

LIVING BY FEELINGS VERSUS DISCIPLINE

Man's Way Versus God's Way (Part 3)

In this series of feature articles, we have been comparing man's inability to solve the problems of life with God's detailed and complete answers for facing, dealing with, and enduring every trial of life. Parts 1 and 2, inserted in the two previous editions of **Standing Firm**, discussed the first two contrasts listed in the following chart. In this article, we address Contrast #3.

<u>Man Says</u>	<u>God Says</u>
Search for the latest or most accepted views. Look for the latest research to determine which one you will follow in deciding how to deal with problems.	Search the Scriptures. God has His perfect ways which have not changed with time.
Save self. Think better about yourself, become comfortable with yourself, and develop your inner potential.	Die to self and follow the Lord Jesus Christ. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, your example, the Author and Perfector of your faith.
Get in touch with your feelings. Feel good about yourself. If you feel bad about your situations or relationships, get out of them.	Obey God's commandments as a demonstration of your love for the Lord. Regardless of how you feel, do the Word through Christ who strengthens you.

Living according to feelings has been a popular philosophy for many centuries

Living by feelings is so common in today's society that we often measure our happiness, our sense of well-being, and even our understanding of right and wrong on the basis of how we feel. We say such things as, "How do you feel about that?" or "If it feels good, do it." or we might even say, "If you feel good about it, you must be right."

Making decisions in search of pleasurable feelings is not a new philosophy of life. This doctrine, called Hedonism, was popular in ancient Greece. Hedonists claimed that pleasure is the sole or chief good in life and that the pursuit of it is the ideal aim of conduct. They believed that gratification of one's immediate personal desires, without regard for other persons, is considered the supreme end of existence. And they claimed that the ultimate gauge of life was how one felt. Does that sound like the world's philosophy today?

The objective in many of the modern secular therapies is to help a person feel better. For example, if a pill helps a depressed person feel better, it is considered beneficial. Another example — If a person feels better after venting his anger by beating a pillow, the therapy is considered to be helpful. He is even encouraged to express his anger toward his mother-in-law because he is expressing his real feelings without harming his mother-in-law physically.

What is wrong with living according to feelings?

Feelings are God-given, so there is nothing wrong with feelings in and of themselves. However, we are not to live according to our feelings. When we follow our feelings, we often sin. The person in the previous paragraph is obviously thinking angry thoughts toward his mother-in-law while he is beating the pillow to make himself feel better. Eliminating bad feelings may provide temporary relief, but the problem and the heart remain unchanged. Jesus said, "...everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court (*Matthew 5:22*)."

Feelings cannot be willed into being or controlled directly. They are involuntary results of hormonal or other physiological changes. Feelings often occur as a response to thoughts, words, actions or the environment. Nowhere in the Scripture does God command us to feel a certain way. God knows our heart (*Jeremiah 17:10*) and how we feel (e.g. *Genesis 4:6*), but He deals with us according to our deeds (*Genesis 4:7; Jeremiah 17:10*). In fact, many of the ways God commands us to love, such as, be patient (*I Corinthians 13:4*) require acting against feelings.

Feelings may or may not be accurate indicators of a person's heart condition. King David experienced distressing feelings as a result of sin (*Psalms 38:3-10*). On the other hand the Israelites were celebrating as they danced around the golden calf in sin (*Exodus 32:19*). Because feelings are fickle, we cannot rely upon them as an accurate measure of our spiritual condition. While feelings are unreliable indicators, they are, nevertheless, useful as signals to alert us to evaluate how we are living. As soon as we become aware of annoying feelings, we should immediately, evaluate the associated thoughts, words, and actions because God does hold us responsible for our deeds.

What is right about living according to God's commandments?

Believers are to live disciplined lives (*I Timothy 4:7-8*). The Lord promises that He will not allow anyone or anything to tempt believers beyond their ability (*I Corinthians 10:13*). He has freed all believers from the power of sin (*Romans 6:7*). We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (*Philippians 4:13*). Therefore, believers can obey whether they feel like it or not. God does not allow any excuse for disobedience to His laws.

Wisdom and blessing come from doing the Word. Discernment between good and evil, i.e., wisdom, is a result of practicing God's will (*Hebrews 5:14*). On the other hand, we delude ourselves when we merely hear the Word without doing it (*James 1:22*). It is only those who are effectual doers of the Word who will be blessed (*James 1:25*).

We demonstrate that we love God by keeping His commandments (*John 14:21-24; I John 5:3; II John 1:6*). Instead of living according to our self-centered feelings and desires (*II Corinthians 5:15; Galatians 5:16-17; I Peter 2:19-20, 4:1-6*), we are to continue to press forward to our high calling in Christ Jesus (*Ephesians 4:1; Philippians 3:12-14; Hebrews 6:1-3*).

We are exhorted not to focus on physical or immediate results; instead, we are to focus on eternal values (*II Corinthians 4:17-18; Colossians 3:1-2; I Timothy 4:7-8; II Peter 1:4-10*), to glorify God (*I Corinthians 10:31*), and to please the Lord in all things (*II Corinthians 5:9; Colossians 1:10*). Rewards in heaven will be based on obedience to God (*II Corinthians 5:10; Colossians 3:23-25*).

Summary

As pointed out above, one of the major differences between the world's teaching and the writings of Scripture is the degree to which one follows his feelings. It should not surprise believers that man's ways are very different from God's ways (*Isaiah 55:8-9*). Yet, tragically, many believers have not caught on to the subtle attraction espoused by the world to follow our feelings.

God instructed Cain in *Genesis 4:7*, "If you do well, will not *your countenance* be lifted up [or will not you be accepted]? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it." This sums up the matter. If we do well, we are accepted by God and we are content; if we do not obey (follow our feelings), sin will master us. God tells us to be master over our feelings; praise the Lord, we can be.

NOTE: Much of the information in this article is taken from the *Self-Confrontation* manual and its accompanying *Instructor's Guide*.