

CRISIS IN THE CHURCH

Part 2

THE PROBLEM OF SURRENDER

By
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With the explosive increase in knowledge that we have experienced in the last hundred years it's ironic that we are more ignorant today about what it means to be Christian than we were early last century. This goes for those within the church as well as those that are without. This high-speed increase in knowledge has not done the average professing Christian much spiritual good. In spite of the never-ending flood of Christian books, music, CDs, DVDs, TV celebrities, teachings and conferences, we are degenerating into worldliness at an alarming rate. We are willfully ignorant of our moral and spiritual decline and love it that way.

The glitz and sleaze of Hollywood has made its way into the church. How tragic it is that the more a church looks and acts like Hollywood the larger it grows numerically even though it deteriorates spiritually. Instead of seeking to know the true faith as revealed in Scripture we are embracing a belief based upon feelings, pop trends, celebrities and political correctness. One reason for this departure from the truth is that many self-professed Christians want a belief system that fits their lifestyles rather than a faith that their lives must conform to. The bottom line is that we do not want to surrender to the truth; we want the truth to surrender to our desires and opinions.

Through almost 30 years of ministry I have seen a consistent problem that runs through the lives of so many people that call themselves Christian—an unwillingness to fully surrender to Christ. I consider this lack of surrender to be the primary reason why so many people do not overcome sin, have bad or failed marriages and why they are unfulfilled in their lives. Surrender is not a peripheral issue to the Christian faith, but absolutely central to it. Without surrendering to Christ a person will never become a believer, mature in the faith, overcome sin, find the joy that comes through knowing the Savior or be used by Him in a tangible way.

One section of Scripture that clearly addresses the issue of surrender and beautifully sums up what it means to be a Christian is Romans 12:1-2:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Paul's use of the phrase "*I urge you*" was a passionate appeal that his readers would carefully listen to the vital message that would follow. He thoroughly believed that what he wrote was of such paramount importance that he begged them to understand and put into practice this teaching.

The apostle was urging the Romans, and now us, to understand that only by the grace of God could we live the truth he was about to introduce. He was establishing the fact that the Christian life is impossible to live except through divine grace. Paul understood human nature well enough to know that we are prone to seek a righteousness that comes through our own merit and ability. That is why we often equate being Christian with not doing the "bad" things other people do while doing the good things we ought to do. Yet left to ourselves, all our supposed good works are little more than expressions of self-love and self-trust which are anathema to God.

The reformers of the early 1500s courageously trumpeted the truth restored to them that the organized church had abandoned for a thousand—*Sola Gratia*—through grace alone are we saved. Yet in our modern day version of Christianity rather than herald this reformation truth we are embracing a cheap grace that costs us nothing or are resorting back to manmade religion based upon human merit. Paul's warning that the Christian life is obtainable only by grace alone remains true today. To abandon this truth is to reject the very message that would bring us to a saving faith in the Savior.

In Romans 12:1-2 Paul specifically urges his readers to grow dependent upon divine grace or they will never give themselves to Christ as living sacrifices. The Lord only accepts holy sacrifices; He will never accept unholy ones. Never! That is why it's imperative we recognize the impossibility of being holy through our own merit or ability. This is a very hard lesson to learn! No matter how hard we try our efforts to be holy through good deeds, church affiliation, doctrinal orthodoxy or separation from the world will never make us holy. Holiness

comes solely through relationship with God which is uniquely tied into the issue of surrender. Until we actually surrender to the Lord we will never enter into fellowship with Him, therefore, we will never be made holy through His grace and sacrificial death.

In the Old Testament, if the people wanted to be in right fellowship with the Lord they would have to offer the prescribed sacrifice in an approved manner. But there is far more to offering a sacrifice than just doing it in the prescribed method. The Lord was, and is, more interested in the motive behind the sacrifice than the sacrifice itself. The motive determines whether or not the Lord will accept the offering. The outward appearance of the sacrifice might look right, but God looks upon the heart. If the heart is not right with God then the sacrifice is never accepted by Him. This is why surrender is such an integral part of being a living sacrifice.

