “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). James tells us to “receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (Jas. 1:21). The Hebrew writer reveals to us that “the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). The Word is our standard, our guide, therefore, we must obey it and live by it. The Psalmist said, “Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path” (Psa. 119:105). ■

Contextually Speaking ...

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.” (2 Corinthians 13:5). These words of Paul to the Corinthians have been adapted to admonish people to examine themselves before pointing a finger at someone else. Or, to just examine themselves often to verify their continued faithfulness. Maybe we need to be aware that such applications of these words are an adaptation and not the original point that Paul was making.

Paul’s point was that the Corinthians’ being in the faith was evidence of his apostleship. He was answering those among them who were questioning his apostleship. In verse 3, he says, “Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you.” In verse 5, he is telling them to examine themselves. Were they in the faith? Of course, they were. Was Christ in them? Of course, He was? Or else they would be reprobates. How did they get in the faith? How did Christ get in them? It was through the preaching of Paul. Their own relationship to the faith and Christ was proof that Paul’s message had been from Christ, as an apostle. He is simply telling them to look at themselves for proof that Christ was speaking in him. In verse 6, he is telling them that after looking at themselves he trusted that they would know that he was no reprobate in spite of what those who questioned his apostleship might be saying – for they themselves were living proof that Christ was speaking in him. ■

That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; (Hebrews 6:18-19 KJV)
