

Are Your Feelings Fighting Your Faith?

Stirring Up the Gift of God

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Today there is a denial of security but a desire for secure feelings; there is a denial for religious values, but a desire for religious feelings. In fact, to most people, feelings are everything. There is a pandemic of mental blindness to truth in thousands of schools and in millions of homes. The question of truth is not even asked, instead people are asking, "How does it make you feel?"

The term feeling is defined by *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* as: "any state or condition of emotion; the exercise of the capacity for emotion; any mental state whatever; as a right or wrong feeling in the heart; angry or kindly feelings; a feeling of pride or of humility." So feelings can be right or wrong; good or bad at least from the strictest definition of it.

Many of you remember the decades of the 60s and 70s lived by the banner: "If it feels good; do it!" That may well have been the beginning of this "feel good" era and this feel-good society today. Sadly this society continues to live by that banner. However is feeling good always a good thing? Or is feeling bad always a bad thing? Where is the proper place for feelings in Christianity?

On January 26, 2011 there was an article by Paul Proctor on the News with Views website entitled: "Today's Christianity: nothing more than feelings." In his article he points out how feelings have become a replacement for faith. Mr. Proctor's article is quite enlightening regarding the attitude of professing Christians and how they wear their religion on their shirt sleeves.

He writes: "If you do a search of the less contemporary translations of scripture the word "feelings" is virtually non-existent. The one place it does appear, in the NKJV, is in Proverbs 29:11, which says: 'A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise man holds them back.'"

There it is cited as more of a superficial or even negative attribute than a positive one, yet as we watch and listen to many from today's churches, be they leaders or laymen, not only do we see a clear fixation on feelings, both physical and emotional, we notice that those feelings have by and large become a replacement of faith.

In fact if you substitute the word "feelings" wherever you see the word "faith" in the older

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Bible versions, it will become clear to you what motivates and guides the average Christian today. The point being, that most of us are not following the living word of God by faith, we are simply following our feelings and calling it faith.

When we consider the sobering words of God recorded by the prophet Jeremiah, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked," it should cause us to take a discerning look at what moves us. If our worship and service toward Jesus Christ is measured by mood, then it may be that our Christianity is more theatrical than theological. Beware of the person who puts on a spectacle.

Today many professing Christians come to church to hopefully experience a good laugh or cry with friends aided by mood-altering music, motivational speakers, movie clips, drama, and sugary snacks. Is this not what many modern-day preachers, teachers, pastors, and worship leaders attempt to facilitate among their congregants through emotional presentations and elaborate productions, strong feelings that generate laughter, cheers, and applause?

And if you have not noticed, leading the charge are people who are very passionate. Passion is a buzz word that is commonly used among contemporary professing Christians to give assorted ministries, however abstract or bizarre, a perceived legitimacy. If a Christian is passionate about something it is automatically assumed and accepted by the brethren to be God-ordained in spite of what the Bible teaches.

As flesh we are naturally drawn to whomever or whatever gratifies us, but that does not mean that all people, places, and things that make us feel good are good for us. Feelings are easily manipulated, especially in group settings where consensus is king and those feelings can become obstacles in our obedience to Christ when we make them our primary motivation and navigation through life.

We know that drugs, alcohol, food, entertainment, recreation, and career can all be addictive and destructive when misused and abused. Add wealth, fame, power, and influence to the mix, where pride becomes an accelerant and you have an explosive combination. What most of us, even Christians, do not realize though is that at the heart of it all is the subtle setting aside of God's Word in order to feel good. Some of us do it for results and others for relationships.

Mr. Proctor nailed it and put his finger on precisely what is one of the most damaging problems in Christianity today. Human feelings actually fight against, and more often than not, compete with, true faith.

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Eve was deceived by the serpent's seductive words and partook of the forbidden fruit, to get results and to thus feel good about herself. Adam accommodated her because of their relationship in order to sustain the connection and good feelings between them. She chose results; he chose relationship. Both of them chose to feel good at God's expense and it backfired.

Now this is typical of the professing Christian churches today. The purpose of coming before God to worship Him in spirit and in truth, is not just to feel good about oneself, but rather to hear, obey, and proclaim the Word of God, regardless of how it makes anyone feel.

