The Power of Surrender

By Steve Gallagher

In our day of civil liberties it is difficult for us to comprehend what it was like for people living in biblical times under the authority of a king. He was a dictator with absolute control over every person in his kingdom. The fairness of this wasn’t examined on 60 Minutes. The legality of it wasn’t challenged in court by the ACLU. There were no protest marches outside the palace. The king’s authority was simply accepted by his subjects as a part of life. Nobody would think of questioning it.

Occasionally, one king would decide to invade the kingdom of another. He knew if he won the ensuing battle, that everybody in that king’s realm would become his subject, including the other king himself. One Old Testament king boasted, “Seventy kings with their thumbs and their big toes cut off used to gather up scraps under my table...” (Judges 1:7 ) When Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem the second time, he had King Zedekiah’s sons put to death in front of him, had his eyes gouged out, and sent him off to Babylon in chains, a broken man. When Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria , decided he was going to attack the northern kingdom of Israel , he sent the following message to King Ahab: “Your silver and gold are mine, and the best of your wives and children are mine.” The king of Israel answered, “Just as you say, my lord the king. I and all I have are yours.” ( I Kings 20:3-4 ) When one king surrendered to another, he understood what it meant: “I and all I have are yours.” It would be an unconditional surrender.

This is a picture of true surrender to the Lord. After many years of tyranny, the king of SELF—along with Satan, the real power behind his throne—is overthrown and a new King is installed. How unfortunate it is when people come out to the benevolent Conqueror with a list of conditions!

 Jesus said, “You cannot serve two masters…” He did not say that we should not; He said that it was not possible. He who attempts it only deceives himself and makes himself miserable. He cannot enjoy the allurements of the world, the selfish indulgences of the flesh or the fleeting pleasures of sin. Once a person glimpses the realities of the Kingdomof God , can he ever be satisfied with the Kingdom of Darkness ? Likewise, living with one foot in the devil’s kingdom keeps the person from enjoying what the Lord has for him. He never comes into the deep sense of fulfillment that total submission provides. He never tastes of the deep mysteries of God. He knows nothing of the joy of the Lord that is beyond favorable circumstances. No, the unsurrendered believer lives in the dismal gray area between two opposing kingdoms. “How long will you hesitate between two opinions?” Elijah asked the wavering Israelites of his day. Jesus was likewise sickened over the lukewarm condition of the Laodiceans. “He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters.” ( Matthew 12:30 )

 This is an issue of extreme importance to the man in habitual sin. He cannot afford to maintain alliances with the enemy. If he hopes to have victory from the clutches of the enemy, he must make a clean break from him. As one minister wrote: “If one foe remains in the citadel, the city is not safe. One weed left in the garden may spread and spoil the whole. One germ of disease in the system may issue in death. Loyalty, to be worth anything, must be complete. In order to be saved, the Son of God must reign supremely in us, King over every thought.”

 “Why must Christianity be so radical?” one may ask. The answer to that question is found in the relationship that is involved. Most relations one has in life require nothing more than a moderate degree of commitment. There is nothing wrong with a person having nothing more than a friendly rapport with a co-worker. However, when one person marries another, he dedicates his life to that person. There is no turning back. There is no half-hearted devotion. He is hers and she is his. They have become one flesh. This is what it means to be the bride of Christ. Surrender to God simply means that the believer becomes one with Him. Just as Jesus prayed, “…that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us… that they may be one, just as We are one.” ( John 17:21-22 )   Just like a young bride gives up her freedom, so too, the believer enters into a submissive role with his Savior. What a foolish girl she would be if she married a man on a whim without really considering what this marriage would mean to her life. She must come to grips with the fact that her carefree single life is now over. She must understand that she has to walk away from old friendships, the old lifestyle and anything else that would come between her and her new husband.

 This is what Jesus meant when He said: “If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?” ( Luke 14:26-33 )

 Imagine how detestable it would be for a girl to marry a man to whom she has no intention of remaining faithful. She wants the benefits of marriage—her husband’s good name, his protection, his devotion, his provision—without giving anything in return. We would think such a woman was despicable. And yet, are unsurrendered believers really much different? Jesus gave His life so that we could be joined with Him. Isn’t it terribly ungrateful for us to demand His devotion to us when we are unwilling to return it to Him?

 Yes, there is a price to following Christ, and every person considering such a commitment should count the cost. “I want to surrender all to Christ, but I’m afraid that I won’t follow through,” one might say. This kind of surrender rarely happens in one experience. It usually is a lifelong process—a lifestyle. The Lord is continually trying to bring us to the place where we trust Him enough to make that kind of surrender. This is a process that takes time.

 That journey toward absolute surrender must begin by taking one step. A prayer like this can be that first step: “Lord, I want to make a total consecration of myself to You but I sense a lot of resistance within myself. Nevertheless, I am willing to be made willing. Conquer my will and have Your way. I commit myself to this process of surrender.”

 If you will sincerely offer up that prayer to your heavenly Father, He will do the rest. I will conclude this article with the stirring words of Hannah Whitall Smith:

“Oh, be generous in your self-surrender! Meet His measureless devotion for you, with a measureless devotion to Him. Be glad and eager to throw yourself headlong into His dear arms, and to hand over the reins of government to Him. Whatever there is of you, let Him have it all. Give up forever everything that is separate from Him. Consent to resign from this time forward all liberty of choice; and glory in the blessed nearness of union which makes this enthusiasm of devotedness not only possible but necessary.”