

Spiritual Double Agents

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Forerunner, "Ready Answer," January 2001

Several months ago one of the vice-presidential candidates metaphorically shed his skin like a snake, adopting a new set of issues and principles totally at variance from the ones he had formally championed in his long Senate career. Alarm bells should have gone off earlier when this same individual, like the mythical, two-faced god Janus, on one hand soundly rebuked and reprimanded the President's shameful and despicable behavior, but then voted to acquit him when it came to the actual impeachment vote.

Recently members of our prior fellowship also metaphorically shed their skins, opting to acclimate themselves to the world's pagan religious customs. Just a few short weeks ago, people with whom we have rubbed shoulders for many years did things that would have shocked us only a decade ago. One enthusiastic Worldwide Church of God member wrote, "It's great to see the [Ambassador] Auditorium decorated for Christmas! I got to see the Nativity display in the Auditorium lobby today. It is in between the candelabra's beneath the dedication. It is fabulous! My family is looking forward to singing the traditional Christmas carols at the Auditorium services this month."

Evidently, many people who have attended services with us over the last several decades may have gone through the motions of Christian behavior—but their hearts were never in God's work or His truth. Some may have attended with the attitudes of keeping their options open—hedging their bets, so to speak. God Almighty has never been impressed with a partial commitment. God describes the Laodicean mind-set as having one foot firmly planted in the world's culture and the other tentatively in God's way: "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth" (Revelation 3:15-16).

God Almighty demands that, before He begins to work with us, we make a firm choice and then stick to that choice until we find ourselves composed totally of spirit. Jesus warns his disciples: "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). Of course, we remember Elijah's ultimatum to the people: "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him" (I Kings 18:21).

God says choose but then burn all bridges to the former way of life. Some of us, I fear, have maintained open-ended options, contingency plans, and escape clauses in our relationship with God. Like the Laodicean, we look at our spiritual contract with a view of finding loopholes and exploiting the blessings. It is apparent that some of us still approach our calling with the attitude of "what can I get away with and still appear to be a Christian?"

Of One Mind or Two?

The initial impetus for exploring this double-mindedness was a continual stumbling over James 1:6-8. Our Creator promises us wisdom—but only under the condition that we do not waver or be double-minded. I have sweat plenty over these verses through the years, having had to battle indecision. Likewise, when I pray, I have problems concentrating. I have battled doubts and fears when I have asked to be anointed.

But is simple mind-wandering or normal doubts the subject of James' reprimand? Or is it something else? Perhaps mind-wandering, indecisiveness, and doubting are more symptomatic than the actual causes of double-mindedness.

The apostle Paul writes that anyone who comes to God must believe that He is and diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). If we are in a conference with a human being, it is rude to tune him out, fall asleep on him, or become distracted. Some of my students have done that to me—giving me an insight on how God must feel when our minds wander when we pray, study, or meditate. Inattention and mind-wandering, although they are related to double-mindedness, do not seem to be what James had in mind.

The anguished father in Mark 9:24 who says, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" might be accused of being double-minded, but he is not. He desperately wants to believe, and he asks for help. He is not of two opinions.

The Greek word translated "double-minded" in James 1:8, *dipsuchos*, in its literal sense means "double-souled," like having two independent wills. The words "with no doubting" in verse 6 are translated from the Greek words *meedén diakrinómenos*, which describes one divided in mind, who wavers between two opinions.

Some may wonder whether the apostle Paul, when he complains, "For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice" (Romans 7:19), was exercising double-mindedness. This state of struggle that goes on in all of us is not the same as double-mindedness. Paul's mind, he goes on to explain, is focused one way, in one direction (verse 22), but inherent in the flesh of every human being is an innate enmity toward God and His law (verse 23; 8:7). Just like Paul, we also fail to keep God's law perfectly because we have human nature in us that is perpetually at war with God's Holy Spirit in us.

All of us have a deep-seated desire to be at one with ourselves. We will not realize this desire until we are totally composed of spirit. Until then, we can expect a spiritual tug of war to go on perpetually. As more of God's Spirit flows through us, renewing our minds and displacing our carnality, we will find it easier to keep our carnal nature in check. All of us, I trust, can point to certain areas in our lives that are now under control—but which at one time were not under control. The spiritual struggle occurring in all of us between our spiritual and carnal natures is not double-mindedness.

A Man With Two Minds

Double-mindedness is literally having two separate minds holding contradictory thoughts. Double-mindedness occurs in a church member when he has an implicit or explicit knowledge of God's law, yet deliberately harbors a sin, choosing to conceal it, repress it or ignore it.

