

February 2009—*Surrender*

Independence and self-determination are highly prized values among Americans, whether they are believers or non-believers. Few people would question the importance and goodness of these values. However, in terms of one's relationship with God, they present a major problem. C.S. Lewis draws this to our attention in his book, *The Problem of Pain*, when he observes:

Now the proper good of a creature is to surrender itself to its Creator—to enact intellectually, volitionally, and emotionally, that relationship which is given in the mere fact of its being a creature. When it does so, it is good and happy. Lest we should think this a hardship, this kind of good begins on a level far above the creatures, for God Himself, as Son, from all eternity renders back to God as Father by filial obedience the being which the Father by paternal love eternally generates in the Son. This is the pattern which man was made to imitate—which Paradisal man did imitate—and wherever the will conferred by the Creator is thus perfectly offered back in delighted and delighting obedience by the creature, there, most undoubtedly, is Heaven, and there the Holy Ghost proceeds. In the world as we now know it, the problem is how to recover this self-surrender. We are not merely imperfect creatures who must be improved: we are, as Newman said, rebels who must lay down our arms.

The first answer, then, to the question why our cure should be painful, is that to render back the will which we have so long claimed for our own, is in itself, wherever and however it is done, a grievous pain. Even in Paradise I have supposed a minimal self-adherence to be overcome, though the overcoming, and the yielding, would there be rapturous. But to surrender a self-will inflamed and swollen with years of usurpation is a kind of death.

The Son of God's humble, trusting, loving, and complete surrender of himself to the will of his Father is difficult for us to fully grasp. But what we can and must grasp is that Jesus' pattern of self-giving is what God asks and expects of those whom he adopts as his sons and daughters. At its heart, such self-giving is not a matter of submitting to God's power but of surrendering to his love. When seen in this light, what once seemed unthinkable becomes attractive and desirable—though still scary and hard. Once made, our surrender must be lived out one day at a time in the obedience of faith and love. There will of course be times when the fallen nature rises up and we reassert our sinful self-will. But God's forgiveness and his empowering Holy Spirit will meet us each step of the way to help us enter ever more fully into intimacy with him and the Trinitarian life of heaven. Crossing this Rubicon is the indispensable act that one must make if God is to become ALL in one's life.

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

*Romans 12:1-2 (ESV)*

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C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), pp. 88-89.