

MYTH 9

Surrender All
to Be Saved



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*Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on **presenting** the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but **present** yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.*

Romans 6:12-13

*Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, **to present** your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Romans 12:1-2

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TRUTH
SURRENDER IS PURPOSED FOR BELIEVERS

The Vietnam conflict was raging when I graduated from university. As a result, Uncle Sam requested my participation. In fact the draft board indicated it was more than a request—I had no choice. It seemed to progressively get worse as I actually entered the army. I was told what to do and when to do it; forget the *why* of doing whatever you are told to do. Just do it!

During a training film concerning capture by and surrender to the enemy, we were informed of our responsibilities. I remember the room being very quiet. As a soldier, the army afforded very few personal rights since each one of us had been required to surrender our wants to the demands and purpose of the military. In an enemy camp, however, our rights would be nonexistent.

As my stint in service for my country wound down, I began to search for a job in the business world. I interviewed with a number of potential companies. After spending time with Uncle Sam, the dramatic difference between military life and the business world was a breath of fresh air. If I decided to accept a job offer, it was just that: an offer, not a requirement. Rather than an official and non-

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negotiable order of the army, I could choose the company where I would work.

Sometimes there is confusion in the spiritual realm about the demand to surrender. Some understand the Christian life to be similar to military life. If you do not surrender yourself totally to God, you cannot be a Christian. Others see the Christian life more like civilian life. To be successful, you must surrender personal rights, but the choice of which rights and how much are up to you. This myth looks at the subject of surrendering to God. We will make a distinction between the role of surrendering to become a Christian and the role it plays in living the Christian life.

Context Determines Meaning

The meaning of words is important. Words are the means of communicating the thoughts and ideas of a speaker or writer.

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The specific words chosen for a particular situation and setting should correspond to the audience to whom a message is directed. Otherwise communication would be confusing and distorted. *The two primary New Testament passages*

that focus on surrender are Romans 6:12-13 and 12:1-2.

Romans 6

In Romans 5:12-21, Paul discussed two possible spheres of existence: “that of sin and death, founded by Adam; and that of righteousness and life, founded in Christ.”¹ Following the introductory questions in Romans 6:1-3, concerning the exploitation of God’s grace by continuing in sin, Paul argued that the believer is identified with Christ in His death (vv. 4-7), and since Jesus now lives, the believer is likewise identified with Christ in life (vv. 8-10). As a

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result of this new position in Christ, Paul presented the believer's responsibility by saying, "Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (v. 11). Make your position in Christ a reality in your life, in every decision and in every action. Believe it to be so, and begin with practical actions to become who you already are.

Then in Romans 6:12-13 Paul gave the application of his appeal in verse 11. "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on *presenting* the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but *present* yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God" (italics added). Paul stated two negative commands ("do not") and one positive command. The first prohibition, "do not let sin reign in your mortal body," speaks to the area of life in which sin rules over and influences the believer's decision-making process. The second prohibition, "do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin," focuses on the continual result of poor choices, resulting in behavior contrary to God's Word. On the other hand Paul's command, "present yourselves to God," looks to behavior that demonstrates the righteousness of God within.

What does it mean for a believer to "present" or "surrender" himself to God? Rather than a "passive surrender" in which the believer has no say, the context assumes the believer's "active participation" in his choice and in his behavior.² The word "present" is used in an active sense. In this verse Paul was calling on believers

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actually to do something as a result of presenting themselves to God. Surrendering, therefore, is to place oneself at the disposal of another or to make oneself available to another one for service.³ That is why the translation above uses the word “present” (NASB) or “yield” (KJV). This is the same way the word is used in other locations in Romans (6:13, 19; 12:1).

Righteous living is the goal of surrendering to God, but the believer’s choice determines the outcome. Influenced by sin and death or by the Spirit and life, the believer must choose to which one he will make himself available (8:12-13).⁴ Only when one yields to God’s influence by the Spirit’s leading and teaching will he experience the death of sin and the life of God in his everyday existence. Obviously in Romans 6 presenting or surrendering is an aspect of the Christian life, having nothing to do with initial salvation.

