

INTRODUCTION:

If you were around in 1975 you might remember the one-hit wonder “Feelings,” by Morris Albert “Feelings, nothing more than feelings; / Trying to forget my feelings of love; / Feelings, whoa, whoa, whoa feelings...” This is the sappiest song I’ve ever heard. It was never was one of my favourites, frankly. Sadly, there are some people whose faith can be described by the first line, “Feelings, nothing more than feelings.” There ARE feelings in the Christian life, but there is “something more than feelings” and that something more is God’s amazing grace.

I said a few weeks ago as we would study the last section of Colossians chapter 2, that I would devote around four messages concerning Legalism and Grace. Recently, I spoke a message called ‘Beware of Grace-Robbers’ and we have examined how legalism can rob us of the powerful impact of God’s grace. Today we’ll look at the danger of building your spiritual life on the shifting sands of ‘feelings’ rather than on the rock solid foundation of God’s grace.

Before we jump into the text, let’s remember why the Apostle Paul wrote this letter. In *Colossians 1:6* we read, *“This gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God’s grace in all its truth.”* That’s the purpose of these recent messages I have delivered to you: that we can understand God’s grace in all its truth. When you begin to understand the awesome power of grace, you will be able to defend yourself against the threat of any grace-robber. *Colossians 2:18-19. “Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.”*

This message basically contains a Warning and an Encouragement for us all here today. We are given a warning not to let religious feelings rob us of God’s grace. But then I want to give you all encouragement how to maintain that grace connection with God that we are so desperately in need of.

I. THE WARNING: DON’T LET RELIGIOUS FEELINGS ROB YOU OF GOD’S GRACE

When we talk about religious feelings, I want you to understand right from the start that the Bible never teaches that the Christian life is to be a dull, stoic, boring, lifeless, religious experience that is devoid of feeling. I want you to understand that because we have an exciting relationship with God, there are times when we will express exuberant feelings! Think about what we read in the Bible..... *“you believe in Him and are filled with inexpressible and glorious joy.” (1 Peter 1:8)* King David got so revved up once, the Bible says *“he danced before the Lord with all his might.” (2 Samuel 6:14)* He had a happy heart that led to happy feet! In Acts 3, a lame man is healed and he was so overjoyed he went into the temple *“walking and jumping, and praising God.” (Acts 3:8)* I know that feeling, don’t you? There have been hundreds of times in my Christian walk when I have been so overcome with emotion and feelings I wanted to shout, jump, and dance. Feelings are real! The danger arises when you start seeking a feeling instead of seeking the Lord.

I’m sure you’ve heard the story of Jonah and the whale. God called Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach, and he ran away from God. Jonah soon learned you can run from God, but you can’t hide. Jonah was tossed overboard during a storm and ended up in the belly of a fish. I saw a cartoon not long ago depicting a very wet Jonah standing on the beach after the fish regurgitated him. Jonah had a cell phone to his ear saying, “Yes, God I can hear you now.” Isn’t it sad some of us are so hard-headed God has to send adversity into our lives before we start listening to His voice?

While Jonah was in the belly of the fish, he prayed an amazing prayer of repentance and surrender. He made an observation about grace deserving our consideration: He prayed, *“Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.” (Jonah 2:8)* Idolatry comes in many forms. If you are seeking a feeling instead of seeking the Lord, then you have made an idol of your emotions. In our passage, Paul gives three warnings about replacing God’s grace with subjective feelings:

(1) Be careful about false humility! In verse 18, the Bible speaks of people who *“delight in false humility.”* In the church at Colossae, there were people who had claimed to have special revelations or visions from God. They were called “Gnostics” from the word that meant “special knowledge.” They acted humble, but inwardly they were proud of their level of spirituality.

