

The Halfway Covenant

by Russell DeLong

The sermon calls for the church to return to its spiritual roots and to reject the halfway covenant, which has led to lukewarmness and complacency.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Psalm 51:10, Matthew 6:24, Mark 8:34, Romans 12:2, Ephesians 6:18, James 4:8, 1 John 1:9, Revelation 3:16-17

Topics: "Repentance", "Spiritual Revival"

Description

Russell DeLong preaches about the dangers of being lukewarm in faith, drawing parallels between the Laodicean church in Revelation and the modern church, emphasizing the need for genuine repentance and wholehearted dedication to God. He discusses the historical background of the 'Halfway Covenant' in 1670, highlighting the decline in spiritual fervor and the compromises made in the church. DeLong presents the thirteen prevalent evils of the time and the eight recommendations proposed to remedy these conditions, urging church members to follow these recommendations for a spiritual awakening.

Transcript

Scripture Reading -- Revelation 3:14-22

Text -- So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth (Revelation 3:16).

"The Halfway Covenant" is the most striking astounding, surprising document that I have

come across in years. I want to pass it on to you. If it stirs and impresses you as it did me, I assure you it will be a valuable ten minutes. It is so descriptive of modern, present-day conditions, although it was written in 1670, that one would declare, if not otherwise informed, that it referred to 1946.

An act of the State Legislature created the Covenant. A Legislative Commission, after

investigation, discovered thirteen evils and proposed eight recommendations to correct these conditions. The sermon will give you first the "Halfway Covenant" and list the thirteen evils, while next we shall present the eight recommendations which were so startling and pertinent that they laid the foundation for the Great Spiritual Awakening of 1740.

Before giving you this fascinating, interesting, but important information, permit me to lay a scriptural and present a brief historical background for the "Halfway Covenant."

I, therefore, invite your attention to a very striking and rather alarming scripture lesson

from the third chapter of the Book of Revelation, beginning at the fourteenth verse and continuing through the twenty-second.

"And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

Rather strong, vivid language. It is God himself speaking to the church at Laodicea.

This was one of the seven churches of Asia Minor. To each of these God directed a

message of grave importance. Such are recorded in the second and third chapters of the Book of Revelation.

There are some striking similarities between God's description of the church at Laodicea and present conditions in the church world.

The Laodiceans thought highly of themselves. They were satisfied, complacent, and

self-contained. How like church members today. They claimed to be rich, increased with goods, and had need of nothing.

But God said, "Thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

What a contrast between God's appraisal and man's evaluation!

And then God makes an alarming, startling pronouncement to a complacent, self-satisfied

church -- "because thou art neither cold nor hot I will spue thee out of my mouth." In other words, you are nauseating, insipid, repulsive -- you make even God sick.

"The Halfway Covenant" could well apply to the Laodicean church as well as to the modern church. Here is the brief historical background to the appearance of the Covenant.

Our National Heritage

On September 16, 1620, a band of 102 brave, hardy, courageous souls set out from

England on the good ship Mayflower. No land was sighted until November 16, exactly two months later, when what is now known as Cape Cod came into view and they set foot on old Plymouth Rock.

The first winter on the bleak, rock-bound coasts of New England, that band faced extreme hardships and tremendous loss. Due to general sickness, savage Indians, and cold weather, fifty-one died. It would have

been easy for the remaining fifty-one Pilgrims to have decided that they were out of God's will and have returned to England. And yet -- when the good ship Mayflower was put in readiness and set sail for home, not one, no, not one of those souls returned. No -- They had set their hand to this plowing, and they sowed the seeds of Americanism deep in the soil of our nation.

They stayed -- they conquered -- they found that for which they had come -- freedom to worship God.

This early generation -- these founders -- were men possessing four dominant characteristics:

1. Sturdy determined faith.
2. Definite and profound convictions.
3. Wholehearted piety.
4. Intense moral earnestness.

The Decline

When the second and third generations came on it is interesting to make the following observations:

1. The spirit of self-sacrifice and devotion to sublime moral ideals passed.
2. There came a partial union of state and church as follows:
 - a) The churches were supported by taxation.
 - b) Church attendance was made compulsory by law.
3. According to the Puritans only the regenerate were eligible for church membership.
4. Only those in full membership had any voice in the affairs of the church.

Such a condition produced many unsatisfactory situations, such as:

- a) Taxation without representation.
- b) Compulsory church attendance without a vote.
- c) Children of non-church members were denied Baptism.

Halfway Covenant

In order to quiet the unrest and discontent and to provide a compromise, the General Court of Massachusetts -- The State Legislature -- Created and passed the Halfway Covenant in 1662. This granted persons church membership, even though they were not converted, who could meet any one or all of the following stipulations:

1. Persons who had been baptized in infancy.
2. Those who assented to the doctrines of the church.
3. Those not scandalous in life.

Such as qualified under the above provisions were granted membership and their children

were made eligible for Baptism, although they themselves were not to be admitted to the Lord's Table and were denied a vote in church affairs.

