

Myth #1: You Should Follow Your Heart

The first in the series: *Urban Myths: Debunking Christian Clichés*
May 15 & 16, 2010

Intro:

I knew a guy who survived a plane wreck - not just a *fender bender wing dinger*, but a *full-on crash* to the ground. Their plane went down in the mountains. It's fascinating to hear how he managed to *walk away with only minor injuries*, but the part of the story that serves as an introduction to today's message has to do with *what led* to the disaster. *How did they get so off course? What was their mistake?*

The crash was caused by *trusting in a faulty gauge*. They believed something that wasn't true. That's never good.

1. Trusting in anything inaccurate is dangerous.

Though our lives are not always at stake, believing what isn't true can lead to disaster.

Some commonly held beliefs don't align with reality. Not all that we cherish is true. Christians have their own urban myths. Some are so gullible that they accept misinformation and mix the substance of the Scriptures with an equal part of superstition. The result is disaster. This series will explore some classic clichés that lead us astray. The idea is to liberate us from erroneous thinking because *believing things that are not true is a dangerous practice*. The tendency will leave you disappointed and vulnerable to disillusionment.

Let me illustrate the importance of building your belief on accurate assumptions: A good friend of mine said, *I must be doing something wrong. Why do you say that? Bad things keep happening to me.* Let's think this over: since your circumstances are painful, you figure that you must be doing something wrong. The *assumption* is that if you *weren't* doing anything wrong that *bad things wouldn't be happening to you*. In other words, *bad things don't happen to*

good people. Let's test that against Scripture. OT - **Job's** suffering was not due to his sin. NT - **John 9:1-3** - Disciples asked Jesus about a man born blind: *was it his sin, or that of his parents?* Jesus said *neither. That's inaccurate thinking.* They assumed, like Job's friends, that all suffering is punishment for personal sin. Suffering *is* a result of the rejection of God's original plan, but it is not distributed proportionally. We live in a fallen world and things don't operate in a way that is fair or predictable. The ultimate example that *bad things do happen to good people is* Jesus. *The worst possible thing happened to the best possible person!*

The difficulties my friend is experiencing may indicate that he's on the exact right road! The idea that *the Christian life is going to be easy* is an example of the kind of inaccurate thinking that can mislead us. I'll be talking more about this and other myths in our new series. I'm indebted to an old friend named Larry Osborne whose book on dumb things smart Christians believe has been a stimulating and invaluable resource for me.

Back to the plane crash: they trusted in a faulty gauge. It couldn't lead them right. The guidance it gave was inaccurate. The same can be said for our feelings. We think we're safe in a decision if we *feel good* about it, but this is very subjective. Have you ever felt something to be true and right and good but it wasn't? Me too. Our feelings do not reflect an unchanging objective reality, but they are affected by other factors so that we may be way off.

Let me show you what I mean: **Compass and magnet.** (*Point south*) This tells me that way is north! I'm going to set the direction of my life according to that heading. *Anyone see a problem with this? I believe I'm headed north, but I'm not. What's wrong?* The gauge is off and that can lead to disaster! People can believe things that are not true!

T - This idea, that *trusting in anything inaccurate is dangerous*, introduces the whole series. Now it is time to get more specific and to deal with the myth that you should merely *follow your heart* in decision-making. Have you heard that? This implies that you can have confidence in the operation of your conscience. Unfortunately, this is not true.

2. People say, "Follow your heart," but our hearts may mislead us. *Following what is faulty* can lead to a crash. *Rely on your conscience* and you may be misled. Why? *Our hearts aren't right!* Think of the compass again:
• *As a compass is affected by a magnet, your heart can be drawn to things that hinder its ability to lead you right.* As a gauge for determining right and wrong, your heart is incorrectly calibrated. **Jer 17:9 - The heart is deceitful above all things...** People say, *I believe in the inherent goodness of mankind.* I don't. Do you know why? That view doesn't stand up under scrutiny. Test it against human history and against Scripture. *Look in the news, look in the Bible, and look in the mirror;* the evidence is clear: *our hearts can mislead us.* There are things that can pull your hearts off track, which may lead your life into disaster.

Our hearts aren't *always* wrong. It is just that they are unreliable as the gauge by which to evaluate what to do. They do work sometimes, but *sometimes* isn't good enough. Would you *rely on a gauge that works only some of the time?*

We feel good about things that *are not good*. And we don't feel like doing the things that *are good*. When you're down you feel like withdrawing, or slipping into some old bad habit. You don't feel like reading your Bible or praying or exercising. In order to get healthy, you need to *do the opposite* of what you *feel* like doing.

The voice in your head may be wrong. The thought that *our meter is working* is a myth. Once it gets off, you're in trouble. It is like an **out of tune instrument**. When it is accurately tuned, you are free to make something beautiful (play song). But when it is out of tune...

T - When people say, *follow your heart*, they may mean that we should make decisions based on having peace.

• *The inner peace you feel concerning your choices may come from a clear and good conscience, or from a calloused one! Ps 73:5 - From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits.* The Bible refers to a **good conscience** and a **clear conscience**, but a clear conscience isn't necessarily a good conscience.

You can walk the way of this world in outright sin and not feel any guilt. What does that prove? Only that your conscience is affected by something other than Scripture. Your conscience may be clear only because it's malfunctioning! The *inner peace* doesn't tell you if your proposed action is against *God's standard*. It just alerts you to what is against *your own personal values* - which may be all messed up! Besides, you can silence your conscience - you can ignore it so long that it won't speak up anymore. **1 Tim 4:2** mentions those who have **seared consciences**. **Tit 1:15** speaks of those whose **consciences are corrupted**. It can happen to anyone.

A businessman does *whatever is necessary* to make the deal. He slides, over time, into practices that are clearly unethical, but doesn't feel any remorse. *I haven't done anything wrong!* He's *operating just fine by his new definitions*.

A neglected wife begins to receive advances from another man at her office. She feels like she deserves it and enjoys the attention. They both justify the illicit relationship because they *feel peace* about what they are doing.

A student wants to get ahead. Cheating used to be out of the question, but everyone is doing it. He gradually acquiesces and it seems okay now; so long as he doesn't get caught, he feels no guilt.

A young woman wants a breakthrough in Hollywood so badly that she compromises morals that were *once in place*. Over time, those old-fashioned standards seem very *out of place*. Each steamy scene gets easier. *God would want her to be successful*, she rationalizes.

Picture a time when you felt bad about something at first, but kept doing it. After a while, it doesn't bug you much anymore. A *calloused heart* loses sensitivity. Think of how much you've changed your standards. Things you would have shied away from in the past, you now deem appropriate. The fact that our standards can change like the seasons should show us that our hearts make a poor basis for determining right and wrong. Fortunately...

• ***There is an absolute standard of morality, but it is not inside of you; it is outside and above you.*** People say, *Look within!* Based on what we've seen so far, that is a bad idea. Our hearts are not reliable. Our consciences are like damaged gauges. They can only indicate what *feels* right and wrong to us at the time. They may not be *tuned* to the objective truth in the Scriptures. What we really need to know is if we are stepping out of bounds according to God's standards.

If any mere mortal could reliably trust in the inner leading of his conscience, it would be the Apostle Paul, but even he didn't trust the flawed standard of his heart. **1 Cor 4:3,4 - I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.** If Paul couldn't trust his conscience, who can? He was a *spiritual giant*, but like us, he was *fallen*.

Paul knew his heart may *approve* things that should be avoided or even *condemn* him about things that are fine.

We've seen that a *clear* conscience may be inaccurate, but so may your *guilty* conscience be off base. Remember the guy I mentioned who was *feeling like God was punishing him for something*? His heart was condemning him, but *you can't trust your heart!* You can feel guilt when you shouldn't and you can feel no guilt when you should. *It's confusing!* That's why we need to look *up* and not *within*. The standard is *not inside* of us; it is *outside and above* us. It is the absolute. The A - 440. Even if your instrument is in tune with itself, in *relative tune*, that isn't good enough.

Think of what throws people off course. *I used a magnet in my illustration*, but what gets our hearts out of tune? It can be intentional. Or it can be that we've gotten too close to something with the power to mess with us (drugs). I asked a friend about this and said: trauma, abuse. You hurt the compass and it will have to be fixed to work right again. In order to do that, you'd need to take it back to the manufacturer. We must turn to God to recalibrate our hearts. I think this is what Paul was talking about in **Rom 12:2 - we are transformed by the renewing of our minds.** Ultimately, it comes down, not to following your heart, but following God's heart. Let me close with by reading what this looks like: **Ps 119:9-11 - How can a young man keep his way pure? By following his heart? NO! By living according to your word. Because of that... I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.** That's the absolute standard, God's Word. That is what we want affecting our hearts!

Conl: Have you lost true north in your life? Are you in danger of crashing? Have you been led into trouble by a heart that desperately needs recalibration? The Scripture is

full of promises that God can give you a new heart. Let's ask him for that.

Prayer.

A few more ideas:

Matt 7 on contrasting foundations. Note that his words are not just to be believed, but to be obeyed. We should base what we believe on what is true, not how we feel. Use Do my words. James does...

Our thinking is clouded. The conduit is clogged up. We don't even recognize how subjective we are.

There's a big section in 1 Cor 10 on conscience. It talks about those with weak consciences. Their guilt feelings are not based on what is actually true, but on legalism. 29 - For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience?

In the Scriptures, we read of David being *conscience-stricken* after several different incidents, but not after the biggest blunder of his life. I guess he had successfully justified his actions, and we can too.

Rom 9:1 I speak the truth in Christ – I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit –