

It Is Written

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Facts vs. Feelings

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There have been attempts over the past few decades to convince the general public that what matters more than anything are the feelings of certain individuals, certain races, or even certain nations. This push to value feelings over everything else includes such things as the laws of the land, scientific and medical and biological facts, and reality, in general. As foolish as that sounds — and let us not deny the truth that such a push is indeed foolish — we are being told that feelings are the ultimate deciding factor about how we identify a human being, what is taught in public schools and institutions of higher learning, and whether or not we support some business; the current argument is that feelings, in fact, should override facts. Facts have suddenly become not just unimportant, but are presented as the cause for many problems and ills in this world and are, as a result, denigrated and shouted down.

Now, as we think about the current situation in the world, it may be that professing believers are increasingly disgusted by the various ways in which feelings are overriding facts but, in case we haven't noticed in the last few decades — or centuries, actually — this has been going on in the religious world, too. It just may be that we, too, are guilty of elevating our feelings over the facts [in this case, the truths of God's word]. It just may be that we have been deceived by religious teachers, or have even deceived ourselves, and we are relying more on our feelings than we are on what God's word actually teaches.

But let us make the point, first of all, that trusting in feelings is not a reliable guide. Take the story of Joseph, for example: Joseph was sold into slavery to some Ishmaelites who were on their way to Egypt, who then sold him into slavery "in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard" (Gen. 37:12-36). His brothers, though, wanted to convince their father that Joseph was dead, so they took his coat, "killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the tunic in the blood. Then they sent the tunic of many colors, and they brought it to their father and said, 'We have found this. Do you know whether it is your son's tunic or not?'" (Gen. 37:31, 32). Jacob recognized Joseph's coat and replied, "It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces" (Gen. 37:33). At that point, Jacob sincerely believed Joseph was dead. His feelings were that Joseph was dead, and he felt that way because he had been deceived.

Many years later, in Egypt, Joseph revealed himself to those same brothers who would then relate to Jacob the fact that Joseph was alive and in a high position in Egypt (Gen. 45:25). Not surprisingly, "Jacob's heart stood still, because he did not believe them" (Gen. 45:26), but through persistence, the brothers convinced Jacob that Joseph was indeed alive and "the spirit of Jacob their father revived" (Gen. 45:27). Despite his feelings that Joseph was dead — for about 20 years, no less — Jacob had been deceived and his feelings were wrong the entire time.

Now, if that could happen to Jacob, is it not possible that it happens even today regarding the doctrines and practices of many religious organizations and individuals? Is it not possible that, like Joseph's brothers, a lie is told or a deception is perpetrated upon others and it is believed for a lifetime, while the truth is denied and/or rejected? Is it possible that there are individuals out there who claim to be teaching the truth of God's word when, in reality, it is not? Is it possible that many people are now either deceived by others or self-deceived and are relying on their feelings instead of verifying what they have been told by looking into and examining closely what God's word actually says and teaches?

Friends and brethren, not only is it possible, but God's word tells us explicitly that there will, in fact,

be false teachers and deceivers who will lead people astray because of what they teach. Consider just a few warnings that have been given to us to be on the alert for those who would deceive us and/or lead us astray:

John writes, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). A false prophet is simply someone who is speaking falsely — they are lying. What they teach and practice is said to be of God, but it is not. Now, if that was true in the first century, why would we think they do not exist today?

Peter also wrote of false teachers in times past and warned the early disciples, “there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction” (2 Pet. 2:1). He went on to note that many “will follow their destructive ways” (2 Pet. 2:2), and warned they would “allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error” (2 Pet. 2:18); that is, they would lead believers away from the truth and into sin.

The apostle Paul, in his second letter to the church at Corinth, warned against the false apostles who had gained a foothold among them and further warned, “And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness” (2 Cor. 11:13-15). Let us not overlook or make light of this warning! Even the devil will make himself appear as one coming from God to anyone who will give him an ear! And he has had great success doing this, for he speaks the words the audience wants to hear, getting them to fall for the old lie that “It doesn’t matter what you believe, as long as you’re sincere,” and convincing many people to trust in their feelings, rather than in the written word of God, and by so doing, leads them away from the truth and into living a lie — either deceived by others, or self-deceived by their feelings.

The apostle Paul himself would be one who knew the dangers of self-deception, having blindly followed his fellow Pharisees in rejecting Christ Himself and then persecuting any who would dare confess faith in Him as the Christ. Later, as a Christian, Paul would look back at that time and acknowledge, “Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth” (Acts 22:9), and then noted how he had persecuted many Christians, jailing them and even putting some to death (Acts 22:10, 11). In his first letter to Timothy, he would also confess he “was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man” but that he “did it ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tim. 1:12, 13). But let us note well that when he stood before the Sanhedrin as one deemed worthy of death, he boldly proclaimed, “Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Acts 23:1).

But how could he say that when he admitted he had done many things contrary to the name of Jesus, persecuted and killed Christians, and was guilty of insolence and blasphemy? Well, friend, he could say he had a clear conscience then because he was following his feelings instead of the facts. When he saw Jesus on the road to Damascus, he could no longer deny the facts, and whatever feelings he had were now seen for the deception that they were, and he wholeheartedly left that behind.

Now, will you risk eternity on your feelings? I hope not!