When we ignore His Words to spare our own feelings, we resist the wisdom from above received through God's Holy Spirit. And when we withhold the Word from others to spare their feelings, we stifle our witness and demonstrate to everyone that we are more interested in gratifying "goats," seducing "sheep," and running rampant with the herd, than submitting to the Shepherd.

This is one of the reasons why the church appears to be in such decline, because they are going out of their way and sparing no expense to accommodate people and their passions instead of God and His Word. Can they really expect God to bless and multiply that? The apostle Paul instructed the young pastor Timothy on how and what he should be preaching to members of God's church. We find that here in II Timothy 4.

II Timothy 4:1-4 I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires [or feelings], because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. [Things that make them feel good.]

The possibility of allowing our feelings to fight our faithfulness should deeply concern us since it is so widespread throughout mainstream Christianity and has affected the church of God as well.

Now the person who allows himself to be driven by his own feelings is not of a sound mind and is flat-out unstable. But the question is, are all feelings wrong? Is there a right place in our submission to God for emotion? What does the apostle Paul tell Timothy to

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do that we too can apply in our own lives? Go back a few pages to II Timothy 1.

II Timothy 1:6-7 Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

A person driven by his feelings cannot possibly have a sound mind. Our primary interest in this statement is this exhortation which Paul addresses here to the young pastor Timothy, that he should stir up the gift of God that is in him.

If this is what we are to do, then why do some Christians seem so miserable? Do they suffer from spiritual depression? How can we diagnose and treat the case of the so-called “miserable Christian”? One of the problems is that they are oftentimes driven by feelings. It should be impossible, but there is such a thing as a “miserable Christian” and it is necessary to deal with this condition.

The Scriptures state clearly, by their teaching, that it is possible for a Christian to be depressed. And not that they justify this, but they do recognize the fact and it is the duty of anyone who is concerned about the nurture and care of the mind to understand such cases and to apply to them the remedy that God has provided so freely in the words of Scripture.

We are confronted by our very subtle and powerful adversary, who knows us so much better than we know ourselves sometimes, and his one great objective is to detract from the glory of God. Now there is no more ineffective way in which he can do that than to make Christians depressed and concerned about their own feelings. Whether we like it or not the fact is that the world still judges God and Jesus Christ by what it sees in those of us who are Christians.

We make certain claims. The very designation of Christian, which we apply to ourselves, is a claim and a challenge and the world is entitled to look at us on those grounds. So the world says, “You’re making a great claim.” And then they look at us and look at the way many of us live, then they say, “Is that really what Christianity is? What’s so great about it?”

In addition to that, Satan gets us to concentrate on the past, some sin we have committed, the time we have wasted and we become miserable in the present because we are worried about the past. Then Satan changes his tactics and tries to depress us in the present by filling us with fears and forebodings about the future, all the while

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trying to get our feelings to be the center of our motivation.

There is also a theme that is very closely associated with fears and apprehensions with respect to the future and this theme is indicated in II Timothy 1. It concerns the whole problem with feelings; feelings in the Christian life.

II Timothy 1:6 Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you.

That is partly about emotions and feelings. Frequently Christians are faced with this real problem of feelings as the cause of spiritual depression and unhappiness in our lives. Where do they come in and what should they be? Of course it affects many people and it is very natural, because after all we all have a desire to be happy. It is even written in our Bill of Rights, to guarantee our pursuit of happiness.

Though there is something in human nature that no one wants to be miserable, yet there are those who seem to enjoy being miserable and those who seem to find their happiness in being unhappy. These are the complainers who complain about everything constantly and consistently.

Feelings, emotions, and sensitivities are obviously of very vital importance and we have been made in such a way that these things play a dominant part in our make up. One of the greatest problems in our life in this world, not only for Christians, but for all people, is the right handling of our feelings and emotions.

We see very vividly the havoc that is caused by the tragedy, the misery, and the sorrow that is found in the world simply because people do not know how to handle their own feelings. We call them emotional wrecks.

Man is constituted in such a way that feelings are in this very prominent position and the thing which the process of spiritual renewal, that is sanctification, does for us is to put the mind, emotions, and the will in their right positions. So no one without God's Holy Spirit can have emotions in exactly the right balance and positions.

