

SELF PART 3



In Mark 8:33-38, Jesus gives us an ultimatum: die to self (i.e. being controlled by/listening to our feelings) or we cannot “come after [Him]” for salvation¹. This ultimatum is based on both loyalty (we can’t serve two masters) and ability: self – or again our feelings, are severely compromised by sin and easily manipulated by Satan and the world. To be controlled by them will therefore result in not only failing to live for Christ, but also behaving no better than Satan and being led astray by the world. It will guarantee losing our souls in hell forever². Self – or once more, being controlled by our feelings is therefore our greatest enemy and humanity’s biggest problem.

The good news however, is that for genuine Christians (those baptized in a legit/biblical church), the tools (or power) to be free, to take control away from our feelings has already been granted to us. We no longer must function as its slaves (Rom 6:1-7). That being said, we must still do the work of applying that power or using those tools if such freedom is to be realized. And to this task we are obligated as part of our covenant vows to follow and give full control to Christ (Rom 6:8-13 w/8:12-13).

How to be free/stop listening to/take control away from your feelings (and give full control to Jesus -i.e. live according to truth):

1. REPENT

The number one reason people will not die to self/their feelings and (as a result) fail to follow Christ is because they are unrepentant in relation to their sin. And being controlled by/listening to your feelings *is sin*. Unrepentance is also the reason so many professing Christians lack passion in living for Christ. Unresolved sin kills passion. Repentance is therefore the first solution or step to take control away from your feelings and living passionate lives for Christ. Hence the reason that the pre-requisite to the gospel – or “take up your cross and follow Me” is always “repent” (Mar 1:15 “repent and believe the gospel” = “take up your cross”/die to self w/ Act 24:24-25 = The gospel includes/is about “self-control”).

Through his discussion on “godly grief” in 2 Corinthians 7:10-11, the apostle Paul reveals what true/biblical repentance (i.e. “repentance that leads to salvation without regret”) looks like. Which means, if we are to possess or practice the kind of repentance that frees us from the tyranny of our feelings, then it must be defined by what is mentioned in these verses:

1.1. No pain no gain (or change)

(10) = True/legit repentance is produced by (or requires) “godly grief” = Literally, godly pain ([λύπη]) = Same word translated as “painful” in Heb 12:11). It is the pain associated with change and taking control away from one’s feelings.

What else is true about this “godly pain” that produces true/legitimate repentance = It is the opposite of “worldly grief” (or again, “pain”). Godly pain brings change and life (or “salvation”) whereas worldly pain brings “death” and “regret”.

What Paul is referring to by “worldly grief/pain” = The emotional pain associated w/feeling sorry for oneself (i.e. “your feelings are hurt”). This therefore is what defines fake/illegitimate repentance. It is a person who thinks they are repenting b/c they feel bad (again, sorry for themselves) when they sin (or more accurately, get caught in their sin). Prisons are filled w/such people (people whose only reason for feeling bad is because they got caught).

What fake/illegitimate/worldly repentance (feeling sorry for yourself) looks like = Acting like a martyr, making excuses (“I did do the crime, but I am a good person”)³, playing the victim (“I can’t help what I do/think”)⁴ or *crying* when sin is discovered in their life. People who respond in any of these ways (to their sin) show that they are unrepentant – or not willing to put self/their feelings to death. They have rejected the pain that will always come when one attempts to take control away from self/their feelings and put in its place the counterfeit pain of self-pity (or again, “worldly grief”)⁵.

How (then) you need to view godly pain = Not as something bad – or an indication that we need to stop our current course of action, but rather as a good thing, as an indication that sin/self/feelings are leaving (or beginning to die) as that which controls us (“pain is weakness leaving/dying in the body”). The Christian life is not butterfly kisses and anyone who attempts to make it that will fail to get to heaven. Godly pain is necessary and something we should run to—rather than away from. It is the place that change or improvement begins. It is how we get stronger and what (therefore) we should expect when truly repenting. Christian gain requires godly pain – the pain associated w/change (“no pain no gain” - or change).

¹ To come after Jesus - or follow Him, for salvation means to live always submitting to what we learn to be the truth (Joh 17:17, 18:37). This includes not only the truth as revealed in God’s Word (i.e. special revelation), but those things in the world revealed to also be true by their agreement with God’s Word (i.e. general revelation). In the words, of the ancient church theologian, Thomas Aquinas, “all truth is God’s truth” (e.g. Act 17:28).

