

SURRENDER -- BUT HOW FAR?

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"O Lord our God, other lords besides thee have ruled over us, but thy name alone we acknowledge" (Isa. 26:13—R. S. V.).

It is one of the odd but inescapable facts of life that, as someone has put it, "No man is really free until he has found a master."

Speaking as Christians, however, I think we ought to add two postscripts to that statement. The first is that "a master" should be changed to "the Master"—Jesus Christ. The second postscript is that finding the Master is one thing, and following the Master into all the high demand of full surrender is another thing.

It was weakness and, frequently the failure of ancient Israel that they tried to live with loyalties—part of their loyalties given to God and part of their loyalties given to the deities of the pagan peoples around them.

Our text is a description and a confession of that unhappy situation. But, while it comes to us out of the ancient past, let us not think for a moment that the condition it describes is not thoroughly up-to-date.

Here, for example, is a Christian who says sadly, "I'm tired of being dictated to by my body. A Christian in conflict: family surrendered to God, business surrendered, money surrendered, but not the body."

I knew a preacher years ago who floundered and all but failed in the ministry because, while he was yielded at most points, he could not quite bring himself to surrender his ambition and reputation to God. When the moment of complete letting go arrived, God flooded his life and ministry with the Holy Spirit and made him a benediction to the world.

1. OTHER LORDS

Consider more closely this divided sovereignty of which our text speaks so vividly. The rule of the Lord God? Yes. But this rule is disputed by "other lords" who make a bid for our allegiance and get it—at least in a measure.

I would like to say three things about this divided sort of living which many Christians are attempting.

"A House Divided"

1. It is unhealthy. It is good neither for the mind, for the emotions, for one's health to be living in a state of conflict between the claims of Christ and the claims of some other "lord"—whether it goes by the name of habit, or friendship, or appetite, or whatever, Jesus said, "A house divided against itself shall not stand" (Matt. 12:25)

"Shadows"

2. It is unhappy. Someone has defined happiness as a frame of mind "in which one is going somewhere wholeheartedly." Note the emphasis on the adverb—"wholeheartedly." Going with Jesus with only half your heart, or even seven-eighths of it, means a shadow across the gladness and buoyancy which ought to be yours.

Fruitlessness

3. It is unprofitable. In Deuteronomy 4 Moffatt has a striking translation of a sentence which Moses spoke to the people of Israel when he warned them against dividing their allegiance to God with idols: "When you produce children and children's children, if you lose your freshness in the land and deprave yourselves by carving an idol in the sight of the Eternal your God * * * I call heaven and earth to witness against you" (Deut 4:24). Let an idol come between you and God, and away goes your spiritual freshness and fruitfulness.

It was a minister caught in the conflict of divided sovereignties — a critical self or a Christlike self—who said: "My ministry is on the surface. I'm an activist. I've been getting by. I'm critical, for I'm not inwardly secure."

Unhealthy, unhappy, unprofitable—that is the three-fold charge that we can fairly level against a Christian discipleship which is divided in its loyalties.

11. DEFECTIVE SURRENDER

Think Next of the defective surrender that is plainly implied by the divided sovereignty.

If it be true that "other lords besides thee have ruled over us," then it must be because our one rightful Sovereign has not received from us the absolute and exclusive commitment to which He is entitled.

"A Lie to the Holy Ghost"

Mind you, there is a surrender that is defective because it is hypocritical. The false consecration of Ananias and Sapphira is so well known that the very name "Ananias" has become a synonym for lying. Other members of that first Christian congregation in Jerusalem were dedicating their all to Christ. Ananias and his wife sold their property, kept part of the proceeds for themselves, and then pretended that what they brought to the apostles was the whole of it. Peter called it "a lie to the Holy Ghost" (Acts 5:3).

There is a consecration hymn we sometimes sing:

"All for Jesus, all for Jesus!

All for being's ransomed pow'rs

All my thoughts and words and doings,

All my days and all my hours.

Let my lips speak forth His praise."

Let my feet run in His ways;

Let my eyes see Jesus only.

Let my lips speak forth His praise."

There is probably no Christian who has not sung it at one time or another. Well, what about it? Were you telling the truth when you sang it? Was I?

"Smoldering Embers"

And then there is a surrender that is defective because it is what we might call ephemeral. Literally, "for a day"—such is the meaning of the word. You decide one day that you are going to take the crown of sovereignty and put it, once for all, on the brow of Jesus Christ. And then, a day later, or a week later, or a month later, you reach up and take it off, and go strutting off with it, wearing it yourself! You had to have your own way in that argument, even though you had to storm through a spell of bad temper to get it. You had to take that money Christ wanted on the mission field or for Christian education and put it into bonds or spend it for a new-model television set. You had to go back to that habit from which you claimed release only the other day! Ah, it was a short-term surrender you made, when it should have been for life!

One Christian worker, once greatly used by God but now "sidelined," confided to a friend: "My consecration today is just like smoldering embers." When you begin taking back what you have given to the Lord, the glow will go out of your soul and the fire out of your discipleship.

"Idols"

But there is a third aspect of defect which often mars our surrender. It may not be hypocritical. It may not be ephemeral. But at best is it partial.

Some of us are mostly surrendered to our Lord, but there is that one habit we are clinging to, and out of which we are making an idol. The old argument that there is no harm in it is something we have worn threadbare. Suppose there isn't, there is still the undisputed fact that you would be a freed, cleaner, more Christlike person if you let it go.

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