James supports this explanation of double-mindedness in James 4:8: "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts you double-minded." Anything one willingly does or does not do that is contrary to God's law (verse 17) makes one guilty of double-mindedness. Double-mindedness depends on a knowledge of and a willful intent to reject God's law, as the psalmist writes in Psalm 119:113: "I hate the double-minded, but I love your law."

We can see an analogous example in the recent election decisions handed down by the Florida Supreme Court. The U.S. Supreme Court soundly rebuked it for ignoring the real federal and state laws and statutes and willfully making up its own.

On the other side, being synchronized with God's law is equated with singleness of purpose and leads to peace of mind and a feeling of wholeness. The same psalmist writes, "Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble" (Psalm 119:165).

God's law itself is the vehicle of wisdom that the petitioner requests in James 1:5. It would be absurd for someone to ask to be filled with the spirit of the law and simultaneously be determined not to keep it. Sometimes we inadvertently do this when we ask a minister or counselor for advice on a problem—but have already purposed in our minds to do it our own way. Then when the minister tells us something that goes against what we have purposed to do in our inner being, a highly uncomfortable state of dissonance emerges.

Harboring any secret sin puts a tremendous strain on the nervous system. Psychologists have a name for this emotional/psychological turmoil: *cognitive dissonance*, literally "inharmonious thought." Some time ago, a television program called *I Led Three Lives* aired. It told the story of an American FBI agent, Herbert Philbrick, who posed as a Communist to learn the enemy's secrets. To do his job effectively, he had to diligently keep things sorted out and compartmentalized. The television drama portrayed the mental strain that this professional agent had to endure to live a lie.

People who were once part of our fellowship but no longer worship with us frequently report that they feel more at peace with themselves now than at any time they were in the church. This should not surprise us. When someone tries to submit to God's law with a carnal mind, unbearable cognitive dissonance occurs. The nervous system plunges into a tailspin until it achieves a sense of equilibrium or wholeness. Carnal nature does not feel comfortable in the light of God's law: "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be" (Romans 8:7). The easiest way to find equilibrium is to reject the beliefs that send them into a spiritual dither.

Some people who once sat among us complain about feeling like hypocrites (actors) enduring our services, knowing that, once the services were over and they were safely out of the parking lot, the mascara applicator would be whipped out and the cigarette lit up. Others perhaps burned in contempt for a spouse or a brother or sister, serving as Satan's double agent.

Alibis and Excuses

We do not need to have the fears we sometimes associate with James 1:6-8. We can take comfort in the knowledge that mind-wandering and normal doubts and fears, while they are undesirable and should be rooted out, are not really what James has in mind. He is warning against double-mindedness. Double-mindedness requires knowing God's law and making a premeditated effort to subvert it and then justify the behavior.

Double-mindedness did not apparently apply to Uzzah, who broke God's law in ignorance or foolishness (II Samuel 6:6-7). However, it does apply to Saul, whom God ordered to destroy the Amalekites totally, but only accomplished 80% of his objectives (I Samuel 15). When confronted with his compromise, Saul makes a whole series of excuses. Excuses and alibis are the defense

mechanisms used by double-minded people. If we put sin out of our lives as soon as we find it, or as soon as it is pointed out to us, we do not have to worry about making and remembering excuses or alibis.

Double-mindedness occurs when we harbor a sin and still appear to live God's way. Tares, during their formative (immature) period, look just like wheat, yet mature wheat and tares do not look the same (Matthew 13:30). Over time, the tare is exposed because it does not mature like the wheat. So a double-minded "Christian" will become obvious by his lack of fruit and worldly, hypocritical attitude and behavior. Interestingly, God leaves the tares among the wheat ultimately to benefit the wheat.

A double-minded person cannot have God's Holy Spirit within him (Romans 8:5, 8-9; Galatians 5:16-17). Jesus says we cannot serve two masters because our allegiance will really be to one or the other (Matthew 6:24). One cannot be a double agent with the world and a member of God's church (II Corinthians 6:17-18; I John 2:15-17).

God demands that we choose one way or the other—but not straddle the fence. We cannot have it both ways. Unless in the battle between the spirit and the flesh we throw down the gauntlet in favor of our spiritual selves, we run the risk of being torn to pieces psychologically and emotionally.

Recall Psalm 119:113: "I hate the double-minded, but I love Your law." Notice that the antidote to double-mindedness is yielding to God's law. Wholeness and singleness of purpose are the result of keeping God's law through the power of Christ working in us. As our Lord reminds us in His Sermon on the Mount, "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good [*single*, KJV; focused, directed], your whole body will be full of light" (Matthew 6:22).