

I press on toward the finish line, where the prize waiting for me is the upward call of God IN KING JESUS. (Philippians 3:14)

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Loyalty to the Lord

Scripture records that during the days of Acts, Barnabas was sent to Antioch and...

When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and ***he urged them all to stay firmly loyal to the Lord from the bottom of their hearts.*** He was a good man, full of the holy spirit and faith. (Acts 11:23-24 KNT [bold italic added])

Before jumping into what is on my heart, a brief word about Barnabas.

In documenting the events of the early ekklesia, Luke obviously knew that Paul and Barnabas eventually parted company over a heated argument about John Mark traveling with them. Some might be tempted to conclude that since Barnabas didn't become as well-known as Paul that he was in the wrong and paid the price for it. As if to ensure history would not wrongly malign Barnabas, Luke made a special effort to commend Barnabas' character and walk with the Lord—*full of the holy spirit and faith*. Most likely, temperament and not doctrine played a part in the split. However, we should never rule out that it was the Lord's will that came to bear, meaning it was necessary for the two to go their separate ways because it was part of God's plan. Sometimes division is necessary in order to bear more fruit. Besides, John Mark later became useful to Paul, and it appears Paul continued to hold Barnabas affectionately in his heart. ***The lesson: God's purpose is achieved in a multitude of ways, even ways that might seem contrary to our logic.***

Now, in the opening verse, Barnabas' heart for the Antiochian brethren is on full display. He ***urged them all to stay firmly loyal to the Lord from the bottom of their hearts.***

Other translations use similar expressions: He *exhorted or encouraged all with purpose of heart to cleave unto the Lord or to remain true to the Lord with devoted hearts (or: with passionate hearts).*

A year ago, in response to the many who were putting their faith in Trump and a crumbling political system (that continues unabated today), I posted an insight titled: [***Where Is Your Loyalty?***](#) A year later, the same question remains just as valid, if not more so.

Given all that is going on in our day, there is much that is vying for our loyalty. Let's be clear that loyalty is a good thing if we are loyal to the right things, meaning there are loyalties, as well, to things that might not be so good.

For clarity's sake, *loyalty* is defined as ***a feeling or attitude of attachment, affection, devotion; faithful adherence to a sovereign, nation, government, leader, group of people, cause, ideology, duty, etc.*** For the discerning, it shouldn't be too difficult to see the potential dangers of some of these loyalties leading to the not-so-good, even more so given the chaotic and dangerous season we are in at the moment.

Shortly after I was impressed by Barnabas' encouragement to those in Antioch, I came across an article titled ***Religion Losing Ground Around the World*** published in the *Miami Herald* on April 9, 2021. The author, Andres Oppenheimer, made an honest appraisal of himself: ***"While I'm not a religious person, I'm not sure that's a good thing."*** Although I'm not a fan of the expression *religious person* to describe what it means to have the faith of Jesus, the Son of God, his admission at least acknowledges a need, even if he cannot express it in terms that lead to life and not institutional religion that is dying.

What really caught my attention in this article was a quote Mr. Oppenheimer attributed to another author with whom he had conversed. Here is how he presented it.

When I asked Shadi Hamid, the author of an article in the April issue of ***The Atlantic*** magazine entitled ***"America without God"***, he told me that ***the decline of religions in the Western world is leaving a huge vacuum, which is being filled by political fundamentalism.***

"New secular ideologies are taking the place of religion," said Hamid, who is a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. ***"What was once religious belief has now been channeled into political belief."***

The decline of religion in much of the world has not reduced people's need to believe in something, because, "Human beings, by their very nature, are searching for meaning, belonging, coherent structure," Hamid told me. And that won't change. ***"Nobody can survive long without some ultimate loyalty,"*** he added.

This last word was most timely, for it came to my attention within a day or two of me being caught by Barnabas' urging whole-hearted loyalty to the Lord. In my experience, the spirit of the Lord often works in this way: gives a word and then adds to it through some other source. Hold to this phrase *ultimate loyalty*; I'll conclude with a word along these lines.

Now, continuing along the vein of lost religion, several articles have appeared lately dealing with polls showing a dramatic decline in those who identify themselves as a member of a church, synagogue, or mosque. In 1937, when polls were first taken, 73% of Americans acknowledged membership in a church, synagogue, or mosque. A decline began to surface in the 1950s and today the number is less than 50% for the first time. Considering that ***"churches"*** refer to Christian churches and Christians make up a larger percentage of all

“religions” in the US, it is safe to conclude (as the polls show) that people are flocking (pun intended) out of the **“institutional churches”** with their **“church membership”** rolls.

By the way, quotes are used in the above to acknowledge this is how the world and, unfortunately, many Christians view the church and membership in it. Joining an *institution* called the *church* with a name attached to it, made up of a pastor in a pulpit, membership rolls, pledge cards, and buildings to meet in that are also called *churches* are outward forms and do not necessarily express the true nature of the ekklesia that Christ promised He would build, which is a holy temple in the Lord, a dwelling of God in spirit. As believers, we don't join a religion, we enter into a [relationship](#) (not a religion) with our Lord Jesus, based in life and love.

