

Almost Persuaded

Fred R. Coulter—September 28, 1990

To put a title on this particular sermon, let's call it *Almost Persuaded*. 'God, I *almost* believe You. What I have heard *almost* makes me want to do it, ***almost persuaded***.' So if you could say that this sermon was dedicated to any one thing, it would be dedicated to those who are religious, who claim that they worship God, who think that they are doing what God wants them to do, but they're really not fully persuaded.

Let's begin by going to Luke 14, a time when Jesus went on the Sabbath Day to have dinner at one of the Pharisee's homes and He healed the man who had dropsy and they were all amazed. Then He gave them this parable now, beginning in Luke 14:15:

"Then one of those who sat *at the table* with *Him*, after hearing these things, said to Him, '**Blessed is the one who shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God.**'"

A toast! Now he'd just seen this man healed. He had heard what Jesus was saying, so here was a Pharisee *almost persuaded*, very religious, giving a toast. Now Jesus did not say, 'Right on, my friend.'

But when the man said, 'Blessed is he that shall eat bread or food in the Kingdom of God,' Jesus didn't say, 'Hey, that's right. That's the best thing I have heard today, because that is a true statement, "**Blessed is the one who shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God.**" But notice Jesus' answer, because there was a bit of hypocrisy in what the Pharisee was saying.

So Jesus gave this parable.

But He said to him, 'A certain man made a great supper ...

[because he said, 'Blessed *is* the one who shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God.']

...and invited many...

[He invited many.]

...And he sent his servants at suppertime to say to those who had been invited, "Come for everything is now ready." But everyone with one *consent* began to excuse himself. The first said to him, "I have bought a field, and I need to go out to see it; I beg you to have me excused.""" (vs 16-18).

Now that's important, especially today— isn't it? Because if you bought a piece of ground today you're going to lay down a pretty fair sized hunk of money—right? So this is a perfect excuse. So if you are *almost persuaded* yourself, let's begin asking the questions to ourselves as we go along— What is my excuse?

"And another said, "I have bought five pairs of oxen, and I am going to try them out...

[Now that again a substantial investment—isn't it? Something that has to be done.]

...I beg you to have me excused." And another said, "I have married a wife, and because of this I am unable to come"" (vs 19-20).

You see all of the excuses the different ones have.

Let's turn to Acts 26 and let's see someone who was *almost persuaded* to become a Christian. But you know there are a lot of people who figure that they are Christians, who are almost Christians, almost persuaded, but they're just like the one who said, 'I have more important things to do, Lord. I just married a wife, I just bought some oxen, I just bought some land.' And you can use the same thing today, same excuses today.

This is where Paul was giving his defense before King Agrippa, and, of course, King Agrippa knew everything that was going on during the days of Jesus and Paul's time, so he said, Acts 26:22:

"So then, having obtained help from God unto this day, I have stood, bearing witness both to the small and the great...

[That is in spite of the fact that the Jews wanted to kill him after he explained to him his goal, his mission, the calling of God, and all of that in the first part of the chapter. I don't want to take the time and get into that.]

...saying nothing else than what both the prophets and Moses said would happen."

Now there are a lot of people who today *think* they are Christians, *think* that they have Christ. They are *almost* Christians, or *almost persuaded*, but do you think they would do as Paul and believe the things that are in the prophets and in Moses? How many people say today: 'I am a New Testament Christian. Oh, that Old Testament is for those people back then. I follow Paul, because that's new theology.' Well, what did Paul say? He preached those things written in the prophets and Moses.

Verse 23: "'That Christ would suffer, *and* that *He* would be the first to be raised from *the* dead, and to proclaim light to the people and to the Gentiles.' And while he was uttering these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, 'You are out of your mind, Paul; much learning has turned you to madness.' But he said, 'I am not mad, most noble Festus, but I utter true and rational words. For the king, to whom I speak with boldness, is informed of these things. For I am convinced that none of these things *are* hidden from him; for this has not been done in a corner'" (vs 23-26).

So King Agrippa knew everything that was done, he heard of all of the things that had taken place. It wasn't done in a corner. It wasn't some small little event. In fact, it turned out to be the greatest event in history since the creation of the world and mankind. Now notice what King Agrippa was asked. Paul asked him, he said, v 27:

"'King Agrippa, **do you believe the prophets?** I know you believe.' Then Agrippa said to Paul, 'Will you persuade me to become a Christian in such a little time?'" (vs 7-28).

'Almost you persuade me to become a Christian.' So King Agrippa was *almost persuaded*.

- How many people are in the same situation today, almost persuaded?
- How about you?
- Do you think that you are wholly persuaded?
- Can you pick up the Bible and say the Bible is the Word of God?
- It is the inspired Word of God, that we are to live by every Word of God
- That you have set your course to do that?
- Have you?

A lot of people claim to, but as I said in a recent sermon, they have their 'yeah, but.' 'Yeah but, Lord, this,' and 'yeah but, Lord, that.' ***They're almost persuaded!***

Let's see what happens to those who are almost persuaded. Let's go back in the book of Acts to chapter seventeen, and I'm going to summarize the first part of the chapter where they come into the area of Thessalonica. They go into the synagogue. A lot of people believe they are persuaded, but here are the Jews then who stir up a lot of trouble. They come after to kill Paul, Silas and Timothy. So they scoot them out of town and get them to Berea. So when they came to Berea,

Acts 17:11: "Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, *for* they received the Word with all readiness of mind..."

[Ready to believe, ready to receive. Not that kind of almost attitude, or nearly persuaded, or 'I will believe on condition that,' no, with readiness of mind.]

...and examined the Scriptures daily *to see* if these things were so."

So these people were *not almost* persuaded, ***they were persuaded.*** And it says that they were more noble.

So then Paul escapes and he goes on down to Athens. When he comes into Athens he sees the city wholly given over to idolatry. It is absolutely something, idols everywhere! And Paul, it said, it stirred his spirit up. He was standing there talking to the Stoics. Now the Stoics are those who are the hermits, the ones who believe in a lot of discipline and strictness and harshness and somehow that's going to make God happy. Now the Epicureans, on the other hand, were those who said, 'Look, we're made to enjoy life. We're made to eat and drink and be happy and make merry and this is what life is all about.' So Paul comes in seeing all these idols and he says, 'Oh, I can't believe this, what I'm seeing.'

So he preached to them the resurrection of the dead. So he came back and let's come down here to v 22, because they wanted to hear this new thing—*the resurrection from the dead.* Now before we get in here I want to mention, as I was checking out of the motel this morning, something happened that I'll never forget. It was quite a thing. I was standing there checking out and here was this young Spanish woman with her husband and they were in the process of checking out and there was a phone call and it was for her, so she picked up the phone. And the only thing I heard was, 'What, what!' And all of a sudden she just fainted and dropped right on the floor. I looked and 'What are we to do?' The clerk said, 'The message was her mother just died.' I've never seen anything like it, she just fell right down and in ten seconds she was up and running out and told someone else who was with here, 'My mother just died.' Now think about people who look upon death in that desperate, desperate way, because they've never heard of the resurrection from the dead. So here

comes Paul preaching the resurrection of the dead. And he comes into the city wholly given over to idolatry.

So he says in v 22:

"Then Paul stood in *the* center of Mars' hill *and* said, 'Men, Athenians, I perceive *that* in all things you are very reverent to deities ['too superstitious' (*KJV*)]; for *as* I was passing through and observing the objects of your veneration, I also found an altar on which was inscribed, "To an unknown God." So then, He Whom you worship in ignorance *is* the one that I proclaim to you. He *is* the God Who made the world and all things that *are* in it. Being *the* Lord of heaven and earth, He does not dwell in temples made by hands'" (vs 22-24).

Almost every religion gets off the course as soon as they start to make a temple for God, because they forget Isa. 66 where God says, 'Where is the house that you will build for Me and where is the place of My rest.' He says, 'Behold, My hands have made all of these things.' So Paul is saying, 'You don't even know this God and He has made the heavens and the earth.'

"Nor is He served by the hands of men, as *though* He needs anything, *for* He gives to all life and breath and all things. And He made of one blood all the nations of men to dwell upon all the face of the earth, having determined beforehand *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their dwelling; in order that they might seek the Lord, if perhaps they might feel after Him and might find Him; though truly, He is not far from each one of us'" (vs 24-27).

This was an astounding message to those people. See, today we have in mind and concept of what we understand about Christianity and the world and especially living here in the United States, we do not comprehend how these people were wholly given over to idolatry. Paul was preaching this strange new doctrine, for he says:

"For in Him we live and move and have our being..." (v 28).

Now, that's a phenomenal message—isn't it? The Greeks had all of these gods, a god for love, a god for this, a god for healing, a god for war, a god for peace, a god for heaven, a god for hell, a god for the sea, a god for the air, a god for the house, a god for the temple, a god here and a god there. It's almost like *Old MacDonald Had a Farm*. Where's a god here and a god there, and all after animals and images and idols and nudity and pornography. And here's Paul right in the middle there, teaching this strange and unusual doctrine and saying that this God that you don't know gives you every breath of air that you breathe. Has created the world so that you can seek after Him.

"...as some of the poets among you also have said, "For we are His offspring." Therefore, since we are the offspring of God....

[He even quoted one of the poets]:

...For in Him we live and move and have our being; as some of the poets among you also have said, "For we are His offspring." Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we should not think that the Godhead is like that which is made of gold, or silver, or stone—a

graven thing of art *devised by the* imagination of man; for *although* God has indeed overlooked the times of this ignorance, He now commands all men everywhere to repent" (vs 28-30).

So here Paul has just launched right in to a tremendous message of repentance and the Kingdom of God, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He says:

"Because He has set a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by a man Whom He has appointed, having given proof to all *by* raising Him from *the* dead.' And after hearing *about the* resurrection of *the* dead, some mocked; but some said, 'We will hear you again concerning this *matter*'" (vs 31-32).

That is, '*I'm almost persuaded.*' Of course then there were some who believed. But isn't it interesting there were so few in Athens who believed that nowhere do we find a church at Athens recorded in the New Testament. Very interesting. Athens was *almost persuaded!*

How about you concerning God? Are you almost persuaded? Let's go up to the Old Testament now and let's see the account with Lot. In Genesis 18 Abraham negotiates with God. Because, you see, Abraham was not persuaded that there were fifty men there, no, nor forty-five, nor thirty. He finally got down to ten and God said, 'All right, for ten men I will not destroy Sodom.' So then in Genesis 19 the two angels come down to check out and see what Sodom is like, to see if the cry that they have heard that comes up from Sodom is indeed as bad as it has said.

