

Emotions & Feelings

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Today, I want to speak to you about human emotions, a component of God's creation that sometimes causes us great difficulty. Our emotions can be used as God intends, but they can also be misused and lead us into sin. In that regard, our emotions are like parts of our bodies. Who cannot say that our limbs and our eyes are blessings, but Matthew 18:8-9 also says of them:

“If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast *it* from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast *it* from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.”

Our emotions are similar in that they can bless us if we use them correctly, but they can destroy us if we do not. Many of us have experienced times when our emotions have gotten out of control and led us into trouble, but we must not disdain them on account of it because, if we do, the harm to our relationships that depend on them can be severe.

Let me illustrate by emotion that is tied to love. Many of us have come into Messianic Judaism already schooled in the three New Testament Greek words for love – *eros*, *philia*, and *agape*. We were taught that *eros* is love that is connected to intimacy and sexual passion, *philia* is the affectionate love of friendship, and *agape* is the purest kind of love that is generated by godly covenant obligation and is substantially lacking in emotion or strong feelings. As a result, some of us have concluded that the highest way to love someone (including God and our spouses), is to do so without there being an emotional component to it and, if emotions and feelings should intrude, then we suspect that our love is not of the purest kind. Those of us who have come to believe this would do well to repent because there is no human activity that is not accompanied by feelings of some kind. Case in point, a Pharisee confronted Yeshua (Matthew 22:36-39) and asked him:

“Teacher, which *is* the great commandment in the law?” Yeshua said to him, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is *the* first and great commandment. And *the* second *is* like it: `You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Let's look at the second part of what Yeshua said, loving our neighbor as ourself. The Scripture uses a derivative of the word *agape* as the kind of love we are to have, yet is there anyone here whose concern for his or herself is without emotional feeling? Of course not, therefore it must be so for the *agape* love we have for our neighbor as well. And if it is so with our neighbor, then it must also be so with the *agape* love that we are commanded to have for God. Notice that the Scripture does not say that we are to love God with our mind only; it says that we are to love Him with all of our heart and soul as well as our mind. This infers emotion, and defines the love relationship that we are to have with our heavenly father as similar to the one each of us are

meant to have with our earthly father – a relationship that includes having positive feelings toward one another. I have to confess that it took me some years to come to the place where my relationship with God took on an emotional component but, ever since it has, I have felt so much closer. Now why have I said these things? It has been to make the point that one of the ways we sometimes misuse our emotional feelings is to try to eliminate them, and that is wrong. Yeshua characterized himself as a man with emotions as we read how he responded to Lazarus' death in John 11:33-36:

“Therefore, when Yeshua saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." Yeshua wept. Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!"

And there are other Scriptures as well that recognize emotions as part of the normal human condition; here are a few:

Psalms 139:23: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties;”

Proverbs 15:13: “A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.”

Proverbs 17:22: “A merry heart does good, *like* medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones.”

Ecclesiastes 3:4: “A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;”

Matthew 5:4: “Blessed *are* those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

I hope that I have shown you that refusing to recognize and utilize our God-given emotions is wrong, but equally wrong is allowing our emotions to drive our actions unchecked by biblical considerations and direction by the Holy Spirit. As a general rule, emotions and feelings in and of themselves are not sins because we cannot control how we feel about things and are therefore not held responsible for them so long as they do not propel us to act sinfully. The trouble is that too often they do because we tend to cater more to our feelings than to obeying the commandments of God. I will demonstrate with two of the most common emotions, the first being fear.

“Fear” and its close cousin “anxiety” are often (although not always) the result of our not having a sufficient faith-reliance in God, and Romans 14:23b tells us that:

“.. whatever *is* not from faith is sin.”

Whereas most feelings are beyond our ability to control, it is not the case with fear and anxiety which Scripture tells us we can control:

Joshua 1:9: “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God *is* with you wherever you go.”

Psalms 23:4: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You *are* with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.”

Luke 12:4: “And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. “

Philippians 4:6-7: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Messiah Yeshua.”

2 Timothy 1:7: “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”

When Scripture commands that we rid ourselves of something or that we have the ability to say “no” to something, we must believe that it is true. In the case of fear, Scripture exhorts us to not be afraid or anxious, and instead to pray. In short, it assures us that God is in control and that He is well able to protect us.

Another emotion that can get out of control if we are not careful is anger. Psalms 4:4a says of it:

“Be angry, and do not sin.”

