

SELF PART 4



In Mark 8:33-38, Jesus gives us an ultimatum: die to self – or being controlled by our feelings/emotions or we cannot “come after [Him]” for salvation. The reason is that self – or again our feelings/emotions, are severely compromised by sin and easily manipulated by Satan and the world. To be controlled by them will therefore result in us becoming no better than Satan, being led astray by the world, denied by Jesus and losing our souls in hell forever. Self – or once more, being controlled by our feelings/emotions is therefore our greatest enemy and humanity’s biggest problem. All people can be separated into two categories: 1) the lost = those living according to their feelings, 2) the saved = those who have crucified their feelings and are living for Christ (2Co 5:15 [“for themselves” = Self/the flesh/controlled by their feelings]; Gal 5:24).

The power to do that (to live crucified to our feelings as that which controls us and follow Christ) was granted at our baptism. In those waters we were set free from slavery to our flesh (feelings controlling us) (Rom 6:1-7). However, we must still do the work of applying the 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/take control away from your feelings (and give full control to Jesus):

1. REPENT

The number one reason people will not deny or die to self/their feelings and (as a result) fail to follow Christ is because they refuse to truly repent when they sin. And being controlled by 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 taking control away from your feelings and living passionate lives for Christ. Hence the reason 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/legit 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. That each is absolutely necessary to our success in this respect is confirmed by Paul’s final statement (11 “At *every point* you proved yourself to be innocent [i.e. right again w/God] in the matter” = Accomplishing true/legit repentance requires conformity to all points that define it).

1.1. No pain no gain (or change)

(10) = True/legit repentance is produced by (or requires) “godly grief” (or pain) - the pain associated with change and taking control away from one’s feelings. It is the opposite of “worldly grief” (or pain) - the emotional pain associated w/feeling sorry for one’s self. Godly pain brings change and life (or “salvation”) whereas worldly pain brings “death” and “regret”. Christian gain therefore requires godly pain – the pain associated w/change (“no pain no gain”) (def. of insanity = expecting change in the results w/o change in the actions).

1.2. Extreme ownership

(11 “what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves”) = In contrast to the person feeling sorry for themselves, playing the victim or making excuses, 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 (the first steps in all recovery programs are admitting you have a problem and possessing a willingness to do whatever it takes to change).

1.3. War

(11 “what indignation”) = 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 (“follow your heart”), but the enemy within that deceives and can never be trusted. To truly repent and turn from our feelings therefore also requires that we go to war to self/our feelings (the f**k cancer campaign).

(what else defines true/legit repentance – the kind that frees us from the tyranny of our feelings/emotions)...

1.4. Phobic Fear

(11 “what fear” [φόβος; phobia]) = Different than momentary (or “casual”) fear (the fear of fight or flight), phobia is the kind of fear that stays w/you. It is fear that ultimately determines what you do (it is causal not casual). All creatures (including humans) have this causal/phobic fear as their main mode of operation (modus operandi). We are hardwired to fear as the key to survive and thrive. We are creatures controlled by fear. What then determines whether it is healthy (or unhealthy) is what fear it specifically is.

The causal/phobic fear that Paul is referring to here (the kind necessary to true/legit repentance) = The fear of the Lord. The Bible says this phobic/controlling/causal fear is “the beginning of wisdom” (Pro 9:10)¹.

What the fear of the Lord exactly is = Constant awareness of a coming judgment where every deed (including every careless thought and word) will be assessed w/o the ability to excuse it away, manipulate (e.g. cry) or play dumb (Pro 24:12; Heb 4:12).

