



Growing up, my father used to say to me, “You’ve got two choices: you can do this the easy way or the hard way.” Anybody else heard this phrase? In that moment we know that the “easy way” involves obedience and the “hard way” involves disobedience—usually some form of independence.

In essence, God is saying this to Solomon in 1 Kings 9. And as we read these verses, the right choice, the easy way, will be obvious. It’s mind boggling to think that Solomon would choose the hard way. That’s the exact intent of these verses. We’re supposed to read the choice God gives Solomon and think only a fool would choose the hard way. Then the Spirit of God will whisper into each of our hearts, “Then don’t be a fool like Solomon. Make the right choice today.”

When Solomon had finished building the temple of the Lord and the royal palace, and had achieved all he had desired to do, the Lord appeared to him a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon. The Lord said to him:

“I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.

“As for you, if you walk before me faithfully with integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did, and do all I command and observe my decrees and laws, I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father when I said, ‘You shall never fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel.’

“But if you or your descendants turn away from me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. Israel will then become a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples. This temple will become a heap of rubble. All who pass by will be appalled and will scoff and say, ‘Why has the Lord done such a thing to this land and to this temple?’ People will answer, ‘Because they have forsaken the Lord their God, who brought their ancestors out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshiping and serving them—that is why the Lord brought all this disaster on them.’”

At the end of twenty years, during which Solomon built these two buildings—the temple of the Lord and the royal palace—King Solomon gave twenty towns in Galilee to Hiram king of Tyre, because Hiram had supplied him with all the cedar and juniper and gold he wanted. But when Hiram went from Tyre to see the towns that Solomon had given him, he was not pleased with them. “What kind of towns are these you have given me, my brother?” he asked. And he called them the Land of Kabul, a name they have to this day. Here is the account of the forced labor King Solomon conscripted to build the Lord’s temple ... 23 ... chief officials in charge of Solomon’s projects – 550 officials supervising those who did the work (1 Kings 9:1–15).

After Pharaoh’s daughter had come up from the City of David to the palace Solomon had built for her, he constructed the terraces. Three times a year Solomon sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings on the altar he had built for the LORD, burning incense before the LORD along with them, and so fulfilled the temple obligations. King Solomon also built ships ... the ships sailed and brought back 420 talents of gold (verses 24–28).

Summarizing this chapter, we see that God gives Solomon a blueprint for divine blessing—the choice—and describes the continued activities of Solomon. Let’s look at specific portions of these verses in detail to uncover deeper meaning and applications for us today.

Solomon had finished building the temple and the royal palace. Solomon had achieved all he had desired to do. Let’s try to put ourselves into Solomon’s shoes. He’s in his 20th year as king. His role as King started with sputters. He recognized that he didn’t have the juice to do the job and asked God for the wisdom to rule well. Then he became the MVP of kings.

With the wisdom God granted him, he accomplished amazing, jaw-dropping building projects, negotiated peace for the nation, brought unparalleled prosperity for the nation, and earned respect from the leaders of other nations. He’s transformed from an uncertain boy to a confident king. Everything about Solomon drips of success and power and wealth, like a sprinkler-soaked child on a hot summer day. If Solomon wanted to end on a high note, this was his time to exit. He’s at the pinnacle of pinnacles.

Can you recall the feeling when you've completed a great accomplishment?

- » bought your first home
- » sold a company
- » retired
- » graduated with honors
- » completed an athletic competition
- » sent your kids off to college
- » got married

... the list could go on and on. We know that feeling. Success! Let's throw a party! The satisfaction of accomplishment. All the hard work; the long hours; the sacrifice. I think this is how Solomon is feeling.

Sometimes when a person's accomplished all they've set out to do, it creates a big problem, a dangerous situation, because we're not meant to live without a purpose. And if Solomon has accomplished it **all**, what's his purpose **now**?

The space between projects is the territory where our hearts are most prone to temptation. I think that Solomon is in a dangerous situation. While Solomon's projects are completed, God comes to him calling him to rediscover his eternal purpose.

Look at how gracious and good God is. He comes to Solomon at this moment of transition and vulnerability to remind him of a promise and deliver a warning.

The LORD appeared to him a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon (v. 2).

A Promise Filled with Purpose—If/Then

As for you, if you walk before me faithfully with integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did, and do all I command and observe my decrees and laws ... (v. 4).

While the major projects are completed, God is reminding Solomon of the true purpose of his life. His eternal purpose remains to walk faithfully with integrity of heart and uprightness, and do all God commands and observe his decrees and laws.

