SABBATH THOUGHT 2026-11-14—SURRENDER OR SUBMIT?

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Some describe their relationship with God as a surrender. Did you know that the word rarely appears in the majority of Bibles? It is never used in the KJV and only appears in the Old Testament of the New KJV that was first published in its entirety in 1982. But the word was removed and replaced in the King James variants that came out later. Even Bibles unrelated to the KJV do not use the word *surrender* except a few places in the Old Testament. In those instances, *surrender* always describes the defeat of a human enemy. *Surrender* is a popular term nowadays so it seems out of place since it is rarely used in Bibles. So, is it accurate? Notice the primary definition:

> SURRENDER—Admission of defeat in a war, fight, or conflict and yielding to the power, control, or possession of another upon compulsion or demand.

Writing requires using words with an accepted primary meaning; otherwise, ideas can be unclear. This is particularly true when translating the Bible. Slang might be acceptable if the audience is narrowly confined to those who commonly use it. That is why surrender is rarely used in Bibles—it conveys being forcibly overcome and defeated, whether physically or mentally. Surrender is forced upon an adversary; it is never voluntary.

As with most languages, English is constantly evolving. For example, *awful* originally described something worthy of awe and reverence; today it means dreadful or terrible. *Fantastic* once meant illusory or unbelievable but now means wonderful or marvelous. One particular word that took me by surprise is *nice*. It is synonymous with kind, pleasant, or agreeable but long ago it referred to someone who was ignorant, foolish, or silly. Most of us probably remember *cool* from the 1960s but it had nothing to do with temperature. Today there is *sick*, which in modern slang means impressive. Some words completely changed—*gay* meant happy and merry not so long ago. Use of the word *surrender* in a religious context became common in the late 1800s when religious movements adopted popular phrases such as “let go and let God.” The hymn “I surrender all” was produced in 1896 and Billy Graham turned the phrase into a global sensation. *Surrender* does make some sense because everyone starts out as an enemy of God:

> ROMANS 5:8, 10 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. … 10 For if **when we were enemies** we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

When people say they *surrender* to God, it is not used to describe a coerced abdication when it comes to a relationship with Him—He does not compel people give up control of their lives. Its meaning has shifted and describes voluntarily relinquishing personal control and desires and submitting to the lordship, authority,

and will of God. It is a reorientation of one's life toward God that involves concepts of dying to self, being a living sacrifice, and the lordship of God and Christ. But even with that new definition, *surrender* can still infer that God is in a battle for human souls when, in reality, it is always a choice:

> DEUTERONOMY 30:19 "I *[the LORD]* call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, *that* **I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life**, that both you and your descendants may live;

I have yet to find a definition for *surrender* that does not include the word *submit*. Submission is willingly and voluntarily allowing someone to have authority over us and it always a choice. In a religious context, that may be how *surrender* is used but that is the primary meaning of *submit*:

> SUBMIT—Willingly subjecting oneself to the authority of someone else and choosing to obey their instructions.

Surrender is a shameful and undesirable state in which one has been conquered by an opponent. Being forced to surrender does not change the motives and purpose of the vanquished. The defeated do not suddenly align their ideals and goals with those of the victor. That is why no one actually surrenders to God. God only offers a choice: voluntarily submit or die. While that may sound warlike, it is not. God does not need to conquer anyone because no one, spirit or flesh, is a threat to Him. Those who willingly submit are no longer His enemies and those who reject His authority are simply destroyed.

God created flesh and blood for the purpose of suffering. This life is proof of that. Someone submits to God when they recognize this world is only suffering and death and the blame is upon mankind! God does not have to be involved for hardships to exist; we are more than capable of producing them on our own. Surrender is an unwilling act whereas submission is making that choice gladly, not reluctantly:

> ACTS 17:11 **These *[Bereans]* were more fair-minded** than those in Thessalonica, in that **they received the word with all readiness *[or eagerness] [of mind]***, and searched the Scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things were so.

A surrender forces obedience through defeat whereas submitting to God transforms enemies into zealous followers. The primary motive for submitting to someone is it is advantageous or beneficial. Submitting to God comes with a promise of life:

> HEBREWS 12:9 … Shall we not much **more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live**?

Jesus was the premier example of submitting to God the Father:

> JOHN 5:30 **I *[Jesus Christ]* can of mine own self do nothing**: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because **I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father** which hath sent me.

Why did Jesus Christ submit to His Father? To establish that promise of God:

> 1 JOHN 4:9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has **sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live *[eternally]* through Him**.

But what is beneficial about eternal life? None, if it is absent the one quality that is desirable above all else—peace. Eternal suffering and conflict is not a life worth living. Peace, above all, has never existed among people or nations. It requires goodwill in the form of justice, fairness, and equity. When the greatest ensemble of angels ever seen appeared at the birth of Jesus, what did they proclaim?

