

ASA

Whole-Hearted or Hole-Hearted?

II Chronicles 14-16

I. A Question of Character.

A. What is God looking for?

If you want to know what God is looking for when it comes to godly character, few passages are clearer than II Chronicles 16:9. *For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose hearts are:*

- ...**fully committed** to him (NIV).
- ...**blameless** toward him (ESV).
- ...**completely** His (NASB).
- ...**perfect** toward him (KJV).
- ...**true** to him (NRSV).

Jesus made the same point when asked which commandment was the greatest.

³⁷ And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with **all** your heart and with **all** your soul and with **all** your mind." ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment (Matt. 22:37-38).

Question: What is God looking for?

Answer: A heart that is **wholly His**.

B. Isn't 99% enough?

While 99% may represent a good score in school, it spells **failure** in covenant relationships.

- In business: How many times do you have to violate a contract to make it null and void?
- In citizenship: How many acts of treason does it take for one to be considered a traitor?
- In marriage: How many acts of infidelity does it take to make one guilty of adultery?

A chain is only as strong as its **weakest link**.

C. Partial commitment is no commitment at all!

- ²³ And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." ²⁴ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever **loses his life** for my sake will save it (Luke 9:23-24).
- ⁵⁷ As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." ⁵⁸ And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." ⁵⁹ To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let **me first** go and bury my father." ⁶⁰ And Jesus said to him, "Leave the

dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."⁶¹ Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let **me first** say farewell to those at my home."⁶² Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 14:57-62)

- ²⁸ For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and **count the cost**, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰ saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' ³¹ Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. ³³ So therefore, any one of you who does not **renounce all that he has** cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:26-33).

D. Asa: from whole-hearted to hole-hearted.

King Asa started well. However, he ended tragically. In the beginning his heart was wholly God's. But in the end, his heart developed holes. His devotion to God was partial at best, non-existent at worst. And as in all marathons, the race is determined not at the start, but at the **finish line**.

TABLE TALK

1. Describe someone you know who began his spiritual life well but ended in spiritual bankruptcy? What happened? Why?
2. Do you believe it is necessary to be totally committed to be a follower of Christ? Can one be a Christian and be only partially committed?
3. Are most people who profess to be Christ-followers totally committed? How do you account for this?
4. Do you believe it is possible to "lose" your salvation? Why or why not?

II. Asa: A Drama in Four Acts.

King Asa reigned from about 910 – 869 B.C. (41 years). His reign can be divided into four time periods.

A. Act I. **Seeking** God Brings Peace – about 10 years (II Chronicles 14:1-7).

*Abijah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David. And Asa his son reigned in his place. In his days the land had rest for ten years. ² And Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God. ³ He took away the foreign altars and the high places and broke down the pillars and cut down the Asherim ⁴ and commanded Judah to **seek** the LORD, the God of their fathers, and to keep the law and the commandment. ⁵ He also took out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the*

incense altars. And the kingdom had rest under him. ⁶ He built fortified cities in Judah, for the land had rest. He had no war in those years, for the LORD gave him peace. ⁷ And he said to Judah, "Let us build these cities and surround them with walls and towers, gates and bars. The land is still ours, because we have **sought** the LORD our God. We have **sought** him, and he has given us peace on every side." So they built and prospered. ⁸ And Asa had an army of 300,000 from Judah, armed with large shields and spears, and 280,000 men from Benjamin that carried shields and drew bows. All these were mighty men of valor (II Chronicles 14:1-8).

B. Act II. **Relying** on God Brings Victory – about 5 years (II Chronicles 14:8-15).

⁹ Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men and 300 chariots, and came as far as Mareshah. ¹⁰ And Asa went out to meet him, and they drew up their lines of battle in the Valley of Zephathah at Mareshah. ¹¹ And Asa cried to the LORD his God, "O LORD, there is none like you to help, between the mighty and the weak. Help us, O LORD our God, for we **rely** on you, and in your name we have come against this multitude. O LORD, you are our God; let not man prevail against you." ¹² So the LORD defeated the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled... (II Chronicles 14:9-12).

C. Act III. **Finding** God Brings Reform – about 21 years (II Chronicles 15:1-19).

The Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded. ² and he went out to meet Asa and said to him, "Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: The LORD is with you while you are with him. If you seek him, he will be **found** by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you. ³ For a long time Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest and without law, ⁴ but when in their distress they turned to the LORD, the God of Israel, and sought him, he was **found** by them. ⁵ In those times there was no peace to him who went out or to him who came in, for great disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of the lands. ⁶ They were broken in pieces. Nation was crushed by nation and city by city, for God troubled them with every sort of distress. ⁷ But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded" (II Chron. 15:1-7).

Finding God meant that the reforms Asa had begun early in his reign now were advanced to a whole new level. He continued his mission to root out idolatry in its many forms in Judah. Further aspects of this reform movement can be seen in how:

- 1) Asa repaired **the altar** of the Lord in the Temple (II Chronicles 15:9).
- 2) Asa led God's people in a passionate ceremony of **covenant renewal** in the 15th year of his reign.