Since being a believer in Jesus is a matter of the heart (Romans 10:9), we need an abundance of caution in interpreting these national polls. To be sure, some might be walking away from Christ but, then again, others might simply be coming outside the camp (organized, institutional religion) to Christ who is Life and [Reality](#) (Truth). The Lord knows the heart, so we must leave it with Him who knows how to build His house.

My purpose in this writing is quite straightforward. Given this day in which so many things are demanding our loyalty and, in the process, dividing us on so many fronts, I urge all — who name Jesus as their Creator, Lord, Savior, and King — not only ***to stay firmly loyal to the Lord from the bottom of your hearts*** but ***to pledge your ultimate loyalty to Him***.

The word ***ultimate*** is defined as ***“the most extreme or important because it is either the original or the final; the greatest of its kind; the most important; the best, highest, last, or final.”*** Is not our Lord Jesus all of these? He's the first, the last, the original and greatest of God's creation. His name is the highest, for it is above every name in heaven or on earth — in fact, all realms of God's creation. He is above all, over all, and in all. God's Son, our Lord Jesus, is at the very center of God's ultimate purpose. There is no one like Him in all of creation. He holds all things together and ***nobody can survive*** without Him.

Dear saints, our ultimate loyalty must be to King Jesus!

Let's ask the spirit of the Lord to search our hearts to see if this is so.

May the eyes of our hearts be enlightened to see more and more of God's Son until He is fully the ultimate in our lives and our ***ultimate*** loyalty is to Him alone.

Addendum

As noted above, “religious” polling began in 1937. During this period, the Lord raised up a brother in the Lord named T. Austin-Sparks and gave him vision of the true nature of the ekklesia in light of the centrality, supremacy, and preeminence of Christ. Most of his messages have been preserved and made available through Austin-Sparks.net.

For those who might be concerned over the results of the current polls, I find brother Sparks’ insights quite instructive — by the way, his sights came during a time when great conflict was rising up, leading to WW2, just as it is in our day, as great conflict continues to rise up, at this point, leading to yet undefined climactic events. Here are a few quotes for your consideration. May the spirit of the Lord enlighten your heart.

Quotes from T. Austin-Sparks

What makes any place the house of God? What makes this place sacred? If it is sacred at all, what makes it sacred? It is **not the building**; this is **not a sacred building**. It is **not a congregation** gathered here. **The only thing that makes it sacred is that the Lord is present**. The Lord is not interested in our places or in our congregations; He is only concerned that He may find a place for Himself where He may be present in pleasure.

I wonder where the tabernacle in the wilderness is now? I expect it is buried somewhere deep under the earth. I wonder where the great temple of Solomon is now?! I think you would be wasting your time to try and find it. You see, God had buried those things.... **Everything that is not of Christ is going to be dissolved**.

Make no mistake. This whole structure of Christianity is going to be tested according to Christ. Christianity is just going to be tested as to how far it was the work of the Holy Spirit of God according to Christ.

It seems a terrible thing, even to think, but as we have touched so very much of what is called '**Christianity**' we are bound to believe that, because **vast numbers who call themselves Christian are in an utterly false position, and the system itself has become so largely an earthly, traditional, formal, and unspiritual thing**, this worldwide shaking is quite necessary and will be eventually justified. If we were writing a treatise, we could show that what is called '**Christianity**' is **really the greatest enemy of Christ**.

It will be seen that it is not a matter of substituting another and better *system* for an old and poor or bad one. **Some people seem to think that it is all, or largely, a matter of the order, technique, and form, and if we returned to the "New Testament" form or order of churches, all would be well.** The fact is that, while certain things characterized the New Testament churches, the New Testament *does not* give us a complete pattern according to which churches are to be set up or formed! **There is no blue-print for churches in the New Testament, and to try to form New Testament churches is only to create another system which may be as legal, sectarian and dead as others.**

Christendom is largely constituted by this [aesthetic] sense – its architecture, its ritual, its music, its adornment, its lighting (or lack of it), its tone, its atmosphere, its vestments and so forth. All are of the soul... **Spiritual death** marks that realm, and while there may be intense emotions which make for resolves, "high" thoughts and desires, there is no genuine change in the nature of those concerned, and repeated doses of this must be taken to maintain any measure of soul-self-satisfaction which makes them feel good.

"The Christian Faith" embraced as a religion, a philosophy, or as a system of truth and a moral or ethical doctrine, may carry the temporary stimulus of a great ideal; but this will not result in the regeneration of the life, or the new birth of the spirit.

End quotes.

Let us be encouraged and remain loyal to the one who is the Builder!

Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain. (Psalm 127:1)

***I will build My ekklesia* (Matthew 16:18)**