² According to the apostle Peter, being controlled by our feelings also reduces us to “irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed” (2Pe 2:12). Like animals whose only tool of discernment is their instincts – or feelings, we become the vulnerable prey of every trick and trap devised by demons and men.

³ I have had people in my office who - after confessing their guilt in relation to a crime have then said, “but that’s not me!” According to Scripture however, it is. You are what you *do*, not what you *feel*. Another reason so much of repentance has to do with feelings (or repenting of being controlled by our feelings): because they are what deceive us into believing we are good – or okay, when in reality we are not (Heb 3:12-13).

⁴ Deu 30:11

⁵ [As it re: to crying]. Anytime a person cries over themselves or another person who is guilty of sin, they are pitying the wicked – a direct violation of Deu 19:21 (“your eye shall not pity”). As such, *never in Scripture do we see repentant people crying for themselves or other guilty people*. Tears are only shed in relation to those who are the innocent victims of their (the guilty party’s) crimes (e.g. God, the spouses of those committing adultery, the next generation who suffer the economic or ethical consequences of their parents’ actions; e.g. Jer 8:21-9:3; Lam 2:11, 18-19, 3:48-51 [“daughter of my people” = The innocent children of the guilty who are suffering bc of their sin – see 5:7; See also Isa 22:4] versus 3:39 [in re: to the guilty]). Consider also: (2Sa 12:1-13) = Notice David’s response after the news of his son’s death. He doesn’t weep but rather worships. The only weeping he did was for the child/innocent party – never for the guilty party (himself). Hence once more, he rises and eats (or ends his time of sadness) after God has made the decision to take the child’s life. There was nothing more that could be done for his son and he wasn’t going to feel sinfully sorry for himself; (Luk 22:61-62) = Peter’s tears were for Jesus not himself; God’s response to those who feel sorry for the wicked (Jos 7:10-11; Lev 10:1-6). Parents therefore who cry for their apostate children or children who cry before they are punished for their sin are displaying the clear evidence of an unrepentant heart, an unwillingness to die to self/their sinful feelings and live for Christ. The question therefore that must be asked when such crying takes place is not, “why are you crying?” but “*who* are you crying for?”

1.2. Extreme ownership

(11 “what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves”) = The fact that a person wants to “clear” themselves means they not only know they are guilty – but willing to admit it (i.e. confess it) and accept the pain. In contrast (then) to the person feeling sorry for themselves, playing the victim or making excuses (the person possessing only worldly grief/repentance), the person who is truly repentant takes extreme ownership of their situation, they call it for what it is and embrace the “godly pain” of change that it will require – no matter the cost (Mat 18:7-9 = Do whatever it takes to get your feelings [those things affected by “the temptations to sin”] under control).

What this word “earnestness” also reveals about the kind of ownership we are to have when it comes to our repentance - or taking control away from our feelings = It is to be immediate (earnestness [σπουδή] = W/speed or haste/immediate action – Mar 6:25; Psa 119:59-60). Which means that the excuse “I need time to process” is (again) unrepentance or sin! Parents, do you allow your children time to “process” your commands or to stop their sinful behavior (e.g. tell them to brush their teeth and go to bed, you find them still watching tv w/this excuse, “I needed time to process your command”)? Why then the partiality/hypocrisy when it comes to the immediate ownership/change God calls you to demonstrate as part of your repentance and getting control over your feelings/sin? Again, the immediate and right response to an apostate child provides a good example where several have failed in this respect. The apostate child refused to immediately repent/die to their feelings and follow Christ. As a result, they are now apostate. Though condemning such behavior, the parents respond (in like behavior), by “needing time to process” and crying (i.e. giving in to their feelings by feeling sorry for themselves and their apostate child – rather than Christ).