Let me state that I have grown up in a Pentecostal charismatic church. That means I believe in the moving, filling, and empowering presence of the Holy Spirit within believers today to be faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8). I believe that God still is performing signs and wonders today as we humble ourselves and pray, and seek God’s face and turn from our wicked ways (2 Chr. 7:14). I believe in the gifts of the Holy Spirit and that He gives them to each believer as He determines (1 Cor. 12:11) such as a message of wisdom or knowledge, or faith, or healing, or miracles, or prophecy, or discernment, or speaking in tongues, or the interpretation of tongues. And I believe the most important way to judge whether a believer is filled with the Holy Spirit is to look at the fruits of the Holy Spirit which should be evident (Gal. 5:22) such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Now, one of the biggest problems I have seen within a variety of ‘pentecostal’ churches is that they have taken the teaching of the Holy Spirit to the extreme and have taught things that simply are not Scripturally sound. For example, according to Ephesians 4 a charismatic church is not one where everyone talks in tongues, or where people are looking like they are drunk, or where they are laughing like hyenas or shaking on the ground. No, a charismatic church is simple a church where the spiritual gifts of the Spirit are operating...IT IS NOT ALL ABOUT SPEAKING IN TONGUES! I remember many people from Pentecostal churches over the course of my life who feel some sense of ‘elitism’ or ‘superiority’ because they speak in tongues and they compare themselves to a believer who has not experienced that yet. And I have directly observed that attitude in those so-called ‘pentecostal’ believers, and I could detect the subtle smell of pride....because this person had some experience that this person did not.

I know of a close friend of mine who recently went to a ‘pentecostal’ church who were very much focused on praying over people to be ‘baptised in the Holy Spirit’ and for the evidence to be seen in the speaking of tongues. Now, this friend is a believer who loves Jesus, is serving Jesus, is witnessing for Jesus.... He has not yet spoken in tongues and so when they offered, he said “sure, pray for me for this”. Now, they gathered around, laid hands on him, and began praying the house down for him to begin speaking in tongues...and you know what? He did not speak in tongues. So they bluntly stated to him, “well, it’s because you must have some unconfessed sin in your life!” And they walked away from him and this man was left there feeling absolutely deflated, alone and so confused...whilst they all walked away with their religious feelings of superiority. I had to spend some time with him bringing him to a solid understanding of what the Bible actually teaches us about the filling of the Holy Spirit, rather than what the ‘charismatic’ churches of today are doing. That man is still going strong for Jesus today as he witnesses faithfully to the lost, as he prays for those who need prayer, he has seen miracles take place, he is being a thorn in the side of the devil and is a threat to the kingdom of darkness....but he still hasn’t spoken in tongues! But you know what I have seen in his life??? The fruit of the Holy Spirit. Do not tell me that he is not a ‘Spirit-filled believer’. And I have seen so-called ‘Spirit-filled tongue-talking believers’ who loudly speak in tongues in front of many on Sundays, and yet their personal lives do not reflect many fruits at all of the Holy Spirit. I have seen so-called ‘Spirit-filled tongue-talking believers’ who week after week go up for the altar call and always fall down to the ground when prayed over, and yet their personal lives do not reflect any major change nor any growth to the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Can you see the problem?

I believe and teach the absolute necessity of being filled with the Holy Spirit. *Ephesians 5:18 says, “Do not get drunk with wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”* But the problem comes when people seek the feeling instead of the filling. God doesn’t fill us with His Spirit for our enjoyment but for His employment. It’s easy to allow pride to make you feel superior when you’ve experienced things others haven’t.

That's one reason why we have so many divisions and denominations within the Body of Christ. People disagreed over some point of doctrine or some religious experience they think you should or shouldn't have...and all that is being created is false humility and pride which leads to division. Are you a little proud you're in church today? Do you feel a little superior to those folks who are sleeping in or out on the lake? There is no room for spiritual pride in grace—because in grace, it's all about boasting in God not in our goodness.

(2) Be careful about angelic encounters! The Bible warns about *“anyone who delights...in the worship of angels.”* Now, of course, I believe in the existence of angels, and I am convinced people today have encounters with angels just as they did in the Bible. In fact, *Hebrews 13:2* says we should be kind to strangers, *“for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.”* But there is an unhealthy obsession about angels that can distract one from the truth about Jesus.

The Gnostics in Paul's time believed in a complicated hierarchy of spiritual beings. God was at the top of the flowchart, but in order to relate to God, a person had to make contact with one of the assistant “spirits” or angels. That's not a lot different from some of the New Age belief that everyone possesses an inner angel who can “channel” messages to you from God. Even our mistaken belief that everyone has a personal guardian angel for all of their life slips over the line into heresy. Where is that clearly articulated in Scripture? It isn't. Angels are good spirits that help protect, reveal information, guide, provide for, and minister to believers in general. God uses them as He sees fit but there is no firm teaching that states we have a ‘guardian angel’ assigned to us permanently.

