

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 favorites, 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.

This is the third message in a series entitled, "Beware of Grace-Robbers." During the previous two messages we examined how legalism can rob us of the powerful impact of grace. This message is about the danger of building your spiritual life on the shifting sands of feeling rather than on the rock solid foundation of God's grace.

As we examine the scriptures, let's review the purpose for which 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 this Grace-Robbers series: 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."

Instead of "Feelings," my choice for a good song to describe our faith is one written by Bono and performed by the Irish rock group U2. The song is simply named, "Grace." The lyrics say: "Grace, it's the name for a girl / It's also a thought that changed the world / And when she walks on the street / You can hear the strings / Grace finds goodness in everything." In his book entitled, *Bono*, the U2 lead singer elaborates, "The thing that keeps me on my knees is the difference between Karma and Grace. You see, at the center of all religions is the idea of Karma. You know, what you put out comes back to you: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Karma is at the very heart of the Universe. And yet, along comes this idea of Grace to upend all that 'you-can-earn-it stuff.' Grace defies reason and logic. Love interrupts the consequences of your actions, which in my case is very good news indeed, because I've done a lot of stupid stuff."

That's good news for all of us, because we've all done stupid stuff and we desperately need God's grace. In this passage of scripture we find both a warning and an encouragement.

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

I must emphasize at the start the Bible doesn't teach that the Christian life is a dull, stoic, cerebral experience devoid of feeling. There ARE times when we express exuberant feelings

about our exciting relationship with God. The Bible speaks of us having "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 Colosse, 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.

When I was in college, I had some Christian friends who were claiming to experience a second blessing, which they called "the baptism in the Holy Spirit." As someone laid hands on them they had an emotionally thrilling experience in which they began to speak in tongues. They kept after me to try it. And since I wanted all that God had for me, one night I allowed three of my friends to lay hands on me and pray for me in my dorm room. They prayed hard and I prayed hard, but nothing "happened." Then one of them told me to begin to speak noises that weren't words, just sounds. He told me to start saying, "La, la, la, la, la..." Well, I started la-la-laing...and still nothing happened. They were disappointed I didn't receive the baptism, because I hadn't prayed in tongues. One of them suggested I needed to examine my life to see if there was unconfessed sin there.

I don't doubt some people have the legitimate gift of speaking in tongues (I have two messages from 1 Corinthians 12 that address that). And there are several accounts in Acts of people having hands laid on them to receive the Holy Spirit and they speak in tongues. But, the danger addressed here is the subtle pride that can slip in when someone has had an experience you

haven't had. Although my college buddies acted humble, it was obvious they believed they were spiritually superior, because they had received what they called the baptism in the Holy Spirit—and I hadn't.

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. Just open the Yellow Pages under “church” to see for yourself how much Christians disagree over doctrine and experiences.

Mark Twain used to say he put a dog and cat in a cage together as an experiment to see if they could get along. They did, so he put in a bird, a pig, and a goat. After a few adjustments, all those animals got along as well. Then Twain said he put in a Baptist, Presbyterian, and Catholic, and soon there was not a living thing left! We shouldn't let differences about experiences produce false humility and 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 angels are real. My last book was entitled, *Angels Really Do Exist*. I'm thinking of writing a sequel about geometry entitled, *Angles Really Do Exist*. 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 (for more info, see Chapter 8 in *Angels Really Do Exist*).

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.

Satan is a liar and he will surely try to convince people there are ghosts and 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.

Angels are not to be worshiped! In the last chapter in the Bible, 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)

(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.

Seldom a week goes by that I don't receive a letter from some self-proclaimed prophet who is telling me what to preach, and telling me what's going to happen to me if I don't say it. Earlier this month, the calendar was 06/06/06. (666) Weeks earlier I received a letter from someone who claimed God revealed to him that June 6 would be the day of the rapture and the beginning of the tribulation. I didn't say anything about it because (1) I didn't believe it and (2) I knew if I did some of you might stay home from work on that day!

There are plenty of people who call themselves Christians who aren't content to study, pray, and serve the Lord—they are looking for a feeling that comes from the next miracle. I call them miracle-mongers.

In 1980 Oral Roberts was trying to build a 60-story hospital in Tulsa called the City of Faith. He had a vision he described to his supporters in these words: "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, but never had more than 294 beds. And in September

of 1989, Oral closed the City of Faith hospital after eight years of operation.

I'm not criticizing Oral Roberts. He is a good man who has preached Jesus for many years. Many good things have been done and continue to happen at ORU. The point I'm making is there is a segment of Christianity that sets great stock in such visions. 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. Remember the lady in Florida who found an image of the Virgin Mary on a burnt grilled cheese sandwich and sold it to a casino for \$28,000?

Recently, the owner of the Bongo Java 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. However one skeptic claimed it looked more Doc from Snow White and the Seven dwarfs.

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. It is receiving the truth that God is full of goodness, mercy, and grace. 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. When I was first being discipled, someone shared a picture with me from a Campus Crusade for Christ tract with a picture of an old steam locomotive to help you understand the relationship between facts, faith, and feelings.

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 caboose. A caboose 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 caboose, but it can't run without the engine and the boxcar. 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 worshiping" or "I don't feel like serving" or "I just felt it was the thing to do."

Feelings can be so fickle. I'm an emotional person. I cried when Bambi died. I cry like a baby at the end of Braveheart. But I don't always feel saved. Sometimes I'm tired, or discouraged, or disappointed. 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 worshiping 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

What's the danger of living by our feelings? Paul writes that when we do, we are disqualified for the prize. That's a word used in athletics when a competitor commits a foul. They're still on the team, they just lost any chance for a prize, a reward. When you settle for feelings instead of God's grace, you miss out on the prize—the wonderful benefits of God's grace.

I remember watching the 1988 Summer Olympic Games in Seoul, Korea. In the 100-meter dash, Canadian runner Ben Johnson beat out Carl Lewis to win the gold medal with a new world record time of 9.69 seconds. The next day, it was discovered Johnson had traces of illegal anabolic steroids in his blood. Because he broke the rules, Johnson was disqualified and his gold medal taken away. Carl Lewis was given the gold.

One day, we will stand before Jesus and He'll be handing out rewards to His servants. If you are a child of God, you'll be there. How sad it will be for some of us to discover we missed out on some of the rewards, because we didn't fully understand God's grace in all its truth. God's grace: Don't ever let anyone rob you of its power!

OUTLINE

"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." *Colossians 1:6*

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

"Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs." *Jonah 2:8*

Be careful about...

- (1) False humility
- (2) Angelic encounters
- (3) Supernatural signs

II. THE ENCOURAGEMENT: MAINTAIN A GRACE CONNECTION WITH JESUS

- (1) FACTS: Believe God's Word
- (2) FAITH: Trust God's Goodness
- (3) FEELINGS: Rely on God's Grace



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes