



## Lesson 11:

### Practicing Supreme Loyalty to Christ

by Eve Knight

What is loyalty? How would you define loyalty?

Miriam-Webster dictionary defines loyalty as:

1. unswerving in allegiance (devotion): such as
  - a. faithful in allegiance to one's lawful sovereign or government  
i.e. they were loyal to their king
  - b. faithful to a private person to whom faithfulness is due  
i.e. he is a loyal husband
  - c. faithful to a cause, ideal, custom, institution, or product  
i.e. she is a loyal churchgoer

Another word that could be used is faithful, right? Is it possible to be loyal to the wrong thing? Or the wrong person? Did Hitler, for example, have many loyal followers? How did that loyalty impact them? Did David Koresh have many loyal followers? How did that loyalty impact them?

What was wrong with the kind of loyalty displayed in those two examples? The people surrendered their thinking and choices to someone else. Is that the kind of loyalty God desires? No! In fact, what does God ask of us?

“Come now, and let us reason together,” says the Lord, “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” Isaiah 1:18 (NKJV)

According to this verse, God wants us to stop thinking, and just do what we're told...No? What does this verse tell us God wants? He wants us to come to Him, converse with Him, and exercise our thinking, through reasoning *with* Him.

Could a random stranger stand in front of us today, and declare that we are all now loyal to him? No! Why? Loyalty can't be declared to be present. If that person had a gun, and told us that he would shoot anybody who chose not to be loyal to him, would that cause loyalty in us? No! Why? Fear cannot create loyalty. It might create obedience temporarily, but not loyalty. Why? Where does loyalty come from? What is necessary for us to willingly choose to be loyal to someone? Knowledge of that person & their character, with love and devotion that grows out of that knowledge.

In the context of our lesson title, which says that we should be loyal to Christ, how does Christ gain our loyalty?



- He loves us
- He showed us His character
- He procured the remedy that can save us
- He defeated death
- He heals and restores us back to His design (and more)

So, back to our lesson title, what does it mean to **practice** “supreme loyalty to Christ?” What does that look like?

- Putting our loyalty to Him first, above all other loyalties
- Continuing to love the truth and grow in our understanding
- Practicing His methods of truth, love, and freedom
- Valuing what He values
- Living a life of love towards others (and more)

The lesson suggests that this overarching theme of supreme loyalty to Christ is addressed in Ephesians. Let’s look at the first part of the passage suggested for **Sunday’s lesson**:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

How do we understand this text? Let’s take a look at what a lexicon tells us about it and see if we can reason through it. I often use the lexicon found at biblehub.com, and this is what it looks like for Ephesians 6:1:

## ◀ Ephesians 6:1 ▶

NASB Lexicon		
NASB ©	Greek	Strong's
Children,	τέκνα (tekna)	5043: a child (of either sex)
obey	ὑπακούετε (upakouete)	5219: to listen, attend to
your parents	γονεῦσιν (goneusin)	1118: a parent
in the Lord,	κυρίῳ (kuriō)	2962: lord, master
for this		3778: this
is right.	δίκαιον (dikaion)	1342: correct, righteous, by impl. innocent



You can see from this, that the word translated as obey doesn't mean just obey. So, if I click on the blue number, it brings up a more detailed description of that word:

### Strong's Concordance

**hupakouó:** to listen, attend to

**Original Word:** ὑπακούω

**Part of Speech:** Verb

**Transliteration:** hupakouó

**Phonetic Spelling:** (hoop-ak-oo'-o)

**Definition:** to listen, attend to

**Usage:** I listen, hearken to, obey, answer.

### HELPS Word-studies

**Cognate:** [5219](#) *hypakouō* (from [5259](#) /*hypó*, "under" and [191](#) /*akouō*, "hear") – properly, to *obey* what is heard (literally, "under hearing"). See [5218](#) (*hypakoē*).

[5219](#) /*hypakouō* ("obey") is acting *under the authority* of the one speaking, i.e. *really listening* to the one giving the charge (order). [5219](#) /*hypakouō* ("to hearken, obey") suggests *attentively* listening, i.e. fully compliant (responsive).

[[5219](#) (*hypakouō*) is an "intensification" of the simple verb "to listen" ([191](#) /*akouō*, "hear").]

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From this, we can see that the word "obey" could be translated as "attentively listen to."

Now, let's think through the text, and try to understand it. First, is this just an arbitrary rule that children need to follow? Isn't it often taught this way? How do we know it isn't arbitrary? (Because it's given a conditional phrase, "in the Lord.") How does this conditional phrase alter the command? What does it mean? Perhaps that even children are to evaluate the advice and commands of their parents, and then heed them as long as they don't go against the revealed will of God?

