

God is no half-way Judge, and Jesus is no half-way Savior

Luke 11:14–28

And He was casting out a demon, and it was mute. So it was, when the demon had gone out, that the mute spoke; and the multitudes marveled. ¹⁵ But some of them said, “He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.” ¹⁶ Others, testing *Him*, sought from Him a sign from heaven. ¹⁷ But He, knowing their thoughts, said to them: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house *divided* against a house falls. ¹⁸ If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? Because you say I cast out demons by Beelzebub. ¹⁹ And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? Therefore they will be your judges. ²⁰ But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²¹ When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. ²² But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils. ²³ He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters. ²⁴ When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ ²⁵ And when he comes, he finds *it* swept and put in order. ²⁶ Then he goes and takes with *him* seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last *state* of that man is worse than the first.” ²⁷ And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, “Blessed *is* the womb that bore You, and *the* breasts which nursed You!” ²⁸ But He said, “More than that, blessed *are* those who hear the word of God and keep it!”

Almost only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades. Actually, almost counts for a whole lot more than that. Every year we re-elect politicians that almost do what is right. We almost convict criminals of the crime they committed, but settle for a lesser charge and punishment instead. We almost do our job at work and yet still get promoted, or at least retained. Truly, half-ways or “mostly” governs just about everything we do. We almost obey all the laws, except when we speed. We almost do our best to help those in need, except when we are pressed for time. And in truth, almost is all that we really can expect from the world, because if society or government was all-or-nothing, and required everyone to do everything right all the time, then nothing would get done at all. Since the Fall, nothing we do is completely just, completely righteous, and untainted by greed or selfish motives. By our very nature, “almost” is all we can hope for — at least in this life.

Almost, however, is not the standard by which God judges men. There are no half-way measures in anything which God demands or does. This offends men greatly. They are frustrated at God’s stubborn refusal to let men get by with their best. God demands perfection. He is intolerant. He insists that His way is the only way. He will not do what we say or want. He won’t compromise, or meet us half-way. As much as men are offended at this, this part of God’s nature is man’s only hope. Just as God does not judge us half-way or meet us half-way, so Jesus is no half-way Savior. If He was, He would

be no Savior at all.

There is a consequence to this, which Jesus reveals in our lesson. If you are not entirely on the side of God, then you belong to the devil. Satan’s kingdom is not divided against itself, ever. There is not a single angel or human in Satan’s kingdom that is partly on God’s side, and partly on the devil’s side. Jesus says, “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.” If you are sitting on the fence, and not yet one of Jesus’ own, then make no mistake, you *have already* chosen a side, and you are already doing the devil’s work, scattering and destroying, however much you might trust in your goodness.

In the world, there is indeed a difference among men, and among the devils even. In our lesson, Jesus says that some evil spirits are more wicked than others. Yet all of them are wicked, and all of them serve Satan. Just because the agents of the devil do not behave with an equal level of malice and violence does not mean they are our friends. They all are part of Satan’s kingdom, and they all do his work. We see this in men also. Unbelievers are not all criminals. They do not exhibit hate and spite constantly. They can be easy to get along with. They show kindness and compassion to one another. They make friends, and give each other gifts. They can dedicate their lives to doing good, and work tirelessly to improve the living conditions of all men. And yet, despite all of this, they are still lost, and belong to the devil. All the good that they have done is not remembered at all, because it cannot change their nature, which is still evil.

Men like to believe that there is some neutral ground to be found. That is why almost every movie our culture has produced dealing with the afterlife depicts death as an state where one can go straight to heaven, straight to hell, or spend a whole bunch of time in some in-between condition, where one wanders the earth or the spiritual planes, settling old business. It is convenient to believe in such a neutral place, for then you can imagine that you don’t have to be completely perfect. If you are good enough, you may not get to heaven right away, but you have the chance to get there eventually. Notice how the Catholic doctrine of purgatory is much the same: Not good enough for heaven, nor bad enough for hell, and a chance to set things right. Yet Jesus offers no such second chance, nor do any of the Scriptures. Rather, God declares, “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). In Jesus’ parables, we see only two groups of people: Those who enjoy the feast, are part of the wedding party, who bring forth fruit; and those who are cast into outer darkness, cut down, separated out. There are tares and wheat. There are sheep and goats. There are those on His right hand, and those on His left. Nowhere does Jesus leave any room for anyone to be in the middle. The eternal destiny of men it is either heaven or it is hell. There is no in-between.

