



Is there a Balm in Gilead?

Healing for a deceitful heart . . .

Scripture

Jeremiah 17:5-6

- This is what the LORD says: “**Cursed** is the one who trusts in man,
 - who depends on **flesh** for his strength and
 - whose **heart** turns away from the LORD.
- He will be like a **bush** in the wastelands;
 - he will not see **prosperity** when it comes.
- He will **dwell** in the parched places of the **desert**,
 - in a **salt land** where no one lives.



Scripture

Jeremiah 17:7-8

- But **blessed** is the man who trusts in the **LORD**, whose confidence is in him.
- He will be like a **tree** planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream.
- It does not **fear** when heat comes;
 - its **leaves** are always green.
- It has **no worries** in a year of drought and
 - never fails to **bear fruit**.



Scripture

Jeremiah 17:9-10

- [Nevertheless]
- The **heart** is deceitful above all things and beyond cure.
- **Who** can understand it?
- “I the **LORD** search the heart and examine the mind,
 - to **reward** a man according to his conduct,
 - according to what his **deeds** deserve.”



Introduction

- He was only 29 when he died.
- The cause was **heart failure** brought on by alcohol and drug abuse.
- In his **short life** and career as a musician, he managed to score **11**, # 1 hits on the Billboard charts, and another **24** that made the top 10.
- He managed this remarkable feat without ever **learning how to read music**.
- When **Nashville's Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum** was established in 1961, **he was one of the first two inductees**.



Introduction

- Despite his success, he was in many ways a **broken man**.
- Nevertheless, America's country music fans didn't seem to care so much.
- There was **earthy truth** in the simple, gritty songs of **Hank Williams Sr.**
- Somehow it made up for all his rough edges.



Introduction

- Among **Williams' best-known hits** is a little **cry-into-your-beer** ditty.
- The first two stanzas go like this:
 - Your **cheatin' heart**
Will make you weep.
You'll cry and cry
And try to sleep.
 - But sleep won't come
The whole night through.
Your **cheatin' heart**
Will tell on you.
- The **cheatin' heart** in question, of course, belongs to a **woman who has done her fella wrong**.



Deceitful Heart

- But that's not the only sort of **cheatin' heart** there is.
- Just ask the prophet, **Jeremiah**.
- He thinks **everyone** has a **cheatin' heart**.
- As he says in Jeremiah 17:9,
 - The **heart** is deceitful above all things and beyond cure.
 - Who can understand it?



Original Sin

- The Scottish reformer **John Knox** agreed.
- When he and a small committee of fellow pastors penned a confession of faith for the newly formed **Church of Scotland**, he made sure to say — referring to **original sin** (Scots Confession 3.03): —
 - * “The **image of God** was utterly defaced in man, and **he and his children** became by nature
 - **hostile** to God,
 - slaves to **Satan** and
 - **servants** to sin.”



The Human Heart

- Lots of people today think old **John Knox** lays it on a little thick.
- If you pressed them, they'd probably say much the same thing about **Jeremiah** — even though his words come straight from the Bible.
- **Devious** above all else? **Perverse**? You'll never see such sentiments printed in the middle of a lacy heart on **Valentine's Day**.
- We don't like to think about the **human heart** in such terms.
- Calling the **human heart** devious and perverse runs counter to the spirit of our age.



Devious & Perverse

- *“I like to think that, deep down, people are basically good.”*
- That **line** is an article of faith for a great many of our neighbors and friends — and maybe, if we're **honest**, for a lot of us as well.
- Such **cheery optimism** about the human condition happens to contradict the church's historic creeds, as they stress the human race's need for a **redeemer**.
- So, what do we make of Jeremiah's **lament** about the **cheatin' heart**?
- Must we write him off as a hater? Or, is he onto something?



Hard Times

- **Jeremiah** is also known as a prophet of hard times.
- All **hell** is fixing to break loose around him.
- After a brief and encouraging **reform** by the good king, **Josiah**, the people of Judah are backsliding under their present king, **Jehoiakim**.
 - They were **worshipping foreign gods** and
 - falling into all manner of **immorality**.
- A **Babylonian** invasion is looming on the horizon while Judah's corrupt **monarch** does nothing but enjoy the hedonistic pleasures of his palace.



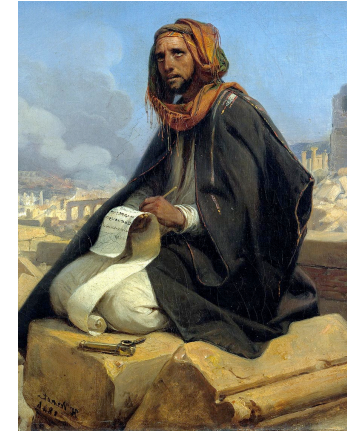
Faithful Few

- By contrast, a **few remain faithful**.
- In a couple of verses reminiscent of **Psalm 1** where this **faithful remnant** is "like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream" (v. 8).
- Jeremiah draws a sharp distinction between those who trust in "**mere mortals**" (v. 5) and those who **trust in the Lord** (v. 7).
- The **first group** is like a transient desert plant that wilts and dies under the blazing sun.
- The **second** has its spiritual roots sunk deep in well-watered soil, and it flourishes.



Self-Deception

- When **Jeremiah** blasts the human heart as devious and perverse, he's got ample evidence from his own experience.
- In Hebrew thought, the **human heart** is the seat of **reason**, not emotion.
- Emotion is thought to reside in the **abdomen**: the source of what we in our culture call, "gut feelings."
- The cheating or deceitful heart of verse 9, therefore, is actually a **corrupted mind**.
- Jeremiah displays here a deep **psychological understanding**, and **awareness** of the endless capacity of the human mind to deceive itself.



The Deceitfulness of Sin

- While, it may seem, at first, that **Jeremiah's prophecy** has little to say to people today.
- Our optimistic, can-do, achievement-oriented culture is less inclined to regard **sin** as a severe condition than generations past.
- Nevertheless, **bad behavior** is out there for all to see, screaming from News Headlines, movies, Cable TV, and social media.
- Interestingly, **most people** are inclined to think
 - **others** commit more sins than they do and
 - should be **punished** for it.

Self-Deception

- According to the **Bible**, we live in a world full of lies, and deceit comes from many sources.
 - There are **lying spirits** who lead astray (1 Timothy 4:1);
 - there are "**evildoers and impostors**" looking for people who are easily tricked and fooled (2 Timothy 3:13); and,
 - perhaps most **insidious**, we have ourselves to deal with.
- In fact, **Self-deception** is probably the most common form of deception in our fallen world.

Self-Deception

- Our own **hearts** are deceitful—so much so that we easily fool ourselves (Jeremiah 17:9).
- Isaiah 44:20 speaks of an **idolater** who is misled by his own “**deluded heart**.”
- The prophet **Obadiah** identifies arrogance as one of the roots of **self-deception**: “*The **pride** of your heart has deceived you*” (Obadiah 1:3).
- **Human pride** always blinds us to the truth.
- It **promises** honor, but it **delivers** disgrace: As the Bible says, “***Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.***” (Proverbs 16:18).

Self-Deception

- **Self-deception** is also very common among **religious people** and people dedicated to learning Scripture.
- But Scripture was not given merely to produce **theologians**; it was given “*so that the servant of God may be thoroughly **equipped for every good work***.” (2 Timothy 3:17).
- Holding the truth in **one's mind** is not necessarily a **character-changing** experience.
- James 1:23–24 clearly illustrates that merely **looking at oneself** in a mirror is not necessarily an **appearance-changing** experience.
- The **mirror** can tell us our hair is messy, but the tangles will remain unless we get out the **brush** and address the problem.

Self-Deception

- James goes on to contrast self-deceived, “**worthless**” religion with “**pure and faultless**” religion, giving a practical example of each.
- One type of **self-deception** is to believe that our words do not matter:
 - “*Those who consider themselves **religious** and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues **deceive themselves**, and their **religion is worthless**” (James 1:26).*
- Another form of deception is to replace function and purpose with a form, ritual, or ceremonial righteousness:
 - “***Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world***” (verse 27).

Self-Deception

- **Samson**, as strong as he was, fell through **self-deception** . . .
 - He trusted the love of **Gentile women**, then tragically disclosed the **secret** of his strength to **Delilah**, who betrayed him to his enemies.
- The giant **Goliath** is another example of **self-deception** . . .
 - He strutted and boasted and flung insults at Israel, yet his **great size** and **physical strength** was no match for a man after God's own heart.
- **Self-deception** allowed the man in Jesus' parable of the “**Rich Fool**,” . . .
 - To believe his **great wealth** was sufficient enough where he could take **life easy, eat, drink** and be **merry**.
 - But this was **wishful thinking**, for he would die that very night.

Church-Deception

Revelation 3:1–3

- To the **Church of Sardis**, Jesus said,
 - I know your **deeds**; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.
 - **Wake up!**
 - **Strengthen** what remains and is about to die, for I have **not found your deeds complete** in the sight of my God.
 - **Remember**, therefore, what you have received and heard;
 - **obey it**, and repent.
 - But if you do not wake up, I will come like a **thief**, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

Church-Deception

Revelation 3:14–22

- The **Church of Laodicea** also was the victim of **self-deception** concerning their spiritual condition.
 - They **assumed** they were an influential church since they were materially rich.
 - However, they were wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.
 - Why? Because the **ministry** they offered was neither **hot** (therapeutic) nor **cold** (refreshing). Instead, it was lukewarm.
- Nevertheless, according to church history, **Laodicea** must have harkened to the words of Jesus as they, for several centuries, were one of the most vital churches in Asia.
- In other words, they were **overcomers**.

How to Avoid Self-Deception?

- According to “**Got Questions Ministries**,”
 - We must be like the **one** who looks intently in the perfect law that gives freedom, [and]
 - continues in **it**
 - not **forgetting** what they have heard
 - but **doing it**.
 - For if they do, **they** will be blessed in what they do. (James 1:25)

How to Avoid Self-Deception?

- Remembering the Word, doing the Word, continuing in the Word—this is what **changes character** and counters self-delusion because as we abide in the Truth, we develop by the Spirit—the **mind of Christ**.
- In other words, when we **imitate Christ**—offering our bodies as living sacrifices, it **transforms** our thinking and our ability to know and understand the truth and enables us to keep our relationship with the Lord where it should be.
- While it is true that **people** who lack **spiritual discernment** are sitting ducks for **false** apostles, prophets, and teachers, they are more susceptible to **fall** to the deceitfulness of their own unspiritual thoughts.

Balm in Gilead

- So, **Jeremiah** regards the corruption of his people — their hopelessness, their lack of a future — and he **cries out**:
- *Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the **wound of my people**?* (Jeremiah 8:22 NIV)
- While there is **no medicine** to cure a **cheating heart**, we can nevertheless put ourselves in a **position** to be transformed by grace.
- However, it is not through mysticism; it is not by following rabbinical Judaism; it is by **imitating Jesus**, which produces in us the **mind of Christ** so that **grace** may abound.

Spiritual Balm in Gilead

- For the **grace of God** that brings salvation has appeared to all men. **It teaches** us to say **“No”** to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to **live** self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age, . . . (Titus 2:11–12)
- God’s grace **teaches** us how to live out the truth so that our **lies** will no longer deceive us.
- *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.* (James 1:22)
- And as we do, the **spiritual balm of Gilead** will heal our **cheating hearts**.
- **Spiritual enlightenment** and the **knowledge of God** come from **imitating Christ** and following His word. It will keep us safe from all self-deception and a whole lot more.

In Summary

- The **biggest enemy** we will ever face is ourselves—especially if we are walking in the ways of the world.
- To combat this problem is to develop the **“mind of Christ.”**
- We gain this when we follow the **“royal law”** of Christ and be **imitators** of God—*offering our bodies as “**living sacrifices**.”* [See Romans 12:1-2]
- Then our **minds** will be transformed, and we **“spiritually speaking”** will come to know God’s good, pleasing, and perfect will. [See Romans 12:1-2]
- 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** (including ourselves) in their **deceitful scheming**. (Ephesians 4:14 NIV)