The text also says, "for this is right." What does that part mean? Again, is this arbitrary, or could there be a design law involved? Let's look at the next part of the verse, and see if it helps us better understand what design law that might be:



“Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise—“so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth. (Ephesians 6:1 (NIV)

What does it mean to “honor” your parents? When I looked that word up in the lexicon, this is what it says:

Definition: to fix the value, to price

Usage: a) I value at a price, estimate, b) I honor, reverence

Properly – assign value (give honor) as it reflects the personal esteem (value, preciousness) attached to it by the beholder.

What might be another word we could use here to reflect this understanding of the definition? Respect, maybe?

Which means that Paul is telling children to listen attentively to their parents and treat them with respect. The text also points out the desired result if children listen to this advice: “that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”

Let’s continue thinking it through. If children listen attentively to their parents, what will that teach them? How does that help them grow? If children treat their parents with respect, what will that teach them? How will that help them grow? If children evaluate what they hear in light of God’s word, what does that teach them? How does that help them grow?

Are you noticing the design law here? It’s the law of exertion. If you want to get better at something, practice it. If children practice respect for their parents, what else do they learn? They learn to treat others with respect, too. If they learn to listen to their parents, what kinds of things are they listening to? In a good home, they should be learning to listen to training, guidance, and correction, to name a few. Can these things help that child in their future? Can they even help that child have a better relationship with God?

Did you notice there’s a second design law involved in this text? That of sowing and reaping. Is someone more likely to have their life “go well,” if they are respectful to others or disrespectful? How about if they have the ability to listen or if they never listen? We reap what we sow.

Based on what we now understand about the text, is Paul’s advice to children about their outward behavior? No! What is it about? It’s about an attitude of the heart. An attitude that can be practiced, one that helps that child develop, grow, and have a more positive future.

Is this an attitude that only children should practice? Of course not. It’s something that we, as adults, can also practice. Even if we didn’t learn this heart attitude as a child, it’s still something that can be learned and practiced, now.



## MONDAY

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Paul doesn't leave his advice for just the children, however. Next, he addresses the parents, and we'll look at two different translations:

Fathers,[or parents] do not exasperate your children;... (Ephesians 6:4a NIV)

Fathers, [or parents] do not provoke your children to anger,... (Ephesians 6:4a RSV)

What does it mean to exasperate? Or as the other translation put it, "to provoke to anger"?

From the Biblehub lexicon:

Definition: to provoke to anger

Usage: I provoke to anger, exasperate

3949 parorgízō (from 3844 /pará, "from close-beside" and 3710 /orgízō, "become angry") – properly, rouse someone to anger; to provoke in a way that "really pushes someone's buttons," i.e. to "really get to them" in an "up-close-and-personal" way (because so near, literally "close beside").

What does it mean, "to push someone else's buttons"? Have you ever known someone so well that you knew exactly what to say or do to get them angry; or you knew the areas that were particularly painful to that person, and you could "poke" that spot with your words and cause a big blowout? This is what the text is pointing to. How well do parents know their children? So how easily could parents "push their child's buttons."

Why does Paul tell parents to avoid doing this? If you were the child, being provoked in this way, would your relationship with that parent get better or worse? Would you be more likely to withdraw, become distrustful, and begin to protect self? Would this response teach you to be more Christlike and loving toward others, or would it teach you to be more like the world, practicing its method of survival of the fittest? Would you begin to think God was like your parent, especially if the parent is claiming to be a Christian? How would that impact your desire to know God?

Now, imagine that you are the parent practicing this behavior. What is that practice doing to you? Is it making you more Christlike to treat your child in this way, or is it moving you away from God?

People who purposefully provoke children instead of being sensitive to their needs are hardening their own hearts, which could eventually lead to abusing them in other ways. And abuse impacts both parties when it comes to having a good relationship with God. Am I saying that in this type of abuse scenario, the child and the parent can't get to know God? No! What it means is they both end up with problem areas that need to be overcome in order to have a good relationship with God. The child has to overcome pain, injury, low self-esteem, shame, an inability to trust, and fear of authority figures (not an exhaustive list), but their conscience hasn't been seared. The parent has to overcome the



searing of their own conscience from the evil choices they made, which makes it harder for them to respond to God. It's not impossible, though, for with God, all things are possible.

Now, is all this something that ONLY parents need to be careful about? Of course not! How easy is it for us to hurt those that are closest to us? Parent, spouse, child, friend, coworker – anyone we know well, we also know how to hurt. The warning is for us, too, and it follows the same design law of exertion.

I remember a story about a high school basketball coach and his son. They had been outside, practicing, when the father received a phone call and went inside. The son, who was tired by this time, started just tossing the ball at the net, not caring whether he made a basket or not. When the father returned, he watched his son for a moment, and then simply said, “Be careful, son; what you practice is what you get better at.”

