

# The deadly duo: The perils of double-mindedness

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HAWKINS, Texas—Have you ever had the experience of talking on the phone while someone in the room asks a question or the television competes for your attention?

Have you ever found yourself around a table in which two separate intriguing conversations were going on at the same time and competing for your attention, forcing you to flit from one to the other, desperately trying to process both of them?

Have you ever been deeply engrossed in a disturbing problem but wanted to carry on a conversation with a family member, only to realize that your responses were coming out wooden and superficial?

At a social gathering have you ever tuned someone out because you had a more-important item to discuss with someone else in the room?

Unfortunately, every one of us at one time or another has found himself in situations like these, and the results turn out identically. Because our attention must vacillate between two (or sometimes more) competing stimuli, we lose both pieces of information unless we deliberately and forcefully attend to the one and cancel out the other.

## **Experts explain**

Psychologist D.E. Broadbent has developed a model of attention in which he uses a Y-shaped tube large enough to receive two Ping-Pong balls. When the experimenter inserts two Ping-Pong balls at the same time, both will collide at the juncture of the "Y," and neither one will get through.

Motivational expert Paul Meyer, in his article "Time Organization," stresses: "Don't try to be ambidextrous, either physically or mentally. If you try to do one task while thinking about another, both tasks will suffer and you will do poorly on both."

## **James explains**

God Almighty has made it abundantly clear that double-mindedness, or split allegiances, places our spiritual growth and development (and ultimately our

salvation) in peril. James's entire epistle touches on the theme of double-mindedness, warning that if our prayers vacillate between doubt and faith we may end up with nothing, leading him to conclude that "a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways" (James 1:8).

Later in the same epistle James prescribes the antidote: the maintaining of a single fixed focus on God's will and purpose for us.

"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded" (James 4:8).

James suggests that the heart becomes impure and contaminated when it tries to maintain two competing and warring allegiances.

In a similar context Jesus warns us: "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Luke 16:13).

### Ground rule

The ground rule for this proscription against double-mindedness and the commandment for singleness of heart and purpose appear as the first commandment of all (labeled the "greatest"—Mark 12:30—by our elder brother Jesus Christ) following the *Shema* proclamation: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:5).

This singleness of purpose is emphasized several times throughout the book of Deuteronomy:

"And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deuteronomy 10:12).

"And it shall be that if you earnestly obey My commandments which I command you today, to love the LORD your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deuteronomy 11:13).

### Pure heart

In all these scriptures the common denominator seems to revolve around the heart. We know, of course, that the heart is not the organ in the circulatory system. It is, figuratively, the very core of the thinking, feeling, reasoning, and evaluating part of man, the very source of all affections.

We are instructed to safeguard and protect the heart as our chief priority: "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23).

Immediately after this admonition to safeguard and protect the heart, specific instructions are given to keep the heart pure and uncontaminated:

"Let your eyes look straight ahead, and your eyelids look right before you . . . Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil . . . Not looking to the right or left conveys the notion of metaphorical "spiritual blinders" guiding us away from harmful and destructive distractions, and keeping our focus singular" (Proverbs 4:25, 27).

When Jesus said "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8), He referred not only to clean, or chaste, thoughts, but to "undivided," "unmixed," "unadulterated," "genuine" and "sincere" thoughts.

Bible translators used the English word *pure* to take the place of the Greek word *katharos*, which conveys the meaning of "cleanse" or "purge," as in a refining process in which the impurities and alloys are drained off. The artistic expressions *catharsis* and *cathartic* (meaning the cleansing or purging of unhealthful emotions) carry this extended meaning.

The intent of *katharos* suggests the harboring of no guile or deceit, the trait Jesus recognized in children when He told the disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it" (Mark 10:15).

### **Two-faced god**

Defilement and deceit are not recognized instantaneously. The father of liars looked perfect on the outside.

"You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you" (Ezekiel 28:15).

We later learn that defilement came to Lucifer because of pride in his wisdom and brightness (verse 17).

The Romans in their mythology concocted the two-faced god Janus (from whom we get the name for January). Supposedly he had a dual nature that permitted him to both open and close things.

The connotation of duplicity, deceit and two-facedness was picked up by Shakespeare when he had one of his archvillains, the deceitful and two-faced Iago (in the tragedy *Othello*), invoke the name of Janus.

The real two-faced god is the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2), who in spite of his vile, iniquitous core was "transformed into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14) Double-mindedness represents Satan's character. Satan has convinced mankind that harboring a little recreational sin won't hurt.

### **Personality ethic**

Motivational author and lecturer Stephen Covey suggests that an insidious paradigm shift has occurred in our country that has displaced the character ethic (driven from a moral and ethical core) with the personality ethic (driven by outer-focus groups and opinion polls with no conscience or character emanating from within). Mr. Covey suggests that "we cannot have the fruits without the roots."

God Almighty demands that the whole process become rendered pure, from the motive and desires of the heart to the outward words and behaviors. Our behavior has to be completely pure (from motive to behavior) and not just the outer appearance, or we will lose our contact with our Creator.

### **Not two-tiered**

Some misguided people have tried to bring about a bifurcation between the two parts of the greatest law, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart" and you shall love "your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:30-31).

Some want to insist on a two-tiered relationship, despising our brother but professing our allegiance to God.

This double-dealing stance destroys our relationship with God. John warns us that "anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20). Jesus stresses the futility of attempting to bring a gift to the altar (or attempting to communicate with God) if we have not reconciled with our brother (Matthew 5:23).

Similarly, husbands who do not treat their wives with honor and respect cannot expect to have the lines of communication open to their Creator (1 Peter 3:7).

### **Not halfhearted**

Some people have found themselves in what they considered dead-end jobs performing thankless tasks for ungrateful people. One might find himself surrounded with fellow workers or clients who show no respect for God's laws or principles.

Do these circumstances give us license to carry out a lackluster performance on the job?

God Almighty demands of us that we approach even in the most mundane and irksome tasks wholeheartedly, as though we were rendering the service directly to Him. While we draw breath, God's Word commands us that "whatever your hand finds to do"—regardless how irksome, frustrating or thankless it may initially seem—"do it with all your might" (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

In the same context we are warned that "he who is slothful in his work is a brother to him who is a great destroyer" (Proverbs 18:9).

As a matter of fact, our Bible study and prayers are jeopardized or even rendered useless if we knowingly steal from our employer by giving him halfhearted or inferior service. And "one who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination" (Proverbs 28:9).

Singleness of mind and a wholehearted approach represent a 24-hour-a-day task, whether we're working, playing or relaxing.

## **Lure of the Net**

Singleness of focus and purity of heart become increasingly difficult in the fast-paced information age. The Internet with its millions of Web sites entices us into more and more exploration as well as more and more distraction.

The web, in this context, becomes an appropriate metaphor for entrapment. In the words of Goethe, "each blow effects a thousand ties." To feel torn and pulled in many directions at once describes the state of many hapless surfers on the Net. It takes a special kind of self-discipline to responsibly stay within reasonable boundaries of the search and not become distracted.

Maintaining singleness of focus and avoiding double-mindedness is not easy and certainly becomes a full-time struggle. But failing to attain a pure heart causes us to lose contact with our Creator.

## **Lesson of train whistle**

The other night I listened to a nearby train whistle, reflecting on the unpleasantness of its dissonant sound. The dissonance (caused by two competing tones out of sync) brought about a feeling of alarm and repulsion.

This same feeling of repulsion God feels toward our behavior when we are out of sync with His law when we vacillate between hot and cold (Revelation 3:16). Dissonance seeks resolution. God demands that we stop halting between two opinions. He would rather we be hot or cold.

To attempt to perform an act while balancing fear and doubt with faith leads to a state of dissonance, disharmony and double-mindedness. God cannot bless the double-minded man until he makes the choice to single-mindedly step out on faith.

Romans 14:23 reminds us that whatever is not of faith is sin. As a friend recently stated, the ingredient that makes the action pure is faith. Likewise the ingredient that makes the heart pure is faith. Only with an undivided pure heart can we expect to make contact with our Creator.