

Series: "Revisiting Three FBC Values"

Sermon: *Biblical: Our Days of Deception (Part 2)*

Text: *Hebrews 4:12; Romans 12:1-2; 2 Timothy 3:10-4:2*

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- Are you awake and focused? This is the 3rd part to the 1st element of an attempt to emphasize 3 of the values we say we hold as a church. We are still talking about the impetus we have to be "**biblical**."
- The next two values I'll talk about in coming weeks, Lord, willing we also value holding to a biblical "**free-grace**" theology and a biblical "**missional**" theology.
- If you not quite awake yet or you are elsewhere focused, it will be easy to say, "*Well, of course we are biblical!*" This will allow you to assume what I am about to say is somewhat redundant or even unnecessary.
- I should like to emphasize that may be a wrong conclusion! This particular sermon of the series can be the easiest or the most difficult to comprehend. This depends on where you are at in the process of our present culture indoctrinating our thinking concerning God, the Bible and **meaning**.
- If you are now wide awake, you will realize I just casually dropped into that last statement one of the most difficult philosophical issues of our time. It is the **meaning** of the word "**meaning**."
- If you are interested in going deeper on that matter, check out my notes on fbccs.org for some references
- BOOKS...[I can offer some deeper technical insight into this through one philosophical book by a respected Christian scientist of a preceding generation who became a philosopher and wrote about the meaning of meaning. His book is called *Meaning*; by Michael Polanyi and Harry Prosch; Polanyi is the respected scientist philosopher and Prosch tries to help me understand what Polanyi meant when he talked about the "meaning of meaning" back in the 1960's. Another helpful book might be Kevin Vanhoozer's, *Is There a Meaning in This Text*. Vanhoozer brings the meaning discussion more directly into the realm of Scripture.]
- What does it mean to be **biblical** if we value that? It means that we see God's Word as his preserved *special* revelation to us. We understand that the meaning of his Word is the meaning the original Author/author intended and can be conveyed by the normal understanding of the conventions of human language.
- It means we come to the Scriptures to read the meaning that God put there not to read our meaning into the text based on what we

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call our heart, our experiences, our visions our feelings and our cultural bent.

- It means we can then allow that objective truth from the meaning of the Author/author and not created by us from us the reader to impact our thinking, feeling, and living for God.
- It means that Scripture is ultimately, how God speaks to us. It is not what we feel about Scripture. Not how we want Scripture to be, not even our own interpretations of Scripture that can be wrong and open to needing correction.
- This means we individually and together as a church must first know, as best we can, what God intended to speak to us in Scripture—we believe that is Scriptures *meaning*—and then we apply that by means of the Holy Spirit changing our hearts, minds and ways.
- I was trying to find how to best express this process knowing Scripture and applying Scripture when I re-read something I marked years ago from a favorite professor. He is writing a commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews. I have in mind his explanation of a familiar verse about God's Word in *Hebrews—Hebrews 4:12* I will quote him: **"Having completed (the) exposition of Psalm 95 and Israel's failure to enter rest, the writer brought this section of warning to a conclusion that is both sobering and comforting. God's Word is a solemn instrument of divine judgment, but His throne is both gracious and merciful. Hebrews 4:12. The lesson (the author of *Hebrews*) had just taught from the Old Testament Scriptures was not a mere historical tale. Instead, as had already been made clear by much he had said, it was powerfully relevant to his audience. For the Word of God is living (*zōn*) and active (*energēs*). Not only that, its penetrating power is greater than any double-edged sword and reaches the innermost being of a person**

so that it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (CRITICAL)
In doing this, it is able to discriminate successfully between what is spiritual in man and what is merely "soulish" or natural (it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit), and does so even when these often-contradictory inner elements are interwoven as closely as joints and marrow. The inner life of a Christian is often a strange mixture of motivations both genuinely spiritual and completely human. It takes a supernaturally discerning agent such as the Word of God to sort these out and to expose what is of the flesh. The readers might think that they were contemplating certain steps out of purely spiritual motivations when, as God's Word could show them, they were acting unfaithfully as did Israel of old.

