

- ***READ Acts 26:12-18*** The conversion of Saul of Tarsus, a staunch Pharisee and persecutor of the Lord's disciples, is certainly one of the most fascinating turnarounds within all of Scripture. We might wonder how it is that such a man would be willing to make such a drastic change, but when the risen Savior appears to you as you are on the way to persecute His people...well that would certainly be a strong message to receive. However, it is only here within this account of Paul sharing his testimony with Agrippa that we find this particular detail concerning Paul's encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. It is within this text that we find this statement by Jesus, "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.*" (**Acts 26:14**)
- For the longest time, I simply read over this text without fully grasping what Jesus meant by this statement, but much of that had to do with the fact that I had no idea what a goad was. That is where trusty google.com came to the rescue and I learned that a goad is actually something similar to what I used when I was younger and would help my aunt deal with her herd of cows. A goad was a stick that often had a blunt end and the other was sharper and sometimes even tipped with iron. This stick was used to prod the oxen during the plowing process so that they might go in the proper direction.
- Therefore, I am convinced that we can take away from Jesus's statement that Paul had been conflicted in some sort of way concerning the truths concerning Jesus. There had been some sort of prodding or goading experienced by Paul while he was living as Saul the Pharisee, and Jesus draws his attention towards the difficulties he had been experiencing while "*kicking against the goads.*" It seems to me that it was at this point of Jesus coming face to face with Paul that he finally stopped kicking against the prodding and the goading, and he fully surrendered to Jesus.
- I had never really given much thought to describing our submitting to Jesus as being a surrendering on our part until I continually heard it referred to as such in the "Not Ashamed" podcast that is put out by the Duck Dynasty crew. On numerous episodes as Jase is recounting different events in his life, he continually refers to the point where someone becomes obedient to the Gospel as someone who is surrendering to Jesus. I thought it was very interesting and began doing some thinking upon and looking into the Scriptures to see if there was any validity to this way of phrasing such a thing.
- The more I thought about it, the more I saw this as making much sense considering that our sin causes there to be a conflict between us and God, and it is only once we decide to raise up the white flag of surrender that we can be united with Him in true fellowship for it is only at that point that we are finally on the same side and in good terms. This morning, I would like for us to look at the different conflicts/battles/struggles that can be found between men and God, and then I would like to look at Jesus's teachings concerning our need to surrender, what that looks like, and how the rich young ruler failed to take the step of complete and total surrender to Jesus within his own life.

I. The Conflicts:

A. Flesh VS Spirit (**Galatians 5:16-26**)

1. This text makes it abundantly clear that the flesh and the Spirit are at odds with one another.

"For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh; these are opposed to one another..." (**Galatians 5:17**) This is even more clearly seen as Paul contrasts the manifestations of either being led by the flesh or by the Spirit.

a) *"Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar. I am warning you about these things—as I warned you before—that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."*

b) *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,*

gentleness, and self-control. The law is not against such things. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit."

2. The conflict between that which our flesh desires and that which our God desires for us could not be any more obvious within this text, and they are even obvious as we observe the world around us. There is constant conflict between that which is good and evil, righteous and unrighteous. Which side will we find ourselves on in this conflict? Will we choose to follow the desires of the flesh, or will we choose to follow the desires of God's Spirit?

B. Falsehood VS Truth (Romans 1:18-25)

1. This conflict between the flesh and the Spirit can find some of its root in the fact that there is also continuous conflict between that which is false and that which is true. In **Romans 1:18**, we are informed that *"God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness & unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."* It isn't as if they are seeking to suppress the truth and not embrace anything, but we quickly see that they are suppressing the truth in order to accept that which is false. They would surely even begin to see it as truth.
2. That which is false within this text is the idea that there is no God of heaven who created everything and therefore men are free to do just as they please...they are able to fulfill any work of the flesh that they might desire. *"They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever. Amen."* Which side of the conflict will we decide to be on? Will we accept the evident truth and truths of God or will we reject them in order to embrace lies and do as we would like to do?

