

Whole Hearted Faith
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I hate admitting this about myself, but my last two years of high school weren't good years for me. School was a breeze (too easy, in fact). I had great friends and loved playing sports. I got along with my parents. From the outside everything looked great. But those last two years of high school were rebellious years for me. I know what some of you might be thinking: a rebellious HSers, big surprise (though I never read in my Bible that God somehow doesn't expect teenagers to obey)! I had a quiet rebellion. My rebellion wasn't an *in your face, I'm not listening to you, mom and dad!* kind of disrespect and disobedience. In fact, I went to great lengths to obey my mom and dad. I faithfully did my chores at home, when my parents asked me to do extra stuff I did that, too. I always made it home by curfew; I would even call my parents to let them know where I was. I distinctly remember a school official telling me, "You're parents must have done something right."

But I used obedience to manipulate. I knew that if I was blatantly disrespectful, I knew that if I was rude and disobedient, if I missed my curfew by two or three hours my parents would be all up in my business. And I didn't want that. Because if my parents were all up in my business they'd find out things I really didn't want them to know. I didn't want them to know where I went with my friends. I didn't want my parents to know what I was doing. If my parents knew those kinds of things I'd be in big trouble and they'd be all up in my business all the time. So, I was super-obedient to hide my disobedience. I know, for example, my parents weren't waiting up for me because I was always on time, which was convenient because they couldn't smell the alcohol on my breath.

I had, what the Bible might call, half hearted obedience and respect for my parents. I was only superficially obedient; I was respectful only to the degree that I could get what I really wanted. That's how the Bible talks about the worship, the devotion and the obedience of the people of Judah. Their devotion wasn't pure and if we're honest we can see that same temptation in our own lives.

The Bible likes to work in factors of 2. Sometimes, the Bible talks about half hearted worship and obedience to God. Meaning, there's a part of you that gives a nod, a gesture of respect or submission to God, but really, the true and genuine part of you really loves and treasures something else. You're *half hearted*. The Bible also talks about the double-minded. A double-minded woman lacks that singular focus needed to honor God. Yeah, she cares about God and the things that he says, kind of. But she cares more and is focused more on her earthly treasures. Grandkids. Job. Motherhood. Vacations. That's *double-minded*. Both are a factor of 2.

(PIC) Here's a look at our sermon series again in picture form. We sin when we follow our own hearts, our own inclinations and wisdom. God gives his people shepherds to help us

see what our hearts are like. But when shepherds are deceitful, when God's teachers don't tell the truth, we follow our hearts rather than following God's word. But here's what I've discovered in God's word and through my own experience: God's people know better. We know better than to throw all of God's commands out the window. So we're tempted to keep this veneer of religiosity where it looks like we still practice our faith. We have just enough evidence to say we follow God; "See, look at my offerings. Look at how I give. I say the prayers and sing the songs. I serve at the youth center. What do you mean I'm not following Jesus?" It's like me as a teenager. What do you mean I'm not obeying you? I'm making curfew. I'm taking out the trash like you want. I'm going with you on our little family dinners... how can you say I'm being disrespectful or disobedient?"

In a way, this kind of rebellion is worse. Right? Do you know why? Because this kind of half hearted rebellion is deceitful. It's deceitful in a way that your garden variety unbelief is not. Ask an unchurched, unbelieving man if he believes in God and he'll tell you with his integrity intact, "Nope, not me!" Now, go to the man who says he believes, but truly follows his own heart, and ask him, "Do you believe in God," and he'll say, "Of course I do!" while deep down it's not true. It's dishonest. It's exactly what Titus 1 says (vs.16), "They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works." Half hearted worship and devotion of God is like obeying him with your lips, but your heart is far from him. May God spare us from becoming like that. Let's see how it worked in Jeremiah.

We're going to do a little flipping; I want to take you to a few passages that highlight this half hearted way of the people to glean some insight and understanding for our good. If you know God you don't want to be half hearted or double-minded.

Let's first go to Jeremiah 2. This second chapter in Jeremiah somewhat sets the stage for the rest of the book. It's our first introduction to God's description of the sins of the people; this is what it looks like when people follow their own hearts. The key verses are 23 and 24 (READ).

Those two verses paint a picture of what happens when you are half hearted. I see a couple of things. The first thing I see is that there is self-deception wrapped up in a half hearted man or woman. God says to the the people in vs. 23, "How can you say, 'I am not unclean?'" God says, "Look what you did in the valley; I know what you did! You burned your own sons and daughters in pagan rituals and you're saying, 'I am not unclean?'" They were terribly unclean; how could you get any worse? Yet, they couldn't see that in themselves; they were blind. They somehow pronounced "I am not unclean."

That's exactly what our sin does to us, friends. Sin blinds us from reality; it deceives us. Listen to just a few verses. Paul says in Romans 7 explaining his own struggle (vs. 11), "For sin, seizing an opportunity through the command, deceived me and through it killed me." The middle, modifying clause isn't the main focus this morning so just remove it for now...*For sin deceived me and through it killed me.* Hebrew 3:12-13 says, "Take care, brothers, lest there be

in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

I know this does not paint us in a very flattering light, but let's acknowledge it (reality is our friend!): every time we sin we are duped. We're like the coyote (PIC). Do you remember this cartoon? Every scheme, every strategy to catch the roadrunner fails; he's fooled every time. That's part of the humor; you can see it coming, but the coyote can't. "How can he be so blind!" But so are we when we sin. We are fooled; the wool is pulled over our eyes. That terribly offends our pride; "nothing fools me," we think. But every time we sin we are duped into thinking there is something more enjoyable and pleasurable than God; we're duped into thinking there won't be any consequences; we are duped into believing that we had good reasons for doing what we did. There's no other way to say it; we're gullible. And being gullible we are deceived by our sin.

But there's hope in learning this about ourselves: if we'd trust ourselves, our capacities, our vision less (knowing we are easily deceived by sin) and trust what God's word tells us more we'll be deceived less likely by sin. What if we were more suspicious of *our* motives, *our* desires and the messages found in the world and *more* confident, *more* assured of *God's* diagnosis of sin and ourselves? We wouldn't be deceived so much, would we? So, practically speaking: Ask God to help you have increased conviction about what God's word says about ourselves and sin and decreased trust in ourselves.

The second thing we see from this passage is that half hearted worship makes us selective about the commands we obey. Look what the people said in vs. 23, "How can you say, 'I am not unclean, I have not gone after the Baals?'" The Baals are the foreign gods. So get this: they're saying, "Hey, we didn't go after the Baals; we're not unclean." And Jeremiah is like, "Well, good for you! You didn't go after the Baals. But look what you did in the valley. You're like a wild donkey in heat that can't be restrained or stopped. You are so utterly committed to following your own hearts nothing will stop you. But you didn't go after the Baals. Congratulations!"

I've been in baptist churches my whole life; my mom and dad made their home in a baptist church when they got married and we've never left. Growing up, I learned about the 5 baptist don'ts. They were pretty much all retired by then, but their ghost still haunted members of baptist churches. The 5 don'ts are:

- Don't drink
- Don't dance
- Don't smoke
- Don't chew
- Don't play cards

Obviously, some of those practices can be more dangerous than others when abused, but if you were a baptist you didn't do those things. In the first church I served, Big Springs, there was a sweet older couple who lived not even a mile from the church. They were in their 80s and were very much influenced by the 5 don'ts and they were hard to shake. And I remember being told that this sweet woman would have her grandchildren close the shades in her home when they wanted to play cards; God forbid if anybody saw what they were doing. The funny thing about her concern was she lived in middle of South Dakota corn fields. Only coyotes stealing their chickens would ever catch them playing cards. But she was trying to honor the 5 don'ts.

Imagine her saying with pride, "I haven't played any cards! And I have danced since my senior prom either!" Is that worth celebrating if at the same time she took advantage of the poor; if she had racists actions; if she kept refusing to pay her bills at the local market? Of course not. When we are half hearted we tend to neglect the weightier matters of God's way while taking pride in our religious observances. Being selective about what you obey and taking pride in that is a good sign that you're struggling with half hearted devotion to the Lord.

For our next passage, turn to 7:1-7 (READ). There's something about the formality, the institution of religion or the church that provides comfort and assurance for people. And I get that to a degree. I'm thinking about these things in relation to our own building here. Some of you were married in this building; some of you said your last goodbye to your spouse here. Some of you first believed in the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in this very room. That's significant. That's powerful. So, this place elicits good memories for you. When we move to our new facilities we will need to spend some time remembering what God has done here and celebrate that grace.

But there's also a way we can get that wrong. There's a kind of trust or comfort or assurance that we shouldn't find in the bricks and mortar or in the membership roll. Because the substance of the matter isn't this building, it's not being baptist, and it's not having your name on the membership roll. The substance of the matter is Christ who produces in us a humility that continually turns to him as a great and merciful Savior.

When we are half hearted, we can easily get that mixed up; you can see the form or the structure of our faith important and not the heart of the matter when the structure and form of our faith are only there to help support what really counts - Christ in us. That's what happened to the people of Judah. In vs. 4 we read, "Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.'" For the people of Judah, the fact that their temple stood tall and strong was all they needed to see to believe they lived under God's blessing. Forget the adultery; nevermind the child sacrifice; pay no attention to injustices against the poor... Look! There's the temple! That's what counts! There's nothing wrong here when we've got God's house in our city. My name is still on the membership roll! We're still singing the right songs! God is happy to destroy the structures and the forms so that the world

knows what he really cares about. And that's what happened in Jerusalem; God burned that temple to the ground.

Well, what does God care about? We learn that in vs. 5-7 (READ). Amend your ways, meaning, turn! Repent! Come back to God and start following him again. In chapter 9 God says (vs. 24), "I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord." Read the between the lines of that, FBC. God is saying, "Do that! Love your neighbor. Practice justice. Do good to others in my name. That's what I delight in. So, do those!" And, of course, we only can do those by trusting in, relying upon our great God.

That's what being half hearted looks like. You deceive yourself, you're selective in the commands you obey and you trust the structure or form of your faith rather than the Giver of your faith.

I'm hoping you're wondering: well, what should I do? I think we get some help from King David in Psalm 86:11, "Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth, unite my heart to fear your name." The first thing that jumps out at me is David's desire for a united heart. That's what he wants. So, what does he do? First of all, he asks for it. God, unite my heart to fear your name! It's a request to God. Do you know what that tells me? This can only be done by God. He works this in our lives. We can't do this on our own. That's why David prays. God, please come and do what only you can do; unite my heart.

For what? Unite my heart to fear your name. That keeps our hearts united; the fear of the Lord keeps me single minded. The fear of the Lord is like smelling salt; it wakes us up. I'm reminded of a couple of passages. 1 Peter 4:18, "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and sinner?" That wakes me up. So does Hebrews 12:29, "for our God is a consuming fire." The more God becomes of greatest consequence to us, the more our hearts will be united in worship and devotion to him. So, cultivate, FBC, practices and ways for the fear of the Lord to increase in your life.

Key verse ~ Jeremiah 9:24

Questions for the week

- How would you describe in your own words what it means to be half hearted in our devotion to God? Why is this a problem?
- Does admitting you get duped and deceived by sin offend your pride? How come?
- What might be ways to stir a greater fear of the Lord in your life? What, practically, can you do?