

Serving God With All Your Might

Halfhearted

One of Satan's most effective weapons against the children of God is to tempt them to serve God in a half-hearted way. The Lord rebuked the church at Ephesus because they had left their first love.^[1] He reproved the church at Laodicea because she was lukewarm.^[2] The prophet wrote in Jeremiah 48:10, "Cursed be he that doeth the work of the LORD deceitfully, and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood." The Hebrew word translated "deceitfully" can mean "laxness, slackness." It is not acceptable with God when we try to serve Him with anything other than our best effort. In the Old Testament, the Lord refused to receive animal sacrifices from His people when they tried to offer an incomplete or maimed animal.^[3]

Our Best Effort

The instruction has been given to us in Matthew 22:37 as follows, "Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 9:10, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."

We often give God our "second best." School, work, sports, or leisure often claims more of our time and attention than does the service of God. Many Christians talk a good game, but put the lie to the talk by their actions. With our modern transportation, we still find people making all kinds of excuses about not being able to attend services on Sunday and Wednesday nights. In serving God, as in other endeavors, "actions speak louder than words."

Before the Lord Jesus performed the miracle of making water into wine, he instructed the servants to fill the waterpots with water. They did not comply in a desultory manner but "they filled them up to the brim."^[4] The Lord simply wants us to give our very best effort at everything we do. This is plainly taught in Colossians 3:23, "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men..."

Not Meritorious

This does not mean that we are "earning points" with God by our efforts. Nothing we do is perfect. Everything we do, even at our very best, is tainted with sin. We get no glory by our vigorous obedience. However, we must be intently obedient because God has directed us to, and because we love Him and want to please him. Even when we do our very best, we must have the proper attitude of utter humility. Jesus taught this in Luke 17:10, where He said, "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do."

The apostle Paul was the most zealous of all the apostles. He worked harder than any of them. He was zealous until the very end of his life, as a reading of 2 Timothy makes plain. However, he gave all the credit for this to the grace of God. This is beautifully stated in 1 Corinthians 15:10, “But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

Knowing that he could not serve the Lord without a constant supply of the grace of God, Paul prayed for himself and others that they would be “strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man...”^[5]

We usually don't exercise proper zeal for God in our lives because we do not have an appropriate fear of Him. We should not serve Him with a servile fear, but we should have great respect for Him and serve Him with a filial fear. Paul said that we should “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Then, he made it plain that the only way we would be able to do this is because “it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”^[6]

Here again we have the healthy balance of working with all our might and giving God 100% of the credit for our accomplishments.

Putting Off/On

Before we were born again, all we had was a sinful nature. After the new birth, we have a spiritual nature which is in competition with our old sinful nature. We must then spend the rest of our lives in putting off the habit patterns of the old nature and forming new habitual ways of living in obedience to God. This is expressed in Ephesians 4:22-24, “That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”

The trouble with many of us, and the reason that we don't make more progress in our spiritual lives is that we do not go about this putting off/putting on with all our might.

We need to really mean business with our service to God!

We need to learn to vigorously say “yes” to God and “no” to Satan!

This putting off/putting on must be done together. If we merely forsake some pet sin and do not fill our lives with righteous activities, we will soon fall back into the sin. God wrote about this to the old weeping prophet, concerning Israel. He told Jeremiah, “See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and

to plant.”^[7] The rooting out, pulling down, destroying, and throwing down, must precede the building and planting.

Repentance and Forsaking Sin

This verse in Jeremiah implies some very vigorous activity. “Rooting out” and “pulling down” produce strong mental images. A person engaged in such activities is very serious in what he is doing. That is the way we must deal with sin in our lives. One reason why God’s children fail to eradicate certain sins from their lives and become discouraged is that they fail to realize that halfway measures will not work.

Before an individual will begin to deal seriously with sin, he must have a change of mind and heart. He must be sorry for that sin, hate it, and have a great desire to turn from it. This change of mind in the Bible is known as repentance. The only way one can truly repent of his sins is that he have a godly sorrow for them. Paul referred to this in 2 Corinthians 7:10, “For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.” A person who has godly sorrow is not sorry just because he has been caught. He is not sorry just because of the consequences of his sin. He is sorry because he has offended a good and holy God!

How do we know if we or anyone else has such godly sorrow? We will know when there is a vigorous and determined turn from that sin and a turn towards righteousness. The Corinthians had been engaged in a very sinful attitude toward the reprehensible behavior of one of their members. One of their members was committing incest and they were not grieved by it. They had been convicted of the horror of their sinful attitude and had repented of it. They made very plain by their conduct that they were truly repentant. They repented and turned from their sin with all their might. Speaking of this Paul said in 2 Corinthians 7:11, “For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.”

This is very powerful language. The Corinthians went to great lengths to demonstrate the genuineness of their repentance. This plainly shows that when we truly have godly sorrow, we will find a way to repent!