Why then do so many people believe they can have it both ways? It is because they do not hear the Word of God and keep it. Since so many people insist that God thinks like men, it is instructive to search the Scriptures to see if indeed we find a God who is satisfied with half-measures, or rather Who demands perfection in all things, not only in what men say and do, but in how they think and feel in their hearts.

Is God really so intolerant that He condemns even the smallest sin, and damns men, so that they are not mostly dead, but completely dead in their trespasses and sins? You know how your friends speak of God. Maybe you have thought this way also, "God only cares about the big sins." He cares about things like adultery, and murder, and theft.

What does God say? "Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). God says that sin is like the deadliest poison, where even the smallest part can kill you. You can keep every part of the Law of God, except for one point, even if that point is as small as losing your temper, just once, when you were a child. One day a young ruler came to Jesus and said, "Good master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answered, "You know the commandments. Don't kill. Don't steal. Honor your parents. Do not commit fraud. Do not commit adultery." The man answers, "I have kept all these things from my youth." He was sincere, because he did not understand what God means by keeping the Law. Of course, in truth the man had broken all the commandments, much less the 9th and 10th, but Jesus does not belabor the point, nor does He comfort the man and say, "Well, you are mostly ready for heaven." Instead, He answered, "There is just one thing you lack. Sell your possessions, give the money to the poor, and follow me, and you will have treasure in heaven." And that, the man could not do. God condemns not only external sins, but internal ones as well, like greed and covetousness. Therefore God declares in Ezekiel: "When I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, but he trusts in his own righteousness and commits iniquity, none of his righteous works shall be remembered; but because of the iniquity that he has committed, he shall die" (Ez. 33:13).

When Luther was struggling with his sins, and finding no help or comfort, all the greatest theologians of his day taught that if you do your best, God will save you. This was of no help. Being brutally honest with himself, Luther always found one more point of the Law that he had failed to keep when he could have. He never did His best. Today this idea is the most common understanding of God's Law. People usually phrase it like this, "I know I'm not perfect, but I am a good person, overall. I think that's enough to go to heaven." It's the same thing in the end. Close enough is good enough, right? But God responds: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Jesus also says, "You shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). It does not matter

how good your deeds are. You should rather ask yourself, "Have I been as perfect as God Himself?" That is the only standard that matters.

But what of a gracious and merciful God? Doesn't He forgive sins? Why, then, do we have to worry about sin at all? I believe in God. Isn't that enough? It is true that God is merciful, and forgives sin. But He does not do so except through Jesus, and that forgiveness is not applied to any man, except through faith. When it comes to Salvation, you cannot have it multiple ways, or by many paths. If anyone wants to find a gracious God, he cannot do so except through Christ. Why is this? Because Jesus is the only One who has gone *all the way* to save us. He is the only *perfect and complete* Savior. Jesus declares, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through Me" (John 14:6). God did not provide some half-way measure when He sent His Son to save us. He had to completely overthrow the power of darkness, and all sin, and all death. If He had done anything less, then no one could ever be saved.

If Jesus had put away only a part of sin, then all men would still be dead in their trespasses and sins, and all that Jesus endured would be wasted. That one little point would still condemn them to hell. For Christ's Sacrifice to be complete, it must atone for all, or it atones for nothing. Jesus has put away all sin, for all time. He entered once into the holy place and made the only Sacrifice that can pay for all sin. "But now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb. 9:26). This is true for the entire human race. "Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life" (Rom. 5:18).

This is the nature of the Gospel. It does not save half-way. This is wonderful news! Jesus has completely overthrown the power of the devil. He has gone all the way! Where He saves, He enters in, and lives within the heart, with the Father and the Holy Spirit. There is no place anymore for the devil to dwell with all his wicked spirits. His power is broken, and we are set free from him. Satan is no longer our master, and sin no longer reigns over us. There is no room for doubt, no reason for fear. Christ has done all. He has taken away all your sin. He has endured all the wrath of God on your behalf. He has opened wide the door of heaven, and He has made you completely clean, and a true child of God. This He declares to you in His Word. Hear it. Keep it, and rejoice that We have a Savior, not by half, but in full measure. Amen.