

Don't Follow Your Heart: Part 2
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The famous musical icon, Bob Dylan, wrote and released a song in 1985 called *Trust Yourself*. Since I'm doing these sermons that we should not follow our heart I thought to myself, "This song is a perfect cultural example of what not to do." As we learned last week, following your heart means you trust your own wisdom and counsel and you choose to follow your own plans rather than God's plan. Dylan's song fits this to a T. So, I found a few renditions of this song online and listened to them so I knew what I was talking about. Let me tell you what I discovered: Bob Dylan is famous for a reason; he's an excellent musician. It's a great song. It has this bluesy way about it; the blend of rhythm and melody is really catchy. Half way through the song there's this guitar riff that's really clever and gives a lot of musical freedom.

So get this: I'm listening to this song that tells me that I should trust myself because I know what's best for me and I start tapping my feet a little bit. I play the song again just because I kind of like it. And eventually I have this refrain in my head, "Trust yourself!" I'm walking around the church with a little skip in myself singing "Trust yourself." And then it hits me; "What am I doing? I'm singing, 'Trust yourself!'" Has this ever happened to you? Where you're tapping your feet, you're singing a song and then you realize what the lyrics actually say? And you realize, "Wow, this isn't a very good song!" But now you kind of like it. Why is that? How does that happen? How can you like a song you know has a message that's not true or good for you? It's because the music has worked on your emotions; it pulls on your heartstrings. That's what good music does. So here's what happens: your emotions have become pleased and your emotions communicate to your mind and will that this song is pleasing.

This doesn't happen just through music; that's just an example. Our emotions can be moved and manipulated in every area of life. When that happens our desires and emotions take the lead in steering the direction of our life. Tell me what you think: do kids, young, dumb and in love, get married based on rational thinking or their heart? The answer is obvious. When we are young, dumb and in love we're not thinking much. That's why you parents are so nervous all the time. *You're* thinking rationally. *You're* thinking about the kind of career your daughter's boyfriend will have; *you're* thinking about what kind of family background this young man comes from; *you're* thinking about the mountain of debt they will have with a big, fancy wedding. Most kids getting married aren't thinking about that stuff. Do you know what they are thinking of? That they are in love because that's what their heart has told them is most important.

You are sensible people; spend some time thinking about life and you will discover that we do a lot of what we do based on our emotions; because of our desires. The house we buy; the job we quit; the trips we take; the food we eat - how will this make me feel? What do I want? That's largely why we do what we do.

For the people of Judah, their evil, stubborn heart led them away from God. Do you know what that means? It means they had no desire for God. They did not want him. Rationally

speaking, they still believed in God. That's why they still offered sacrifices; that's why they made oaths and vows to God - as you read Jeremiah you discover that stuff never stopped. The people still performed their religious duty; they knew (rationally) it's what they were supposed to do. But inside, in their hearts, where their desires and passions lived, they didn't want God. He didn't excite them; God wasn't appealing or desirable. They worshiped with their lips but their hearts were far from him (We'll talk more about this in the coming weeks). And because of their hearts, because they had no desire for God, they sinned and fell under God's judgment. It's why we're reading about so many horrible things in Jeremiah.

Now, you should wonder: is there any hope? Because who can change his heart? Who can change her desires - what she wants? I know I can't change my heart and I certainly can't change another person's heart; and the heart wants what it wants - there's no "why" after that.. But this is where the good news of God's new covenant comes in. This is part of the new plan, the new relationship, God is preparing for his people in Jesus Christ. Let me show you (READ Jeremiah 32:36-41).

I want us to focus exclusively on this promise of a new heart. In vs. 39 God says, "I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever." Later in vs. 40 he says, "I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me." If you are somewhat new to this Jesus-stuff you might wonder, "Why does God want his people to fear him? Isn't fear bad?" It's not bad when you fear the Lord. Fearing God is a way of saying you care about what he thinks more than anyone else. And look what fearing God leads to: "that they may not turn from me." That makes sense, right? When we care most about God in the deep recesses of our hearts, we won't wander away from him; we won't turn away from him. That's really good news.

We see this same language in chapter 31. Vs. 33 says, "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people." Having God's law written on our hearts is some of the best news found in God's word. When God writes his law on to our hearts it means we will care about God's way; we will want to do what God commands. That's what happens when God gives us new life. When we put our faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins, God makes us alive to him; alive to his word, alive to his way and his wisdom. We want to do what God says; we love what we hear. Why? Because God has changed our hearts. We receive his Holy Spirit and his Spirit does what no earthly power can do - change our hearts. That's the good news of the new covenant.

If you would call yourself a seeker this morning; you're interested in what you're learning about Jesus, but you haven't gone all in, this is what you get when you do. God changes your heart. If this information, this news, about having a stubborn, evil heart has hit home with you, if you've been able to say, "Yeah, that's me," the fix, or the remedy, for this problem is Jesus Christ in you. It's trust in his death on the cross for the forgiveness of your sins. Because when you give Jesus your life, he gives you a new heart. Take that step and watch God change your life.

Maybe hearing this news makes you wonder: “Well, why can’t I follow my heart? Brian, you’re telling me that followers of Jesus have a new heart, we have godly desires and godly aspirations. Isn’t listening and following our hearts exactly what we *should* do?” This is a very good question. I’m going to answer it now and then spend the rest of the morning explaining my answer. The answer is *NO*. Even as Christians we should not follow our hearts. Let me tell you why.

Here’s the first reason: we still have ungodly desires. We still have an enemy inside of us. The Evil One is not our only enemy. The enemy inside of us the Bible calls our *flesh*. The flesh is this earthly, selfish part of me that I still walk around with every single day. That doesn’t automatically go away when we start following Jesus. We Christians will live with our flesh until the day we die. The Bible doesn’t say we get rid of our flesh; the Bible says we have to overcome our flesh. We have to rise above it. That’s why Paul says what he says in Romans 7-8; why do I do the things that I don’t want to do? Why do I do the very things I hate? I hate the sins I commit, yet I do them! Why? Because of your flesh. It’s because you still have selfish, ungodly, unloving desires. And then what Paul does in chapter 8 is teach how you can find victory by the Holy Spirit over your flesh. And guess what: it’s a battle.

Let me summarize it this way: the reason why Christians can’t “look inward” or “follow their heart” is because we still battle ungodly desires. We live in between worlds; we live in the already-but-not-yet. We already we have a new heart with new affections and desires for God (praise the Lord!), but our ungodly desires and wants have not yet been eradicated. Our selfish tendencies have not yet been driven from our life. And since that’s the case, we have this inner battle being waged within us at our heart level; we have a battle of wants, a battle of desires.

So, we can’t just say, “I’m a Christian, I can follow my heart now” because the NT says you still want to be selfish; you still want to put yourself while at the same time you also want to walk in God’s way. I can’t possibly show you all of those passages, but I’ll make a list of a few of them and put them on our facebook page. Here are just two. In James we’re told (1:14-15), “But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.” Friends, he’s writing to Christians; *Count it all joy, my brothers and sisters...* this word is for followers of Jesus

Paul says in 2 Cor 11:3, “But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” Your thoughts will be led astray? How? By the cunning work of Satan. Do you remember how Satan tricked Eve? He lied to her. But that’s not all that happened; do you know what came next? (Gen. 3:6), “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of it’s fruit and ate.” It looked good and it was desired; she wanted it, even though God said *NO!* Imagine how Eve could have rationalized her desires: The fruit looks good; God wouldn’t keep something good from me. It’s delightful; God makes delightful things. Maybe I should eat! It’s desired to make one wise. God wants me to be wise. So, I think I should eat.

Friends, the NT is clear: we still have ungodly desires that constantly tempt us away from the Lord. We can't follow our hearts even as Christians because the presence of ungodly desires is still our reality; it's still our battle. And we can't discern on our own what desires are good or evil.

I will share the second reason why we should not follow our hearts as Christians very quickly. The NT never tells us to do anything of the kind. There are countless strategies found in God's Word on how to live with God and please him, how to discern God's will for our lives and none of them include "look within" or "follow your heart". Why would we choose a life-strategy the NT never encourages while ignoring all the ones that it does?

So, how do we know if the thoughts we have, the feelings we have, are true and godly? How can we tell if we're being deceived by our own selfish desires or if we have godly desires? The answer is found in Hebrews 4 (READ vs. 11-13).

Notice what this passage says the Word of God does in our lives. The Word of God *discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart*. That means the Word of God highlights for us what our heart is thinking; what our heart is valuing and prizing. The Word of God does that for us. The Word of God communicates to us whether our desires are from God or from our flesh. This is why being taught God's word is so important; it's why it's so important to saturate our minds and hearts with the Word of God.

So, how might that work? Imagine: It's a beautiful Saturday. And you wake up and you start dreaming how to spend the day. And your wife comes in (or maybe your mom and you dad) and says, "I need your help to clean the garage for the garage sale next weekend." And she starts running through the list of things that need to get done without even asking you what you might want to do. And inside, a battle is beginning. "I wanted to go fishing! I was going to play video games! I wanted a day to relax!" But then you start having other thoughts: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. Count the interests of others more significant than your own." You tell me: what are the godly desires and what are the selfish ones? And look how the Word of God discerned those desires for you.

The more we are matured and sanctified by the Word of God with the help of the Holy Spirit, the more we will intuit which desires are good and should be obeyed and which ones are selfish and evil and should be opposed. The more the Word of Christ dwells in us richly, So, listen to God's Word, FBC. And come next week to learn how God wants for that to happen.

Key vs. ~ Jeremiah 32:39

Questions for the week

- Can you think of areas in your life where you largely do what your feelings or desires say? What are those?
- How does the promise of the New Covenant encourage you?
- What's the most important thing you've learned from these two messages about not following your heart?