

Surrender to God: Stand Up to the Devil

‘There was a pious old gentleman of an earlier generation who used to get up regularly at prayer meeting in his church to pray: “Use me, O Lord, use me—in some advisory capacity!”’

Somehow, I don’t think that’s how it works! We’re either surrendered to God, or we’re not. Believers are necessarily surrendered to God, otherwise we wouldn’t be believers at all. But, as the lesson from Jacob (James) 4 shows, learning to be fully surrendered to God may take some time. More time for many of us. Some of us have, seemingly, more things we need to surrender to God. Look again at Jacob 4:7-10: “So then, surrender to God. Stand up to the devil and resist him and he will flee in agony. Move your heart closer and closer to God, and He will come even closer to you. But make sure you cleanse your life, you sinners, and keep your heart pure and stop doubting. Feel the pain of your sin, be sorrowful and weep! Let your joking around be turned into mourning and your joy into deep humiliation. Be willing to be made low before the Lord and He will exalt you!”

Truly it is a process. We are each, under construction, works in progress. None of us have arrived, yet. Or reached perfection. None of us have joined our Lord Jesus in sin-free living. Now we will become perfect, sinless and completely righteous.

We've been promised that blessed state. Our Lord declares that He will bring to completion all the work He has begun in us. If we let Him. If we surrender to God and let Him continue the work of pruning off our unproductive branches, of reshaping our lives on the divine potter's wheel. Depending on how we are, it might be quite painful. But everything God does in our lives is redemptive, kind and loving. We might need proverbial rotten teeth extracted, painful though the process may well be, but we all know that the result will be far better than if we just left things alone.

Consider John the Baptizer. Notice that we're calling him the "Baptizer". Not the "Baptist". You can probably guess the reason why, as there are so many various kinds of "Baptists" running around, we need to make sure that John the Baptizer is not confused with any of them. Since the opening joke was brief, let me give here a partial list of various Baptists just in the United States: Alliance Baptists, American Baptists, Confessional Baptists, Welcoming and Affirming Baptists, Bible Fellowship Baptists, Missionary Baptists, Central Baptists, Converge Baptists, Cooperative Baptists, Free Will Baptists, Full Gospel Baptists, Fundamental Baptists, General Association Baptists, General Association General Baptists, General Association Regular Baptists, Evangelical Baptists, Six-Principle Baptists, Independent Baptists, Institutional Missionary Baptists, Landmark Baptists, Liberty Baptists, National Evangelical Life and Soul Saving Baptists, Primitive Baptists, Old Regular Baptists, Old Time Missionary Baptists, Original

Free Will Baptists, Reformed Baptists, Regular Baptists, Separate Baptists, Separate in Christ Baptists, Seventh Day Baptists, Southern Baptists, Southwide Baptists, Sovereign Grace Baptists, Two-Seed-in-the-Spirit Predestinarian Baptists, United American Free Will Baptists, and on and on.

So, I think we can all agree, John the Baptizer is what we should all call him these days! But notice what our Lord calls him. Matthew 11:7-11a records: ‘Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John. “What kind of man did you see when you went out into the wilderness? Did you expect to see a man who would be easily intimidated? Who was he? Did you expect to see a man decked out in the splendid fashion of the day? Those who wear fancy clothes live like kings in palaces. Or did you encounter a true prophet out in the lonely wilderness? Yes, John was a prophet like those of the past, but he is even more than that! He was the fulfillment of this Scripture: ‘See, I am sending My prophetic messenger Who will go ahead of Me and prepare hearts to receive Me’. For I tell you the truth, throughout history there has never been a man who surpasses John the Baptizer”.’ Wow. High praise from the Lord. “Throughout history there has never been a man who surpasses John the Baptizer”.

How can this be? The Bible doesn’t record a single prophecy given by John the Baptizer! How can he be greater than all the other prophets of the Old Testament. Isaiah wrote 66 chapters worth of prophecies, including some of the most famous regarding

Lord Jesus Himself, which we read every year for Advent and Christmas! Lord Jesus went further in verse 14 saying: “If you can receive this truth, John is the Elijah who was destined to come”. Since Malachi 4:5-6 teaches that Elijah would return prior to Messiah’s appearance, the Lord is saying that John is the return of Elijah in spirit, though even greater than Elijah. Note that Elijah was the only designated prophet to be raptured into Heaven without dying. There was only one other man, not called a prophet per se who was also raptured without dying. He was Enoch way, way back in Genesis 5:24. He was the father of Methuselah, who became the grandfather of Noah, who built the ark.

So if John the Baptizer never gave a prophecy, what made him to be the most important man who has ever lived? Well, he was Lord Jesus’ cousin. But that shouldn’t make any real difference. If it did, wouldn’t Lord Jesus’ own younger brothers and sisters also rank very high? Or Mary, the woman who gave Him birth? What was it about John the made him the greatest man on earth for all time? He was the Baptizer. The Baptizer of Lord Jesus! No other human in all history ever baptized Lord Jesus! What a privilege!! No greater honor could any human conceive! John told everyone: “Behold the Lamb of God”. John pointed to the Lord, walking in the flesh: “Behold, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). He was the first to proclaim this. And that was a prophetic utterance beyond all other prophecies. John may never have spoken any other prophecies

at all. But this one tops all others. No others can begin to compare. John was the first man to know Who Lord Jesus was. In fact, John knew Him even before either of them were born!! Recall how John the Baptizer leaped for joy inside Elizabeth's womb when the pregnant Mary visited Elizabeth, as Luke 1:41 records.

But then, why did, just a few years later, John the Baptizer question who the Lord was? Well, consider John's situation. After the mountaintop experience of baptizing the Lord, John hadn't hardly seen the Lord, if at all. And now, John was languishing in prison, soon to be beheaded by King Herod Antipas. Wouldn't you wonder why Lord Jesus didn't even come to visit you in prison? And why wouldn't the Lord work for your release? Wouldn't you begin to wonder if maybe you'd made a huge mistake those few years ago? But John did not know his destiny, which was to die for the Lord. In this light, John the Baptizer was the very first *adult* martyr for Christ. Because the very first martyrs were all the baby boys that King Herod had massacred in his heinous attempt to kill the Baby Jesus after the visit of the three wise men. We can know for certain that John the Baptizer was at peace when he gave his life, in that horrific way, for the Lord.

Looking back at Jacob (James) 4:7: "So then, surrender to God. Stand up to the devil and resist him and he will flee in agony". Note, if only for selfish reasons we want to protect ourselves from the devil's onslaughts, we need to pay close attention to this verse. We all face the devil's attacks through his numer-

ous minions from time to time. Some of us much more so than others. Particularly if we're being used mightily of God to advance the Kingdom of Heaven, the devil will not be pleased with us, and he will do anything and everything he can to stop us in our tracks, or if not that, then to thwart us, slow us down, make us miserable, distracted and dejected, in any way possible. Jacob's words from Holy Spirit here promise us that if we will stand up to the devil, and resist him, then he will flee from us in agony. How great is that! This isn't the best example, but maybe it illustrates the point. When I was a boy on our Angus cattle farm, I was with the cattle in the pastures a lot. One mother cow somehow got the idea that I was endangering her calf. So she set about to eliminate this danger—me! Head down, she began stampeding toward me. Well, I started to run, too. Directly toward her! She was so shocked, she skidded to a complete stop just feet from me, in total bewilderment and fearing me. She backed away, and let me go on about my day. I'm sure the Lord moved that day. Otherwise, I would have become an unfortunate farm accident!

The clear lesson here in Jacob is that we must surrender to God first. Then, and only then can we stand up to the devil, confront him, and he'll flee with his tail between his legs. Surrender to God first. Continually. Ask Holy Spirit to show you all the areas of your life where you've yet to give Him control. I know there are several. But give them over, one by one, and the blessed life, where the devil's assaults just bounce off you, will be yours.

