

Dealing With Feelings

The subject of emotions opens up a "can of worms" for many Christians. They have learned to walk in victory over sickness and have claimed God's promises for financial blessing, but they live their daily lives on an emotional roller coaster!

Some are anxious over many things and walk in bitterness from past hurts. For others, controlling jealousy, rage, and anger is a never-ending struggle. To all of them, freedom from these negative feelings would be as welcome as deliverance from cancer!

In desperation, some believers have sought the counsel of a secular psychiatrist or psychologist. Others have turned to the church and sadly received the same counsel they would have received from a secular psychiatrist or psychologist.

The philosophy of the world is to "cope" with emotions, because it is believed you cannot change the person you are. The person who seeks secular counseling is told, "You must learn to accept yourself — the good with the bad. The reason you are the way you are is because of your childhood environment, such as having been abused by your father, mother, uncle, or friends."

Unfortunately, this type of counsel has crept into the church. When the delivering power of God is mentioned, instead of grabbing hold of God's Word and believing that the power of His Holy Spirit will set them free, people begin to recall their past abuses.

This becomes a convenient excuse not to trust God's power and promises. Although I believe your background can *contribute* to your emotional makeup, it does not *determine* it.

Furthermore, many well-meaning ministers have put down the emotions as something evil. They have taught Christians to be emotionless and numb to any feelings. They believe that by suppressing and ignoring your emotions, you will not have to confront them at all.

Perhaps you have come from a church background which had no emotion in

worship and even forbade an occasional "amen" to the sermon. You were supposed to serve God, but there was to be no enjoyment or emotional response attached to it.

Moreover all these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee...

Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things.

Deuteronomy 28:45,47

Here, God was just as angry with this group of Israelites for not serving Him with gladness as He was with those who never served Him. He mentions curses which will come upon them which are just as severe as the curses which would come upon them for not serving Him at all. God demands that all of us serve Him with joyfulness and gladness of heart!

Apparently, it is as much a matter of choice to serve God with gladness as it is to serve Him in the first place. Therefore, emotions must be subject to our will. In the same way we choose to be saved, we choose to serve God cheerfully.

Created in God's Image

Our inward man, the spirit man, is created in God's image (Genesis 1:27). The inward man consists of two parts: spirit and soul. These are both eternal. Since we possess both and are created in God's image, God must also have a soul.

Emotions are part of the soul and thus are eternal. We will possess a sense of humor, experience joy and laughter, and worship God with gladness of heart throughout eternity.

Since we are created in God's image, God must also have emotions. This is certainly true in the Scriptures. He is a God *of joy* (Deuteronomy 28:63, 50:9), *jealousy* (Exodus 20:5; 34:14), *laughter* (Psalm 2:4), *grief* (Hebrews 3:17), and *anger* (Numbers 11:1:12:9).

Not only does man possess emotions, but so do angels (Luke 15:10). Anyone who

has been around animals, especially pets, knows that animals also have emotions. So we can see that this attribute of God is found everywhere around us.

What Are Emotions?

First of all, emotions are the spice of life! They do not add substance to life, but they flavor it with excitement and enjoyment. And, just like spices, they do not sustain life, but add flavor to life's experiences.

For example, a football player may dance for joy in the end zone after he makes a touchdown. His joyful expression does not add any more points to the scoreboard, but it does add enjoyment to the game.

Emotions are also the appreciators of life. We respond to the national anthem with a tear, our child taking his first step with a shout, and many forms of entertainment with a laugh. We respond emotionally to situations in life, but the substance of life is in the situation, not in the emotional response.

This is where many Christians get off track. The wonderful emotions resulting from experiences with the Holy Spirit become so important to them that they leave the substance of the Word of God to seek the experiences. This is like trying to live on spices without food! You will have flavor, but no nutrition.

Many Christians today leave the teaching of the Word because they feel it is boring, and they search for emotional services. Although the Holy Spirit does send times of laughter and spiritual refreshing, they are never designed to take the place of the Word of God.

Some Christians are also looking for an emotional experience to take the place of the commitment to God's Word. Instead of searching out the promises of God and applying them to their situations, they are looking for a service of groaning, crying, or laughing to solve their problems.

If deliverance is not accomplished in one service, they follow the minister from church to church and city to city looking for their answer.

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

The answer has never changed. Just like food is still necessary to sustain natural life and guard us from disease, *the Word of God is our spiritual "bread" to sustain spiritual life and give us strength to overcome temptation to sin.*

It is daily Bible study and meditation as well as the teaching of Scriptures from the pulpit which enable us to grow up and become more and more like Jesus — and that includes our emotions.

Are We To Be Victims of Wicked Emotions?

Although there are emotions God wants us to enjoy, there are also those He wants us to control. Joyfulness of heart and gladness are to be invited into our lives, but jealousy, bitterness, and fear are not a part of the Spirit-filled life.

Are we, like psychologists say today, to “cope” with all negative emotions? Are these “bad” emotions really a part of our unchangeable personality, which we are supposed to accept? Our answer cannot rest with men, but with God and His Word.

Jesus told His disciples, "Let not your heart be troubled" (John 14:1,27), and "Fear not" (Matthew 10:28: Luke 5:10). Thus, fear must involve a *choice*, or Jesus would not have commanded us not to fear.

Furthermore, if fear is a choice, emotions do not have power over us: we have control over them. We not only have the choice to reject the evil emotions but the choice to accept the good ones! We can truly put on "the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" (Isaiah 61:3).

The Power of Choice

But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communications out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that

ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is created him.

Colossians 3:8-10

If the temptation to lie came to you, would you let it control you? If you had a sudden urge to curse God, would you let it come out of your mouth? The answer to both questions should be no. These are sins, and we would not want to grieve the Holy Spirit by doing either. We have the *choice* not to sin, and when we choose not to sin, the power of the Holy Spirit will back us up.

Anger, wrath, and malice (bitterness) are included in the same list of sins. Apparently, wrong emotions are as much a sin as lying and blasphemy toward God!

We have the same authority over emotional sins as we have over sins of the tongue and actual deeds. We can *choose* our emotions. Using the illustration of getting dressed and undressed, Paul tells us what we are to "put off" and "put on."

We are to "put off" anger and wrath like dirty clothing. (See Colossians 3:8.) We are to "put on" the knowledge of the Word of God and tender mercies like clean clothing. (See Colossians 3:10-12.)

God tells us that sins of emotions have no more power over us than an old set of clothes. (See also Ephesians 4:22-52.) With the Holy Spirit and the Word of God controlling us, we are impossible to defeat.

Titus tells us that a bishop is to be "not soon angry" (Titus 1:7). James tells us that we are to be "slow to wrath" (James 1:19). Paul told Timothy that believers should lift up holy hands "without wrath and doubting" (I Timothy 2:8). David tells us to "cease from anger" (Psalm 37:8).

We, not our emotions, are in the driver's seat. We are the master, and they are our slaves.

Success Is a Choice Away

Here are a few points for you to consider:

1. How anger is handled separates the wise from the foolish (Proverbs 12:16: 14:29).
2. Success comes quickly when we handle anger (Proverbs 15:1,18: 16:32: 19:11).
3. Wicked emotions left unchecked will consume you like a flood (Proverbs 27:4).

Now is the time to choose! How long will you be controlled by your flesh? The longer you wait, the more difficult the deliverance. You cannot control your emotions in your own strength, but by the power of God and His Word you can walk free today.

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