¹² And they entered into a covenant to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, with **all** their heart and with **all** their soul... ¹⁴ They swore an oath to the LORD with a loud voice and with shouting and with trumpets and with horns. ¹⁵ And all Judah rejoiced over the oath, for they had sworn with **all** their heart and had sought him with their **whole** desire (whole heart), and he was **found** by them, and the LORD gave them rest all around (II Chron. 15:12-15).

- 3) Asa put his devotion to God over his devotion to his own **mother!**

¹⁶ Even Maacah, his mother, King Asa removed from being queen mother because she had made a detestable image for Asherah. Asa cut down her image, crushed it, and burned it at the brook Kidron.

Here we see an illustration of what Jesus declared was one of the non-negotiables for Christian discipleship.

*If anyone comes to me and does not hate¹ his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he **cannot** be my disciple (Luke 14:26).*

- 4) Although Asa was never able to completely rid the land of idolatry, his heart was undivided in its devotion to God.

*But the high places were not taken out of Israel. Nevertheless, the heart of Asa was **wholly** true (fully committed, blameless, perfect) all his days (II Chron. 15:17).*

Asa's **performance** was flawed but his **heart** was pure. Later, we will meet King Amaziah whose performance was outstanding, yet his heart was divided.

Amaziah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, yet not with a whole heart (II Chron. 25:2).

Question: Which do you think God prefers?

- Whole-hearted devotion with imperfect performance? (like Asa)
- Or perfect performance with half-hearted devotion? (like Amaziah)

D. Act IV. **Forsaking** God Brings Calamity – about 5 years (II Chronicles 16:1-14).

1) Conflict with Israel.

In the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Asa, Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah and built Ramah, that he might permit no one to go out or come in to Asa king of Judah. ² Then Asa took silver and gold from the treasures of the house of the LORD and the king's house and sent them to Ben-hadad king of Syria, who lived in Damascus, saying, ³ "There is a covenant between me and you, as there was between my father and your father. Behold, I am sending to you silver and gold. Go, break your covenant with Baasha king of Israel, that he may withdraw from me." ⁴ And Ben-hadad listened to King Asa and sent the commanders of his armies against the cities of Israel, and they conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel-maim, and all the store cities of Naphtali. ⁵ And when Baasha heard of it, he stopped building Ramah and let his work cease. ⁶ Then King Asa took all Judah, and they carried away the stones of Ramah and its timber, with which Baasha had been building, and with them he built Geba and Mizpah (II Chronicles 16:1-6).

¹ Jesus is using a hyperbole. Our love for Jesus must be so dominant, that all other loves seem like "hatred" in comparison.

In his later years Asa's devotion to God wavered. He no longer trusted God with his whole heart. Rather he trusted in Syria. In terms of international diplomacy, his initiative was **successful** and the threat of Israel from the north was removed. However, in spiritual terms, his reliance on Syria was disastrous.

*⁷ At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him, "Because you **relied** on the king of Syria, and did **not rely** on the LORD your God, the army of the king of Syria has escaped you. ⁸ Were not the Ethiopians and the Libyans a huge army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet because you **relied** on the LORD, he gave them into your hand. ⁹ For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him. You have done foolishly in this, for from now on you will have wars." ¹⁰ Then Asa was angry with the seer and put him in the stocks in prison, for he was in a rage with him because of this. And Asa inflicted cruelties upon some of the people at the same time (II Chronicles 16:1-10).*

God sent the prophet Hanani **to warn** Asa about his backslidden condition. But rather than submit to the prophetic word and turn from his sin, Asa put the prophet in prison.

2) Final disease.

¹² In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa was diseased in his feet, and his disease became severe. Yet even in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but sought help from physicians. ¹³ And Asa slept with his fathers, dying in the forty-first year of his reign (II Chronicles 16:12-13).

Asa had one final opportunity to seek God and trust in Him. Alas, his heart was hard and he turned only to human remedies². He died in **unbelief**.

SUMMARY:

Asa began well. Whole-hearted devotion characterized the first 36 years of his reign. But something happened and toward the end of the race, his heart that once had been **holy** became **holey**! His total devotion leaked out and his heart became divided. No longer did he trust (rely) on God. The prophet Ezekiel offers a terrifying commentary on such a spiritual condition.

*²⁴ But when a righteous person **turns away** from his righteousness and does injustice and does the same abominations that the wicked person does, shall he live? None of the righteous deeds that he has done shall be remembered; for the treachery of which he is guilty and the sin he has committed, for them he shall die. ²⁵ Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way not just? Is it not your ways that are not just? (Ezekiel 18:24-25).*

² This verse should not be taken to mean that God's people should not seek professional medical help. Rather, it lets us know how far Asa's spiritual condition had fallen. He no longer trusted God.