Every time we practice something, we get better at it. If it is complaining, we get better at it. If it is gossiping, we get better at it. If it's being negative in our speech, we get better at it. It's also true that if we practice better things, we get better at those, too. Let's look at the rest of what Paul said, which points to some better options:

Fathers,[or parents] do not exasperate your children; **instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.** (Ephesians 6:4 NIV)

Fathers, [or parents] do not provoke your children to anger, **but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.** (Ephesians 6:4 RSV)

Notice that Paul is contrasting these two behaviors. There's something to avoid, and something to do in its place. Let's look at the phrases, which Paul clarifies as being “of the Lord.” Here's the first phrase, which I've summarized from the information in the Biblehub lexicon:

**Bring them up in:** to bring up to maturity, to nourish, to nurture.

What does it mean to nurture or nourish a child? To feed them; to provide what is necessary for their growth and development; to notice what they are good at and encourage them in those areas; to have as a goal their maturity.

**Training/Discipline:** training and education of children, hence: instruction; chastisement, correction. Properly, instruction that trains someone to reach full development or maturity.

What does it mean to discipline? To disciple, train, provide opportunities to learn and grow, to teach ways and methods, even to learn about how to think things through. When necessary, it also involves correction. What does a child learn when they are corrected? Do they learn to recognize harmful behavior? Potentially how to soften their heart in response to the correction? How to try to “make things right,” by repairing relationships hurt by their behavior? Can these things benefit the child both in the moment, and in their growth and maturity? Can they also benefit the child in their relationship



with God?

**Instruction:** admonition, warning, counsel. Warning through teaching – improves a person’s reasoning so they can reach God’s solution; for example, by going through His thought process.

What does it mean to provide Instruction? Teaching God’s word, His methods, and how He created the world to operate. Learning how He sees people, about His love for all of us, and even how to have our “hard hearts” removed and replaced with His “heart of flesh.”

Did you notice the common theme in these definitions? To bring up to maturity, to train someone to reach full maturity, to improve reasoning by learning how God thinks, learning His methods. And what is biblical perfection? Maturity. The goal of the parent is to help their child grow up, think for themselves, and become mature adults who choose to practice God’s ways and methods and have His law written on their hearts and minds.

Again, is this advice only for parents? Certainly not. First, let’s look at how it applies personally. Do we have a responsibility to nurture ourselves? To be committed to learning and growing in both the discipline and the instruction of the Lord? What does that look like? Could it include being careful about how we think about ourselves as well? Learning to see who we are in Christ? Overcoming the negative thought patterns that we all have learned, and replacing them with truth? And how do we learn the truth?

Consider also what happens to many who are abused: they are often emotionally “stuck” at the age of the abuse. So can that person provide what Paul is suggesting to their own “inner child”? And can those who haven’t experienced abuse assist by speaking truth, and encouraging maturity?

Second, how does it apply to how we treat others? Is it enough to just avoid hurting those around us? No! We all have a sphere of influence, don’t we? Can we be the kind of people who nurture those around us, and find ways to help them grow in maturity as well? Are there texts that come to mind regarding how we should practice treating others?

So then, in everything treat others the same way you want them to treat you, for this is [the essence of] the Law and the [writings of the] Prophets. (Matthew 7:12 AMP)

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ... Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Ephesians 4:29 & 32 NIV)

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. (1 Thessalonians 4:11 NIV)

So then, we must always aim at those things that bring peace and that help strengthen one another. (Romans 14:19 GNT)



Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:2-3 NIV)

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (Colossians 3:12-14 NIV)

Under his control all the different parts of the body fit together, and the whole body is held together by every joint with which it is provided. So when each separate part works as it should, the whole body grows and builds itself up through love. (Ephesians 4:16 GNT)

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. (John 13:35 NIV)

What are some of the pitfalls of being able to treat others well? Our own pride? Selfishness? Anger or other out of control emotions? How much does it matter how we treat others? Perhaps more than we think?

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. (C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*)

How does any of this connect to the theme for the lesson this week of practicing supreme loyalty to God?

Would God want us to treat others with respect? Would He want us to attentively listen to other people? Would these types of attitudes be considered part of being loyal to God? Can we treat people well, even when we disagree with them? Can we treat them well, even if they are criticizing us? Can we treat them well, even if they are actively trying to cause us harm? Can we reflect God's character to those around us, thus demonstrating our loyalty to Him? And would that, in fact, be a "supreme" loyalty, because it is not contingent on circumstances, or on what others do, but on staying true to God? And can we do any of this without the Lord working in us and through us? It is our job to cooperate with Him, to make the choices, and He provides the power for us to be like Him.





