

Series: "Revisiting Three FBC Values"

Sermon: *Biblical: Our Days of Deception (Part 1)*

Text: Jeremiah 17; Jeremiah 14; Ephesians 4: 11-16

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- Has your heart ever led you astray? Has your heart ever led you astray since you were a born again believer?
- Mine has. I could give you examples but they might be too personal and painful for all of us to hear.
- So, I'll go somewhat generic on you. Many, many years ago (so don't try to figure out who it was) a couple came to meet me in my office in the old trailers. They wanted marriage counseling and someone to perform a marriage ceremony for them.
- The first thing I always try to make sure of is whether one or both parties is a born again believer. I will not marry a believer to an unbeliever. I think that is a biblical standard.
- Some of my best friends married as believers and unbelievers and now have wonderful kids and great ministries for the Lord. However, I still feel the Bible prohibits taking the risk that all will work out. Therefore, I don't *help* people take that risk.
- In the case I have in mind, both the man and the woman had strong testimonies of believing in Jesus for everlasting life. It was as clear as it can ever be that they were both born again. Great!
- The next area I deal with is the tough area of divorce and remarriage.
- This couple had both been married to other believers. They had both now divorced those first spouses because they wanted to marry each other.
- Why at FBC? One of them "*used to go there.*" They were certain "*free grace*" meant I would be accepting of their plan.
- Before I told them I was absolutely **not** accepting of their plan, I was interested and wanted to dig a little deeper into their motivation for this new marriage.
- Here was the answer both gave with great conviction with what they felt was substantial evidence supporting their reasoning.

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- ***"God clearly told us His perfect will in our hearts! We were to leave our first spouses and get married to each other! In our hearts we know that this is God's perfect will! The loving and Godly thing to do is for you to accept our hearts' desires and marry us."***
- I tried to disabuse them of their absolute heart certainty about what God had told them but to no avail. They left very angry. Someone else married them. They divorced each other a few years later.
- I guess God had probably spoken to their *hearts* again and told them about his "***new*** heart-driven perfect will for their lives."
- This is an extreme example of using ones "heart" feelings, emotions, etc. to discern God's will. It was nice to believe that God had spoken directly to them and ok'd their plan.
- But, when it comes to the trustworthiness of such heart-guidance for "hearing from God, all feelings from the heart are on a spectrum of unreliability.
- *"Wow, Raleigh! You must be a fun-loving guy to live with! You really believe what I feel in my heart never matters?" "You believe my emotions don't tell me anything important?"*
- *I humbly submit to you...*That is not what I said. I said that heart feelings and/or emotions are not trustworthy indicators to claim one has internally heard the revelation of God's perfect will.
- As I finished last week, I asked you to think about some words from the LORD recorded by the prophet in **Jeremiah 17:9**. The NIV reads: ***"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure (or desperately wicked as the grouchy KJV translators rendered it). Who can understand (or know) it? Verse 20 continues with the answer: "I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve."***

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- It's attention getting enough to hear God is going to look at their heart motives when he judges their actions.
- However, more importantly, for what we are talking about this morning, clearly the only one who can absolutely know and judge their human hearts correctly is God.
- A person's own heart can be so ***self-deceptive*** that they cannot interpret it correctly.
- Probably, none of us likes to think this is the case for us but it was for the people of God in Jeremiah's day.
- Even Josiah with his seemingly good heart motive to restore the Temple and worship of the LORD—to tear down the idols throughout the Kingdom of Judah—even this boy king with heart feelings and impulses toward Yaweh the true LORD God—when he discovered the written down Scriptures—the revealed Word of God—he himself realized he had something wrong based on his heart and tore his clothes in repentance.
- All this talk about "heart" can be confusing because the word is used some many different ways in Scripture and by us. When we hear it we assume we are saying the same thing.
- Before these words in chapter 17, Jeremiah had had a conversation with the LORD about this same matter. It's in 14:11 and following: ¹¹ ***Then the Lord said to me, "Do not pray for the well-being of this people. ¹² Although they fast, I will not listen to their cry; though they offer burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Instead, I will destroy them with the sword, famine and plague."***
¹³ ***But I said, "Ah, Sovereign Lord, the prophets keep telling them, 'You will not see the sword or suffer famine. Indeed, I will give you lasting peace in this place.' "*** ¹⁴ ***Then the Lord said to me, "The***

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prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them. They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds.

- Here the LORD speaks of the peoples' desires as *delusions of mind* rather than *deceptions of heart* but they are very close.
- Biblical ***anthropology*** is tough even without crossing between the Old and New Testaments and between translations of the ancient Hebrew and Greek.
- What I mean by "biblical anthropology" is the meaning of words such as *mind, heart, soul, spirit, flesh, body, desire, will*, etc. It's about what all that up a human being, how a human being's component parts function and, metaphorically, even where they are located.
- One of my great DTS professors was still working on a PhD dissertation at the Aberdeen University when I went to work with him as a semi-TA. The long-lasting and frustrating subject of this doctoral dissertation was simply entitled "*Pauline Anthropological Terms.*" Mercifully, by God's grace, he did eventually finish it.
- My point is that trying to understand how even just Paul uses terms like *spirit, flesh, mind and heart* is tough. He is fluid in his usages. Imagine how complicated this gets when you mix Pauline or NT usages with those of the LORD and the now Prophet Jeremiah!
- But, I don't think semantics are the issue here. In Jeremiah 14 God speaks of "the ***delusions of their own minds.***" In 17 he talks about the "***deceitfulness of their hearts.***" In both he means the human impulses to do what they want or what they think is right. Their hearts and minds want to define things for God.

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- Later, Jeremiah is an OT book in chapter 31 in which we find out about a new covenant and about believers having different **hearts** by God's work.
- Ezekiel 36 also speaks of "new hearts" that will come some day.
- Then, Paul tells us that "**in Christ**" we are **new creations** with the Holy Spirit indwelling each one who is born again by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.
- Therefore as I often say, my identity is not Raleigh the broken down sinner just barely saved by grace. My identity is "**Raleigh in Christ!**"
- However, the Apostle Paul ALSO speaks of *groanings* and more *groanings* in *Romans 8* because even the redeemed are not yet **totally redeemed**. We still live in these *flesh earth suits* capable of sin—**capable of self-deceit—capable of delusions in our minds**.
- So, however Pauline and overall biblical anthropology ultimately shakes out, we cannot claim that we are now, in Christ, absolutely protected from and insulated from feelings and emotions that can guide us in sinful ways.
- Therefore, as it was with young King Josiah, we cannot claim simply because something *feels* spiritual and godly to us that it is absolutely the will of God revealed to us. We are still susceptible to selfish deception and our feelings are easily swayed by that deception when it is in play.
- In addition this business of self-deception is in Satan's wheelhouse. He is the Great Deceiver!
- Again, if you need some experiential theology on this, remember the two very certain Christian lovers who blew apart families of kids and hurt husbands and wives. They were supposed to image the unity of the covenant faithfulness of God in marriage according to the clear **teaching of God's Word**.

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- Instead, they followed the powerful, emotional deception of what their anthropological parts they called "their hearts" and utterly destroyed the potential bearing of the image of God to their world.
- If that is too impersonal an illustration, here is another first-hand experience. I know, at times, what I call "**my heart**" or, just as often for me, "**my mind**" deceive me into believing that what I want to do must be God telling me his will when it is either clearly not or sometimes may or may not be.
- My heart and mind is particularly deceptive when I can make my *thoughts and desires* seem spiritual and God-honoring by my own definitions of what being spiritual ought to look like.
- This is rather than defining the reality by consistent, ongoing, careful examination and application of biblical truth in God's revealed, written down, unchanging Word called Scripture.
- BTW: There are few things I have found to be more destructive in the churches I have been a part of than when people claim they absolutely know truth and God's will on the basis of their personal insights, their inner voices, their emotions, or even their **hearts**.
- I might read many of the same Christian books you read. If I haven't read them, Mary probably has and we have talked about them a bit.
- I pay careful attention to "*popular theology*" in those books. It is one thing for which the evil internet might be good. I also many times hold my nose and read through religious books and blogs and listen to religious podcasts by folks I already know I will disagree with because I already know I have different governing values.
- Waa1 Waa! Moan and moan again, Raleigh—Look, I do all this *dirty hard, miserable discernment work* for you because I love you all just that much! :-) Mike Rowe ought to do a segment on working in *excremental theology*.

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- Hey! Sometimes I even study God's Word written down in the Scriptures to compare today's theology with what God says rather than what current popular theologians **feel**.
- You see, very clearly, the pendulum has swung and it has gone way past any center point on an arc of reality on biblical truth and human feelings.
- For a couple or maybe three generations past folks whose lives I saw—so-called bible-centered folks like us, emphasized the truth of written down Scripture—the Bible as being the Word of God—alive and powerful—no matter what anyone **felt** about it.
- Granted those generations sometimes also adamantly insisted that their scientifically modeled methods of interpretation **absolutely always** produced the exact meaning God had intended in the text he had written down for them. Granted, there was often very little **exegetical humility**.
- Their listeners and readers took them seriously and lived and fought as if one or another great expositor's **interpretation was Scripture** rather than **Scripture** itself being **Scripture** and needing communal work of elders and teachers to get it right at times. This was as bad as throwing away the book called the Bible and keeping the commentaries or preferred systems of theology **about** the Bible and thinking of them as being the Bible. **That's wrong!**
- **However, this dogmatic egotism is not exactly reigning today in Jesus Church.** The pendulum has indeed swung widely.
- How does this sermon fit in the discussion of the first of three values for FBC—*biblical—free grace and missional?*
- It fits because the first governing value must be being "biblical" and meaning the same thing when we talk about it today or we can just make up any other values we desire in our human hearts and minds.

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- By "biblical," I don't mean feeling some bubbly "**biblicity**" mixed in with my guiding inner light, my special feelings, my personal visions and my human heart's desire. Neither do I mean an **egotistical interpretive dogmatism**
- I mean actually knowing Scripture in the way that elders and pastors and teachers are given as a requirement for their leadership in the church. They lead mostly importantly by knowing what God said in Scripture. To know these things they must be more than just those who remember a few biblical ideas and stories.
- They must be those who study the Scriptures—the written Word of God in an ongoing process to learn more and more of what God has said to us so they can help guide the rest of us to discern by Scripture as well. Then we will not all living by our oft competing hearts' desires.
- They must also be those who are willing humbly to work with other studiers of Scripture to refine any imperfect or incomplete interpretations of what God has written down for us so that we might truly know him and his ways. (Sad day Heard Reitman leaving)
- We may have the happiest heart-feelings that seem so wonderfully spiritual to us but, unless we truly submit them to God's revelation of himself and his plan written down in Scripture, we will need to tear our clothes in repentance like the young King Josiah who I am sure felt with all the feeling his young heart could muster that he was honoring God when he was really still honoring his own deceptive feelings.
- Value #1: We will be as biblical as we can know how to be meaning we will constantly be learning the Scriptures and constantly using them—God's written Word to us—to tell us what God has said as

our directive for his will rather than what we have simply felt in our hearts.

- Whether elder, preacher, teacher, long-time believer or new believer, as FBC, we will immerse ourselves in understanding Scripture because we can trust that it is certainly what God has said to us about his perfect will.
- We recognize that our heart-feelings may or may not ever be correct and unified as the body of Christ. Therefore we will remember what God said to us through the Apostle Paul writing to our brothers and sisters in the church of Ephesus found in **Ephesians 4:11-16**
11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. 14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.
- Biblical unity comes not from everyone buying some exciting pastor's vision—not from some well-designed program that works well to grow the church—not from following everyone's dreams and visions and heart feelings. Following all of these, as if God were speaking, will keep a church in an ***infantile condition***—i.e., always tossed back and forth—and blown here and there.

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- Biblical unity comes from all of us learning Scripture and letting that LIVING WORD OF GOD lead us in its light together.
- This is not the cool way to do church today—certainly not to grow a big one.
- So, do we value being biblical in this way or don't we?