

# It Is Written

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## Feeling God's Presence

*by Dan Gatlin*

We live in a time where emotion often trumps scripture and logic. That has long been the case in the denominational world, and is becoming more and more true with some New Testament Christians. This represents a subtle, but significant, paradigm shift among some Christians and churches. It affects the preaching that is done and the doctrine that is believed.

Many have a desire to feel close to God, or as some put it, to "feel God's presence" in their life. Some have questioned the reality of God or perhaps their own faith if they can't "feel Him near." We hear our denominational friends speak of God as if they have daily conversations and an intimate relationship with Him. And, we may desire to have that kind of feeling, but recognize that we don't have it. For many sectarians, that feeling is proof that they are saved. Christians, desiring to have that feeling, may question their own faith, or worse, accept these feelings as "proof" that denominational people are saved too. The desire to feel close to God is certainly a good one, but does the bible teach that the saved should "feel" God's presence?

Many righteous men have felt that God had abandoned them, when in reality He hadn't. David writes, *"How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, Having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and hear me, O LORD my God; Enlighten my eyes, Lest I sleep the sleep of death; Lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed against him"; Lest those who trouble me rejoice when I am moved. But I have trusted in Your mercy; My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, Because He has dealt bountifully with me"* (Ps. 13:1-6). David felt forgotten and abandoned, but the reality was that the Lord saved him and "dealt bountifully with" him. His feelings didn't align with reality. Intellectually he knew that God was with him, but his emotions indicated something different. Of course, his feelings were wrong.

The prophet Habakkuk wrote, *"O LORD, how long shall I cry, And You will not hear? Even cry out to You, 'Violence!' And You will not save. Why do You show me iniquity, And cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me; There is strife, and contention arises. Therefore the law is powerless, And justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; Therefore perverse judgment proceeds"* (Hab. 1:2-4). God assures the prophet that He has not abandoned His people, but that He would raise up the Chaldeans to punish them (and later punish the Chaldeans). Perhaps this was not the answer that Habakkuk was looking for, but it demonstrated that God was near and was about to take action. A similar complaint and response can be seen in Jer. 12.

Feelings can be wrong. "Better felt than told" religion has long deceived men. Jesus warned, *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"* (Matt. 7:21-23). These are religious people who offer service to God and feel saved. What's the problem? Jesus tells us in the phrase, "you who practice lawlessness!" 1 John 3:4 tells us that sin is lawlessness. They are religious, but they do not follow God's law.

Paul described the condition of the Jews in the 1st century, *"For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God."* (Rom. 10:2-3). What does Paul mean by saying that they sought to establish their own righteousness? The word "righteous" is used in at least three different ways. 1 John 3:7 says, *"Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous."* "Righteous" can mean: 1) God's plan for man's salvation, 2) man's state before God, or 3) God's character. All three applications are used in 1 John 3:7. In Romans 10

Paul describes the rejection of God's plan for a human plan. The Jews plan was not according to knowledge, but of their own devising. And, so it is today. God's word is rejected in favor of a good feeling.

The bible teaches us that God is near. "*'Am I a God near at hand,' says the LORD, 'And not a God afar off? Can anyone hide himself in secret places, So I shall not see him?' says the LORD; 'Do I not fill heaven and earth?' says the LORD*" (Jer. 23:23-24). "*Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me," Even the night shall be light about me; Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light are both alike to You*" (Ps. 139:7-12). God is near whether we "feel it" or not.

Our responsibility is to love God and remain faithful to Him no matter what else happens in life. Paul told the Romans, "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.'* Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:35-39). We are not promised that we will be spared the difficulties of life. And, there may be times when we feel alone. But, know God is near and salvation is ours if we endure (Jas. 1:12).

## 12 Evidences I Have Lost My First Love

*by Mark White*

"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love" (Rev. 2:4).

1. When my delight in the Lord is no longer as great as my delight in someone else, I have lost my "first love."
2. When my soul does not long for times of rich fellowship in God's Word or in prayer, I have lost my "first love."
3. When my thoughts during leisure moments do not reflect upon the Lord, I have lost my "first love."
4. When I claim to be "only human" and easily give in to those things I know displease the Lord, I have lost my "first love."
5. When I do not willingly and cheerfully give to God's work or to the needs of others, I have lost my "first love."
6. When I cease to treat every Christian brother as I would the Lord, I have lost my "first love."
7. When I view the commands of Christ as restrictions to my happiness rather than expressions of His love, I have lost my "first love."
8. When I inwardly strive for the acclaim of this world rather than the approval of the Lord, I have lost my "first love."
9. When I fail to make Christ or His Words known because I fear rejection, I have lost my "first love."
10. When I refuse to give up an activity which I know is offending a weaker brother, I have lost my "first love."
11. When I become complacent to sinful conditions around me, I have lost my "first love."
12. When I am unable to forgive another for offending me, I have lost my "first love."