There is a curious relationship between this particular problem of feelings and that other problem of being nervous and frightened of the future that we see building constantly as the news media tries to scare us with regards to wars and rumors of wars, plagues, etc. These things tend to go together, so it is not surprising that the two things are found in II Timothy.

It seems that Timothy was a naturally nervous person but it appears that he was also given at times to depression. These two things are often found in the same kind of person. So there are certain people who are more prone to depression, in a natural sense, than others.

Now let me emphasize an important principle: although we are being converted and sanctified, our fundamental personality is not changed. The result is that the person who is more given to depression than another person before conversion, will still have to fight it after conversion.

We all have certain common problems in our lives but we all have special individual problems as well. We all vary in our gifts, we do not all have the same talents and the same goes for our difficulties—they are all different. Solomon writes:

Proverbs 14:10 The heart knows its own bitterness, and a stranger does not share its joy.

In other words, the heart knows its own sorrow and everyone has his own burden to carry. We all have something which is uniquely difficult for us and it is generally something associated with our temperament or natural makeup.

So the person who is naturally given to self examination, ill health, and depression will still have to bear that in mind in his efforts to be a Christian.

The danger for such a person will be in becoming depressed, particularly in connection with his feelings. This is often the result of feelings that we have pushed deep into our subconscious mind and frequently we do not even know that they are there.

Very often our feelings are driven by the human need to feel in control. Every last one of us wants to have control of his own life. That is one of the battles we fight as Christians.

In the book, *Feelings Buried Above Never Die* by Carol K. Truman, who is a remedial counselor and therapist. Miss Truman writes in chapter four of her book: "How Feelings Impact Our Lives," how we all want to be in control which effects our feelings. She writes:

The inability to hang onto that feeling of being in control or of being comfortable and peaceful is frustrating. In reality it is not a place of comfort or peace at all. Talk about a war going on inside! Regardless of how diligent

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we strive to find and experience our comfort and peace, we are unknowingly driven to create disorder and dysfunction in our lives. We do this by having to be right about something which the mind perceives incorrectly.

For some of us it seems, the more we strive the more comfort and peace eludes us, and for some of us the more they strive the more chaos we experience. Others of us never seem to achieve results on an ongoing basis. We are seeking in various areas in our lives, therefore we may experience more and more frustration which could eventually lead to our giving up.

I think we have all experienced that type of thing in life before, when we just feel like giving up when something just will not go our way. Continuing on with the quote here:

When we reach this point we may presume that we have no control over our lives. Complete helplessness or hopelessness could be the feeling we experience which in turn could lead to the feeling of “what’s the use” and then we throw in the towel and fold up.

Let us look at some of the characteristic qualities we as human beings create in our lives as we are striving to return to our place of comfort and peace. Have you ever known anyone who seems to purposefully, subconsciously of course, and continually experience chaos in their relationships with other people? They are unable to keep friends for long periods of time constantly looking for new friends who will accept them, relate to them, identify with them, and be loyal to them.

Perhaps you have known someone who is always manipulating or trying to control others. Those who try to control characteristically need to be right. If they are right then they feel they are in control. They will not let down their veneer or facade for fear someone may see that they might not have it all together.

If you ask them how things are going, they will always tell you that everything is great, but in reality they may be hurting deeply or feeling inadequate or insecure because of some of their unresolved feelings. They never want you to see or perceive them as lacking in any area in their life. That would be too much for them.

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People who feel inferior are often the ones who allow others to control them, to use them as a doormat time after time. Their motto is to keep peace at all costs and it usually costs them their inner peace or their peace of mind.

Then there are other people who seem to take advantage of family, friends, and associates. They use everyone to their advantage with no regard to anyone else's welfare. They are forever insensitive to what is going on outside themselves.

Have you ever know a person who always had to have things done their way? Sometimes they could be considered perfectionists and sometimes they may not. This is someone who never allows anyone else to be in charge, whether it has to do with something around the house, around the office, at a party, or at an outing. And when they insist on doing everything their way, not letting anyone else help, they often act like martyrs seeming to want to make others feel guilty because of all the work that they are doing. When the event is over and they are exhausted, they characteristically gasp, moan, and sigh, "I'm alright. Don't pay any attention to me.

Then there are the rescuers and the pleasers. These are the people who feel they must make everything right or solve everyone's problems, so they keep their antenna poised always looking for people to help. They seemingly feel responsible for every person's ills and want to have the solutions for everyone else, but are usually unable to see the root of their own problems. Generally the rescuer or pleaser is suffering from deep-seated feelings of rejection which they do not realize.

Some people maybe unable to adequately communicate and express their feelings to their loved ones, or anyone else. Often this type of person, because of an inability to communicate, experiences a total lack of coping skills and eventually withdrawals from society, hibernating in their own little world.

Then there are those at the other end of the spectrum who seem to talk just to hear themselves talk. What they have to say is usually irrelevant or mindless chatter. They like to be included in what is going on around them but lack the confidence or social skills to be able to be part of the group, so they always seem to be on the outside looking in, just hoping what they have to say will be accepted or appreciated and help them to be a part of the group.

Miss Truman is trying to show how many different problems and how many different temperaments are effected by these different feelings. Continuing on with this lengthy quote here:

Then there are those who have a difficult time getting ahead financially in this life. No matter how conscientious they are, it is a real challenge for them to obtain permanent employment. They may go from job to job without much success at all, or they may have a good job, but never seem to have enough money to cover their financial obligations. They are never able to buy or afford a decent car, rarely buy new clothes. They seem forever deprived, which seems to be their plight in life, yet other people with a similar set of circumstances make it fine on a comparable income. What makes the difference?

You may have know someone who seems to have a combination of the above examples working against them much of the time. What is their story? Some people have one sort of tragedy after another. Is it fate in life or is it something that they sadly, but unconsciously, create?

Applying the law of cause and effect, we begin to understand the reason for all kinds of conditions in people's lives. Any or several of the above-described characteristics, as well as those not mentioned, are indicators of being out of harmony with natural laws.

For if we experience pain or discomfort long enough we usually start looking for answers, answers that will lead us back to real comfort and peace. What we do not realize is that our ultimate unconscious goal is to come to understand who we really are. How else would we have been driven to know the truth? Is it not by desiring to understand why life is not working for us that we begin searching for answers? What else would motivate us to start looking for the causes of our effects or what makes us tick?

So take a real good look at what is going on inside. If you identify any of these characteristics, what are your thoughts, what are your feelings? If the negative conditions in your life are ongoing and the patterns are repeated over and over again, this is screaming at you that you are definitely out of harmony with natural law, God's laws, the laws of the universe, and it is time to wake up. Locate the cause of the effects.

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Now one of the more obvious indicators that your feelings and thoughts are inharmonious or out of sync with natural laws is when health problems appear. Pain of any kind lets you know that you are out of tune with natural laws. God is trying to communicate to you through your body, and pain is one sure way He gets your attention.

It is most unfortunate however that very often a person does not listen or will not listen to this communication. Consequently the message doesn't get through. Diseases is, at the very least, a spiritual opportunity, if not a sign of spiritual crisis or change.

Could disease be a sign of wrong action in life? Disease always requires a spiritual reexamination of our lives, particularly if the disease is severe. Hence in order to understand and resolve any disease, self examination is the first step and fundamental base in accomplishing this.

I would like to add that we bring God into it, praying and asking Him to show us in our self-examination what we should be doing.

I went through this long quote because she had such a wonderful, descriptive way of expressing those different types of problems with feelings in people.

Probably the most profitable thing to do at this point is to look at the subject of feelings and emotions in a general way. So at this time let me make some general statements about feelings and their place in our Christian lives.

Where do feelings come in? What is their place in our lives? First and foremost, in the life of a Christian, feelings must be involved. We see that very thing in what Paul said to the Christians in Rome.

Romans 6:17 But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.

So we are to obey from the heart. Paul praises it here and it almost seems opposite from what we have been talking about here. But the whole emphasis here is that the gospel of Jesus Christ is so great and glorious that it effects the whole person, from the core of a person's emotions not just merely a part of the person.

What I want to emphasize here is that our feelings as well as our minds and our will should be actively involved. If you and I have never been moved by our feelings, then we should examine the foundations again. How heightened should your feelings be to be actively involved?

We cannot read through the Bible, through the Psalms and the New Testament especially, without seeing at a glance that rejoicing in our God, our calling and election, is meant to be an essential part of our way of life. One of the most remarkable things conversion does is to take us out of the horrible pit of despair and establish our feet upon a rock and move us forward.

Feelings are meant to be involved and when the gospel comes to us it involves the whole person. It moves your mind, your heart, and your will, as you see its glorious truths.

The second principle we must not to forget is that we cannot create feelings. We cannot command them at will, we cannot generate feelings within yourself. You can make yourself weep and bring tears, but that does not necessarily mean that they are true feelings. There is a false sentimentality very different from true emotion. That is something beyond our control, we cannot create it.

The more you try to produce feelings within yourself, the more you are increasing your own misery. Looked at mentally, it is one of the most remarkable things about man, that in this respect, he is not master of himself. Man cannot produce or generate feelings, he cannot bring them into being and to attempt to do so exacerbates the problem because it comes across as being insincere.

That leads us to the next principle which is, there is nothing that is quite as variable about us as our feelings. They flow from one end to the other and spike from top to bottom and that is because they are dependent on so many factors. There are so many things that influence our feelings, not only temperament, but physical conditions also.

The ancient people used to believe that feelings were located in different organs of the body, and in a sense they were right. The phlegm, for instance, from which they spoke, was the melancholy mood. You will recognize this term I think: "all seems yellow to the jaundiced eye." There is an element of truth here, because physical conditions effect us profoundly.

Again let us notice that the fact that you have become a Christian does not mean that you immediately lose all these constitutional tendencies. They are still there and

therefore with all these factors our moods tend to vary.

We amaze ourselves that waking up in the morning we find ourselves in a mood or condition quite different from the day before and nothing you know of can account for it.

Yesterday you may have been perfectly happy and went to sleep anticipating another wonderful day, but you find yourself waking up in the morning in distress and in a wrong mood. That is the essential problem. In other words, our feelings are variable and we must be careful not to be controlled by them, because if they are variable then that makes us unstable.

The same is true of our temperament, whatever it may be. We are all given our temperament by God and He has made no two of us the same and we must remain different. We are unique in that sense. Yes, we have our temperament, but there is nothing that is as wrong and unchristian as to allow our temperament to rule us.

Now there are some people who are proud of doing that, and we all know of people who say "I always speak my mind; I always say what I think, and I do things my way." Think of the damage done by such people as they trample, self-righteously, over the susceptibilities of the other people.

What if everyone did that and shrugged it off by saying, "I'm just that sort of person." The answer to them is that they should not be. That does not mean that they can change their temperament, but it does mean that they should control it. In other words, temperament is a gift from God but as the result of sin, temperament is to be kept in its place. It is a wonderful gift but it is to be controlled.

It is exactly the same with feelings because our feelings are always seeking to control us and unless we realize this they will undoubtedly continue to, and that is what we mean when we talk about moods and moodiness.

The moods seem to descend upon us out of nowhere but the danger is when we allow it to control and grip us. We wake up in a bad mood in the morning and the tendency is to go on like that throughout the day and remain like that until something happens to put us right again. There is an example in the Old Testament of a bad mood in the example of Saul, king of Israel.

I Samuel 16:23 And so it was, whenever the spirit from God was upon Saul, that David would take a harp and play it with his hand. Then Saul would become refreshed and well, and the distressing spirit would depart from him.

So sometimes King Saul allowed outside influences to control his emotions to the point where he was incapacitated or depressed. Sometimes a negative change in a person's mood can be the result of a demonic influence, human jealousy, or feelings of guilt, or an adverse physiological reaction to something.

The danger is when we submit ourselves to our feelings and allow them to dictate to us, to govern, to master us, and to completely control our lives. So obviously we must be on guard with regard to our feelings and emotions at all times.

In addition I would like to point out the danger of thinking that we are not Christians at all because we have not had some particular feeling or experience. This, from a spiritual standpoint, is one of the more common manifestations of this condition.