Romans 12

A similar perspective is in Romans 12:1-2. Paul wrote, “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, *to present* your bodies a living and holy sacrifice” (italics added). Based on God’s mercy and love in giving His Son to die for our sin, Paul issued an appeal for a logical, reciprocal expression of love and service on the part of the believer. All believers are encouraged to make themselves available for spiritual service. This again is not a passive surrender to God. Following the pattern of Romans 6, this passage likewise moves from “what to do” (v. 1) to “how to” (v. 2).⁵

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In verse 2 Paul gave the “don’ts” and the “dos” in two commands, saying, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is.” The *first* way in which you make yourself available for spiritual service is to not model your behavior after the world. Why not? Because before believing each one “walked according to the course of this world” (Eph. 2:2). Obviously believers can revert back to their old ways of thinking and behaving. Paul’s prohibition is a warning—do not conform yourself to the world’s system. The *second* command is positive. Paul exhorted believers to be conformed to God’s Word, walking in God’s ways rather than after the blueprint of the world. Once again Paul discussed two different realms of existence—sin and death versus righteousness and life.⁶ Believers are to be in the world but not shaped and drafted into the world’s mold.

Romans 12, as well as the parallel passage in Romans 6, points to the fact that our spiritual transformation is the result of thinking and acting God’s way, not the world’s.⁷ Paul also told how to change our thought process—“by the renewing of your mind.” As in Romans 6 two influencing agents, sin and the Spirit, vie for the believer’s attention and affections. What you think matters! Only as the mind grows sensitive to God’s Word through the Spirit’s leading and teaching can the distinction between God’s ways and those of the world be sorted out and separated. The end result is wise choices reflected in Christlike behavior. As our thought patterns become more and more aligned with Scripture, our choices and decisions will reflect our new life in Christ. What is the goal of this transformation process? “That you may prove what the will of God is” (12:2).

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In both Romans 6 and Romans 12, the idea of “surrendering” oneself relates to believers making themselves available for spiritual service. It is a discipleship issue. There is no hint whatsoever of surrendering in order to become a Christian. To import a different meaning is to misinterpret these passages.

Lethal Injections

Our previous discussion provided a biblical perspective to the concept of surrender in the Scripture. However, some leaders require surrendering control of one’s life to Christ in order to be saved. Let’s consider an example. At the conclusion of a sermon, one preacher offered an invitation. He indicated, for those who wished to receive Christ for salvation, they should pray along with him as he prayed.

Those who suggest that surrendering is required at salvation have fallen into a serious error.

Praying, he said, “I yield control of my life to You. I invite You to be my Savior.” The issue at once comes to the forefront: Does saving faith demand a yielding or surrender by an unbeliever?

Even though the words “surrendering” or “yielding” cannot be found anywhere with respect to unbelievers in the New Testament, some, however, impose this discipleship criteria directed to believers into the definition of saving faith. This is the case if the concept of “denying oneself” (Matt. 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23) is associated with surrendering or yielding to Christ at initial salvation. However, of the thirteen times the word “deny” is used in the New Testament, nine times it refers to Peter’s denial of Jesus during His trial.⁸ Once Jesus declared

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that He will deny those who deny Him.⁹ The final three instances (Matt. 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23) refer to the same occasion, near the end of His earthly ministry, when Christ appealed to individuals to follow Him in discipleship.¹⁰ The question concerning this one incident (addressed in these three discipleship passages) is whether Christ is calling individuals to a saving relationship or to more intimate fellowship. In *Myth 3: Faith Is a Tricky Word*, we discussed this topic. Based on our prior conclusion, it is clear that this incident is not a call to initial salvation, but rather a call to Christians for further commitment in intimacy with Christ. Therefore the “surrendering” that Christ demands is similar to what Paul required. It is directed to believers to live the Christian life.

“Denying oneself” in these three discipleship passages does not imply or infer a “surrendering oneself” to Christ in order to be initially saved. However, John MacArthur writes,

The centrality of Jesus’ lordship to the gospel message is clear from the way Scripture presents the terms of salvation. Those who dichotomize between believing on Christ as Savior and *yielding* to Him as Lord have a difficult time with many of the biblical invitations to faith...it is clear that people who come to Christ for salvation must do so in obedience to Him, that is, with a willingness to *surrender* to Him as Lord.¹¹

Agreeing, A.W. Tozer elaborates, “We must restore again to the church the idea that the offer of salvation by faith in Christ carries with it the condition that there must be also a *surrender* of the life to God in complete obedience.”¹²

Those who suggest that surrendering is required at salvation have fallen into serious error. They have concluded that discipleship directed to believers is synonymous with salvation for unbelievers. This theological error confuses coming to saving faith with daily walking by faith.

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Accuracy Is Everything

Biblically surrendering or yielding is a voluntary action in which the believer makes himself available to God for service. Surrendering must only be associated with the Christian life; it is not an issue for saving faith.

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Myth 9, NOTES

1. Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 351-352.
2. Rene Lopez, *Romans Unlocked* (Springfield: 21st Century Press, 2005), p. 135.
3. In the Garden at Jesus' betrayal, His rebuke to Peter's swordsmanship was "Do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He *will* at once *put at My disposal* [present] more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt. 26:53; italics added). This is the same way "present" (NASB) or "yield" (KJV) is used in Romans 6:13, 19; and 12:1.
4. From the contextual setting of Romans 8, one would assume righteous behavior results from the believer allowing the Spirit to influence his choices. In Romans 8:12-13, Paul wrote, "So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live."

Contrasting these two ways of living—walking by the flesh or walking by the Spirit—involves not only who or what influences the choices of the believer but the results stemming from those decisions.

5. Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, p. 242.
6. Moo, *Romans*, p. 755.
7. Some understand that 2 Corinthians 3:18 relates to an inner transformation (passive, character realignment) rather than an outward transformation (active, behavioral manifestation). This author believes behavior modification (transforming the believer's walk from the ways of the world to the ways of God) via the influence of the Spirit is the issue in both 2 Corinthians 3 and Romans 12.

In reference to 2 Corinthians 3:18, George Ladd agrees with the author when he says, "However, it is not clear that Paul conceives of the indwelling of the Spirit as an inner spontaneous power that issues in gradual progress and growth in Christian virtues...in this passage the Spirit is *not the indwelling power* of the new life but is identified with the ascended, glorified Lord. The Christian's preoccupation with his exalted Lord will mean that he will be more and more conformed to the image of Christ" (italics added).

George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 518.

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Also, a passage outside the Pauline writings seems to agree with Ladd's assessment, providing insight to 2 Corinthians 3:18 and, therefore, clarity for a proper interpretation of Romans 12:2. James used the same mirror analogy used in 2 Corinthians 3:18. In a section concerning the Word and works (James 1:22-25), James stated that to intently look into the mirror of God's Word and to abide in it results in a believer being a Word doer, a Work doer. Likewise, 2 Corinthians 3:18 envisions a believer exposed to the Lord in a mirror analogy. That exposure over time transforms the Christian. Even though the Spirit is mentioned only in 2 Corinthians, we must conclude that James assumed the Spirit's involvement in *knowing the Word* and *keeping the Word*. In turn, one must not conclude that choices and actions of believers are not in view in Romans 12:2. In fact, the *first command* of Romans 12:2 is an instruction to not be conformed to the course of this world system, while the *second command* is an instruction to be transformed so that the will of God is proven in the believer's walk, not merely intellectually discerned. That does sound quite similar to the *putting off* and *putting on* motif in Romans 13:12-14.

8. Occurrences where "deny" refers to Peter's denial are Matthew 26:34, 35, 75; Mark 14:30, 31, 72; Luke 22:34, 61; John 13:38.
9. An occurrences where Christ indicates He will deny those who deny Him is Luke 12:9.
10. Occurrences where "deny" is used with discipleship requirements are Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23. In all thirteen texts, "denying" relates to one's allegiance or loyalty to another person. This word and its derivatives never have any other meaning.
11. John F. MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), p. 207 (italics added).
12. A. W. Tozer, *We Travel an Appointed Way* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1988), p. 77 (italics added).