Genesis 19:13, where the angel said:

"For we will destroy this place, because great is the cry of it before the face of the LORD. And the LORD has sent us to destroy it.' And Lot went out and spoke with his sons-in-law, who married his daughters, and said, 'Get up and get out of this place, for the LORD will destroy this city.' But to his sons-in-law he seemed to be jesting....

[So they weren't even persuaded. His sons-in-law were not persuaded.] (So then in the morning):

...And when the morning dawned, then the angels hurried Lot, saying, 'Rise up! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city.'" (vs 13-15).

Let's think about this. How many were saved? *Lot, his two daughters, and his wife*—total of four people—**four** out of that entire city. I hope to have something about a new discovery that they think that they have found where Sodom has been buried under tons of sulfur and brimstone for all these centuries. But I'll bring that later. So you know the rest of the story. You would think that Lot was really persuaded, because he wanted to go. But let's see Lot's attitude here.

"And it came to pass when they brought him outside...

[Because the angels took him by the hand and said, 'We have to get out of here, now flee into the mountains. Get out of here.' So they took him by the hand, they went forth, and they said]:

...'Escape for your life! Do not look behind you, nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountain lest you be consumed.' And Lot said to them, 'Oh, no, my LORD....

[He wasn't quite persuaded—was he?]

...Behold now, your servant has found grace in your sight, and you have magnified your mercy, which you have shown to me in saving my life. But I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil overtake me I die. Behold now, this city *is* near to flee to, and it is a little one...

[little city of Zoar]

...Oh, let me escape there—is it not a little one?—and my soul shall live" (vs 17-20).

So they said, 'Okay, go to the city.' So they went to the city and soon as the sun rose—let's pick it up here in v 24:

"Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire, from the LORD out of heaven. And He overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground....

[But what about Lot's wife? She wasn't persuaded at all, because it says of her:] .

..But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt" (vs 24-26).

Almost persuaded! Almost believing! but not quite! So look what happened to her.

Now let's see another account here in the book of Deuteronomy. God gave tremendous promises, *blessings*, so that He would have His people Israel go into the promised land, that He promised them, a land flowing with milk and with honey, a tremendous land. A land where God said they could eat bread without scarceness, where they could dig and get copper and gold and ore out of the ground, where they could make fine and magnificent and beautiful homes, and eat bread to the full. So what did Moses do? He sent out a spy from each one of the twelve tribes and they went out and spied out the land and they brought back with them a bunch of grapes that was so huge that it had to be carried on a staff between the shoulders of two men. But when they got back, ten of the spies said, 'Oh, these cities are so tremendous, and the people are tall, and the Anakim, they're just too much for us.' And all the people began to moan and groan and began to rebel.

Deuteronomy 1:26: "Yet you would not go up, but rebelled against the commandment of the LORD your God. And you murmured in your tents and said, 'Because the LORD hates us...'" (vs 26-27).

Now that's what happens when you're not really fully persuaded of God. Then you find reason to accuse God. So they said, 'Oh, the Lord brought us out here because He hated us.' Another place they said, 'Oh, that we would have died in Egypt rather than be in this wilderness.' So then you know the punishment that came along. God said, 'All right, you're going to stay in the wilderness for forty years.'

So when the people heard that God said, 'Now you're not going to go up,' they said, 'We will go up. Oh, yes, we've sinned against the Lord.' Verse 41, after the sentence was given:

"And you answered and said to me...

[This is Moses speaking now.]

...'We have sinned against the LORD; we will go up and fight according to all that the LORD our God commanded us.'

They weren't persuaded the first time, so they thought they could take matters into their hands and do it anyway. Well, they weren't persuaded the second time. What does this tell us? Two very important things:

- God said what He meant when He was going to bring them into the promised land, when He was going to fight for them that these enemies would be nothing, just as Joshua and Caleb had told them.

'Look don't worry about them. They'll just be like grasshoppers. God will fight our battle. He'll take care of them.' *Oh, no, I'm not persuaded. God has brought us out here to kill us, because He hates us.* So then the answer came back, 'All right, if that's the way you feel about Me,' God's answer was, 'For every day they were spying out the land forty days shall you spend a year wandering in the wilderness.' And the second thing:

- They weren't persuaded of what God said the second time either.

So then they said, 'Oh, we'll change God's mind,' or 'We'll go up and do what the Lord says. If we don't do what He says.' But then again then they're transgressing the commandment of God—aren't they? 'God will have to do this for us.' And so they were going to go.

Verse 41: "'And when each one of you had buckled on his weapons of war, you were ready to go up into the hill. But the LORD said to me, "say to them, 'Do not go up, nor fight, for I *am* not among you, you will be beaten by your enemies.'" So I spoke to you...

[Moses said]

...And you would not hear...

[You weren't persuaded by with what God said.]

