

March 11, 2018

"Consider it pure joy..."

"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in humility that come from wisdom. But, if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven, but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil...the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness."

James 3:13-17

"...don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend to the world becomes an enemy of God...Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you...Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up."

James 4:1-10

Jesus taught clearly that ***"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Money."*** (Matthew 6:24) Every day and many times each day you and I have to make a conscious decision to either serve God and follow God or to serve ourselves and follow the world. We can never choose to do both.

No matter the situation, the two choices are always clear, I think. I can choose to be a humble servant seeking the best for others or I can allow my own selfish ambition to control me and choose only to serve myself. The choice is always between selfless and selfish, and I must constantly choose between the two.

There is, of course, a huge amount of pressure to choose the world and its ways. That pressure can come in many ways but the underlying message is always the same. The world will always try to influence me to gratify myself above all else. I am encouraged to take care of myself, serve myself, and even "worship" myself constantly. My personal happiness, the world tells me, is all that matters.

Our Lord would have us live by a different standard. He would have us be pure. He would have us choose peace over conflict; consideration over rudeness; submission over domination, mercy over condemnation, and love over hatred. The key to making these choices is found in humility. I must surrender my own search for personal value completely to God and learn to ***"...consider others as better than..."*** myself. (Philippians 2:3)

In the end it all comes down to our choice to either submit to God or to deny God. Each of us has to decide between these two alternatives over and over again. It is really easy to talk about living a submitted life, but it is really hard to actually do it.

A submitted life means that I belong to God all of the time. It means that he directs my life, my actions, my attitudes, and my opinions. When I choose to submit my life to God it means he is in charge and my only task is to obey his will. When God calls me to go where I do not want to go, if I have submitted my life to him, I go. If God calls me to serve in ways I do not want to serve, I serve in those ways anyway. Often the choice to submit will be painful, but that does not mean I can deny God.

Jesus calls those who would follow him to deny themselves and take up their cross (Matthew 16:24) Too often we think Jesus has called us simply to 'go to church', or 'read the Bible' or 'pray

for others'. Jesus has called us to so much more; to surrender all of our being to him, to die to ourselves, and to follow him wherever he leads even when we do not want to.

It is easy to follow Jesus when he leads us to where we want to go anyway. It is so much harder when he leads us to give up things that are not good for us, stop associating with people who are not good for us, give up our own self-serving opinions and ways and let his words guide even our inner-most thoughts more often than not against our very will. To walk with Jesus is literally to live "I Surrender All".