- The reality of that oft "strange mixture" of human motivations in our heads or hearts or both, brings me back to where we have been in the first parts of the first value. I will review that for you...
- **Review**
- Old Historical example...*King Josiah* (8 years old)—His best heart intentions missed the point until they were examined by God's Word Therefore...**Historically #1** human thinking/feeling ...heart and brain alone are ultimately utterly fallible and often very misleading as guides of what God has said no matter how spiritual the feelings might feel.
- Historically #2, today, with postmodern philosophy, as I said last week, the **pendulum** of what does "meaning mean" has swung way over to the side that defines meaning is what I FEEL it means in my heart.
- Why has it been so easy for the Church today to relegate the Word of God—the Scriptures to a lesser role when it comes to determining what God has said? It is because, as in Israel's day, there is great

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"cultural contamination" concerning the nature of the Bible and truth in our day—in the culture and in the church, whether we realize it or not!

- [*"NOT ME! I watch Fox News so I am OK! I know the truth!]*
- Now the next point...How could that deception happen on such a wide scale in Jesus' church? Well, it could happen because some of us sometimes live our lives as pretty much, lazy unaware idiots—this is not new and it is why Paul keeps shouting "**wake up!**" in his letters to the early church of his day.
- And, it is true, because of this, sleepiness (especially by church leaders and teachers), we missed the pernicious influence of another trend happening at the same time as the one I talked about last week—that one was the postmodern besmirching of the Holy Bible—Scripture—God's written Word. "Don't tell me truth is contained in the old moldy, outmoded, boring, negative book called the Bible. Truth is what I say it is. I say God didn't speak in words in Scripture. He spoke in feelings in me."
- We believers have likely been more impacted by that besmirching than we might think. It might show up most in our unwillingness to speak the truth God has revealed in Scripture because of the consequences.
- If you need examples—I wish I had time to read one article—look at what even Christian writers are saying to destroy a brother Tony Dungy for being biblical— he is a post NFL coach that is now a TV commentator.
- These Christians claim that Dungy attending the march for life and believing that homosexuality is wrong based on what he reads from God in Scripture is **unscriptural**, They KNOW what God **meant** to say. Jesus is LOVE and love is letting people do what they want. The Bible even says that in the red letters somewhere—they are certain.
- The used to be Grand Rapids—super preacher, mega-church maker best-selling author of, Love Wins, by Rob Bell made it necessary for his publisher Harper Collins to turn the printing presses back on six times within a month of the release of a book claiming with great certainty from his heart that our loving God would have nothing to do with something we think of as "hell."
- Rob made Time magazines list of the top 100 most influential people. We can be pretty sure that pastor Rob wasn't influencing and selling so hundreds of thousands of this title to unbelievers.
- We can be pretty sure he was "scratching the itching ears" mostly of believers who wanted to be validated by his **heart** theology in their own **heart** theology that had shaped an idol of what our loving God ought to look like.
- The **meaning** of Scripture, as I have defined it for our value, just doesn't matter in cases like this. We have not been untouched by this cultural value.
- LATER: If you don't think you have being infected at all, ask yourself how often you tell anyone about hell these days. Ask yourself if you are willing to take Scriptural stands or you simply keep your mouth shut because God likes peace. Here is an odd test but if you apply it

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you will get the point. As yourself how you would tell someone to select a church to become part of today?" Scriptural principles or mostly, what is in it for me??

- What is this second cultural element I mentioned that is a concurrent trend infecting our culture and yes, our church today concerning Scripture and its meaning? Let me cite something from a book I mentioned some weeks ago when discussing the nature of the church today. This remains one of my best summarizing sources for the general ideas shaping our culture.
- A sociology professor by the name of Philip Rieff, wrote a book in 1966 called, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*. In this book, Rieff took the sick, twisted wide-spreading ideas of Sigmund Freud as a practical and notable starting place for a very big turn in our culture.
- Then, going forward he showed how others added force to Freud's **satanic** lies collected from those before him but certainly popularized by him. Rieff didn't call Freud "**Satanic**." I am adding my own strong opinions along the way here.
- Rieff also went backward in history. With his customary broad-brush approach, he painted a picture of other big changes in our western culture comparable to this Freudian call to cultural degradation.
- I think Rieff was imperfect in his probably, too-broad statements but they are not without some helpful validity.
- He suggests that western culture had near its start the era of the **political man**. By this, he means ideas of men like *Plato & Aristotle*. What made a man an acceptable man in the culture of that day was his or her connection with the *polis*—the public life of the people.
- Next in our cultural heritage, came the emphasis on the **religious man**. This was the human made to be a valuable person by being religious. The religion he is talking about was that of the taking part in the mass and ceremonies not necessarily a biblical religion. It

might even have included the religion of witchcraft that developed in tandem.

- The **third** era of the source of human significance in our culture came to us as the **economic man**. This era placed significance in making money, producing things, innovating products. Science and human rationalism as the way of truth was part of this—the internet is part of it—AI will be part of it.
- These are very long term cultural trends with ill-defined borders. However, many of us grew up in the long transition between the 3rd element of significance—being an “economic human” and the 4th.
- I believe that this 4th cultural wave has now taken over the lead and often makes us older folks angry. Some of you are young enough that you probably only really know this 4th wave. We 3rd-wave folks (*shut-up boomer*) get angry because this fourth wave does not hold many of the same governing values as the 3rd that we know so well—and often have sold-out to.
- However, very often even we “boomers” are not aware of just how much we have also now been coopted by the emerging values of the fourth wave even as Bible-believing Christians.
- What is the 4th? It is the **psychological man**. Author Carl Trueman explains that this is the now the type of person who is “*characterized not so much by finding identity in outward directed activity as was true for previous types (political, religious and economic man) but rather in the inward quest for personal psychological happiness.*” (The Rise and Triumph... p 45)
- The matter of “**feelings**” is now central to human significance. My expressiveness as an individual and my **feelings** governing those expressions is a paramount need for **feeling** valued and it thus must be my right to be significant by my **feelings**.

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- For the 4th wave folks, this has become a governing value in life for the seeking of significance. Anyone who does not allow that my ***felt*** truth is ***the*** truth, becomes an enemy. They become, to me, an actual *violent oppressor* of the ***real*** significant me I am creating.
- In the case of more conservative churches like ours, when this cultural wave infiltrates, we hear things such as "they *don't love me as they ought! They have hurt me by not letting me be me as is my right*" OK, they don't say that second part out loud but they feel it so it must be true.
- What does the Bible say about any of this? "That doesn't matter! "I have read some of the Bible—well certainly heard some of it and more importantly, I have watched every Veggie Tale ever made. I am biblical. I have "bibli-city" in my feelings so they must be truth—they must be God speaking."
- May I take the time to read you one more quotation? This one is from Trueman's book that says so much of how this enters the church. I have talked about this before but it needs to be repeated over and over. This is why being ***biblical*** means so much to us as a church that we call it a ***value*** as we mean that to mean.
- As I said, in earlier periods of our culture, men and women found purpose and well-being--significance outside of just themselves and their interior feelings, emotions—their heart. Were people perfectly correct back then? Were they ***biblical***? No! Culture was never and never will be perfectly biblical until Jesus sits on the throne.
- However, Trueman writes of cultural trends that were at least not focused only on the individual as we find both in princes and paupers today...Back then..."***They found their purpose and significance by being committed to something outside themselves. In the world of psychological man, however, the commitment is first and foremost***

to the self and is inwardly directed. Thus the order is reversed.

Outward institutions (like the church with its authoritative Bible and mission of discipleship) ***become in effect the servants of the individual and her sense of inner well-being. ...In fact, I might press this point further: institutions cease to be places for the formation of individuals via their schooling in the various practices and disciplines that allow them to take their place in society. Instead, they become platforms for performance, where the individuals are allowed to be their authentic selves precisely because they are able to be who they are "inside."*** (p.49)

- Even in the more conservative churches like ours, this cultural right and governing value, this desire to express who we are on the inside from our feelings—our hearts, couples very nicely with that earlier mentioned Postmodern destruction of the value of Scripture—God’s Word written and preserved for us.
- As an old written-down text, the Bible is no longer authoritative but fortunately, culture teaches me I still have an authority. It is “me myself and I!”
- Add my governing value of the absolute right to focus on my own interior life—my feelings—what my heart says—add it to the devaluation of Scripture and the result is that now God’s speech/God’s revelation is determined mainly by what I feel inside in my heart. What God ***means*** is what I ***feel*** he means. This is not necessarily what Scripture says and thus ***means*** but that no longer matters—at least not quite as much.
- And, as was said last week with me as one prime example, my own heart—my own thinking and feeling can be the most deceptive thing about me.

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- We very often do not act as the noble *Bereans* did when Paul spoke to them. They asked "*What does the Word of God say—what do the Scriptures say?*"
- More and more we find people in churches like ours saying "*God told me in my heart and I am thus certain he is speaking directly to me and that this is his will. Now, Raleigh, go ahead and prove you are a loving, free-grace Christian by agreeing with me.*"
- Disagree—question—even question lovingly—even question on the clear basis of Scripture and you are being "judgmental," mean, evil and unchristian! You are NOT free grace!! You are not LOVING like Jesus was in the red letters they remember seeing—or maybe someone told them about.
- Very often this person, in our sort of churches, whose governing value is the feelings of their imperfect heart, will think they are being *very biblical* because they have some vague memory or feeling of a Bible verse or a story they remember from Scripture that they can mold in their thinking to support their feelings as a kind of proof text. As I say, more likely it is something they have taken in from some secondary source instead of their own careful, ongoing study for the intended meaning of God's Word.
- They might even insist they have *measured* their feelings by Scripture when what they mean is they are aware Scripture exists and have sometimes read it or perhaps seen a YouTube video about the matter, and thus must know it pretty well—or at least well enough to proof-text their feelings.
- [BTW: *I once again became an expert, journeyman plumber a few weeks ago by watching YouTube. I also needed to become an expert fireman because of exercising my plumbing skills to join some copper pipes with a MAP torch inside our bathroom wall.*

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- How does this entire sermon fit in the discussion of the first of three values for FBC? It fits because as Paul says to the Corinthians "**because of the present crisis**" today our first governing value should be being "biblical." We need that objective Word of God as a place to start our lovingly speaking the truth to one another.
- We need to be saying the same thing when we say we value "being biblical" or we will have, at best, no more than a worldly "**false consensus**"—not the unity and maturity of a biblical *koinonia*.
- This does not mean, "I feel a personal "*bibli-city*." It means truth is what the Scriptures say in the normal understanding of the language, rhetoric and context by which God revealed it as truth. Not my feelings about what God said—but what God said.
- For most all of us believers, this requires *communal* help to know. We study together speaking truth in love for correcting and rebuking and all that the Word can do. We can't know it all alone as our culture tells us we can by simply looking inside ourselves and calling that truth. That makes us a god who defines truth.
- It is the Living Word of God that is powerful to change us and to give us real significance as imagers of God as Paul "**beseached**" the Roman Christians in their culture to "**offer up**" their earth suits with all their feelings as "**living sacrifices**" so that their *minds*—their thinking about truth could be **renewed** by the truth outside of them—God's Truth—God's Word. (**Romans 12:1-2**)
- When the church in Ephesus was in danger of loosing it's purpose and deserting its mission, Paul told Timothy the only remedy—**in season and out**—accepted and rejected—was the truth that he had learned from his grandmother, mother and the Apostle—God's Word. The **feelings** of the congregation, some of the leaders, and even some sinful teachers meant nothing for that body's needs to

turn back to their first love. Only God's Word held the objective truth that would allow them to love God well and not make the same mistake as Josiah and Israel had made. **(2 Timothy 3:10ff)**

- We have not outgrown our need for God's Word—the Scriptures. We will continue to need the truth God has revealed in His Word until we see the LORD face-to-face.
- The written Word of God has not become outmoded in a world of bumper sticker theology and entertaining clickbait that sells books and popular theology.
- If the Word of God seems outmoded, it is because we are measuring its power and usefulness by the standards of a pragmatic world that is not our home and shouldn't define our metrics.
- If the Word of God seems boring it is because we have given ourselves over to entertainment that is only skin deep—actually only **FLESH** deep.
- If the Word of God seems un-relational and cold it is because we have grown used to immediate, easy relationships no deeper or eternal than those that make our human hearts *tingle* for what is but a moment from a true perspective.
- If the Word of God remains unread, unstudied, undigested, and unappreciated in my life it is because I am not valuing what God values...there is just no escaping this truth!
- The same goes for a church named FBC. Do we truly value the Word of God as a church? Are we governed by that value—by being biblical? Is this true from our elders and teachers and then truly spreading through the entire body as we grow disciples?
- Does the value of being **BIBLICAL** truly shape who we are together?