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ABSOLUTE SURRENDER

June 10, 2003

Many years ago I read Andrew Murray's essay on "*Absolute Surrender*". I have to say that it was at the time somewhat confusing to me, but as I read the scriptures I found that it was what Jesus commanded all of us to do. There are three scriptures that relate to this command. The first is Luke 9:23 (NIV). He said, "*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.*" The second is Luke 14:26, "*If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters — yes, even his own life — he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.*" The third is found in Luke 18:28-30, when Peter said to him, "*We have left all we had to follow you!*" "*I tell you the truth,*" Jesus said to them, "*no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life.*" These demands on the surface are harsh. To give up everything seems like an impossible demand to most people.

Most often people think that what Jesus meant was we had to be willing to give up material things, but on closer inspection he meant that we had to give up relationships too. He made it plain in the scriptures I cited. But do we have to give them up completely? I have always believed that we had to put Him before any one else in our lives. But of late I have come to the conclusion that we have to be willing to give them up completely if He asks us to do so.

I have not seen many persons giving up their human relationships to follow Him among the Christians I associate with. In the apostolic record we find that Peter did not give up his wife, and certainly the mother of James and John was with them on at least one occasion. Even Jesus' Mother was with him at his crucifixion. It is clear that we do not really give up our closest human loves; it is that we have **to love Him more**. In Matthew 10:31 he emphasized this demand, *Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me . . .*

How then are we to interpret the demand to hate those people closest to us and the demand to love him more. The answer is the context in which these statements were made. The demand to hate was made to a large crowd who were following him. Here he was trying to show those who were following Him around that his ministry was not showbiz. He did not want to entertain them with miracles, he wanted them to believe in Him and do his will. The statement in which he demanded that they love Him more was made to the twelve disciples who he was sending out. He knew they had made the choice to love him more

and had left their material possessions and relationships to follow him. He just wanted them to be sure of their commitment. They were sure for they followed him to death. They all died violent deaths except for John who presumably died in exile.

Are most modern church members true disciples? The answer is no. Most of them have not put Jesus first in their lives. How do I know this? I know it is true because they are not obedient. Jesus had told us that if we loved him we would obey his commandments and if we did this he and the Father would come and make their home with us (John 14:23). Since we do not see or perceive God and Jesus in or with many who call themselves Christians (and disciples) it does not seem that they have loved him more than others or even life itself. Being obedient means that we will love God with all our hearts. If we love him we will serve him by doing what he commanded. We will seek and witness to the lost. We will feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, take strangers in our homes and visit those who are sick and in prison.

I admit that it is impossible to obey any of the commandments of Jesus unless we have absolutely surrendered to him, but we can do the ones that count most. First we can love God with all our being. This means that we will communicate with Him in prayer every time we get a chance and listen to find out what he wants us to do. Most people do not pray. Some years ago George Gallup did a poll of church members and found that most of them prayed an average of one minute a day. Pastors prayed an average of only three minutes a day. I have to admit that most fathers talk to their children only ten minutes a day so it is clear that people do not communicate well, but how can one expect to have a relationship with God if we do not talk to him? How can we know what his will is for us if we do not listen?

Jesus told us we were to be witnesses for him to the ends of the earth. Most people believe that being a nice, kind sweet person is adequate witness. The only thing that such behaviors witness to is being a nice, kind sweet person. I do believe that such behaviors will attract persons to us, but I also believe that it opens the door for us to share what God has done in our lives and what he can do in the lives of the persons we want to witness to. It is a fact that a large percentage of those who develop a real personal relationship with Christ do so because someone verbally witnesses to them. We cannot make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:18-20) if we have not surrendered to Him. Some friends of mine are now in Jordan. It is a Muslim country, but the agency with whom they are working found a way for those who work for them to witness to the Jordanian Bedouins. It is not easy to give up the comforts of a large home, with greenery all around, with plenty of water, and all the conveniences of our country to go to the deserts of Jordan with no greenery, little water, and no conveniences to tell people about Jesus. Still they are surrendered to His will and because they love him they have obeyed.

In my own life I tried to be obedient and went to Madagascar where I knew I might get some tropical disease, but the Lord told me to go. While there I contracted malaria, something that I did not think I would or could do since I was taking prophylactic medication. What I and the CDC and my doctor did not know was that the medication would not protect me against a certain strain of malaria. One and a half years after I was in Madagascar I developed malaria and almost died before they found the bugs in my blood. Following Him almost cost me my life. It has cost the lives of a multitude of other Christians throughout the ages. They followed him because they did not count the cost. Neither did I.

I did not count the cost because soon after I first became a Christian I promised Jesus that I would go where he told me to go and do what he told me to do. I have been as obedient as I know how to be, and God has honored my obedience. I do not think that I would ever have been obedient if I had not absolutely surrendered. Have you or do you want to? If you want to and haven't just do it.