I am referring to situations where you hear others talking about how zealous they are about their own diligence in prayer and Bible study stating what an exhilarating feeling it gives them. You might say that you get joy from it but I have never had that feeling of ecstasy and you begin to wonder if you are even a Christian at all.

I am not trying to say anything negative about that person who is excited about it, but I am just saying that we do not all react the same way because our temperaments are different.

We must remember that feelings must be involved in true Christianity, but the mere fact that we have not had certain ecstatic feelings does not mean that we are not Christian. Temperaments are different, some people tend to be extravert thrilled and others are introverted. Paul writes:

Ephesians 4:19 who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

Ephesians 4:19 (ESV) They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

The Greek word from which callous is translated is *apalgeo*, which means: to become insensitive to pain, callous, and so indifferent to truth, honor, or shame. For example, those who have become apathetic to truth.

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The person whose superficial excitement over God's truth is not genuine is in reality only concerned about their feelings and emotions being stimulated, not about the actual truth of God's Word. Their feelings are sensual while their hardhearted mind is callous to any real spiritual joy. When a person feels alone and is merely occupied with brooding upon oneself, he becomes totally self-centered even to the point of narcissism. Today narcissism runs rampant in social media arena.

Now this is in contrast to Hebrews 4:15, which tells us that we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses. The Greek word from which sympathize is translated is *sumpatheo*, which means: to feel for, to have compassion on. Christ's feeling is a genuine emotion.

Feelings are essential, but if we advance certain feelings as being essential, then we may as well become victims of Satan's influence and spend our whole life unhappy and miserable.

What do the Scriptures tell us about how we are to deal with this problem of feelings? Let us look at some specific principles here. The first principle is a practical one. If you are at all depressed at this moment, then you should make certain that there is no obvious cause for the absence of joyous feelings. For instance, if you are guilty of sin you are going to be miserable.

Proverbs 13:15 Good understanding gains favor, but the way of the unfaithful is hard.

If you break God's law and violate His rules, it will not be joyous. If you think that you can be a Christian and exert your own will and follow your own likes and dislikes, your Christian life is going to be a miserable one. Any happiness you have will be short lived.

Look at the world and the happiness they think they get. It is a temporary buzz of happiness. If you are holding onto something that is bothering your conscience or holding on to some favored sin, because it is not of faith, you will not be joyful. The apostle Paul tells us that whatever is not from faith is from sin.

I John 1:9-10 says that there is only one thing you can do and that is to admit it, acknowledge; repent of it, and go to God immediately and confess your sin and ask for His help to overcome it.

I John 1:9-10 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our

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sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

If your unconfessed sin seems to make you happy, I would be wasting my time and yours by going on with the list of other causes of the problems with feelings. So many people are trapped at this point. You cannot hope to solve this problem while we are embracing some sin.

By taking that for granted and assuming that it is not the case, the next thing is to avoid the mistake of over-concentrating on your feelings. Avoid dwelling on them and above all avoid the terrible error of making them central to your life. This is one of the causes of spiritual stumbling.

Feelings were never meant to take first place, they were never meant to be dominant. If you make them your driving force, you are doomed to be unhappy because you are not following the order that God Himself has ordained. Feelings are always the result of something else and the psalmist expresses that here in Psalm 34.

Psalm 34:8-9 Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him! Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him.

You will never see until you have tasted Him, spiritual speaking. Taste and see follows as the day follows the night. That is something that is constantly emphasized in Scripture. After all, what we have in the Bible is truth. It is not meant to be an emotional stimulus, it is meant to be an intellectual stimulus. The Bible is truth and truth is addressed to the mind.

It is God's supreme gift to mankind, and as we comprehend and submit ourselves to the truth, that is when our feelings follow. What do I feel about this must never be the first question we ask ourselves when we study God's truth. Our first questions should be: Do I believe it? Do I accept it? Has it gripped me?

This is an essential and important rule that we must not concentrate too much on our emotions. Do not spend too much time analyzing your feelings because that is the express train to physical and mental illness.

Take for example people who refuse to spank their child. That is letting your feelings

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drive you rather than what God says, because God clearly says, multiple times, “spare the rod, spoil the child.” This whole matter is very subtle.

