

George Washington

English III CPI

Ms Baulch

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### The Double Edged Sword Called Loyalty

Everyone is loyal to something or someone. My grandparents only use P&G products for their everyday lives because my grandpa worked there for most of his life. They have continued to use these products even when there are cheaper alternatives. My dad only buys medicine from Blanks Pharmacy (a small, family owned pharmacy that he used to work at), even though there are other pharmacies out there that are much faster and more convenient to buy from. My family is loyal to these brands—others are loyal to ideas, friends, and families. Either way, when we hear the word loyalty, we typically associate it with something good. Loyalty can be a good thing, but not always. Consider looking at someone in history like Adolf Hitler, who was loyal to his extremely bigoted ideas and went as far as trying to rid Europe of the people who didn't fit his agenda. It is the bad parts of loyalty that hide from us and hurt us, and we don't even realize it most of the time until it is too late. Take a toxic relationship for example, where the relationship as a whole is something that is bad, but the people in it are loyal to each other and don't even see that what they are being loyal to is harmful. Loyalty overall is a good thing, but it can be a bad thing if given the right circumstances.

Loyalty by itself, is innately good. When we think of loyalty, the first thing we think about is a good thing. We see it as a positive trait. Infact, according to Merriam Webster, “loyalty” is defined as “unswerving in allegiance”. We immediately associate allegiance with something good, like a family. My grandma, Kathy Washington, can back this up, as when I

interviewed her she talked about how she has seen loyalty grow in the family she created. She has four sons, and has watched all of them grow up and mature. She sees how all four of her sons are extremely loyal to the families that they went on to create, and she says one of her favorite things in the world is to see how loyal her sons are to their children. I for one can agree, as I know my dad would do anything for me and I would not trade his loyalty to me for anything in the world. My grandma's experiences with loyalty prove to me how good it is. Another example can be seen in the Holy Bible, when King David is praying to God for the good of his people. "Lord, the God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Israel, keep these desires and thoughts in the hearts of your people forever, and keep their hearts loyal to you." David prays these petitions not for himself, but for the good of his own people. He knows that if his people are loyal to God, then they will be much better off, and be better people.

However, there is another side to loyalty that we don't always consider. Loyalty can have a darker, worse side to it than we always think. We can be loyal to thoughts or ideas that are bad, or are ultimately harmful to us. Take the character of Jay Gatsby in F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby*. In the book Gatsby spends his whole adult life chasing the love of his life Daisy. He is extremely loyal to the idea of getting her back, going as far as throwing lavish parties with people he doesn't even like to try and attract her. He wastes his life being blindly loyal to her, and ultimately it is what kills him, when he is the one that takes the blame for an accident that Daisy was at fault. Gatsby's loyalty was harming him throughout the whole novel, and it is an example of how loyalty can cause us harm without us even realizing.

Another way loyalty can be bad is if we are loyal for the wrong reasons. An example is in the myth of Orpheus. Orpheus was set to get married to his fiancée, Eurydice. On their wedding day however, Eurydice was bitten by a viper and died immediately. Orpheus decided

that he needed to get her back, and he traveled all the way to the underworld. He made a deal with Hades and in order to get her back, she would travel with him to the overworld, but he could not look at her. If he did, he'd lose her forever. Orpheus ended up looking at her, and lost her. He makes an example of being loyal to the wrong thing. If Orpheus would have been loyal to Eurydice and her own good, he wouldn't have looked at her. Instead he was loyal to the thought of having a wife, and he lost that forever.

When we are loyal for the wrong reasons like Gatsby or Orpheus, it holds us back from what we can truly be. Loyalty can only be a good thing when it doesn't take away from the other good aspects of someone's life. Loyalty must be something we willingly give, and not something that takes. If we are loyal to something and not willing to see the other options or the other paths, it also holds us back. Sometimes when someone is loyal they are so caught up in it that they don't see the people around them and push everyone away, like what Gatsby did. We cannot be loyal to one thing and be unwilling to change. Mark Twain said it best when he said "Loyalty to petrified opinion never yet broke a chain or freed a human soul." ("Mark Twain Quotes"). If we are unwilling to change, loyalty is not a good thing and does nothing good for us or anyone else. Andrew Gold writes in his article "Pernicious Loyalty", that "Loyalty is generally considered valuable, and in the usual case it is. Yet some of the very features of loyalty that make it valuable also encourage behaviors harmful to beneficiaries, third parties, or society as a whole". When we are loyal to the wrong ideas or people, we can end up hurting the people around us. Loyalty is a beneficial thing, but can be harmful when practiced the wrong ways.

Loyalty is something that falls on that thin line between what's right and what's wrong. It can go either way, and that is why it can be dangerous. It can turn from a good thing to something bad extremely quickly. Something that loyalty brings could be good for us, but

harmful for others. Like in the story of Naughty Dog's *The Last of Us* video game. In the game, a smuggler named Joel is tasked with taking a girl named Ellie that is the only known immune person to the cordyceps virus ( a virus that brought about the end of the world and the zombie apocalypse), to a hospital across the country to try and find a cure. Along the journey Joel grows closer to Ellie and even starts to see her as his own daughter, that he lost when the apocalypse began. When the time comes to hand Ellie over, Joel learns that making the cure would kill her. Joel, being so loyal to Ellie and the idea of having a daughter again, kills everyone in the hospital and saves Ellie. By killing everyone in the hospital he doomed the rest of the world's hopes of ever finding a cure. While Joel's loyalty is certainly something good for him and Ellie, it is a terribly bad thing for the rest of humanity, showing how something that is good can spill over into the bad side and hurt others.

Another example of something good that can ultimately turn bad is in my Interview with Mr. Klier. In the interview Mr. Klier explained how he sees loyalty to school and work in his students. He described it as being a good thing, but when the student let laziness come into the equation it corrupted their loyalty and harmed them overall. We can see how thin the line is between good and bad when we look at a thesaurus for the word loyalty. When we look on Thesaurus.com, we can find synonyms like "single-mindedness". When we are single mindedly loyal to something it can be harmful, tying right back into the examples of Jay Gatsby and how it ruined his life. Another synonym is submissive, meaning you surrender your allegiance to anyone superior to you, meaning it can be ever changing and that we can harm others by how fast we switch up.

This thin line gives us a choice: be loyal for the good, or for the bad. We must choose, as if we have both good and bad loyalty, then it's better to not be loyal at all. The song “Loyalty” by Kendrick Lamar exemplifies why we cannot be caught between the two sides in its lyrics:

Tell me who you loyal to...Is it money? Is it fame? Is it weed? Is it drink? Is it comin' down with the loud pipes in the rain? Big chillin', only for the power in your name... Tell me who you loyal to...Is it love for the streets when the lights get dark? Is it unconditional when the 'Rari don't start? Tell me when your loyalty is comin' from the heart...Tell me who you loyal to Do it start with your woman or your man? (Mmm) Do it end with your family and friends? (Mmm) Or you're loyal to yourself in advance?

The song gives example after example of objects in this world that people are loyal to. It's asking the listener to think of what they are loyal to and think about if it's actual loyalty, or something else. When it says, “tell me when your loyalty is coming from the heart,” it means that while we can be loyal to all the objects the song talks about, it's not worth being loyal to them unless it's real, because true loyalty comes from the heart.

Choices in where loyalties lie and where they are rooted are even better exemplified in the show *Better Call Saul* during one of the final episodes of the show. In the episode “Rock and a Hard Place,” the main antagonists of the show, Saul Goodman and Nacho Garcia, must both make their final decisions about what they want to do and who to be loyal to. For Saul, his decision is between being loyal to the laws of America and being a good lawyer who follows the law, or being a lawyer who helps criminals and the cartel get away with their crimes illegally. Saul chooses the latter, and decides to use the bad sides of loyalty and throw away his friends and family for money and power. On the other hand is Nacho, a member of the cartel who has

been loyal to the wrong people his entire life. He must decide whether to be loyal to the cartel who made him who he was, or between his friends who helped him get out. Nacho chooses the good side of loyalty, and chooses to help his friends and try to put the cartel down for good. This episode is a prime example of the choices we must make for our loyalties, and the consequences of choosing good or bad. We must be like Saul or Nacho, and choose. Playing both sides like they did for the majority of the show will not work out in the end, and ultimately it will come down to a choice at some point.

My essay has shown the two sides of loyalty. While being good, there are ways that harm our loyalty and can even harm us. Loyalty is a necessity in life, we all are loyal to something in some way, even when those loyalties can hold us back and harm us. It is in those loyalties that we must understand that while loyalty is an overall good thing, there can be hurtful aspects to it. Once we realize that, we can make sure to keep the harmful aspects away, and keep our loyalties as good and as helpful as they can possibly be.

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