It was a halfway covenant -- a part-way membership.

But such -- instead of promoting spirituality -- promoted formality. The church became flooded with unregenerate persons.

Gradually, further compromises were made until the Lord's Table was opened to all, and finally Baptism became a converting ordinance for the unsaved.

The backslidden condition of the church contributed to a widespread apostasy and general lapse in morals until conditions became so corrupt that Rev. Increase Mather cried out: "Oh, New England, New England! tremble, for the glory is gone; it is gradually departing." Later he added, "Oh, degenerate New England! What art thou come to at this day?"

Conditions became so alarming that even politicians took serious cognizance so that a bill

was introduced to the State Legislature in 1670, authorizing a Commission to investigate and report on two items:

1. What are the evils that have provoked the Lord to bring His judgments on New England?
2. What is to be done that these evils may be changed?

After careful investigation the Commission reported on Question Number One, having

found the following thirteen evils existing in 1670. Notice them -- Do you think these same evils prevail today?

1. Decay of godliness on the part of professing Christians.
2. Pride and extravagance in dress.
3. Neglect of Baptism and church fellowship.
4. Profanity and irreverent behavior in the sanctuary.
5. Absence of Sabbath observance.
6. Lack of family government and worship.
7. Backbitings, censures, revilings, litigations between church members.

8. Intemperance, tavern haunting, adultery, lustful dress and behavior, mixed dancing, gaming, idleness.

9. Dishonesty.

10. Covetousness and love of the world.

11. Opposition to reformation and leniency toward sin.

12. A want of public spirit supporting schools, etc.

13. A general unfruitfulness under means of grace and a refusal to repent.

The Commission not only found thirteen prevalent evils but proposed eight

recommendations to remedy these conditions. The proposals made are startling, penetrating, pungent, and scriptural. They provided the background and paved the way for the Great Spiritual Awakening of 1740.

I firmly believe that if these eight recommendations were followed today, we would look back in the future to the Great Awakening of 1946.

The thirteen evils which existed at the time of the Halfway Covenant all exist today in a more universal manner. Lukewarmness, godlessness, neglect of means of grace, Sabbath

desecration, lack of family worship, lack of family government, intemperance, tavern haunting, immodest dress, pride, adultery, dishonesty, love of the world, refusal to repent.

Our nation needs to confess its sins. Uncle Sam could well afford to go to the mourner's bench and repent in sackcloth and ashes.

We cannot serve God and mammon. We cannot hold on to church membership in one hand for the sake of respectability and hold on to the world for the sake of sinful pleasures.

Upon us as church members rests the responsibility for the apostasy and evils of our

present generation. We must return to God in humility and repentance. The halfhearted attitude of halfway covenanters will never produce a great spiritual awakening. We must accept our responsibility and save our nation, our children, and our church by rededicating and reconsecrating ourselves completely.

Eight Recommendations

The Legislative Committee not only found the evils but it also recommended specific remedies. It is one thing for a physician to diagnose a case, but it is another to prescribe a cure.

Here are the eight recommendations of the Commission. Note how they might apply today.

Number One -- That the chief persons in church and state set a godly example.

Sin and godlessness on the part of government officials encourages corruption, graft, and

irreligion. If the President, his cabinet, senators and representatives, governors, and other officials would humbly confess their need of divine guidance, and by their example live a godly and moral life, it would do more for our nation than all the proposed appropriations, labor and farm legislation, and other legal machinery.

Our trouble is not lack of knowledge, not ignorance of proper techniques, not paucity of education. Someone has said, "The worst man in the world knows more than the best man practices."

We need something to activate the will in the direction of righteous acts. Our nation needs not only leadership in the fields of government, finance, labor, agriculture, and education, but we must have moral and spiritual leadership not alone by precept, but by godly example.

Such leadership is needed not alone in affairs of state but in the church as well. Bishops, superintendents, pastors must not only preach truth -- they must be personifications of righteousness themselves. It is not enough to be administrative, financial, and ecclesiastical leader -- such must be preeminently spiritual leaders.

The recommendation of the 17th century Commission is still sound -- let there be a godly example set by the chief persons in church and state.

Number Two -- "Let none be admitted to the church who has not made a full profession of saving faith."

In other words, permit only regenerated persons church membership -- nullify the Halfway Covenant -- Keep church membership sacred for Christians who have met Jesus and have been born again.

It is time to call a halt in America. It is time to stop lining up new members three-deep in front of church altars, men and women who make no profession of saving faith. To receive into the church sinners of all description, Sabbath desecraters, adulterers, gamblers, drinkers, dancers -- worldlings all -- is about as practical as it would be for a United States battleship to take in German sailors during the war. How long before they would scuttle the ship? And -- it looks as if these unregenerated, worldly-minded, sinning church members have pretty well scuttled the true Church of Christ in America.