...but rebelled against the commandment of the LORD, and went presumptuously up into the hill. And the Amorites who lived in that mountain came out against you and chased you, even as bees do, and destroyed you in Seir, to Hormah. And you returned and wept before the LORD. But the LORD would not hearken to your voice, nor give ear to you. So you stayed in Kadesh many days'" (vs 41-46).

In either case, not persuaded, not even almost persuaded. But then you see how the carnal mind reasons around. 'Well, then, we will go ahead and do it anyhow, because this is what God said to do.' But when God changes what He says to do and told them, 'Don't go up,' then obviously they weren't going to accomplish what God said He would in the first place.

Let's look at another one, Number 20. The book of Numbers contains all of these rebellions, all of the ten rebellions of the children of Israel while they were wandering in the wilderness. Now you've

got to feel sorry for Moses. You've got to feel sorry for Aaron. From the first day that he entered into Egypt to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt, as God said, they said, 'Who are you?' *Well, the Lord has sent me.* 'Well, what is His name?' *God is going to take you out with a strong hand.* So he went into Pharaoh and he said, 'Pharaoh, the Lord God says let My people go.' Pharaoh looks at Moses and says, 'Who is the Lord that I should let the people go?' So Moses said, 'You let the people have their rest.' *I will not give them any rest.*

So immediately the Israelites were afflicted more when Moses first came. Then you know the rest of the account how Pharaoh finally let them go. They got six days out from Egypt and they were ready to cross the Red Sea and the people said, 'Oh, no, what are we going to do? God has brought us in the wilderness to kill us, but we want all the blessings, Lord. But we don't like what you're doing to us, Lord.' So then the miracle of opening the Red Sea and walking through the Red Sea, and they were all happy and delirious and just rejoicing and praising God. Three days later they came to where they needed water again and the water was bitter and they said, 'Oh, who's going to give us water?' A few days later they wanted to have some flesh to eat, 'Oh, who's going to give us flesh to eat?'

And so just picture all the years of poor Moses. Moses went to God and said, 'Oh, Lord, these people that you're bringing out. They're something. You distressed me with all of this.' And every time they rebelled, the Lord said to Moses, 'Moses, these people, these are your people.' So it was a back and forth thing with them.

After they abode in Kadesh and Miriam died there (v 1). Numbers 20:2:

"And there was no water for the congregation. And they gathered themselves against Moses and against Aaron. And the people contended with Moses and spoke, saying, 'Oh that we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! And why have you brought up the congregation of the LORD...

[they still say 'the congregation of the Lord.' That's interesting— isn't it?]

...into this wilderness, so that we and our livestock should die there?" (vs 2-4).

Now, if you were Moses, wouldn't you have had enough? There were times when I'm sure, that Moses would have just as soon walked off and said, 'Lord, they're Yours.' You go through and read it and see if you would not have done that. At least that would have been your feelings.

"And why have you made us...

[Notice what they say here, 'made us.' *You forced us.*]

...to come up out of Egypt to bring us into this evil place? *It is not a place of seed or of figs or of vines or of pomegranates. And there is no water to drink.* And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces. And the glory of the LORD appeared to them. And the LORD spoke to Moses saying, 'Take the rod, and gather the assembly, you and Aaron your brother, and **speak to the rock** before their eyes. And it shall give forth its water, and you shall bring forth to them water out of the rock. So you shall give the congregation and their

animal's *water* to drink.' And Moses took the rod from before the presence of the LORD as He commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said to them, 'Hear now, you rebels. Must we bring water for you out of this rock?'....

[Moses was angry.]

...And Moses lifted up his hand and with his rod he struck the rock twice. And the water came out plentifully, and the congregation and their animals drank" (vs 5-11).

But notice what is said next. Now, if you are *almost persuaded*, this is a good lesson right here, the next verse.

"And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, '**Because you did not believe Me,** to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them'" (v 12).

What was it that he was told to do? Beat the rock or speak to the rock? *He was told to speak to the rock*, but he took the rod and he hit it twice. God still gave them water, but notice what God said of Moses and Aaron. He said, '***Because you believe Me not.***'

So if you are *almost persuaded*, do you fall into the same category as Moses that you don't believe what God has said? What must God say to be believable? *God doesn't have to prove Himself to you or to anybody else. What God says is so! And what God has preserved in His Word is true!* And *this is what should persuade you*, not just your own thoughts and your own choices and your own excuses and what you want to do for God. But what God wants to do for you.

Let's go to Luke 1, and here is another case of a tremendous miracle being done. This is the account leading up to the events concerning the birth of John the Baptist. Now again I will summarize the story for you. Zacharias was a priest according to the course of Abijah, which was the week of Pentecost during the year in which this occurred. He was old. His wife Elizabeth was old and they were barren. They had no children. So being his duty to offer incense, he went into the Holy part of the temple to take the incense. And an angel of the Lord appeared unto him.

Luke 1:11: "Then an angel of *the* Lord appeared to him, standing at *the* right side of the altar of incense....

[This is an angel, not God, but he had a message from God to tell Zacharias.]

...And when he saw *the angel*, Zacharias was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, 'Fear not, Zacharias, because your supplication has been heard; and your wife Elizabeth shall bear a son to you, and you shall call his name John. And he shall be a joy and exultation to you; and many shall rejoice at his birth, for he shall be great before the Lord. And he shall never drink wine or strong drink in any form, but he shall be filled with *the Holy Spirit* even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to *the Lord* their God. And he shall go before Him...

[That is quoting the Scripture now referring to Jesus Christ.]

...in *the* spirit and power of Elijah, to turn *the* hearts of the fathers to *the* children, and *the* disobedient to *the* wisdom of *the* righteous, to make ready a people prepared for *the* Lord" (vs 11-17).

Now notice what happens next, a very simple question.

"Then Zacharias said to the angel, 'By what *means* shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.' And the angel answered *and* said to him, 'I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you, and to announce this good news to you. But behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day in which these things shall take place, because you did not believe my words, which shall be fulfilled in their time'" (vs 18-20).

Now that's a pretty heavy Scripture—isn't it? An innocent question, because Zacharias was *almost persuaded* that this could be and an angel sent directly from God.

So the angel said, 'Because you didn't believe me, you're going to be dumb until he's born.' Of course, you know the rest of the account. He came out of the temple and all the people wanted to know what was going on, and he couldn't tell them a thing. That must have been quite an amazing and almost hilarious situation. Probably had to write it down. You know what happened when John the Baptist was born. Everyone wanted to name him Zacharias after his father and he shook his head no. And he wrote down John, 'His name shall be John.' And they didn't want to accept that. Then finally the dumbness was lifted from his tongue so he could speak and he says, 'His name shall be John.'

Now Zacharias had to go through all of that because he was *almost persuaded*. Now let's look at another case of someone who is *almost persuaded*. Everyone wants eternal life—right? Everyone wants the good things that God is going to give—right? Everyone wants it, but too many of them want it their own way. So here came a certain rich ruler.

Luke 18:18: "And a certain ruler asked Him, saying, 'Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'....

[Here's another thing about Jesus. He never agreed with any man. In Matthew's account, He says, 'Why call Me good, there's none good but God.']

...Then Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good except one—God. You know the commandments: "You shall not commit adultery. You shall not commit murder. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness. Honor your father and your mother"" (vs 18-20).

"And he said, 'I have kept all these *commandments* from my youth.' And after hearing these things, Jesus said to him, 'You still lack one thing; sell everything that you have, and distribute to *the* poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come *and* follow Me'....

[And he wanted eternal life. He was *almost persuaded*. He was doing the commandments of God, marvelous.] (So Jesus said):

...You still lack one thing; sell everything that you have. But when he heard these things, he became very sorrowful; for he was quite rich. Now when Jesus saw him become so sorrowful, He said, 'How difficult *it is for* those who have riches to enter into the Kingdom of God!'" (vs 21-24).

Almost persuaded—right? But excluded!

- Are you *almost* persuaded?
- Do you believe *almost all* that God says you should do?

Now I've got a booklet here that I want to read out of and it's from an *almost persuaded* 'Christian.' The title of it is, *Remember the Sabbath Day*. Very interesting booklet, nice booklet, and it's put out by the Coral Ridge Ministries. The author is D. James Kennedy, PhD. It shows the picture of the church. My what an impressive church, a huge and a gargantuan, tremendous organ. You would think, 'Oh, what a fantastic thing! This has got to be of God. Oh, these people with this have got to be close to God. After all, look at the size of that choir and the size of those pipes for the organ. Oh, what a fantastic thing that is!'

So he writes a booklet concerning the Sabbath. Now for those who keep the seventh day, you think, 'Hey, right on.' So he starts out with Exodus 20:8-11, which says:

"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it Holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter; your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your livestock, nor the stranger within your gates; for *in* six days the LORD made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and sanctified it."

You think, 'Boy, here's someone who's keeping the Sabbath. Isn't that nice?' So he makes the statement that 'the Jews kept the seventh-day Sabbath, but Christians keep the first day of the week as their Sabbath.' So here he is, a minister, says, 'Remember the Sabbath day,' but he means Sunday. Now isn't that just like the Israelites when God said, 'Go into the land,' they said, 'No.' So God said, 'All right, you're not going into the land, if that's what you want.' They said, 'No, we'll go into the land.' So here's a man who quotes the Sabbath, quotes about the seventh day of the week, but says it's the first!

He says we shouldn't work on the first day of the week, what a shame it is. Here, let me read just a little bit to you out of this. (Remember the Sabbath Day by D. James Kennedy, PhD.):

We have come to a time when Sunday sports dominates the scene and are as American as apple pie. I would like to tell you about something that was American. King James I of England when he issued a decree of his famous book of sports brought about something absolutely new in England. It was the initiation of Sunday afternoon sports of all kinds.

So this is nothing new, sports on Sunday afternoon.

This caused a tremendous outcry on the part of many of the Godly pastors and Godly people and it brought such a hindrance to their church, that historians tell us that it was one of the

primary reasons why the groups gathered together and sailed two years later from that land to America.

Well, to make a long story short, he says that the Pilgrims arrived and there was a storm going on and it was on Saturday, so they stayed there on the ship and wouldn't unload on Sunday because they kept Sunday and then they unloaded after Sunday. So that's quite a thing.

There is a uniqueness to this commandment in our time.