And similarly, Ephesians 4:26-27 tells us:

“Be angry, and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.”

Once again, we see that it is not the feeling or the emotion that is sin, but rather improper actions that we allow as a result. To make the point, Scripture reveals an occasion on which Yeshua became angry but did not sin:

Mark 3:4-5: “Then He said to them [i.e. the Pharisees], “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they kept silent. And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And he stretched *it* out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other.”

Because anger can easily get out of control and lead us to sin, Scripture warns us about it multiple times. Here is some of what Scripture has to say about anger and what we should and can do about it:

Proverbs 12:16: “A fool's wrath is known at once, but a prudent *man* covers shame.”

Proverbs 15:1: “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

Proverbs 15:18: “A wrathful man stirs up strife, but *he who is* slow to anger allays contention.”

Proverbs 16:32: “*He who is* slow to anger *is* better than the mighty [man], and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.”

Proverbs 16:32 is especially important in its emphasis that anger is such a strong and potentially explosive emotion, that a man who is able to control it is better even than a conquering warrior. Here are some other Scriptures about anger:

Proverbs 19:11: “The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, and his glory *is* to overlook a transgression.”

Ecclesiastes 7:9: “Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools.”

James 1:19-20: “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”

I could list other emotions and feelings that can get us into trouble, but I think that the two I have given – fear and anger – are sufficient to make my point. But let me not leave you without giving you Scripture’s way to deal with such emotions and avoid sinning on account of them. There are two ways and they go together; the first is to put ourselves in God’s hands and pray to him for protection and wisdom instead of precipitously resorting to self-help:

Psalms 4:1: “Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have relieved me in *my* distress; Have mercy on me, and hear my prayer.”

2 Corinthians 1:3-4: “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

That is the first way that we are to deal with our emotions – putting ourselves in God’s hands and praying for His merciful protection, and solutions. The second way that goes along with it is to remember that God has already given us power and authority (in Yeshua’s Name) to be proactive. We read in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that:

“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*.”

So, the second way that we keep from sinning in the face of strong emotions, is to look for the way of escape that God has assured us is always there, and to believe that with power and

authority given us by the Holy Spirit, we have the ability (and also the responsibility) to direct our actions in a godly manner despite our emotions urging us otherwise. Do we really have such spiritual power, and isn't using it usurping God's role? Yes, we have the power because God has given it to us, and no, it is not usurping God if we use it because it, is what God intends; consider these Scriptures:

Proverbs 25:28: "Whoever *has* no rule over his own spirit *is like* a city broken down, without walls."

According to this Scripture, we have the power to rule over our own spirit, and God expects us to exercise that rule.

Proverbs 29:11: "A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise *man* holds them back."

Apparently, we are able to control that which we say and that which we do not say, and God expects us to seek Him (through the Holy Spirit) to know which is which.

Romans 12:1: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service."

According to this Scripture we are expected to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, which means that we are expected to endure whatever God calls us to endure – even discomfort and pain – in order to serve His purposes. Some of us have been taught that if we have sufficient faith, all of our worldly troubles will go away. Regrettably, that is not what Scripture says.

Romans 12:2: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

From this Scripture, we know that it is within our power to refuse to be conformed to the standards of this world, and that it is within our power (by submitting to God) to have our minds renewed so as to be in synch with the mind of the Lord. A fantastic achievement, but entirely doable according to Philippians 4:13 that says:

"I can do all things through Messiah who strengthens me."

And 1 Corinthians 2:16 that says:

"For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Messiah."

I am almost finished, but not quite yet. Galatians 5:16b exhorts us to:

"Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

And Galatians 5:22-23 tells us that:

“.. the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

Notice the reference to “self-control.” Believers have the ability to tap into God’s power, and exercise self-control on a level that would be impossible without it. Colossians 3:8b tells us that, in God’s power, we are able to:

“.. put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language ..”

All of what I have shared in this message can be boiled down to a single Scripture, 2 Corinthians 5:7 that says:

“For we walk by faith, not by sight.”

The sight that is referred to in this Scripture is not only eyesight; it is any sensory input to us that gives us information upon which we are moved to act. Such sight may be through what we see, through what we hear, or through what we feel inside us when we either see or hear. Walking “by faith and not by sight” does not mean disregarding the things and feelings that impact us. It means that we refer them to God and receive back his instruction before we act on them. If we do not learn to do that, we will continuously stumble over our unchecked emotions and feelings and act in ways that damage our lives and the lives of others.