III. Can We Lose Our Salvation?

A. Lesson's from Asa.

- 1) A good start does not guarantee a **good finish**.

With a heart fully devoted to God and trusting fully in the promises of God, Asa lived for over three decades of his reign in the blessings that come to those who trust God fully. What could have caused his devotion to waver? How do we account for his unbelief in later life? The text does not answer these questions. The author leaves it to our imagination. In Asa we have a graphic illustration of someone who began the race so well but **stumbled** tragically near the finish line.

- 2) **Partial** devotion is not enough.

A divided heart is a recipe for spiritual ruin. Loving and trusting God with part of our hearts (even most of our hearts) is ultimately equivalent to spiritual **adultery**.

- 3) God is not **to blame**.

Regardless of how the doctrine of election/predestination is understood, it must never make God the author of unbelief. Asa was fully **responsible** for the unbelief and division in his own heart. This is seen especially in the prophet Hanani that God sent to Asa to warn him of his dangerous spiritual condition (II Chronicles 16:7-10). Asa's refusal to listen sealed his fate.

- 4) Asa the **unbeliever**?

In his final disease (gout? gangrene? infection?) Asa had one final occasion to turn his heart back to God. Instead, he trusted in the doctors. This is our last picture of King Asa. Apparently, he died in unbelief. Because salvation is by faith alone, unbelief is a damning sin. To die without faith in God is to die without hope of heaven. The biblical account of Asa's life seems to leave a big **question mark** dangling over his life. Was he finally saved? Did he get to heaven? Did he lose his salvation? The inspired text simply will not say.

B. Blessed Assurance.

When it comes to the doctrine of the security of the believer, the biblical data is plentiful and intricately nuanced. Some verses seem to say the opposite of what others seem to affirm. Such a reality means the Bible has been interpreted in various ways on this important subject. Defining doctrine in this matter is a delicate affair. To remain on the narrow path of biblical truth, two ditches must be avoided.

- 1) **Cheap** grace.

Popular theology promotes an "easy believism" that takes complex biblical truth and reduces it to a slogan.

- "Once saved, always saved."
- "God has already forgiven your sins: past, present and future."
- "Christians aren't perfect; just forgiven."

2) Eternal insecurity.

Some who believe that salvation can be lost conclude we can therefore never have real assurance of salvation and security in Christ; as if our names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life in pencil!

C. What the Bible says.

1) Some verses imply that the covenant with God, once made, can never be unmade:

- *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and **no one is able** to snatch them out of the Father's hand (John 10:27-29).*
- *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?... ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor **anything else** in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35, 38-39).*
- *And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will **bring it to completion** at the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6).*
- *But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that **he is able** to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me (II Tim. 1:12).*

2) Some verses imply that the covenant with God can be broken, like a divorce:

- *I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit **he takes away**, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit... ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned (John 15:1-2, 6).*
- *This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, ¹⁹ holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made **shipwreck** of their faith, ²⁰ among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme (I Tim. 1:18-20).*
- *For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ if they then **fall away**, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt (Hebrews 6:4-6).*

- For if we go on ***sinning deliberately*** after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries (Heb. 10:26-27).

3) A biblical synthesis:

- And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who ***endures to the end*** will be saved (Matthew 24:12-13).
- Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands ***take heed*** lest he fall (I Cor. 10:12).
- ...we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God ***in vain***.² For he says, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, ***now*** is the day of salvation (II Cor. 6:1-2).
- But I ***discipline my body*** and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified (I Cor. 9:27).
- Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you ***practice these qualities*** you will never fall (II Pet. 1:10).

Charles Spurgeon hit the nail on the head when he concluded:

*It seems to me that the path of truth is to believe them both; to hold firmly that salvation is by grace, and to hold with equal firmness that the ruin of any man is wholly and entirely his own fault; to maintain the ***sovereignty of God***, and to hold the ***responsibility of man*** also; to believe in the free agency of both God and man; neither to dishonor God by making Him a lackey to his creatures' will, nor on the other hand, to rid man of all responsibility, by making him to be a mere log or a machine. Take all that is in the Bible to be true. Never be afraid of any text that is written by the sacred pen. When you turn the pages over, I do hope you never feel as if you wish that any verse could be altered; I trust you never desire that any text might be amended so as to read a little more Calvinistic, or a little more like the teaching of Arminius. Always stand to it that your creed must bend to the Bible, and not the Bible to your creed, and dare to be a little ***inconsistent*** with yourselves, if need be, sooner than be inconsistent with God's revealed truth.*

TABLE TALK

1. What is the main thing you have learned in the lesson today?
2. Do you think King Asa was finally saved? or finally lost? Support your answer.
3. Give an example of someone you have known who abused the doctrine of eternal security.
4. Give an example of someone you have known who lived in constant insecurity.
5. State in your own words the biblical doctrine of assurance.
6. Do you have assurance of your own salvation? Why or why not?

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life (I John 5:13).