Isn't that absolutely incredible? I could not believe this. I was absolutely astonished! Now he's *persuaded* that we ought to have one day in seven. He is *persuaded* that the first day of the week is the Lord's day, but he really doesn't know which one is the Lord's day. Let me read just a little bit more here.

There is a uniqueness to this commandment in our time. It is the only commandment which you as a professing Christian can break and will be tempted to break with impunity on this earth.

Now he's professing to worship Christ. Let's go to Mark 2. What I'm going to read here, what he says about the Sabbath, and what you cannot and should not do in relationship to other commandments, and then says that the Sabbath is the first day of the week is absolutely incredible! I've never had anything, to use the modern expression—*blow my mind!*—as this did.

Mark 2:27 says, this is Jesus talking—the One Whom he says he is worshipping, the One Whom he says enters into his church, which by the way has an idol on top of the steeple, and is there in the presence when the choir sings and the organ plays and the people gather on Sunday. Jesus said,

"The Sabbath was made for man, *and* not man for the Sabbath; Therefore, the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (vs 27-28).

Now he's *almost persuaded* concerning the Sabbath and he lays a pretty heavy trip on everyone.

You obviously cannot steal and murder without getting yourself in danger of the law. Not too many people are tempted to worship idols.

But he has one right on top of his church in the form of a cross.

If you lie, you're going to bring upon yourself the censure of at least Christians. If you take God's name in vain, certainly Christians are going to set you straight in a hurry. You can be dishonest and profane the Sabbath and seek your own ways and your own pleasures and work and you will not only get in trouble with the law, but you will be censured by Christians. You may even be applauded by them and set forth as an example of many who work on this day are. Therefore, you come down to one commandment which is going to be a test as to whether you really love God.

I can't believe what I just read! He is saying that the first day of the week is the Sabbath and not the seventh day, when he quotes in here the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord and Jesus Christ is the Lord of the Sabbath. He didn't quote that, by the way. Then he goes on and says:

Are you really concerned about what God thinks? Are you really concerned what God says?

It's interesting. He ought to ask himself those questions concerning what God says in relationship to what God has taught us in the Bible concerning the Sabbath.

Now let's go back to 1-Kings 18 and here are some people back here who were stuck between two opinions. They were almost persuaded either way. So then God had to make it clear. We find that this is an account of Ahab and Elijah. And Ahab was the king and he was a wicked king and he was evil and he did terrible and horrible things. He married Jezebel, who was the daughter of the Canaanite high priest. He caused all Israel to commit idolatry, to worship Baal. So they get together with a meeting.

1-King 18:17: "And it came to pass when Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, 'Are you he that troubles Israel?' And he answered, 'I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have in that you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and you have followed Baalim...."

[And Baalim with the 'im' at the end means many different Baals or lords.]

...Now therefore, send *and* gather to me all Israel to Mount Carmel, and four hundred and fifty of the prophets of Baal, and four hundred of the prophets of Asherah who eat at Jezebel's table.' Then Ahab sent to all the children of Israel and gathered the prophets together to mount Carmel. And Elijah came to all the people and said, 'How long will you vacillate between two different opinions?....'" (vs 17-21).

And that's what so many people are divided in. They're *almost persuaded*. They *almost believe*.

- Are you divided between two opinions?
- Do you want to serve God?
- Do you want to serve God His way, every way that God says you should do?
- Are you *really convinced* of that?

Or

- are you *almost persuaded*?

There's going to come a time, just like with the people of Israel here. They were divided between two opinions and God caused them to choose. There is going to come a day in your life just exactly like this, that God is going to bear down into your life and you're going to have to choose whom will you serve and how will you serve. So let's follow along in this account here. He said:

"How long will you vacillate between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him. But if Baal is God, *then* follow him.' And the people did not answer him a word. And Elijah said to the people 'I, I alone, remain a prophet of the LORD. But Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men'" (vs 21-22).

So he said, 'We're going to run a little contest here, folks.' I'll sort of summarize the story. And he said, 'We're going to take two bulls and we're going to have the priests of Baal get over here and offer their sacrifice and then I will offer mine and the God that answers by fire, He is the Lord.'

Verse 25: "And Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, 'Choose one bull for yourselves, and prepare first, for you are many. And call on the name of your god, but place no fire *under* it.' So they took the bull which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon saying, 'O Baal, hear us.' But there was no voice, nor any who answered. Then they leaped upon the altar which was made....

[You've got to shout and yell and scream and dance and gnash yourself.]

...Now it came to pass at noon Elijah mocked them and said, 'Cry aloud with a great voice, for is a god. Either he is meditating, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey. Perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened!' And they cried with a loud voice and cut themselves with knives and lances until the blood gushed out upon them" (vs 25-28).

Isn't that pleasing to God, cut yourself, let the blood run down and beat your back and beat your flesh and make yourself into mincemeat and jump up and down and yell and scream, 'Oh, Baal!'

"So it came to pass when midday was past, and when they prophesied until the offering of *Elijah's* oblation...

[That's is when it should have been offered.]

...there was neither voice nor any to answer, nor anyone who paid attention. And Elijah said to all the people 'Come near to me.' And all the people came near him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that had been thrown down. And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob to whom the word of the LORD came, saying, 'Israel shall be your name.' And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD, and he made a trench around the altar big enough to contain two measures of seed. And he arranged the wood, and cut the bull in pieces, and placed *it* on the wood, and said, 'Fill four water jars with water...

