

Surrender

Neil Girrard

Some have observed that the word “surrender” is never used, not even once, in the New Testament and these object to songs like “I surrender all” and to impassioned pleas to “surrender to God and be saved.” Some who raise these kinds of objections – that if we’re going to preach the gospel we should use only the words the original apostles and Christ Himself used – however, also claim to be “revivalists” (a gifting and calling not found anywhere in the New Testament) or they practice a “gospel” that does not require them to take up any cross, to deny themselves in any way or to die daily to their own desires. (see Lk. 9:23, Gal. 2:20, 1 Cor. 15:31, etc.) If these were the only considerations to make about this objection, there really would be no value in even discussing it. However, there is more to this word and concept that truly is worthy of some consideration.

There is one very good practical reason why the word “surrender” is never used in the New Testament. The word derives from the *French* language (*sur*, “up” plus *rendre* “render” - *Webster’s*) – the New Testament was written in koine (common) Greek long before there was a French language as we know it today. Again, if this were all there were to the story, there would not be much to discuss.

However, it is right here that we begin to find something of interest. Jesus *did* say, “Render [offer, give up] to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and render [offer, give up] to God what is God’s.” (Lk. 20:25) We are indeed to “render up” to God what rightfully belongs to God. This literal meaning is legitimately found in a right understanding of Jesus’ statement here but it is not the whole counsel of God nor any excuse for the current excessive and truly ignorant uses of “surrender” we find today.

When we look at the dictionary’s meaning of the word “surrender,” we find:

1) to give up possession of; yield to another on compulsion, 2) to give up or abandon – (verb) to give oneself up, especially as a prisoner – (noun) the act of surrendering.” (*Webster’s*)

If we turn to a thesaurus, we find:

(noun) capitulation, yielding, giving up, submission, giving way, unconditional surrender, abdication, resignation, delivery. (verb) 1. [To accept defeat] capitulate, yield, give in, quit [discontinue, cease, halt, pause, stop, end, desist]; 2) [To relinquish possession] give up, let go, resign; abandon [leave, quit, withdraw, discontinue, break off, go off from, cast away, cast aside, let go, cease, cast off, discard, vacate, give away, part with, evacuate, surrender, yield, desist, concede, renounce, abdicate, lose hope of, go back on, secede, waive, forgo, back down from, lay aside, dispose of, have done with, thrown in the towel, break the habit]; haul down one’s colors, strike one’s flag.” (*Webster’s*)

As we can see, “surrender” is a broad, imprecise word with many varying implications. Such a word just does not work well in precisely describing how we are to approach God even though many of its implications are found throughout the New Testament – indeed many of the words and phrases found in the definitions and synonyms of “surrender” are used in their own

right many times. But the word “surrender” simply lacks the precision of some of these phrases or is too broadly inclusive of other ideas to have been a suitable word choice in most translations of the New Testament. To advise someone to “surrender to God” is like the advice to “let go and let God” – each phrase has a measure of validity *as far as they go* in expressing truth. But, as is true will all catch phrases, there comes a point where the phrase and the truth part company. Again, if all there was to this discussion was the splitting of minute hairs, there would be no point – this would be mere wrangling over words. (see 1 Tim. 6:4)

But inherent in the idea of “surrender” is that of two entities or forces in opposition or at enmity with one another. And it is precisely here that we find why “surrender” is such a convenient catch phrase that *almost* encapsulates the New Testament’s teachings and why the writers of the New Testament refrained from using that imprecise word.

Paul wrote, “The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.” (Rom. 8:7) Elsewhere he wrote, “For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other...” (Gal. 5:17) And James wrote, “You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.” (Jas. 4:4) The sinful, fleshly or carnal nature stands in opposition and at enmity toward God and we are told that it *cannot* submit (a synonym of surrender) to God’s ways. What is the remedy then for the sinful nature?

Paul wrote, “*Put to death*, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature...” (Col. 3:5) And, “Count yourselves *dead to sin*...” (Rom. 6:11) The flesh is never called upon to surrender to God - that would be like bringing a pig to Jerusalem for High Holy Days! The sinful nature is to be conquered or captured by our spirit and soul and *executed* by our refusing to surrender to its desires. As Paul says elsewhere, “You were taught [by Christ’s Spirit], with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” (Eph. 4:22-24) Put off the old, be renewed in mind and spirit and put on the new. This is Paul’s instructions and the idea of surrendering the flesh is never found anywhere in the New Testament.

What then are we to “render up” to God? If we recall this literal meaning – “render up” – however, we do find the idea of surrender. Paul wrote, “Do not offer [give, render up] the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer [give, render up] yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer [give, render up] the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness.” (Rom. 6:13)

It is in the context of living as “instruments of righteousness” according to the will of God – and not in the context of the sinful nature – that songs such as “I surrender all” have great validity and even much edification for the soul and spirit.

All to Jesus I surrender, all to Him I freely give;
I will ever love and trust Him, in His presence daily live.

All to Jesus I surrender, humbly at His feet I bow;
Worldly pleasures all forsaken, take me, Jesus, take me now.

All to Jesus I surrender, make me, Savior, wholly Thine;
Let me feel the Holy Spirit – truly know that Thou art mine.

All to Jesus I surrender, Lord, I give myself to Thee;
Fill me with Thy love and power, let Thy blessings fall on me.

I surrender all, (I surrender all), I surrender all, (I surrender all),
All to Thee my blessed Savior, I surrender all. (Judson W. Van de Venter)

Make no mistake – the person who sings this song in hypocrisy at the “church” of their choice while their lifestyle, finances and “theology” is not surrendered to Christ, is just as deceived as the one who objects to this song, refusing to either sing the song or to surrender completely to Christ.

Consider the faith of Abraham. He was promised a son – Sarah laughed (Gen. 18:13) because of how old they were at the time God promised them a son but Abraham believed. (Gen. 15:4) Sarah then brought in Hagar to Abraham (Gen. 16:2) and he must have thought “Aha! This is how God is going to give me a son.” Thus, Ishmael (the father of the Arabs) was born and his descendants have caused problems for the children of Israel pretty much ever since.

Then God did what He had promised. Sarah gave birth to Isaac. (Gen. 21:2-3) Then, probably when Isaac was about 30 years old (a picture of Christ’s sacrifice too) God tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. (Gen. 22:2) Abraham obeys but note well his response to Isaac when he asks why there is no animal for the sacrifice – “God will Himself provide the lamb for the sacrifice”! (Gen. 22:8) Isaac is on the altar and the knife is poised when a voice (probably not a loud one either!) from heaven says, “Do nothing to your son. Now I know you will not withhold from Me anything since you have not withheld your son, your only son.” Then Abraham sees a ram caught in a nearby bush. (Gen. 22:12-13)

In the same way, we too must lay before God everything that is of value to us and let Him have His will with that particular thing. It is precisely in this way that we act as the bride of Christ.

It is our very life in Christ – every aspect - that must be placed on the altar of God. It has been rightly observed that the sheep isn’t supposed to get up and wander away from the altar. It’s supposed to die there. Anything of the flesh nature must already be put to death and the parts of our body (emotions, intellect, strength, all) are to be offered to God as instruments of righteousness (what is right in God’s eyes). When our heart, mind and spirit are renewed by His Spirit, then we can know what His will is and, with our spirit in union with His Spirit, we can begin to pursue and attain to His will for our lives. This is adequately, if not precisely, summed up in various meanings of the word “surrender” and, in normal conversation, is an apt enough description of our attitude toward God even though “surrender” is technically not an appropriate word to describe all that we must do.

Paul wrote, “[Christ] died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again.” (2 Cor. 5:15) To those who have been taught some version of the modern “gospel,” the idea of surrendering all to Christ and God is indeed a foreign concept. This is so, not because the idea of surrendering to God is, as we have seen, completely absent from the New Testament, but rather because the modern “gospel” has become something different from the gospel given once for all in the New Testament. One who feels no need to “render up” to God the things that rightly belong to God is one who is clandestinely still in opposition to God and one who will likely use every “theological” excuse to

avoid putting his sinful nature to death and to avoid taking up his responsibility to increasingly experience the new life in Christ Jesus. Such a one should not delude himself into thinking that he has entered into the genuine salvation that Christ gives to those who believe and obey Him. Rather, this one has surrendered only to the modern deceptions that masquerade as the way to follow Christ and God.

The one who struggles to lay everything at the feet of God is in good company. The Lord Himself prayed and shed, as it were, great drops of blood seeking to attain to the will of God. (Lk. 22:44) This *is* the mindset of spiritual maturity, the attitude that attends genuine salvation in Christ: “Not My will, but Yours be done.” (Lk. 22:42) This is surely the essence of what de Venter was trying to express by saying, “I surrender all” and anyone who would object to this knows very little of the real life in Christ.

Let he who has ears hear.

Neil Girrard
Paidion Books
P.O. Box 327
Capitan, NM 88316

Website – www.paidionbooks.org

Email – paidion@paidionbooks.org

This article - <http://paidionbooks.org/girrard/deeper/srndr.html>