One primary reason we do not fully give ourselves to the Lord as living sacrifices is because we want to control our lives. This can take a lot of courage and soul searching to admit, but we will never become authentic believers, or mature as ones, until we understand our natural propensity to be in control of our lives. We not only want to be in control of our own lives, we love controlling the lives of others as well. If we were honest enough to admit it we would even go so far as to say that we would like to control God, well, at least enough to get our own way and to be blessed by Him according to what we think we deserve. Yet the true blessings of God do not come through getting our own way or receiving the fulfillment of our twisted illusions about what we deserve, but through surrender.

Because we passionately want to control our lives, living surrendered to God is one of the hardest things we will ever have to do. From the moment of birth we are on a quest for independence—to be our own boss. Not just that, as we grow older and experience pain, suffering and loss, we endeavor to protect ourselves by striving to have greater control over our lives. In our effort to not be hurt we futilely attempt to be in charge. At other times, when we want our desires to be fulfilled we fight to be in command of our lives. One way or the other, multitudes of people use their religious belief as a means to control their lives and the lives of others rather than their faith being a path of surrender.

Biblical Christianity, on the other hand, is one hundred percent the opposite of being the boss of our lives because it's all about dependency upon God. The moment we offer ourselves as living sacrifices we loose all say and rights over our lives. The only way we can grow dependent upon Christ is to comprehend to depths of our neediness, cry out for His grace to conform to His

likeness and then purposely sacrifice (crucify) our hurts, desires, possessions and self-righteousness. Out of love for Christ we must sacrifice every portion of our being, down to the minutest desire or attitude. Without living the crucified life we will never be a living sacrifice to God. We may be religious, but never a holy offering to the Lord. That is why the sacrifice must be slain on the altar or it will never be a sacrifice at all.

A living sacrifice will not be conformed to this world because it will have a different way of thinking, loving and acting than non-Christians. However, the only way we will not be conformed to this world is through surrender. It is at this point that many people fail. We often equate conformity to the world as acts we define as worldly and nonconformity as abstaining from those worldly ways. But worldliness is a state of the heart and mind. People can be worldly in their hearts while abstaining from outward worldly acts. Jesus told us that if we lust after a person we have committed adultery (Mt. 5:27-28). Though a person does not commit adultery outwardly, yet inwardly they can still be thoroughly guilty. This is the same with worldliness. We can abstain from those things that are outwardly worldly while our hearts still long for the world as did Lot's wife (Lk. 17:32). Or we may congratulate ourselves on our supposed unworldly lifestyle and yet, in fact, be opposing God through a worldly heart of pride and self-righteousness (Jam. 4:6, 1 Pe. 5:5).

Here again, it is all about relationship with God. Only when we are living sacrifices will we be set apart to God for the purposes of God. It is not about what we do or do not do, but about who we are in Christ. That is why Paul said that our minds must be transformed by the grace of God. We are not only to stop living worldly lives; we are to stop thinking like the world because we have ceased loving the world. To think, love and act differently we must be transformed through divine grace because it is not in the power and nature of man to change himself for the better. Without Christ's transforming grace we will think and love like natural men whether or not we go to church, think religious thoughts or act in religious ways. All we have done is to cloak our worldly ways with religious garments. No, we must be changed from the inside out and this comes only through yielding our entire being to the crucified Savior for our undoing and remaking.

It is impossible for the natural man, whether religious or not, to be pleasing to God. There is nothing in our sinful nature that can fulfill God's "*good, pleasing and perfect will.*" When we surrender to Him all the past, pain and anger, all our dreams and ambitions, all of our loved ones

and possession, and all our religious baggage, we will find the transforming power of God that we might know His “*good, pleasing and perfect will.*”

We forfeit so much joy and victory because we refuse to be living sacrifices to God. When we live surrendered to Him we will find the sweetest, safest, most joyful place to be is when we are living in His “*good, pleasing and perfect will.*” We will then wonder why it took us so long to begin learning how to live the surrendered life through the grace of God.

It is worth it all!

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