[Now mind you, this was after three and a half years of drought and water was very precious. So he said:]

...Fill four water jars with water and pour on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood.' And he said, 'Do *it* a second time,' And they did *it* the second time. And he said, 'Do *it* the third time.' And they did *it* the third time. And the water ran all around the altar. And he filled the trench also with water" (vs 29-35).

Now notice how Elijah prayed. Elijah didn't have to be persuaded. He already was, he knew. There was no division of opinion with Elijah. Now here are the impossible circumstances.

"Now it came to pass at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said...

[Notice the short prayer.]

...'LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that You *are* God in Israel, and that I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You *are* the LORD God, and that You have turned their heart back again.' Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the burnt sacrifice and the wood, and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that *was* in the trench. And when all the people say, they fell on their faces. And they said, 'The LORD, He is the God! The LORD, He is the God!'" (vs 36-39).

So I want to ask you what is it going to do to persuade *you*?, and, In that persuasion, are you going to be persuaded wholly or almost? Can't have it both ways. The New Testament says, 'No one can serve two masters. You'll either love one and hate the other or hold to one and ignore the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.' You can't serve God and your way. You cannot take the words of God, as this minister did referring to the Sabbath, and say, 'Folks, now this applies to Sunday, the first day of the week,' when God says it's the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week. And then so subtly twist everything. And all of sudden *the people are persuaded* that the first day of the week is, yes, the Sabbath.

Now let's look at a couple of other Scriptures here as we try and answer this question. Let's go back again to the book of Luke. As we're turning there—that was a tremendous example with Elijah and the people and the sacrifice and everything that was happening there with the prophets of Baal. And of course, then you know the rest of the account that they took and slew all the prophets of Baal. Even after that Elijah thought that he was the only one left on earth that there was. He went down to Mount Horeb. He went in a cave and said, 'Oh, Lord God, I'm so discouraged. Jezebel's after me and I know we got rid of all these prophets.' Then you know the account where God said, 'Now, Elijah, I've got seven thousand that haven't bowed the knee to Baal. Now get up and go do your work the way you ought to.' He didn't answer him in the earthquake. He didn't answer him in the fire. He didn't answer him in the windstorm, but it was a small still voice. So God was merciful to Elijah. He said, 'Don't fear Jezebel, get up and go do what you need to do.'

So it's the same thing in your life. Don't sit there and think about all the things contrary, all the things that will hold you back. Is it a car? Is it a wife? Is it a home? Is it whatever people think? Is the church that you belong to? Is it your friends? Is it your relatives? And after all, what will they think? So *if you are almost persuaded*, let me read to you a parable to let you know that you can't just do what you think you ought to do, but rather you have to do what God says you should do.

Let's go to Luke 17:5, and here's a tremendous parable where there's an absolutely magnificent lesson for us. Now there are many different things we can learn out of this, but this is really a tremendous one. Luke 17:5:

"Then the apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith.' But the Lord said, 'If you had faith as a *tiny* mustard seed...

[Now I don't know if you've ever seen a mustard seed, but a mustard seed is a little teeny, teeny speck of a seed.]

...you might say to this sycamine tree, "Be rooted up, and be planted in the sea," and it would obey you'" (vs 5-6).

That's a tall order— isn't it? So the apostles couldn't quite understand that.

Verse 7: "But which of you having a servant plowing or shepherding will immediately say *to him when* he comes in from the field...

['Oh, you've worked a hard day, you've been out there in the field, go ahead and go eat. ']

...Rather, will he not say to him, "Prepare what I may eat, and gird yourself, *and* serve me while I eat and drink; and afterwards you may eat and drink?" (vs 7-8).

Now I want to ask you a question. How long do you think you would put up with that? How long do you think your union would put up with that? Here in Southern California they're having a big strike with all the major supermarkets because they don't want their people to work. Can you imagine, here you are out in this field, you're plowing and that's tough work. Have you ever been behind an oxen plowing in the dust and the heat and the smell and the flies and the birds hovering around? And you're all dusty and dirty, you fed the cattle, you fed the donkeys, you milked the cows, you come into the house and the master says, 'Go get yourself cleaned up and I want you to fix dinner for me and serve me. And when you're all done with that you can eat!' That's a tall order— isn't it? 'Ah, this, I'll sure be glad when I don't have to work for this guy anymore.' And you're out there and you're cooking the food and you're dying of hunger and you don't dare put your finger in to take a morsel— right? *Because you'll be beaten with stripes if you do.*

He says, ""...Afterwards, you may eat and drink." Is he thankful to that servant because he did the things that were commanded him?...." (vs 8-9).

Just because you do the things that you're commanded, is that any great thing to God— really?

So here it is with this man who's saying, 'Oh, the Christians always kept the first day of the week which is their Sabbath and we're going to take the word of God and we're going to put it on the first day of the week and we're going to keep this day like the Sabbath and keep it Holy. And I don't want any of you people working. I don't want any of you going to any of those games. I don't want any of you doing your own pleasure. I don't want any of you doing your own business on the first day of the week, the Sabbath of the Lord.' Even if he kept the seventh day Sabbath, even if you did everything that God commands you to do, have you done anything worthy of thanks from God to you, or have you only done that which was commanded? *You've only done that which was commanded!*

"Is he thankful to that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not.... [*Of course not!*] ...Likewise you also, when you have done all *the* things that are commanded you, say,

"We are unprofitable servants, because we have done that which we were obligated to do"" (vs 9-10).

