



"True faith drops its letter in the post office box and lets it go.
Distrust holds on to a corner of it and wonders that the answer
never comes."
—A.B. Simpson

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Surrender

Several years ago, bumper stickers and other merchandise proudly bearing the motto, "[God](#) is my co-pilot," became popular. A short time later, astute individuals began promoting a fitting response to this pithy saying: "If God is your co-pilot, switch seats!"

This little vignette exemplifies two sides of the same coin. On one side, we are most comfortable leading the way in whatever charge captures our fancy at the time, trusting—often erroneously—that God is right there with us to ensure success (as we define it). On the other lies the unassailable truth that if God is not leading the charge, we are in the wrong role—and dabbling in disaster.

The first approach is the most comfortable, so it is not surprising that its characterizing motto broke onto the scene first. The second feels decidedly unnatural because it requires us to do something most people are loathe to do: surrender. Allowing God to direct our lives—without continually advising, complaining, recommending, suggesting, and giving input on the details—goes against the natural (carnal) inclination within us. Yet,

experience teaches that it is only when we finally give up, ceding sovereignty to the Almighty, who has had it all along, that things begin moving positively. Ultimately, matters work out far better with God in control than anything we could accomplish with our limited vision. Truly, the crucial first step on the journey—surrendering—is most often the hardest.

[Romans 8:7](#) gives a succinct portrayal of a carnal mind, what we could call the spirit of a carnal man: "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the [law of God](#), nor indeed can be." While we may define *law* as "codified right and wrong," the "*law of God*" raises the meaning to a higher level. We might paraphrase this verse as, "The carnal mind is not subject to the *rule* of God," which encompasses far more than just obedience to what has been written down. The *rule of God* is simply letting Him govern His universe—and our lives, too. Certainly, this includes obedience to the laws He instituted for our benefit, but it goes well beyond this. A man can be nominally obedient to God's instructions yet still not be surrendered to God's rule.

The story of Jonah is about such a man, a prophet who grudgingly complies but never truly surrenders to God's will. A mere three verses into the book, he is fleeing from God's presence rather than yielding to His instructions. God reinforces His rule over His creation by sending a mighty tempest to create a crisis, a point of decision for Jonah and the sailors ([Jonah 1:4-16](#)). To a degree, Jonah surrenders when he instructs the sailors to cast him overboard, yet it appears to be the capitulation of a man *giving up on life* rather than *giving his life* in obedience ([Jonah 1:12](#)).

When God commands Jonah a second time, he complies, preaching God's message for the Ninevites ([Jonah 3:1-4](#)). However, he becomes angry when God's Word—given through him—accomplishes its purpose, and Nineveh repents (see [Isaiah 55:11](#)). Jonah is *obedient* in terms of following orders, but he does not *surrender* to God's will when things turn out differently than he expects. As when he was on the ship, he would have rather died than live with circumstances he did not like ([Jonah 4:3](#), 8-9). Up to the book's abrupt ending, we see a nominally obedient Jonah, yet a man who never fully surrenders to the rule of God. The last we see of him, he is in despair over a life that is not according to his terms.

In absolute, stark contrast to Jonah is [Jesus Christ](#), the beloved Son in whom the Father was well pleased ([Matthew 3:17](#)). He did not seek His own will, but that of the Father ([John 5:30](#)). He *always* did what pleased the Father ([John 8:29](#))—not merely obeying but *surrendering* to His Sovereign. He taught His followers to pray, "*Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*" ([Luke 11:2](#), emphasis ours). The night before He surrendered His life for us, He plaintively told His Father, "Not as I will, but as You will" ([Matthew 26:39](#); [Mark 14:36](#)); "Your will be done" ([Matthew 26:42](#)); and ". . . nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done" ([Luke 22:42](#)). "I do not want to go through this," He says in essence, "but *Father, I surrender.*"

The outcome of this supreme surrender to God's rule is without parallel. Not only has the Father put *all things* under Christ, but it has opened the way for the blotting out of [sin](#) and restoring the relationship between God and humanity fractured in the Garden of Eden. When a person cedes sovereignty to the Almighty, things begin moving and ultimately work out far better than anything that could be accomplished with limited human vision.

The apostle Paul teaches in [Ephesians 5:24](#) that "the church is subject to Christ." An ancillary meaning of this statement is that the church *is composed of those who are subject to Christ*. The church—the Body of Christ—consists of those subject to the *rule of God* in all its implications and not merely grudgingly obedient. Those whom the Father chooses are those who, like their Elder Brother, continually and sincerely declare, "Father, I surrender. Not my will, but Yours, be done." When we truly yield control to God, we tell Him we are finally ready for Him to act.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Jonah: Typical Israelite](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Jonah constitutes a story more than a prophecy, analyzing the consequences of rebelling against God's instructions (a trait or common failure among

Jacob's offspring, whose carnal natures hold their narcissistic world views above God's perfect will). Jonah does not end with a definitive conclusion, probably because those reading might not see their own spiritual blind spots, just as Jonah could not see his consummate hatred against gentiles, whom God loves and who has called. Jonah is indeed an Everyman figure, standing for all carnal offspring of Jacob, having fractured relationships with Almighty God, putting xenophobic 'patriotic' concerns above the compassionate will of God that all mankind should repent and find salvation. To this borderline-suicidal narcissist, his universe held only himself, permitting God's will if it conformed to his own will. In the sign of Jonah in Matthew 12:38-41, the three day and three nights parallel should not be taken exclusively without focusing on the warning not to question God's mercy on all people, who is slow to anger, relenting from doing harm, something sadly which Jonah apparently resented. If we have the same seething hatred for a group of people outside of our spiritual or physical family, God will try to reach us as He tried to reach Jonah. Do we, like Jonah, question or perhaps resent God's compassion and mercy on people we still regard as our enemies?

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Fully Accepting God's Sovereignty \(Part One\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Most converted Christians realize that God is sovereign, or they at least recognize His sovereignty over all things intellectually. But sometimes the Bible reveals something about God that makes them uncomfortable. John Ritenbaugh asks if we truly accept His sovereignty without reservation despite our lack of complete understanding.

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