Notice that the faithfulness God is looking for is both heartfelt "integrity of the heart" and revealed with outward actions, "observe my decrees."

What is "Integrity of Heart"?

A heart fixed on one thing—a deep, internal commitment to do the right thing, regardless.

A heart that is true and pure. The contrast would be a divided heart. When we have a divided heart, we hedge our bets. We're committed to the Lord in part and just in case God doesn't come

through the way we want, we make sure we still get what we want.

Heart-felt devotion

"Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1).

It looks like heart-felt confession

"For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

It looks like the broken heart of King David, after he had an affair with Bathsheba. We see it in 2 Samuel 12 and Psalm 51.

The second instruction God gives Solomon in verse 4 is to **"Do all I command and observe my decrees and laws."** In essence, this is obedience to God in minute detail. Think of it this way: A heart of integrity reveals itself through thoughtful, thorough, obedient actions.

I fear that obedience has gotten such a bad rap in our culture today and sometimes this gets confusing for Christians. Think of it this way: Two weeks ago Kristy and Joe from our church got married. And because of Kristy's heart-felt love for Joe, she prepared in minute detail for Joe. Great attention was given to every detail. Of course, the dress, her hair, her shoes. She even spent two hours sitting completely still with her eyes closed, as she had extra eyelashes attached to her eyelids!

Did she do this because she was following a rule? No. She went through detailed preparation to make herself beautiful because she loves Joe. Her heart of heart-felt devotion revealed itself through thoughtful and thorough actions. And in the same way, Christians should give careful attention to our actions because they reveal our love for the Lord.

In verse 4, God is instructing Solomon that he can find renewed purpose in his life by aligning his heart to God and acting in obedience. This is the test for Solomon and for us. There's no specific assignment given; we love assignments; just give me a job to do. There's no job given to occupy Solomon's time, which means there's also no job to distract Solomon.

No, in this renewed purpose, to have a heart of integrity and act accordingly, God is calling Solomon back to the basics. God is calling Solomon back to a simple love affair with himself.

How does this resonate with you today? Are you in need of renewed purpose? Is your heart fixed singularly on God or is it divided? I believe the choice God offered Solomon is given to us today. The easy way—the right choice, the path filled with

blessing—starts with heart-felt confession. Maybe this is the right step for you today.

I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father when I said, 'You shall never fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel' (v. 5).

A Warning

If

"If you turn away from me and don't observe the commands and decrees ... If you go off and serve other gods and worship other gods" (v. 6).

Then

"I will cut off Israel, I will reject the temple I just filled with His Spirit. Israel will become a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples" (v. 7).

There's something insightful happening with the grammar here. The root of the word "byword" is seen earlier in 1 Kings. ***"And Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates River" (4:21). "He spoke 3000 proverbs and ..." (4:32).***

The root of "ruled" in 4:21, "proverb" in 4:32, and "byword" in 9:7 are the same. The author of 1 Kings is intentionally making a Hebrew play on words to deliver a pun-like message. While the proverbial wisdom of Solomon built the fame of Israel, his proverbial folly will be equally widely known.

God wants the same thing today he wanted in Solomon's day—people who would walk with integrity of heart and align their actions to God's laws. This is why we started this church in Redwood City. We are committed to leading with hearts of integrity and acting obediently. And in dependent humility to God, we expect that the good news of Jesus Christ will save people, just like it saved us. We expect to grow numerically and in spiritual maturity.

You probably know that Solomon choose the hard way, the disobedient way. That's the legacy Solomon left. Chapter 11 tells us that Solomon's foreign wives turned his heart after other gods and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord.

It's telling that verse 25 says, ***"Three times a year Solomon sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings on the altar he had built for the LORD, burning incense before the LORD along with them, and so fulfilled the temple obligations."***

Fulfilled the temple obligations? Does that sound like heart-filled devotion? That would be like saying, "Once a month Mark took Kathy on a date, and so fulfilled the marriage obligations." Seriously? We're meant to read this account and feel exacerbation! The right choice is obvious.

In chapter 8 Solomon saw the cloud of God fill the temple; he saw it with his own eyes! His house was next door to the temple. And three times a year he fulfilled his "temple obligations." Why wasn't he there daily or weekly or monthly, expressing heart-felt love? Oh, Solomon. He was so close to God's presence, yet so far.

How about you? Although familiar with God's Word and close to God's presence, is your heart close to God or far away? Do you have areas of small compromise in your life? Do you have hidden sins?

Today would be a good day to give pure devotion to Christ. Today would be a good day to give your heart wholly to the Lord.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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