Are you *almost persuaded?*

Let's go back and see what God says in Revelation, the third chapter. And here is a group of people right at the end time that are *almost persuaded* that God's way is right. Now here in the book of

Revelation, chapter three, we find a church that is *almost persuaded*—halting between two opinions—whether they're really going to do all that God says or not. And because they're not fully persuaded, they get themselves in trouble. Let's read it here. He's talking to the Church of the Laodiceans.

Revelation 3:15: "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot...

[God wants you one way or the other. He doesn't want you *almost* persuaded. He's wants you cold, having nothing to do with Him; or hot, totally on fire for God.]

...I would *that* you be *either* cold or hot....

['That's what I want.' He said:]

...So then, because you are lukewarm...

[You're *almost persuaded*. You *almost* are willing to do what God says.]

...So then, because you are lukewarm, and *are* neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth" (vs 15-16).

Isn't that the way it is? If you like hot coffee, you'd rather ice tea or hot coffee rather than warm coffee that tastes like yuk! Or try this: have three bowls of water—one cold, one lukewarm, and one hot. So you put your hand into the cold one. Let it get a little cold, maybe even put some ice in it to really make it cold. Then take that hand and stick it into the lukewarm. It's going to feel hot. So those people who are *almost persuaded* are convinced that they're doing the will of God.

Now then take the hot bowl and get your hand used to it and stick it in there and have it as hot as you can have it. When your hand gets used to the heat, take it out and put it into the lukewarm one and it feels cold. This tells us that all things are relative in relationship to how we view them, but they are not relative in how God views them.

So here's this whole church, this whole group of people, lukewarm. He says,

"...I will spew you out of My mouth....

[Now to make it more difficult]:

...For you say...

[So they're talking back to God.]

...I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing...

['We've got it made. God is with us.']

...and you do not understand that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked...

[spiritually. Because you are *almost* persuaded.] (So God says):

...I counsel you to buy from Me gold purified by fire...

[God is going to put the test and the porch of trouble and tribulation and persecution to test your persuasion. And will you at that time be like the people who said, after the sacrifice of Elijah, 'The Lord, He is God'? Will you at that time say, 'Lord, all Your ways are right and good,' and repent?]

...I counsel you to buy from Me gold purified by fire so that you may be rich; and white garments so that you may be clothed, and the same of your nakedness may not be revealed; and to anoint your eyes with eye salve, so that you may see" (vs 16-18).

Because when you're fully persuaded, you can see. The scales of deception drop to the side and fall off. Now God says, 'I don't think I'm too harsh on you.' He says:

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore, be zealous and repent" (v 19).

Take your *almost* persuaded stance and become *wholly and fully* persuaded, because that's what God wants.

Now let's go to Mark 12, and we will close here. I want to show you how God wants us to be toward Him in everything, not being *almost persuaded* and picking and choosing what we want and don't want, what we will and will not do, and then begin accusing God, because we don't get out way and talk back to God and say, 'Look, we've got it made anyway, because we're 'rich and we're increased with goods' and we don't need anything more of God.' There was even a man, a high religious figure that said at one time, 'Why, I've been in the church for so long and I have served God so well all of these years, that Satan is no longer interested in me.' Need I tell you what happened? What does the Proverb say? 'Haughtiness comes before a fall,' and he fell. God is no respecter of persons with anyone.

If we are *almost persuaded*, then you need to ask yourself this question, Mark 12:29:

"Then Jesus answered him, 'The first of all the commandments is, "Hear, O Israel..."

[Now you put your name right there, not just Israel, because that makes you think that God is talking to someone else. Put your own name there.]

...Our one God is *the Lord, the Lord*. And *you shall love the Lord your God...*

[This is how God wants you to be.]

...with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." This is *the* first commandment" (vs 29-30).

And that is the cure to being almost persuaded.

- *Wholly* follow the Lord!
- *Wholly* kneel to God!
- Do what He says!

—and then you will not be like King Agrippa and say, 'I am *almost persuaded.*' *You will be able to say, 'I am wholly persuaded.'*

Scriptures from *The Holy Bible In Its Original Order* by Fred R. Coulter

Scriptural References:

- Luke 14:15-20
- Acts 26:22-28
- Acts 17:11, 22-32
- Genesis 19:13-15, 17-20, 24-26
- Deuteronomy 1:26-27, 41-46
- Numbers 20:2-12
- Luke 1:11-20
- Luke 18:18-24
- Exodus 20:8-11
- Mark 2:27-28
- 1-Kings 18:17-22, 25-39
- Luke 17:5-10
- Revelation 3:15-19
- Mark 12:29-30

Scriptures referenced, not quoted:

- Isaiah 66
- Genesis 18
- Numbers 20:1

Also referenced: Booklet:

***Remember the Sabbath Day* by D. James Kennedy, PhD. (published by The Coral Ridge Ministries)**

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