Why fear of the Lord/constant awareness of a coming judgment breaks us free from being controlled by our feelings (or the sinful flesh) = We can’t serve two masters (or two forms of phobic/causal fear). Fear of the Lord will always be stronger than FOMO (fear of missing out) – the main reason people obey their feelings. So when we have fear of the Lord, those feelings get suppressed and neglected (Pro 23:17) = The key to not letting our feelings (“heart”) move us to “envy sinners” (to worry that what they have we don’t or what they are experiencing, we aren’t) is to “continue in the fear of the Lord.”²

¹ “Fear is hardwired in your brain, and for good reason [our survival]. Neuroscientists have identified distinct networks that run from the depths of the limbic system all the way to the prefrontal cortex and back. When these networks are electrically or chemically stimulated, they produce fear, even in the absence of a fearful stimulus [i.e. this fear is different/separate from casual fear]. Feeling fear is [therefore] neither abnormal nor a sign of weakness: The capacity to be afraid is part of normal brain function. In fact, a *lack* of fear may be a sign of serious brain damage [Psa 36:1 w/Deu 28:28 w/Ecc 9:3 w/Eph 4:17-19 = The choice to listen to the wickedness in our flesh/feelings leads to brain damage – the “callous” inability to fear God, to giving ourselves a spiritual lobotomy].” – Dr. Theo Tsaousides, Ph.D. (neuropsychologist)

² The basis of FOMO (or fear of missing out) is another fear, the fear of death (or possessing only one life). This fear however is alleviated by embracing the salvation gained by Christ and living faithfully for God (i.e. living in the fear of God) (Heb 2:14-16) = Christ granted us freedom from the phobic fear of FOMO/the “fear of death” which the “devil” uses to enslave the world. Anyone therefore driven by this (bad) phobic/causal fear is not only being controlled by their sinful

Why (else) fear of the Lord/constant awareness of a coming judgment is an important piece of true/legit repentance = Because it also causes us to not only live for God but also love/care about others (the goal of repentance) - including their moral/spiritual state (Lev 19:14 ["fear your God": "I am the Lord"] - 17) = Verse 14 shows an appositional relationship between how God is using the phrase "fear your God" and "I am the Lord" (i.e. that the latter signals or communicates the former). As such every command that follows and carries this phrase ("I am the Lord") is meant to communicate this as it cause - or means for carrying it out ("fear your God"). In light of what these specific commands are about, what we are being told is this: fear of God is what will cause us to not only live for God, but also love/care about others – including their moral/spiritual state (to not "curse" or be "partial", nor be a "slanderer" but instead "reason w/him frankly" [regarding his moral/spiritual state], to "love him as [ourselves]"); (2Co 5:9-11) = Notice three things: 1) Paul identifies "fear of the Lord" as the coming judgment where all deeds (good and bad) w/b repaid (11 "Therefore knowing the fear of Lord" – i.e. knowing of this coming judgment [10"before the judgment seat of Christ"]), 2) this fear (or knowledge of this coming judgment) motivates (controls/causes) Paul to "please (Christ)" as his goal in living versus fulfilling the desires of his flesh of feelings (9 w/14-15 = What Paul called "the fear of the Lord" in v11, he now equates w/ or identifies as "the love of Christ" that "controls us" (i.e. causes us to do what we do). In this case, "live no longer for [self] but for him...who died and was raised." (See also 7:1 = fear of the Lord is once more the motivation/cause to "holiness" or living for God), 3) this fear also causes Paul to "persuade others" - i.e. to convince others of their need to turn from being controlled by their feelings and (instead) live for Christ (since they too will face His judgment) – i.e. it made him care about the spiritual/moral state of others!

In summary then, the question to ask ourselves, is what do we fear most (or what fear controls us)? Is it God (and His coming judgment) or missing out on the cheap, temporal pleasures of the flesh? Is it fear of God or FOMO/the fear of death? There are only two masters (God or Satan), two causal fears (fear of God or FOMO/fear of death). Who and which one controls you? Who are you listening to - God or our feelings and Satan? As discussed, the answer to that question is the key determiner to whether we are truly repentant and following Christ. A great way to discern on which side you are currently standing is to consider Paul's words in (Phi 2:12 "fear and trembling" = Anxious distrust of your flesh and its ability to bring you spiritual harm). Is this your Christian walk (how you "work out your salvation")? Does the fear you claim to possess for God cause you to operate w/anxious distrust of your flesh and its ability to cause you spiritual harm? IOW: are you careful - or do you just go wherever your feelings are taking you in the moment (and say your "sorry" later?).

1.5. Failure or quitting is not an option

(11 "what longing [strong desire], what zeal [strong commitment to see one's desire fulfilled], what punishment [tough treatment of the guilty]" – 1Pe 2:14) = When taken together these three refer to a person who possesses the mindset that failure or quitting is not an option. Which in this case refers to the mission of wresting control away from our feelings/emotions. The person who is truly repentant (in relation to being controlled by their feelings/emotions) is therefore more than just willing to go to war with self or the flesh, they are more than just embracing or taking extreme ownership in respect to what that will mean – or the cost involved. They have also removed from their "personal menu" of decisions, the decision to quit or (once more) fail. Success over their feelings/emotions is the only acceptable and available choice. And as mentioned with the other qualities defining true or legitimate repentance, this (too) is absolutely necessary. IOW: you will neither be recognized (by God) as repentant – or gain control over your feelings unless this is your mindset: you will never quit, never give in (again) to your feelings/emotions as that which determines your behavior.

Why this mindset (never quitting) is so critical to true/legit repentance = It is the *prescribed* punishment that fits the crime. In Mark 8, Jesus identifies our sinful flesh, our feelings/emotions as deserving of death, as guilty of capital punishment. And that is the kind of punishment we are exercising against our feelings/emotions when we choose to never quit in our fight against them, to never (again) give them a voice, to never (again) let them call the shots, to never (again) acquiesce to their temptations. By such actions we are suffocating them, banishing them, beating them down and executing them! We are putting self to death (1Co 9:24-27 = Paul's "never quit" mindset for gaining the "prize" involved "discipline" – or punishment [NAS – "beating"] his "body". Such punishment/discipline however was psychological – not physical. It was discipline/punishment in relation his feelings/emotions – the refusal to give in to their temptations and desires. To make them his "slave", to do his bidding [versus him doing theirs]. This we can be certain of. Why? Because Paul already knew that "severity to the body" was of "no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh" [Col 2:23]. IOW: focusing on getting strong physically as the cure to your moral issues does nothing more than make you a "strong quitter". Our world is filled with such people: they look tough on the outside, but their souls are soft and sick.

Why this mindset (of never quitting/failure is not an option) is so critical to taking control away from our feelings = We are self-programmed robots: your brain/body are listening to what you tell it through your thoughts and words (Pro 23:7 "for as a [man] thinks within himself, so is he" [NAS]). Which means if you go in w/the option to fail or quit, you will more than likely fail versus if you go in w/o that option – success will be realized (especially since God has already given us the power and promise we can do it – 2Pe 1:3). Multiple studies have shown that people program themselves for defeat before they even start because their mindset going in is negative/defeatist (e.g. "I can't do this, I don't know if I can do this, this is too hard") or because they give themselves the option to fail (e.g. The factor most determining whether 100 mile endurance runners finish the race is their mindset before the race even starts. If they go in thinking, they have the option to quit when things get difficult/painful, they end up quitting. If they go w/the mindset that failure/quitting is not an option, they complete the race); In a 2008 study, researchers found that subjects who were given a placebo but told it was caffeine were able to lift significantly more weight than those who were really given caffeine; Seals 40% rule works on the principle of mindset: when your feelings tell you that you are done, you have only expended 40%, which means you still have 60% left in the tank. IOW: Most people convince themselves to fail or quit long before their bodies ever will).

CLOSING CONTEMPLATION = Based on the biblical definition of repentance, have you repented of being controlled by your feelings/emotions? You won't gain victory over them until you do. You aren't following Christ until you do.