C. Man's Wisdom VS God's Wisdom (James 3:13-18)

1. Within this text of James, we come to read of the contrasts and conflict that is between the wisdom that is of this earth and of men and the wisdom that is from above and of God. Notice, *"But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart, don't boast and deny the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from above but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there is disorder and every evil practice."* These verses make it painfully obvious that embracing the wisdom of this earth and of man leads to all sorts of problems that are completely avoidable, and choosing such wisdom becomes even more foolish when it is compared with the wisdom that is from above and of God.
2. *"But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy, and good fruits, unwavering, without pretense. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who cultivate peace."* This should be no contest at all! We should clearly desire to adopt the wisdom that is from above and of God, and yet there continue to be so many who forsake the peace of God that comes from His wisdom so that they might embrace their own wisdom even if it leads them down a path of difficulty. Which wisdom will we embrace? Which side will we choose? Will we surrender or will we continue to kick against the goads.

D. My Will VS God's Will

1. I keep asking which side we will choose because that is the conclusion of the matter. Which will am I going to follow? Will I do as I want to do and embrace the desires of my flesh, reject the truth of God for the lies of this world, and rely upon my own wisdom instead of the wisdom of God? It all comes down to whether I will do what I want to do or do what God's wants for me to do.
2. If I am going to continue to reject the things of God then I will find myself constantly at odds with God and in conflict with Him and the teachings of His Word. For those who are ignorant of God's Word, this might not bother them so much, but for people like those in this assembly and even Saul of Tarsus...this would become very tiring and uncomfortable. The only relief that we could possibly find is to surrender to Jesus, but what does that look like? What does it demand?

II. To Surrender To Jesus Demands:

I want to consider this point from a couple of different angles. Firstly, I want us to look at Jesus's teaching that can be found in **Mark 8:34-38**. Secondly, I want to take what Jesus says in this text and compare it to what is seen in **Mark 10:17-27** when the rich young ruler comes to Jesus. Jesus teaches us very plainly what is demanded in order for one to surrender to Him, but we'll notice that the rich young ruler wasn't willing to surrender to Him in such a way in our text.

A. My willingness to surrender to Jesus.

1. The very first thing that Jesus states to the crowd as He calls them to Himself is, "*If anyone wants to follow after me...*" This statement indicates to us that true surrender to Jesus demands a willingness on our part. If we recognize the conflict that is taking place between us and Jesus then the first step in resolving that conflict is to desire for the conflict to be stopped, and we must recognize that this conflict isn't going to be halted by Jesus giving up. The King of kings and Lord of lords didn't leave heaven in order to lose. No, He is going to be victorious, and all that remains is for us to recognize the solidified outcome and decide that we want to be on that winning side with Him.
2. When we look at the rich young ruler, we seem to get the impression that this man desired to know exactly what it would take in order for him to be with God in eternal life. Now, this young man could've spent much time trying to figure out the answer to this all important question by himself, but I believe we would do well to give him some credit for his willingness to come to Jesus and ask Him the answer to this question. This man would never have a chance to surrender to Jesus if he wasn't first willing to at least come before Him and ask this question. Likewise, we will never surrender to Jesus unless we become willing to do so.

B. Denial of myself.

1. Further, we can't surrender to Jesus unless we are willing to deny ourselves. To deny ourselves is to put away self-centered interests. This means we must be willing to lay aside the works of the flesh, falsehoods, and our own wisdom. We must be willing to do things on His terms and not our own. But...what would cause us to be willing to do such a thing? Why would we be willing to set change everything about ourselves? Why would we be willing to surrender so much of who we are to Jesus?
2. I think the rich young man gives us a little insight into why, and that centers around the fact that Jesus is our good Teacher, He is our good King. Remember that seeking our own desires, truth, and wisdom only puts us in a place where "*there is disorder and every evil practice.*" Clearly when we are in charge things go badly, so why wouldn't we want to change sides? Why wouldn't we be willing to surrender to Jesus and His desires, truth, and wisdom? To me this seems like a no brainer, but Jesus's next statement brings this surrender thing to the point where things get real.