We will not make excuses for our sins. We will try with all our might to forsake them. Paul told the Ephesian saints that certain sins should “not be once named among you, as becometh saints...”^[8] The apostle John wrote his first epistle to “My little children”, and said “these things write I unto you, that ye sin not.”^[9] It is very true that it is impossible for any of us to live sinless lives, but we should, nevertheless, do the very best we can to avoid sin.

We should be so diligent about this that we will not only scrutinize our actions. We will want even our words and our thoughts to be acceptable to God. David felt this way in Psalm 19:14, “Let the words of

my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.”

We will never turn from sin, while we are toying with it in our minds. Many times God’s children desire to walk with Him, but they also want to enjoy their “pet” sins. This is an impossibility. Many years ago, when David was granted a godly sorrow for his sins, he wanted to get as far away from sin as he possibly could. He begged God to “Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.”^[10] He was not satisfied with just superficially “cleaning up his act.” He cried out in Psalm 51:10, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.”

When an individual is truly repentant he will do everything he can to avoid sin. He will evaluate what friends, circumstances, etc, tend to cause him to fall into sin and he will avoid them. He will be obedient to the principle stated in Hebrews 12: 1, “let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us...” Anything or anyone that constitutes a “weight” will be dropped. The particular sins which the repentant one finds snare him with ease and regularity he will regard as “besetting sins,” and will go to great lengths to avoid them.

Sometimes, if we have a particular sin that we just cannot seem to forsake, we must try drastic measures. There are times we may have to fast as well as pray. Sad to say, fasting is almost a lost practice among most professed Christians today. However, fasting was both practiced and taught by our Lord Jesus Christ. On one occasion there was a particularly potent demon that was troubling a young man. The boy’s father brought him to Jesus’ disciples but they could not cast it out. The disciples asked Jesus why they could not cast it out. He told them this was due to their lack of faith. Then He said to them, “Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and *fasting*.”^[11]

If we are really serious about forsaking our sins and are having trouble doing so, we will humble ourselves and seek the aid of a trusted Christian friend. We will confess to him, ask him to hold us accountable, and ask him to pray diligently for us. This practice can be very effective in helping us to forsake our sins. James wrote, “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”^[12]

I once knew a very godly man who made it a point while in the grocery store to always avoid going down the aisle where the magazines with the lascivious pictures were displayed. I knew another godly man who had to travel. When he would come to his motel room he would unplug the television set and turn the screen to the wall. These godly men were serious about avoiding sin.

In the above-cited passage from Hebrews 12, we have the Biblical pattern of putting off/putting on. While we are to lay aside the weights and avoid the besetting sins, we can do so only while we are “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith...”^[13] The only way we can consistently avoid besetting sins is in walking in close and intimate fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do Not Spare!

Sometimes the child of God becomes miserable because of the consequences of his sins. He wants to do better. He decides to reform his life. However, he does not try to turn permanently and

wholeheartedly from his sins. He does a little superficial repenting, but in the back of his mind he entertains the thought of someday returning to some of his cherished pet sins.

This will never work and is a trick from Satan. It is analogous to cutting off Bermuda grass with a hoe, but in neglecting to dig up the roots. It will be back again!

There is a very graphic picture of this in the Old Testament. When God was about to give the land of Caanan to the Israelites, He gave instructions to them by His servant, Moses. God told them to utterly drive out the sinful inhabitants of the land. He did not intend for them to leave any of the former inhabitants there. He warned them there would be dire consequences if they did not obey Him in this. God told them plainly in Numbers 33:55, “But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell.” Later, Joshua taught them this very same lesson.[\[14\]](#)

Sadly, the children of Israel grew slack and did not utterly drive out their enemies. This led to their eventual destruction. We must be deadly serious about not allowing any known sin to remain in our lives. There must be no mental reservations. The apostle Paul instructs us in Romans 13:14, “But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.”

Satan does not want us to make this clean break with sin. I once knew a young man who had begun using marijuana. He was in a worship service and confessed publicly that he had been convicted of this sin and was going to repent and turn from it. He was going to destroy all his supply of this drug. However, on the way home, as he destroyed most of his supply of the marijuana, he told the friend who was with him that he was going to save and smoke “one more joint.” That “one more joint” was his downfall. He never quit and today his life is in shambles.

Putting On

We should be just as vigorous about seeking fellowship with God as we are in repenting from our sins. We must be diligent in our prayer life. We need the constant help of God as we battle Satan, the world, and our sinful nature. There are many places in the New Testament where the Lord Jesus has encouraged us to never give up in prayer. One of the most striking of these is found in Luke 11: 1-13. We must not cease knocking on the door of heaven until it is opened to us. We will not be motivated to pray this way unless we expect God to answer our prayers. We all too often go to the throne of grace in a half-hearted manner, not expecting anything from the Lord. James tells us that we must “ask in faith, nothing wavering.” He says that we are double-minded if we come to God in prayer in this way and we should expect nothing from the Lord.[\[15\]](#)

When James call on us to draw near to the Lord he says “purify your hearts, ye double minded.”[\[16\]](#)

We must look to God with anticipation and expectancy when we are vigorously trying to obey Him. He has promised to help us and He will. We do well to listen to the instructions our Lord has given us in

Psalm 81:10, “I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.”

When we seek God’s fellowship in obedience to Him, He has promised us we will have it. He has given us this promise in Hebrews 11:6, “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” Let us diligently seek Him in prayer, in the reading of His word, and in obedience to His commands.

Being Single Minded

We have already looked at the dangers of being double-minded, but this is so important we would like to say more about it. The battle is in our minds. If Satan can get in control of our minds, he will control our actions. Satan does not want us to be resolute, to be determined. He wants us to have mental reservations about serving God with everything we have.

This battle has been going on for centuries. Thousands of years ago, a man of God issued a ringing challenge to the professed people of God. As he stood on Mt. Carmel, Elijah said, “How long halt ye between two opinions? If the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him.”^[17] The Hebrew word translated “halt” here means “to limp.” So long as we have divided allegiance, we will be crippled and will not be able to properly run our Christian race.

The Lord Jesus Christ made it plain 2000 years ago, in Matt. 6: 24, that “Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” Mammon is the god of materialism. Many Christians think they can make an idol of material goods and also serve the Lord. Jesus said this cannot be done. Many Christians spend much more time, effort, and concern on their financial welfare than they do on their spiritual well being. They will go to work even if they are a little sick, but they will not go to church under these conditions. A man may study for hours a manual that describes a task he has to perform at work, but will rarely spend time in the Bible.

Everything we own and everything we are belongs to God. Satan does not mind if we go through the motions of serving God as long as we don’t get too serious about it.

Satan offers us compromises when he sees that we are really intent on our service to God; that this is the primary motivation of our lives. Satan has been at this business of offering compromises for several thousand years. When the Lord sent Moses to Pharaoh and said “let my people go,” Pharaoh refused to do so. When the Lord applied pressure on Pharaoh, he began to offer the children of Israel some dangerous compromises.

It is obvious that at times Pharaoh is a representation of Satan and Egypt is a representation of the world. The first offered compromise is in Ex. 8: 25. He gave the Israelites permission to offer sacrifices to God but said they must do it “in the land.” This was not acceptable because God had told His people

to separate themselves three days' journey from Egypt. The analogy today would be Satan allowing God's people to go to church, but to continue to live worldly, carnal lives. Satan does not much care what we do on Sunday if he can have our loyalties the other six days of the week.

The second offered compromise is found in Ex. 8: 28. This time Pharaoh said that the children of Israel could leave Egypt, but they could not go "very far away." This also was not acceptable. It was not a three day's journey into the wilderness. The parallel today would be the person who had gotten closer to the Lord than they once had been, but they are just not close enough. They may have given up a few pet sins, but they have not completely separated themselves from the ways of the world. Thankfully, the children of Israel also rejected this compromise.

The third offered compromise is found in Exodus 10: 10. This time Pharaoh said all the adults could go, but the children must be left behind. We can see Satan's design in this diabolical proposal. If we do not serve God with our all our might and do everything within our power to influence our children in the ways of the Lord, then when our generation has died, Satan has gained the victory. Alas, we see too many Christian parents today who are so busy making a living and having a good time, they are failing to influence their children to walk in the paths of righteousness.

Children are very astute observers. To our children our actions speak louder than our words. If we show by our actions that it is all right to occasionally miss worship services to attend a sporting event, or some other entertainment, we are speaking volumes to them. We are telling them that serving the Lord is really optional. We are telling them that it is okay to serve the Lord "on a convenient basis," as long as it really costs us little in the way of commitment.

We need parents today, particularly fathers, who will refuse this Satanic compromise. We need men who will stand as Joshua did millennia ago and make the same noble commitment he made in Joshua 24:15, "And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

The fourth offered compromise of Satan is found in Exodus 10: 24-26. This time the Lord had really put the pressure on. Pharaoh was ready to do some real bargaining. He was very cunning. He told the children of Israel they could go. They could even take their little ones with them. However, there was one drawback. He said "let your flocks and your herds be stayed..." He would allow them to go, but they must leave their wealth behind. It is refreshing and encouraging to see how vigorously Moses rejected this compromise. He said they had to take all their animals, because they did not know what God would require of them in the way of sacrifice. In fact, Moses courageously and boldly told Pharaoh that "there shall not an hoof be left behind."

Are those who read this ready make this statement? Are you ready to say that I am going to separate myself from the life-style of the world? Are you ready to say that I will serve the Lord with my children? Are you ready to say that all my material goods belong to God, and that not a hoof shall be left behind? If you are not ready to say this, you have compromised with Satan and are not serving God with all your might.

Does Satan have your number? He is very cunning and knows where the chinks in our armor are. He will not be defeated with half-hearted resolve. When Peter told us to be alert and to fight the Devil he said we must resist him “stedfast in the faith.”[\[18\]](#) The word translated “stedfast” means “strong, firm, immovable.”

Christians don’t need anything Satan and the world has to offer. We need to learn to always say “no” to the world and “yes” to God.

We can see a wonderful example of this in the life of Abraham. Abraham went to battle to rescue Lot, who had been captured. Because Lot had been living in Sodom, the king of Sodom was also rescued. After the battle was over Abraham was approached by two kings. One of these kings was Melchizedek, king of Salem. He was a figure of the Lord Jesus Christ in His capacity of high priest. This is plainly seen in the book of Hebrews. Melchizedek offered Abraham bread and wine. This is the first time in the Bible these elements are mentioned. The teaching here is obvious. Jesus Christ refreshed Abraham with His own self. Abraham gladly received these gifts and was refreshed by them.

The wicked king of Sodom also approached Abraham and offered him gifts. He was glad that Abraham had rescued him. Abraham resolutely refused to take a single thing from the wicked king of this wicked city. Abraham said “I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine...” Folks, this is heroic language. We should stand and cheer. Abraham would take nothing from this wicked one.[\[19\]](#)

How resolute are we? Are we willing to resoundingly say “no” to Satan, the world, and our flesh? Are we willing to just even more resoundingly say “yes” to our merciful and faithful High Priest?

Some Examples of Zeal

God has always honored those who serve Him with all their might. Two men who did this stand out in the history of Israel. Joshua and Caleb were among the spies who were sent out by Moses to spy out the land of Canaan. They wanted to go immediately into the land and conquer it as the nation obeyed the command of God. However, the nation had to postpone their conquest of Canaan for forty years because they were influenced by the ten other spies who did not think they could conquer the land. The ten were motivated by sinful unbelief. Because of this unbelief, the nation of Israel had to postpone their entry into Canaan and those who were twenty years old and older were destined to die during the forty years’ wandering in the wilderness. The only two who were permitted to eventually enter Canaan were our heroes, Joshua and Caleb. The Lord said they were permitted to enter the land because they “wholly followed” Him.[\[20\]](#) They completely, not half-heartedly, followed the Lord.

Do You Really Believe?

Do we really believe that it is many times worth the effort to serve the Lord with all our might? Do we believe the Psalmist was correct when, speaking of the commandments of the Lord, he said “in keeping

of them there is great reward?"[21]

We prove our belief by our actions. One time long ago a destitute widow was told by the prophet, Elisha, to go borrow pots from her neighbors and he told her to "borrow not a few." [22] When she obeyed, oil miraculously came into those pots. To make a livelihood, she sold the oil that came into those pots. However, when the last pot was filled, the supply of oil stopped. The widow probably wished she had fully believed the prophet and had borrowed many more pots.

There is a wonderful spiritual lesson here. We need to be obedient to God. We need to vigorously do what He tells us to do. We should trust the Lord even more than the widow trusted the prophet.

When Elisha was on his deathbed, he called the King of Israel to his bed. He shot some arrows out the window. Then he called those arrows the "arrow of the LORD'S deliverance." He told the king to take the arrows and to smite the ground with them. The king smote the ground three times. Elisha was very angry with him and told him that now he would be able to smite the enemy only three times.

Obviously, the king of Israel was only half-hearted in what he did. He evidently did not really believe Elisha, and his unbelief showed itself in his actions. [23] Had he been more zealous and trusting, he would have smitten the ground with the arrow many more times and would have had a greater number of victories over the enemy.

I pray that it will our belief and not our unbelief that will show itself in our actions as we attempt to serve the Lord our God with all our hearts!

[1] Rev. 2: 4.

[2] Rev. 3: 16.

[3] Lev. 22: 22-24.

[4] John 2: 7.

[5] Eph. 3: 16.

[6] Phil 2: 12, 13.

[7] Jer. 1: 10.

[8] Eph. 5: 3.

[9] 1 John 2: 1.

[10] Ps. 51: 2.

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[11] Matt. 17: 21.

[12] James 5: 16.

[13] Heb. 12: 2.

[14] Josh. 23: 6-13.

[15] James 1: 5-8.

[16] James 4: 8.

[17] 1 Kings 18: 21.

[18] 1 Pet. 5: 9.

[19] This account is found in Gen. 14.

[20] Numbers 32: 12.

[21] Ps. 19: 11.

[22] 2 Kings 4: 3.

[23] This is found in 2 Kings 13: 14-19.