There is no doubt that the Scriptures emphasize the importance of self-examination and we know we must submit to God without complaining, knowing that, in His time, He will see us through. In the Old Testament in Lamentations 3, Jeremiah lists some wonderful assurances that can encourage us today during our time of trial and testing.

Here are seven assurances found in Lamentations 3:

- 1) The Lord does not cast off His people and forget them (found in verse 31)
- 2) In the midst of pain we know He loves us (found in verse 32)
- 3) God does not enjoy chastening His own (found in verse 33)
- 4) He feels our pain (also found in verse 33)
- 5) God sees the way people treat us (found in verses 34-36)
- 6) God is on the throne and in control of all events (found in verses 37-38)
- 7) If He chastens us for our sins, we should not complain because even His chastening is evidence of His law (found in verse 39)

Lamentations 3:39-40 Why should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Let us search out and examine our ways, and turn back to the Lord;

As long as God spares a man's life, why does he complain? The chastisement is really for our own good, only let us use it and turn our lives around. We will be thankful for it in the end and we will be on our way to having true joy.

In the New Testament the Corinthians neglected to examine themselves at a certain time, but they were experts at examining everyone else. When the church gathers together we must be careful not to become religious detectives who watch others but yet fail to acknowledge our own sins.

I Corinthians 11:27-29 Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup

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of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

This is especially true and applicable to Passover time, but it is also applicable throughout the entire year and something we should be doing every day of our lives. If we are to participate in a worthy manner, we must examine our own hearts, judge our own sins, and confess them to God.

We must examine ourselves to see whether we have properly understood the unselfish atoning nature of Jesus' death for others and how that should be imitated in our own life.

II Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.

So we are told there to examine ourselves, and to also test ourselves. If you have a King James Bible it might say “prove yourself.” *Barnes Notes* has an excellent explanation of the English word “prove” in the King James Version or “test” in most other translations. He compares “test” to the word examine, which is used at the beginning of the verse. The apostle Paul admonishes the Corinthians church and members of the church today to “test ourselves.”

Barnes Notes says: “The Greek word used here *dokimazete* for “prove” or “test” is stronger than that before used and rendered “examine” which is *peirazete*.”

The word “prove” refers to a saying, or trying metals by the powerful action of heat, and the idea here is that they should make the most thorough trial of their religion to see whether it would withstand the test.

The proof of their piety was to be arrived at by a faithful examination of their own heart and lives by a diligent comparison of their views and feelings with the Word of God. And especially by making trial of it in life. The best way to prove our piety is to subject it to actual trial in the various duties and responsibilities of life.

A man who wishes to prove an ax to see whether it is good or not, does not sit down and look at it, or read all the treatises, which he can find on ax making, or on the

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properties of iron and steel. Valuable as such information may be, he shoulders his ax and goes into the woods and put it through trial there. If it cuts well, if it does not break, if it is not soon made dull, he soon understands the quality of his ax better than he would in any other way.

So if a man wishes to know what his religion is worth, let him try it in the places where religion is of any value. Let him go into the world with it and try to do good, to endure affliction in the proper manner, to combat the follies and errors of life, to admonish sinners of the error of their ways, and he will soon see there what his religion is worth.

As easily as a man can test the qualities of an ax, let him not merely sit down and think and compare himself with the Bible and look at his own heart. Valuable as this may be in many respects, let him treat his religion as he would anything else. Let him subject that religion to actual experiment, which will enable a man to imitate the example of Paul or the great Master Himself in doing good. To endure persecution for Jesus, to bear calamity without complaining, to submit to a long series of disappointments and distresses for Christ's sake, thus proving it to be genuine.

That religion will prompt a man unceasingly to a life of prayer and self denial, which will make him ever conscientious, industrious, and honest, which will enable him to warn sinners of the errors of their ways and will dispose him to seek the friendship of Christians. That will answer the purpose. It is like the good ax with which a man can chop all day long and in which there is no flaw, which does not get dull, and which answers all the purposes of an ax. Any other religion than this is worthless.

In examining and testing ourselves, we should compare ourselves not with each other, but with the Word of God and with the infallible rule which God has given and by which we are to be judged.

Galatians 6:3-5 For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing [which includes all of us because compared to God we are nothing], he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load.

