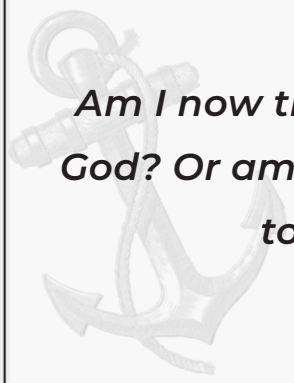
Anchored Update [76]

Loyalty: What Are We Really Faithful To?

When fear, approval, and obligation compete with faithfulness.

Anchored Verse



Am I now trying to win the favor and approval of men, or of God? Or am I seeking to please someone? If I were still trying to be popular with men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.

— Galatians 1:10 (AMP) —

The first of a four-part series on loyalty. Fear and love can produce the same outward commitment, so this week we look at what actually sits underneath our faithfulness, and at how Paul's words in Galatians 1:10 settle whose voice gets the final say.

by Sean Brannan

Friday, 27 November, 2026

Welcome to Anchored, friend,

Happy Thanksgiving! I hope you had a wonderful day, whether your table was full or quiet, and that you found some rest with the people you love. Thank you for spending part of your holiday weekend here.

A Quick Update: A while back, a friend asked me to write on the topic of loyalty. The request has stayed with me since, partly because the more I thought about loyalty, the less simple it seemed. This issue starts a four-part series that grew out of that conversation. We'll begin with loyalty to God, then look at loyalty to ourselves, then loyalty to others, and finish by asking how the three fit together when they seem to pull against each other. It also draws on From Survival to Surrender.

Work on the new website is well underway. Look for announcements in mid-December.

What Are We Really Faithful To?

Most of us admire loyalty, and for good reason. We admire the friend who shows up at the hospital at two in the morning, the spouse who stays through the hard years, the person who keeps their word when walking away would be easier. I've been grateful for people like that, and I've wanted to be one of them. Loyalty is part of how love lasts, and Scripture honors it from Ruth's refusal to leave Naomi to the steadfast love of God Himself.

What I've had to ask myself, though, is what actually sits underneath my commitments. Sometimes I stay because I love someone and believe in what we've committed to. Other times, I stay because I'm afraid of what leaving would cost: their disappointment, the conflict, the loss of being needed, or the quiet fear that I'll end up alone. From the outside, those two kinds of staying look identical. Some counselors describe a pattern called the fawn response. When disapproval or conflict once felt unsafe, often in childhood, a person can learn to protect themselves by accommodating, agreeing, and keeping everyone pleased. In Chapter 1 of *From Survival to Surrender*, I described responses like this as protective, not as character defects. The trouble is that protection can become the default long after the original threat has passed. Carried forward, it can feel like devotion while fear is the thing actually doing the steering.

That's why I don't think loyalty, on its own, is automatically a virtue. Its worth depends on what we're loyal to, and why.

Paul's letter to the Galatians was written into a fight over exactly that question. After Paul planted these churches, other teachers arrived and told the Gentile believers that faith in Christ

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wasn't enough; to be fully accepted, they also needed to keep certain parts of the Jewish Law, especially circumcision. Paul calls this a distortion of the gospel (verses 6 to 9). The Amplified Bible notes that his opponents were accusing him of preaching just to build a following. Their charge seems to have been that he'd made the gospel easier to win people over. Verse 10 is his answer. A man trying to win popularity, he says, could not be a servant of Christ.

In Galatians 1:10, the word "still" is worth slowing down for. A few verses later, Paul describes who he used to be: so zealous for the traditions of his ancestors that he outpaced his peers, and so devoted to them that he tried to destroy the church (verses 13 and 14). Paul knew fierce loyalty from the inside, and his community would have praised it. I read his "still" as looking back on that life, when his devotion and his standing among people were tangled together. When Christ met him, the intensity of his loyalty stayed, and its object changed. He now calls himself a bond-servant, someone who belongs to a master. A servant's faithfulness is settled by whom he belongs to, and that settles which voices get the final say.

This is where loyalty can go wrong in two directions, and where it can go right. I've seen all three in me.

» **Self-abandonment** is staying committed in order to keep someone's approval while quietly compromising what's true. I agree when I don't agree, I stay silent when honesty is needed, and I call it loyalty.

» **Self-centeredness** is the opposite misuse of this very verse. "I only answer to God" can become a way to dodge correction, avoid hard conversations, or walk away from responsibilities we actually made (which is different from stepping away from something harmful). Paul wrote this letter because he loved these people, and later in the same letter he tells them to carry one another's burdens (6:2). Galatians 1:10 was never permission to stop caring about people.

» **Surrendered faithfulness** is staying accountable to God's truth when obedience costs something, including someone's approval, and letting that loyalty shape how we love the people around us.

These aren't labels for people. Most of us move between all three, sometimes in the same week, and our motives are usually mixed. The point is to notice which one is leading.

Proverbs 3:5-6 offers an alternative to fear-driven loyalty: trusting the Lord with all your heart instead of relying on your own understanding. For many of us, the understanding we rely on was formed in survival: keep people happy and you'll be safe. Trusting God with that can feel like stepping off a ledge, because approval once felt like the ledge. Chapter 7 of the book opens with this same verse. It looks at how, when safety once depended on keeping people

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pleased, even our obedience to God can quietly become another way of earning approval. Jesus's call to deny ourselves (Luke 9:23) is a call to follow Him, and next week we'll look at what that does and doesn't ask of us.

So this week, instead of asking whether I'm loyal, I'm asking what currently has the most influence over my decisions and commitments. I expect to find some love in there, some fear, and a few places where I've called approval by the name of faithfulness. That's a starting point, and I'd rather start honest than stay comfortable.

Key Takeaways

- Loyalty's worth depends on what we're loyal to and why, because fear and love can produce the same outward behavior.
- In Galatians 1:10, Paul's loyalty to Christ settles which voices get the final say, without giving him permission to stop caring about people.
- Faithfulness can go wrong in two directions: abandoning truth to keep approval, or using *"I answer to God"* to avoid real responsibility.

This Week's Articles

There's no new article this week. Issue #74 (*When I Need to Control the Outcome*) pairs well with this one, since approval is one of the outcomes many of us try hardest to control.

> ***Galatians 1:10 was never permission to stop caring about people.***

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Anchored Prayer

Abba,

Thank You that I belong to You. Show me where fear has been calling itself loyalty, and where I've used Your name to avoid what love asks of me. Teach me to be faithful to You first, and let that faithfulness shape how I love the people You've given me.

Hallelujah. Amen.

My Prayer

"A servant's faithfulness is settled by whom he belongs to."

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Anchored Breathwork

Belonging Breath (4–4–6) for Releasing Approval

Purpose: To settle your body when the fear of disappointing someone starts making your decisions, and to remember whose you are.

Posture: Sit with your feet on the floor and your back supported. Rest your hands open on your knees.

1. **Inhale** through your nose for **4 seconds**.
   Quiet cue: *"Abba, I am Yours..."*

2. **Hold** gently for **4 seconds**.

3. **Exhale** slowly through your mouth for **6 seconds**.
   Quiet cue: *"...I don't have to earn this."*

Repeat for 5–7 cycles.

Pro Tip: Try this before a conversation where you expect to feel pressure to agree. If the hold feels uncomfortable, shorten it to 2 seconds. The longer exhale is what helps your body settle.

> ***From the outside, those two kinds of staying look identical.***

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Anchored Reflection

This week, think of one commitment that feels heavy right now: a relationship, a role, or a promise you're keeping.

What am I most afraid of losing if I disappoint someone?

Where might I be confusing approval with faithfulness?

What would surrendering that fear to God look like?

If this stirred something, Chapter 1 of From Survival to Surrender, *"The Quiet War Within,"* looks at how protective patterns like people-pleasing form, and Chapter 7, *"When Surrender Feels Unsafe,"* looks at why letting go of them can feel so risky. You can find it on my Amazon author page or at R3B Press.

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Every newsletter, article, and Anchored Reflection begins with a real question or burden.

If something is pressing on your heart, send it my way. Each week I choose a focus for the newsletter, an article, or a reflection. What you share could be the catalyst for someone else's breakthrough. I would also love your feedback on recent articles.

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