People often ask me if I believe in ghosts. I do—I believe in the Holy Ghost! But if you mean do the spirits of people who have died sometimes linger around? The answer is NO. But what about spooky things that happen? Well, don't forget there are spirits, both good and bad—angels and demons. This is very clear in the Scriptures.

Satan is a liar and he will surely try to convince people there are ghosts and floating human spirits if it will distract them from God. The Bible says Satan disguises himself to trick folks. *“Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.” (2 Corinthians 11:14)* The devil is the master of misdirection. Satan is delighted if he can distract Christians in becoming obsessed with things like Ouija boards, séances, ghosts, and horoscopes. And don't forget, angels are not to be worshiped! In the last chapter of Revelation, the Apostle John is escorted around heaven by an angel. John was so overwhelmed by the awesome beauty of heaven he fell down to worship at the feet of the angel. The angel had a fit! He said, *“Do not do it! I am a fellow servant...Worship God!” (Revelation 22:9)*

Also be careful of those who claim to hear or feel God say certain things, or claim to have some special revelation from the Holy Spirit...and yet it runs contrary to God's Word. Their so-called revelation either is nowhere to be found in the entire Bible, or worse, it contradicts, maligns, perverts, or says that there are parts of the Bible that are false. Watch out for those wolves – they are destructive, dangerous, poisonous...and yet seem oh so spiritual.

(3) Be careful about supernatural signs! The Bible says in *verse 18: “Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions.”* The Bible warns us about people in the church who claim to have special miracles and visions from God. They love to go into great detail about their dreams and visions. It's easy for them to become puffed-up with weird ideas. Lest you misunderstand me, let me assure you I believe in miracles, signs and wonders. I believe God is still performing miracles today. But the danger exists when believers become so obsessed with seeking visions and experiencing miracles they neglect the Word of God.

I'll never forget Thursday 6th July 2006. It was 06/06/06 (666). Man, there were crazy prophecies by crazy religious people claiming it was going to be the day of the rapture and the beginning of the tribulation. I remember some Christians saying they'll stay home from work that day, just in case! And there are plenty of people who call themselves Christians who aren't content to study, pray, and serve the Lord— instead they are looking for a feeling that comes from the next miracle or sign. I call them miracle-mongers.

Illustration: I'll never forget reading about Oral Roberts in 1980 who was trying to build a 60-story hospital in Tulsa called the City of Faith. He said he had a vision and he described it like this: "When I opened my eyes, there He stood...some 900 feet tall, looking at me. He stood a full 300 feet taller than the 600-foot tall City of Faith. There I was face to face with Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God. I have only seen Jesus once before, but there I was face to face with the King of Kings. He reached down, put his hands under the City of Faith, lifted it, and said to me, 'See how easy it is for me to lift it.'" Mr. Roberts reported his eyes filled with tears and he promised Jesus he would share the message with his seed faith partners. In 1984 Oral went to his supporters and asked for \$8 million in the next month to finish the project or God would take him home. His supporters responded by giving over \$9 million in one month. The City of Faith hospital did open, and even though the facility was built for 777 beds, it never had more than 294 beds. And in September of 1989, Oral closed the City of Faith hospital after eight years of operation due to a mounting \$25 million debt. Now, I'm not criticizing Oral Roberts – he loved Jesus, and preached Jesus for many years. But the point is that there is a segment of Christianity that places too much emphasis in such vision. If we aren't careful it will make us believe we are sub-Christian because we haven't had visions of a 900-foot tall Jesus. Some people need some kind of visible apparition to believe.

- *In 2004, a lady in Florida who found an image of the Virgin Mary on a burnt grilled cheese sandwich and sold it on EBay to a casino for \$28,000?*
- *There's a statue of the Virgin Mary in Fresno, California where it is said that tears well up in Mary's right eye and stream down her face. The owner placed a glass under the statue's chin to collect the apparently miraculous tears and shared it with people expecting some kind of supernatural feelings.*
- *Recently in 2016, the owner of a coffee shop in Nashville looked at a pastry one morning and saw the image of Mother Teresa staring back at him. Word soon spread. It was called the "nun-bun," the "immaculate confection," and the "cin-a-nun roll." Thousands of customers flocked in to see it.*

We could go on and on about supernatural signs, unexplainable phenomenon's... and there are many churches today focusing upon this and people are coming just to see what craziness will be experienced. The point is, we shouldn't be looking for anything except Jesus. Feelings come and go, but Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever! Don't be misled by these grace-robbers. Grace is the greatest miracle of all! In addition to the warning, Paul also give us:

II. THE ENCOURAGEMENT: MAINTAIN A GRACE CONNECTION WITH JESUS

In verse 19 the Bible says a person can be misled when they have lost connection with the Head, who is Jesus. We live in a wireless age where we know what it means to be connected. My laptop computer is configured for wireless connection. When I'm connected I can click on the icon in the task bar and it tells me whether the connection signal is excellent, good, or poor. In the same way, there are people who only have a weak connection with Jesus, because they are depending too much on their feelings. What then, is the place feelings play in our faith? Consider the importance and the order of these three words: ***Facts, faith, and feelings.***

(1) FACTS: Believe God's Word

The starting place to start in the Christian life is not feelings, but the FACTS in God's Word. Christianity is not built upon the billowy clouds of subjective feelings; it is built upon the rock-solid truth found in the Bible. Here are four solid facts for you to consider:

(1) There is a God and He loves you unconditionally. Whether or not you feel loved, God's love for you is constant and unchanging.

(2) Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. It's a fact He lived a sinless life, died on a cross, was raised from the dead after three days, and ascended into heaven.

(3) It's a fact when you have received God's free gift of eternal life, your sins are completely forgiven.

(4) When you trust Jesus you become a child of God. It's not that you WILL be a child of God—you are already. The Bible says, ***"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God! And this is what we are!" (1 John 3:1)***

(2) FAITH: Trust God's Goodness

Faith is simply receiving God's grace. We can't even exercise faith on our own; it is a gift from God. *Ephesians 2:8 says, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God."* Faith is not just believing God exists, and faith isn't just believing facts about Jesus. Faith is trusting God even when we can't see what He's doing. It is receiving the truth that God is full of goodness, mercy, and grace – even when it doesn't feel like it. Faith is not just believing God CAN do something—it is believing God WILL do something. After facts and faith, we finally come to:

(3) FEELINGS: Rely on God's Grace

If you try to live your Christian life based on your feelings, you will stay frustrated. Let me give you an excellent example to help you understand the relationship between facts, faith, and feelings. Picture an old time steam locomotive – it's powered by coal and has carriages.

The facts of the Bible can be represented by the engine: It provides the power to move the train. Faith is like the boxcar full of coal. Faith gives energy and fuels the train. Facts without faith are like a locomotive with no fuel. And then feelings are like the carriages. A carriage is a part of the train, but it doesn't provide the power, or the fuel. It is simply attached to the train. The train can run without the carriage, but it can't run without the engine and the coal. Sadly, too many Christians allow their feelings to get out in front. These feeling-based believers often make statements like, "I don't FEEL like praying" or "I don't feel like worshipping" or "I don't feel like serving" or "I just felt it was the thing to do."

Illustration: Feelings can be so fickle. You might be a really emotional person. Maybe you cried when Bambi died. Maybe you cried when DiCaprio died in the icy waters of Titanic. Or what about Hachi: A Dog's Tale? Who didn't cry when Richard Gere died and yet his dog waited outside the train station every day for a decade after his master had died. Sure, you might be a very emotional person but here's where you need to be careful. Believe it or not, I also am a very emotional person....just ask my wife! Sometimes I'm tired, or discouraged, or disappointed, or even grumpy. And sometimes I don't always feel saved! But God's Word tells me something different, so I am careful NOT to let my feelings get out in front. That's the whole point of this message.

Here's what grace tells us: God loves you whether you feel like He does or not. God loves you even when you don't feel like worshipping Him. God is faithful even when I'm not faithful. God is still with me even when I don't feel His presence. God's mercy endures forever even when I don't feel that way. God has completely forgiven my sins and buried them in the depth of the sea of His grace—and I am no longer guilty...even when I feel guilty!

CONCLUSION

So folks, the Bible tells us today not to be disqualified by those who seem spiritual but are run by feelings, or are told certain revelations, or who see supernatural signs. Watch these people because they will make you run in a strange direction and will rob you of truth and the wonderful benefits of God's grace. Those people do not understand grace nor teach it correctly and will attempt to 'disqualify' you. Instead, listen to what the Bible clearly states in *Colossians 1:12, "giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light."* I love that!

You are qualified because of what Christ the Lord has done for you. That is grace. Always hold Jesus Christ at the centre of our Christian walk, and place His Lordship and superiority above your personal feelings, thoughts and views.