C. Taking up of my cross.

1. Not only are we told that we must deny ourselves, but then Jesus follows that up by stating that we must take up our crosses. It is quite unfortunate that such a statement doesn't resonate with us as it would with Mark's original audience, but we must understand that this is the ultimate statement of self-denial because it is a call to die to self. Those who desire to surrender to Jesus must not simply deny themselves, but they must die to self in order to live with Christ. (**Galatians 2:20 & 5:24**)
2. There is nothing about our lives that we shouldn't be willing to give up if it means surrendering to Christ. This means that we might have to give up family, friends, jobs, interests, and maybe even give up our literal lives for Christ, but aren't all of these things that Jesus was first willing to do for us? Of course they are! Jesus was willing to give up heaven for us (**Philippians 2**), and therefore we must be willing to give up anything in this life for Him. Sadly, though, this is where the rich young ruler stumbled before Jesus.

3. Back in **Mark 10**, we read that Jesus lists off all of these things that this young man needed to do in order to have eternal life. As a good Hebrew, this young man would've been well familiar with his need to follow the commandments of the Law. He wasn't a murderer, and adulterer, a thief, a liar, or a fraud, and he cared deeply for his father and mother. And yet, there was something else that he had already surrendered to, and that was his wealth. He was fully under the control of his possessions and they were keeping him from surrendering to Jesus. Therefore, the Bible tells us that he went away from Jesus grieving because of the great demand that had been laid upon him by Jesus for him to go and sell all that he had. This young man already had a Lord in his life, and he wasn't ready to surrender to another one at the moment. He wasn't willing to die to himself.

D. Following of Jesus.

1. The fact that this young man wasn't willing to follow Jesus as Jesus said needs to be done tells me that real surrender is realized before one can truly follow Jesus. One must truly deny himself and take up his cross before he is willing to go wherever and do whatever Jesus commands.
2. Following Jesus demand that we go with the expectation that we are going to do anything and everything that He tells for us to do. Only those who have surrendered to Jesus have such a mindset. Are we counted among those people? I would suggest that unless we trust in God then we are not willing to do whatever it is that Jesus demands for us to do.
3. That is the whole point of what Jesus is stating in **Mark 10:23,24**. Our Lord states plainly that it isn't just difficult for those who are rich to enter into the kingdom of heaven, but it is in fact impossible for such to happen...when those rich people are trying to enter into heaven all while trusting in their riches! That is Jesus's point, and it is obvious when we consider that this rich young man wasn't able to follow Jesus because he was under the power of his riches. He couldn't surrender to Jesus as Lord because he already had a lord. Likewise, we must be willing to fully trust in God and submit and surrender to Jesus if we want any chance of being in eternity with God.
4. Sometimes that trust might lead us to places where we don't quite feel like going. It might lead us to do things that we simply don't want to do, but if we are going to be the people of God then we must be willing to do even those things that we simply don't want to do. Our willingness and ability to do so will only be seen if we have truly made the decision to surrender to Jesus.

What a sad time it is any time we read of the rich young ruler and just how close he was to surrendering to Jesus and following Him in this life. And yet, such examples are recorded for us so that we might learn and grow from the shortcomings and mistakes of others. With that in mind, the question remains...will we be a people who fully surrender to Jesus, or will we continue to fight, battle, and struggle against Him and His will for our lives. I sincerely hope that our considerations have stirred our minds to understand that giving everything of ourselves to Jesus is truly the best way to go. This conflict between God and men will eventually end...which side will we be on? May we each humble ourselves before our heavenly Father, and surrender our wills entirely to Him for in the end...we will all be much better for it. Kicking against the goads will only lead to further pain and strife, so may we therefore make it an integral part of our lives to always be surrendering our will to the will of Jesus.