The biblical authors are in agreement that we must examine ourselves and that we must search out our own hearts. The very fact that they had done so meant that naturally and inevitably, we too have to look at our own feelings. Jesus Christ set the example, the apostles followed and set the example, and we must, as God's saints, do the same.

They want us to make sure that we are not merely intellectualists who are interested in arguing about theology. So the next principle is that we must recognize that there is all the difference in the world between rejoicing and feeling happy. Scripture tells us that we should always rejoice. Take the epistle of Paul to the Philippians where he says:

Philippians 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

He repeats that twice because it is so important and something that should be repeated in our lives over and over again. To rejoice is a command, yes, but there is all the difference in the world between rejoicing and being happy.

Believe it or not you cannot make yourself happy, but you can make yourself rejoice in the sense that you will always rejoice in the Lord. Happiness is something within *ourselves*, rejoicing is *in the Lord*. It is vitally important then to draw the distinction between rejoicing in the Lord and feeling happy. Take II Corinthians 4 for example. You will find there that Paul puts it all plainly in a series of extraordinary contrasts that you are very familiar with.

II Corinthians 4:8-9 We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed

Now I do not think that he was very happy at that point as he listed these things, but notice how Paul's joy begins to show as he continues to write. Jump down to verse 16.

II Corinthians 4:16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. [that renewal causes rejoicing] For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Nothing but encouragement there and something to be rejoicing about.

II Corinthians 5:6-8 So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not

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by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

To be present in the body? Or to be present with the Lord? Which does every saint desire? What do we look to? What causes our rejoicing?

Now let us turn to II Timothy 1 which brings me to the practical point which is to know how to stir ourselves up. That is the essence of the matter.

The danger is that when the mood comes upon us we allow it to dominate us and we are defeated and depressed. We say that we would like to be delivered, but yet we do nothing about it. Paul tells Timothy to stir up the gift of God.

II Timothy 1:6 Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

Laying on of hands by a minister symbolizes the receipt of God's Word and Spirit.

We have to consciously tell ourselves that you have to do away with dull apathy and gloomy sadness. The Scriptures tell us how to do this, they teach us to remind ourselves who we are and what we are. You have to consciously tell yourselves that you are not going to be dominated by your feelings, that they will not control you, and then get up and stir up the Spirit of God within you. This is the constant exhortation of the Scriptures. If you allow these moods to control you, you will remain miserable.

Never once should feelings be allowed to have the upper hand. This is something we can do, but how? Your business and mine is not to stir up our feelings, rather it is to believe and to be thankful. We are never told anywhere in Scripture that we are saved by our feelings. We are told that we are saved by faith, and faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

Never once are feelings put into the primary position. We are to remind ourselves that "I can't make myself happy, but I can remind myself of my faith. I can urge myself to believe." We can address ourselves as the psalmist did in Psalm 42.

Psalms 42:5 Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance.

It is so important that just a few verses later in Psalm 42:11 he repeats it for emphasis. That is the way to rejoice. Do not worry about feelings, our feelings will look after themselves. Satan will suggest that because you do not feel, you are not a Christian, but put faith before your feelings.

The child of light is sometimes found in darkness because of an occasional sin but he goes on walking, he does not sit down in defeat and commiserate with himself.

If you want to be truly joyful and spiritually blessed and you would like to know true joy as a Christian, here is the prescription in Mathew 5:6.

Matthew 5:6 Blessed [truly joyous] are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness [not those who thirst for happiness but righteousness], for they shall be filled.

Do not go on seeking thrills, but rather seek righteousness. As certainly as you do, you will be spiritually blessed, you will be filled, you will get the joyousness you long for.

I find it interesting in Psalm 4, it says:

Psalm 4:6-7 There are many who say, "Who will show us any good?" Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us. You have put gladness in my heart, more than in the season that their grain and wine increased. [That is when their material prosperity overflows.]

Seek for happiness and you will never find it; seek God and His righteousness and you will discover you are joyful. It will be there without you knowing it or seeking it. Miracles happen when you express gratitude to God. Praise Him and give thanks in all things.

True happiness and joy are both preceded by gratitude. God is our joy even as God is our peace, so avoid the incitements and temptations of Satan to give feelings this great prominence rather put God at the center and all other things will be added to you.