

Retaining or Surrendering Our Rights—What Would Jesus Do?

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | December 1, 2022



If we are to live like Jesus in this world of sin, do we live by retaining our rights or by surrendering them? As those who are called to reveal God's character, to glorify Him upon the earth, to let our light shine into the darkness of this world, are we to give up our rights or are we to stand firm for them?

Do we have any inalienable rights that we are never to surrender? When Jesus was on Earth, did He surrender His rights or retain them?

Some point to Philippians 2:5-9, which tells us that Jesus did not think equality with God was something to be grasped but humbled Himself by becoming humanity and surrendered Himself all the way to the cross, as evidence that we are likewise to surrender our rights.

There is no question that Jesus sacrificed Himself and surrendered His original position in heaven in order to take a lowly position on the earth. But in doing this, was Jesus surrendering His rights or exercising them? Was He giving up His rights, or was He solidifying them?

What is your answer? It will depend on what law lens you see the world through. If we use the human-law lens, the view that God's law functions like human law—imposed rules that require imposed

penalties—then, yes, Jesus gave up His rights.

However, if we use God's [design-law](#) view, then we see something beautiful and incredible.

The Reality of Our Rights

When Adam and Eve sinned, did Jesus have the right to save them and their descendants from sin? Did Jesus give up His right to do so, or did He exercise His right to do so?

Who is the rightful ruler of planet Earth: Adam or Jesus? Did Adam rule Earth as creator and owner of Earth, or was his rule subordinate to God, functioning as a steward under the rightful authority of Jesus?

When Adam sinned and Satan claimed Adam's position as ruler of Earth, did Jesus surrender His right to Earth and cede it to Satan, or did Jesus retain His right and exercise His power for the purpose of overthrowing Satan, destroying Satan's power (Hebrews 2:14), and redeeming humanity and Earth from Satan's clutches? (Romans 8:20).

When Jesus was on Earth two thousand years ago, did He surrender His right to heal, to save, to forgive sins, to set captives free? (Luke 4:18). Did Jesus surrender His right to teach and reveal the truth about His Father to the religious authorities and theology professors?

Did Jesus surrender His right to life? Or did Jesus say that He was laying down His life only to pick it up again?

The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority [the right] to lay it down and authority [the right] to take it up again. This command I received from my Father (John 10:17, 18 NIV84).

Did Jesus surrender His right to carry out His Father's command or retain it? And what was the Father's command? It was the command to fulfill Their joint mission to overthrow Satan, destroy sin, destroy death, and save humanity. God was in the Son reconciling the world to Himself (John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 5:19).

Did Jesus surrender His rights or retain them and exercise them?

What about His personal liberty—did Jesus surrender His freedom or retain it?

When Peter cut off the ear of the high priest's servant, Jesus commanded the disciple, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" (John 18:11 NIV84). Matthew also records Jesus saying:

Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must

happen in this way? (Matthew 26:53, 54 NIV84).

Did Jesus go to the cross against His will, or did He freely choose to walk that path—to fulfill His mission?

Did Jesus surrender His right to joy, or did He retain His right?

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who **for the joy set before him** endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2 NIV84, my emphasis).

Did Jesus surrender or retain His right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness?

Jesus retained and exercised His rights, **but He did so only in harmony with reality, by living out God's design laws of truth, love, and freedom.**

The argument for Christians giving up our rights applies only when we view our rights through human law, **because human law is about imposing our will on others, forcing others to submit to our ways;** it is imperialism, demanding that others acknowledge us and treat us the way we insist is our right. But the truth is, we do not have the right to demand that others think, feel, believe, or act as we think they should. God has given us the right to control only ourselves (Romans 14:5; Galatians 5:23). Thus, to the degree that we think it is our right to force others to accept us or treat us the way we think we deserve, we need to surrender it—it is a false right, out of harmony with God's design law.

However, we are *never* to surrender our God-given rights to live godly lives, because the kingdom of God is within us (Luke 17:21). When we exercise the right God has given us, which is to govern ourselves by living out His methods and principles, we never seek to force others to do things our way; we also never surrender to them our right to live godly lives. So the righteous will live the truth, in love, while leaving others free, and will not collude with the beastly methods of coercion of consciences, even if we lose our government reimbursements, our jobs, or our freedom to travel.

Satan is a liar, and he deceives people by getting them to replace the laws of God for the methods and laws of humanity and then to seek to advance their rights through imperial methods of legislation, force, and coercion upon others, rather than advancing our rights through the living out of the truth and love of God in how we treat others.

So be like Jesus—never surrender your right to love others like He has loved us!