Let's heed the recommendation of the Commission and stop this nefarious, insidious practice and keep the church pure and sacred for spiritually born-again Christians.

Of course, such a measure will hinder the minister in making a large numerical increase in church membership, but it will make a church stronger spiritually when undissipated and undiluted by a host of carnal-minded, sin-loving worldlings.

Number Three -- "Let the discipline in the church be enforced."

In other words, stand by the ideals, rules, and regulations as laid down in church manuals.

Number Four -- "Let the churches renew their covenants with God."

In other words, come back to God and re-vow the statement of faith and code of conduct.

Rededicate and reconsecrate yourself to the program of the church.

Number Five -- "Let the sins of the times be engaged against."

In other words, let the church stop pussyfooting and fence-straddling. Let the preachers

gather some of the fire of holy indignation against the sins of the day. Too many ministers are afraid of their own sinning official members to strike out against sm. But if the evils are remedied, such judgment must begin in the church. Ministers must be ready to preach without fear or favor and be prepared for the consequences as were the prophets of old.

Number Six -- "Let the churches promote holiness and a closer walk with God."

Instead of casting reflection on the ideal of holy living, let ministers and laymen alike make holiness and communion with God the definite objective of church activity.

Number Seven -- "Support Harvard College."

Today this would mean -- give your support to colleges that believe in the church. Support your church colleges.

Harvard was founded by a group of ministers. It was organized as an arm of the church to promote religion.

If we would have a revival of religion today we must look to church colleges for spiritual and moral leadership. Little help will come from state and private institutions.

Number Eight -- "Cry mightily unto God that He be pleased to rain down righteousness."

Here is the climactic recommendation. Prayer -- more prayer -- intercession -- importunity. Prayer is the key that unlocks God's spiritual storehouse. Prayer changes things. Prayer changes persons. Prayer changes the pray-er. And prayer causes God to work objectively.

I challenge the church members of America to follow these eight recommendations. If done -- a mighty revival will follow inevitably.

Back in the early part of the eighteenth century the thirteen evils were running rampant. The Commission presented the eight recommendations. It was not long before Jonathan Edwards, the Tenants, and George Whitefield began to preach with fearlessness and power. Tens of thousands were converted and the Great Awakening swept New England and the eastern seaboard.

Churches were crowded, schoolhouses packed. Whitefield preached to as many as 30,000

at one time in the open fields. At Yale he warned of the "dreadful ill-consequences of an unconverted ministry."

A tremendous, soul-transforming revival came.

Today evils exceed those of early New England. Crime is overwhelming our nation.

Drinking, gambling, murder, burglary, and divorce are reaching new highs.

Our churches are swamped and filled with halfway covenanters -- people who want the

benefits of the church but shirk their duties. They want the church in one hand and the world in the other -- lukewarm, indifferent, lethargic.

God is surely speaking anew, "Because thou art neither cold no? hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."

Oh, for a Jonathan Edwards to preach on the sovereignty and justice of God.

Oh, for a Whitefield to picture the beauties of Christ.

Oh, for Charles G. Finney to point out the logic of Christianity.

The Great Awakening of 1740 came on the heels of great sin and colossal apostasy.

The Great Postwar Revival can and will come if millions of lukewarm church members will cast aside the halfway covenant and be wholly and completely given to God.

It is impossible to serve God and mammon. You cannot have the sinful pleasures of the

world and at the same time, have the happiness of spirit that comes from God. You cannot hold evil in one hand and good in the other hand. You must be on one side or the other. You cannot belong to both the army of Satan and the army of Christ. You must choose one or the other. Jesus said, "He that is not for me is against me." Which side are you on?

Jesus stands bidding for you today. Surrender completely to Him. Bid good-bye to the things of the world, to evil companions, and to selfish ambitions. Don't be a halfway covenanter. Don't be a halfway Christian. Be out and out for God and His kingdom.

Yield your all to Him. Make a wholehearted, complete surrender.

All to Jesus I surrender

Humbly at His feet I bow,

Worldly pleasures all forsaken,

Take me, Jesus, take me now.

I surrender all, I surrender all,

All to Thee, my blessed Saviour,

I surrender all.

God grant that thousands of lukewarm, halfhearted church members may surrender to Christ completely today.

The fire of His Holy Spirit can burn all worldly inclinations out of your heart.

All to Jesus I surrender,

Now I feel the sacred flame;

Oh, the joy of full salvation!

Glory, glory to His name.

Let us bow in prayer.

To Thee, O God, we commit this vast radio audience. Many have tried to hold on to Thee

and the church in one hand and the world and sin in the other. They have wanted the benefits of the church but have refused to pay the full price for these blessings. They are lukewarm, unconcerned about souls, and indifferent to the demands of the Kingdom.

We pray that such may surrender their all to Thee and renounce any connection or

allegiance to Satan and sinful pleasures. Help them to come over on Thy side unreservedly and surrender completely to Thy will. Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/russell-delong/the-halfway-covenant/>

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