In summary then, you will never get control over your feelings and truly follow Christ until you legitimately take ownership by admitting that *you are controlled by your feelings* and commit to immediately doing whatever it takes to change it – *to embracing the pain that brings real gain!*

1.3. War

(11 “what indignation” [ἀγανάκτησις]) = Fierce opposition toward who/what is wrong. In this case, your feelings that are controlling you. They are no longer to be viewed as the friend you can trust (e.g. “follow your heart”), but the enemy within that deceives and can never be trusted (Jer 17:9 “heart”[לֵב] = The seat of man’s emotions). As such, to repent is to declare war on self. If that is not your stance in relation to your feelings, then you are not truly repentant and will never gain control over them.

What feelings/emotions are from a scientific perspective and how it reinforces why you shouldn’t trust them = Feelings/emotions are nothing more than *guesses* that your brain constructs in the moment. Those experiences (the experiences of feelings/emotions) are the experience of “speculation without sufficient information to be confirmed as correct” (the definition of a guess). As such, there is zero correspondence between how powerful the emotion/feeling is—and its ability to be right (See *How Emotions Are Made* by neuroscientist Dr. Lisa Feldman Barrett). Which means this: if you are trusting your feelings/emotions, to determine what to do (or not do) in life – or what is right and wrong in life, then you are literally “guessing your way through life”. You are making decisions (some w/eternal consequences) without sufficient information to be confirmed as correct (again, the definition of a guess). And because of what the Bible tells us about sin (and its corruption of our feelings/emotions), that means that a large portion of those guesses are horribly wrong (e.g. COVID related anger/attacks on Asian Americans⁶; Patriotism = “Buy American”⁷). Hence the reason (then) we must die to feelings/emotions controlling our lives. And that starts through repentance – which includes declaring war on them. They are not our trusty friend. They are instead (once more) our greatest enemy, the ignorant deceiver living inside of us who tries very hard to get us to listen.

“Trusting your feelings is like trusting a two-year old with your money. What he chooses to do with it is bound to change and hardly will it ever be in your best interest.” - Anonymous

What happens when you continue to feel sorry yourself or play the victim refusing to embrace the pain of change, take ownership and go to war with self (i.e. when you refuse to repent of being controlled by – or listening to your emotions/feelings) = You change your gospel to accommodate your unrepentance (i.e. and eventually apostasize). Why? Because the tension between what Christ requires and how you are choosing to live (w/your emotions/feelings remaining in control) is unsustainable. Something will eventually give. And if it is not on the side of your feelings, then it will be on the side of the gospel.

CLOSING CONTEMPLATION = Having I truly repented of listening to my feelings and letting them control my life? Am I embracing the pain of change, taking ownership of my failure and going to war w/self?

⁶ Such attacks are believed to be the result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the (supposed) Asian origin of the disease. How this justifies attacking Asian-Americans who bear no culpability for the pandemic or its place of origin, demonstrate these actions to be fueled by nothing more than irrational and sinful emotion (e.g. “Coronavirus Disease 2019 is believed to have emerged in Wuhan, China in late December 2019 and began rapidly spreading around the globe throughout the spring months of 2020. As COVID-19 proliferated across the United States, Asian Americans reported a surge in racially motivated hate crimes involving physical violence and harassment.” – Angela Grover, “*Anti-Asian Hate Crime During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Exploring the Reproduction of Inequality*”)

⁷ The belief (and often accompanying animosity toward those who buy foreign cars) that it is bad for America – or takes away from American business (and therefore a sign of disloyalty to America or a person lacking Patriotism) is likewise a sinful emotional response (Mat 12:36-37) given the facts that “international trade has historically provided more resources and jobs than it has taken” – Steve Forbes (Forbes.com). For example: 1) More than one in five American jobs depend on international trade, 2) companies exporting goods increase employment 2 to 4 percent faster than those that do not, 3) to export goods [a business producing over 1.6 trillion in revenue to American businesses] requires that we also import – i.e. international trade is a two-way street, 4) imported goods (incl. foreign cars) and foreign companies create jobs for over 6 million people in America, 5) foreign goods also create competition which lowers prices and improves quality (e.g. The impact of the 80’s foreign car surge in America on its domestic brands: better quality and prices) (Source: Business Roundtable, “*How The US Economy Benefits From International Trade And Investment*”). In this light, it sb also be mentioned that Jesus and His people do not fight for/against the policies/politics of earthly kingdoms/nations since their loyalty belongs to another kingdom/nation (Joh 18:36 “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would be fighting...”; Phi 3:20)