> LUKE 2:13-14 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 14 "Glory to God in the highest, and **on earth peace, goodwill [among men]**!"

"Peace on earth; goodwill among men" resonates in the hearts and minds of most people as the greatest achievement possible. The reason it will never be achieved is because it requires everyone to humbly submit to one another, something that will never happen. Even among religious organizations there are constant disputes about anything and everything. People fight about doctrine, beliefs, position, and authority; all because of selfish lust and greed. Everyone is an enemy in a world apart from God, even among so-called allies:

> JAMES 4:1-6 Where do wars and fights *come* from among you? Do *they* not ***come* from your *desires for* pleasure that war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war.** Yet you do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures. 4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be **a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God**. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit that dwells in us yearns jealously"? 6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

The solution, James concluded, was simply "submit to God" (v. 7). Submitting to Him acknowledges and yields to His authority without reservation. God demands obedience but He does not force His will upon anyone.

It is ironic that in submitting to God we can end up being engaged in a war against those who were once our allies. When someone submits to God, they are given a set of armor[1] because a battle ensues simply for making that choice:

> 2 CORINTHIANS 10:4-5 For **the weapons of our warfare** *are* not carnal but mighty in God **for pulling down strongholds, 5 casting down arguments and every high**

[1] Eph. 6:10-13.

thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,

Our war, however, is not to force the enemy to surrender—this is one enemy who will never give up. It is not a battle to defeat our adversaries but to defend our right to choose God's Way. There is a war going on but surrender is not an option. God either gives life or takes away life. He cannot be forced to do anything—He either wills it or not. Life exists simply because it is the will of God:

JOB 34:13-15 Who gave Him *[God]* charge over the earth? Or who appointed *Him over* the whole world? 14 If He should set His heart on it, ***if*** **He should gather to Himself His Spirit and His breath, 15 All flesh would perish together**, and man would return to dust.

No one surrenders to God in the strict sense of the word because no one can engage Him in a fight—He is power beyond measure:

2 CHRONICLES 20:6 and said: "O LORD God of our fathers, *are* You not God in heaven, and do You *not* rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and **in Your hand *is there not* power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You**?

God is not fighting a war; He will always prevail—His people will be saved and His adversaries will be destroyed. There is only a personal choice of life or death. Eternal peace is coming regardless of how anyone chooses. God makes no provision for His enemies to surrender. Those who submit will live in peace and those who refuse will be destroyed to ensure that peace. The choice is peace or destruction. That is why Satan and his allies are not fighting to win a war—they can only wreak destruction before they themselves are destroyed. Enemies of God can only rebel, not win. Nor can they surrender; it is not an option with God.

God gives good things to those who are not His enemies. Those who willingly submit to Him realize that His Law is the only framework of a Way of Life that ensures His benevolence, goodness, blessings, and, above all, peace:

JEREMIAH 29:11 For **I *[the LORD]* know the thoughts that I think toward you**, says the LORD, **thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope**.

LUKE 12:32 "Do not fear, little flock, for **it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom**.

MATTHEW 7:11 "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, **how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things** to those who ask Him!

HEBREWS 9:11 But Christ came *as* High Priest **of the good things to come**, …

Obedience produces agape love, which is the foundation of peace. Peace cannot be achieved by defeating one's enemies because hearts and minds are not changed

through force. In fact, trying to force the will of someone upon others can create martyrs; those who are willing to die for their beliefs especially when faced with defeat by their enemies. Remember the kamikazes in WW2? True peace is a condition wherein there are NO ENEMIES because all willingly submit to each other under a common ruling authority:

> EPHESIANS 5:21 **submitting to one another in the fear of God**.

Some prefer to describe their calling and election of God as a surrender. I suppose it is more poetic but it never refers to an enemy that God defeated and forced into submission. Citizens of the Kingdom will not be conscripts forced to serve against their will. God "so loved the world"[2] that He will never compel anyone to obey Him. Submitting to God is a beautiful way of describing those who are humble, meek, merciful, and compassionate. These have received the promise of peace[3]:

> PSALM 37:11 But **the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace**.

The Firstfruit saints will witness the greatest achievement in the history of mankind when Christ returns. The ensuing peace will bring tears of joy and laughter:

> ZECHARIAH 8:3-6 "Thus says the LORD: 'I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, the Mountain of the LORD of hosts, the Holy Mountain.' 4 "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. 5 The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.' 6 "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'If it is marvelous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, will **it also be marvelous in My eyes**?' says the LORD of hosts.

Can this truly happen? Surely, by the might and power of God! Until then, remember the gift given by our Savior and hold onto it:

> JOHN 14:27 "**Peace I *[Jesus Christ]* leave with you, My peace I give to you**; …

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[2] John 3:16.
[3] Also Ps. 37:37.