

SURRENDER!—AND WIN!

⁷Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

¹¹Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. ¹²There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?

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“Hold at all costs.” “Never surrender!” “Never give up.” “The captain goes down with his ship.” Phrases like these express determination. We like determination. We like it when people do not give up. Even if the team is down 34 to 3 at half time, we want them to come out and play with all they have in the second half. Think of the Alamo. The Texicans were greatly outnumbered and surrounded. It would have been easy to surrender, but they chose to die fighting. We admire people like this. They are heroes.

We like it determination because surrendering means you lose. In chess, if your king is checkmated, you surrender and lay you piece down to show you have lost. It means the soldiers give up the fort, or a boxer throws in the towel. But there is a time you should give up. There is a time you should surrender. Surrender to the Lord and, as you will see, you do not lose. You win.

I. Surrender to God.

Remember those old black and white movies starring Humphrey Bogart or Edward G. Robinson? The police have the gangster, Rocko, trapped in some building. They call out, “It’s over, Rocko. Come out with your hands up.” And the defiant Rocko yells back, “You’ll never take me alive, copper.” A great shoot out occurs and Rocko dies a dramatic death.

God has you surrounded and he calls to you to come out with your hands up. Like Rocko, you broke the law. **“Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. ¹²There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?”** James could have talked about any sin, but chose the sin of slander because that was a particular problem in his church. We have a church here where everyone was condemning and judging everyone else. What could such slander look like? It could be as simple as people gossiping about another. Or you refuse to associate with that person because of something they did. It could be this feeling that you are better and you look down at another. Slander is not only a sin against the 8th Commandment; it shows an unwillingness to forgive. Yes, the Christian is guided by God’s Word to call a sin a sin in the hopes of leading someone to repentance. But we are not to judge that person. That is God’s role. The slanderer says they know better than God. “No, Lord, this person should not be forgiven.” They would ignore or ostracize that person. They were saying they know better than God’s perfect law. They are saying they know better, period and it is they who should be making the laws, not the other person, not even God.

James is cornering his listeners with their sin so they can’t escape. They are the lawbreakers. Society should not tolerate lawbreakers. If someone thinks that speed limit laws are not for him, well, he should be pulled over, ticketed, have his license taken away. If someone thinks he should be judge and jury and shoot another person in revenge, he should be thrown in jail.

If we do not tolerate lawbreakers, why should God? Have you noticed that sins are always worse in the third person, such as “Their sin, he did wrong,” but are not nearly so bad in the first person? They lied, but I only stretched the truth a little. They slandered, but I am telling the truth. If we got angry, it was his fault. Adam tried to blame Eve for his sin, but it didn’t work. He should have just given up and said, “I have sinned.” David tried to hide his sin with Bathsheba, but he didn’t escape. Eventually God through Nathan surrounded him and he came out with his hands up and said, “I have sinned.”

Instead of pretending we are not sinners or not as bad as others or hiding it or blaming others, just give up. Confess it. Probably the best example of surrendering to God is the story of the lost or prodigal son. Sure, he had some laughs. But in the end he realized what a fool he was. He surrendered. He came out with his hands up and confessed he sinned against his father and against God.

God has you surrounded and calls you to you come out with your hands. But here is the interesting thing. When you surrender to God, he doesn’t through you in jail; he releases you from jail.

“Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” James does

nothing more here than to call his readers to repentance. Remember, repentance is turning around the sinner. It means confessing our sin, believing they are forgiven in Christ, and finally a desire to amend or change your sinful life. The prodigal felt the shame of his actions. He regretted what foolish and awful things he did. The laughter and merrymaking that characterized his sinful life was replaced by grief. Mourning and wailing are emotions expressed at funerals. The prodigal son was attending a funeral, his own as a sinner.

But this is a good kind of grief. Jesus said, **“Blessed are you who weep now.”** How can weeping and deep regret for our sins be a blessing? Because of what God will do. **“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”** God will lift us up, all the way up to heaven. If we come out with our hands up to God, he will come near us. Being taken into his custody means we leave the prison of sin and hell. He can. He does because of Jesus. I am yet to meet a stain that will clean itself. Stains remain unless someone applies detergent to them and scrubs them out. God washes out the stain of our sin in the blood of Jesus Christ. In other words, he forgives us.

Faith is surrendering. Faith gives up and clings to Jesus like a man who man clings to a life preserver. Faith stops resisting and trusts God. Surrendering to God isn't shameful, it isn't cowardly. It saves us. But we don't just surrender to God, we also surrender to our neighbor.

II. Surrender to your neighbor.

He was convinced he was right. Saul was a bounty hunter, a servant of the court whose job was to round up these fanatics called the Way or Christianity. Then Jesus changed all of that. Instead of hunting down Christians, he made more as a missionary. Zacchaeus was a wealthy man. Then Jesus came into his home. There was a change. He decided to give a sizeable portion of his income to the poor, half of it, and if there was anyone he cheated over the years, he would pay them back at 300% interest. He was willing to dig through years of his books and records to see whom he cheated, and undoubtedly there would be a few because that's how tax collectors usually made their money.

“Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” James said. Remember, in repentance there are three steps, confessing sins, believing they are forgiven in Jesus, and a desire to amend or change our sinful life. God saves us. Now, let's clean up and live as the redeemed children of God. God doesn't just wash our hands of the guilt of our sins; he scours the heart so that we are no longer “double-minded.” Double-minded means you are torn between two things. It's easy to be double minded. It is easy to a pious Christian on Sunday, but not on the other six days of the week. That is double minded. When you hear something bad about another person, you have two options, believe it and repeat it, or put the best construction on it.

God calls us to surrender, and not just for the forgiveness. He wants us to surrender to him with our lives, too. That is why he tells us to not only wash our hands, but to purify our hearts as well. David remembered his sin with Bathsheba and asked God, **“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”** David knew where his problem began, with a corrupt heart. David knew what terrible things his sinful desires caused. David, being forgiven, didn't want to do that again. So he asked God for a pure heart and a steadfast spirit so that the next time he would actually resist sinful thoughts and stop them. He wanted what James wanted, to submit to God and resist the devil. **“7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”** When we surrender to God, we will resist the devil. Those go hand in hand. Then we are no longer double minded. We are single minded.

And when we surrender to God, we will surrender to our neighbor. As it says in Ephesians 5, we want to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. That is key. They probably don't deserve to have us serve them and submit to their needs. But we do anyway, not because they deserve it; we do so out of reverence to Christ. So the husband surrenders to the needs of his wife, the parents to their children, the boss to his workers.

Dear friends, when things get tough at work, don't give up. When the team is losing, don't quit. Play harder. Before God, however, put your hands up and surrender. Stop making excuses. We can't escape. Surrender to God as we trust that these sins are forgiven by the blood of Jesus. Let's surrender ourselves to God as we resist the devil. Surrender to God as you love you neighbor as God loves you. This kind of surrendering makes us winners. INJ Amen.