## TUESDAY

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Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free. (Ephesians 6:5-8 NIV)

Slavery was pretty common during Paul's time, and in the culture he lived in, as well as in all the cultures around him. Some slaves were captured enemies. Some were those who owed too much debt and sold themselves into slavery until that debt was paid off. These were called bondservants, but also called slaves. In the last sentence of Sabbath's lesson, it says,

“What can we learn as we watch Paul apply the values of the gospel to the flawed social structures of his day?”

Was Paul trying to apply the gospel to the social structures? It doesn't seem so from the text. *Can* you apply the gospel to social structures at all? No! How do we know that? What does the gospel do? What is its power?

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentiles. (Romans 1:16 NIV)

Where is the gospel applied? In everyone who believes. The gospel has power to heal individuals. What is the danger in trying to apply the gospel to social structures? We end up using Satan's methods of imposed law to try to do good. Can we do God's work using Satan's methods? No! Let's go back to the verse:

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free. (Ephesians 6:5-8 NIV)

Notice where this advice is directed. To the individual slaves...we can presume that these slaves are believers, because they are in the group listening to the letter.

In this advice, was Paul concerned about outward behavior? Or again, is he focusing on an attitude of the heart? Notice what he's telling them to do, obey (attentively listen to) their masters, with respect. Does this sound familiar? It's the same advice that he gave to children, and it's based on the same design laws: the law of exertion and the law of sowing and reaping. Do you think it would benefit the slave to be known as one who listens well and respects his master? Although we are not slaves, could it benefit us to have a similar attitude towards those who might have authority over us in some way?



Our bosses, for example? What about others who are in positions of authority? Police? Store managers? Emergency personnel? Whether we agree with them or not, can we still cultivate an attitude of respect for all of them?

The phrase “sincerity of heart,” can also be translated as simplicity, purity, graciousness, singleness of mind, or “single-focus.” How could this attitude benefit the slave in Paul’s day? How would such an attitude benefit us? Have you ever had a hard time focusing on a task? Has it ever occurred to you that you could ask God to help with this? I admit, it didn’t occur to me until I studied this passage.

Notice also, this attitude is not just when the slave was being watched, but all the time. What type of attitude does someone tend to have if they only obey while they are being watched? Usually a resentful one, right? What does that do to the character? Do bosses (or masters) want this kind of worker? No! What would you call this attitude of working well, even when nobody is watching? Integrity maybe? How would an attitude of integrity benefit the slave? How would it benefit us in our work? Would you say that if you practiced this kind of integrity that you would be growing in Christ? Certainly, it would reflect His work in us, wouldn’t it?

The word wholeheartedly can also be translated as goodwill, kindness, and enthusiasm, and Paul directs them to work in all things as if serving the Lord. Why would Paul give them these suggestions? What would be the result of a slave who worked in this way? Might the master look favorably on such a slave? Do we have any examples in scripture of someone with an attitude like this? Like Joseph or Namaan’s servant girl? Joseph committed to be true to God, no matter his circumstances. The servant girl had a good enough relationship with her masters that they listened to her when she suggested going to the prophet. She clearly cared about her master, wanting healing for him.

How does working like this change the individual? How does it impact the character? Where is this person’s loyalty, ultimately? Does this kind of attitude depend at all on the character of the “earthly master”? No. Whose character are we responsible for? Our own! Our thoughts, choices, and actions are either building for us a character more like Christ, or one more like Satan. God promises to prompt and guide, but it is always our choice to cooperate with Him, and then He provides the power.

## THURSDAY

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Paul then focuses on the master in this slave/master relationship. This master is also a believer. How do we know? Because they are also listening to the same letter.

And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.  
(Ephesians 6:9 NIV)

Here, Paul says that masters were to treat their slaves in the “same way.” The same way as what? As the slaves were told to treat them: with respect, looking out for their good, treating them with integrity and sincere hearts, as if they were serving Christ. How would this attitude benefit the master? How



would this attitude benefit us, if we are in a position of authority over someone else?

Masters also were to avoid something specifically: threatening their slaves. Why avoid this? This is Satan's way, and it's not something believers should practice, because we want to get better at Christ's methods, not the enemy's methods.

Notice also that the master is told that both the slave and the master have another Master in heaven. Why might the master have needed to be reminded of that? How were they probably tempted to think of their slaves? Possibly as less-than? Below them? What does it do to the character of one who thinks this about another person? Who thinks of them as possibly less than human, or who thinks of themselves as higher than other people? It damages their character and moves them away from God's design. And it sets the stage for abuse of another. Can you think of any examples in recent history when people were *encouraged* to divide themselves into two categories and look down on the opposite group?

How does God view people?

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:26-28 NIV)

As the masters needed to be careful how they thought of their slaves, so too, we should be careful how we think about other people. We want to practice God's methods, with His power. Loyalty to God changes how we view others, because He is changing us, writing His laws into our hearts and minds. When our hearts are changed, our actions follow.