

23 - 29 August 2020

Related Bible reading(s): Matthew 16.13-20

PostScript: Faithful and loyal

🌐 Loyalty is invoked in many situations: some worthy, others not so much.

Reflection

‘Loyalty’ is a virtue – isn’t it? Loyalty to our families and friends is a desirable quality – isn’t it? What about loyalty to communities and countries, monarchs and governments, political parties and social causes, religions or beliefs? What about loyalty to employers and trades unions, to entertainers and sports personalities? What about so-called ‘brand loyalty’, to manufacturers or service providers? Are all these kinds of loyalty virtuous? Are they all desirable qualities?

Faced with such questions, we might reasonably begin to think, ‘Well, it depends on how they behave.’ It’s possible for family loyalty to morph into the unhealthy attitude of ‘my family, right or wrong’ (and Jesus consistently challenged ideas of who constitutes ‘family’ anyway – see Mark 3.35, 10.29 et al.). And, of course, political and social entities – being human – are always imperfect and can all too easily become corrupt. Appropriate loyalties are not always as clear-cut as we might wish; for instance, in the continuing controversy over Brexit, both Leavers and Remainers have accused each other of disloyalty to the UK, on the grounds of defying the referendum result or of leading the country to disaster, respectively; and both believe they are right.

When it comes to corporate or brand loyalty, things can be even less clear; for instance, increasing awareness of the Chinese government’s treatment of Uighur Muslims has led prominent figures in the West such as [US Senator Josh Hawley](#) and [UK footballer Mesut Ozil](#) to draw the attention of influential organisations and brands to the risks of tacit complicity with oppression.

Reasonable people will recoil from the idea of loyalty to something they discover to be wrong, and willingly adjust their loyalties if corrupt behaviour

is pointed out to them. In other words, we recognise that 'blind loyalty' is neither virtuous nor desirable, any more than any other kind of culpable blindness.

The Bible and subsequent Christian tradition, emerging from very hierarchical societies, often use the imagery of loyalty to a 'king' or 'lord' to describe the relationship with God to which we should aspire. Here, at least, we are on safe ground, as long as we remember that 'God is love' (1 John 4.16) and that love is therefore the ultimate standard by which we should assess any other loyalties to which we feel drawn. As Christians, our loyalty must always be to the practice and promotion of God's unconditional love for all creation.

Prayer

Lord God, heavenly king,
through your Son Jesus Christ you have revealed to us
that our highest loyalty is to love you, our neighbours and ourselves.
May we always keep this guiding principle in our hearts and minds,
as we face the competing calls on our loyalty that life brings us:
through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

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KEY:  icon indicates ways to connect faith with everyday life

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