

# TRUTH AND FEELINGS

By

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Charismatic leader Lee Grady had this to say in *Charisma* of June 1997: “Praise and worship means shouting praises to God, banging on drums and symbols, jamming on electric guitars, dancing, waving, laughing, weeping, raising hands in the air, bowing and even lying prostrate on the floor. I'm ready to break out of the religious restrictions that keep Sunday morning worship stiff and predictable. I'm ready to do something wild, something that releases me and those around me to revel in His love with absolute abandon.”

What he describes sounds more like that which Elijah witnessed when he challenged the Baal worshippers. It certainly doesn't resemble anything I've read of in the New Testament, nor in the history of the first century Christians. Many churches are employing some of these activities in order to create the feeling of excitement and attract those who are looking for “something wild” which they might identify as a sign of God's presence.

Another writer has said “Rather than relying on the arguments of theology, more people are accepting the strongest evidence possible for the existence of God – an inner feeling of a divine presence.

Are inner feelings actually the strongest evidence possible for God's existence? Pagans who worship non-existent gods have the same kind of inner feelings! Paul wrote that those who deny God are without excuse, not because of the way they feel, but because they reject the evidence of creation (Rom. 1:20-21). Further evidence is in the person of Jesus and His resurrection, and in the authenticity of the Bible as proven by fulfillment of prophecy.

A great amount of modern religion which goes under the name of Christianity is based on such “inner feelings” with no objective truth to support it. F. B. Meyer wrote: “Many of God's professing children confound the Christian life with a hysterical sensationalism and a large amount of emotional and noisy manifestation.” Many people only “feel” God is present if there is some special physical manifestation in the crowd – speaking in tongues, impressive or exciting music, with emotion running high. There is no doubt that the “feel good” advocates know how to produce a large congregation. The question is whether or not it produces the genuine faith in and obedience to our Lord and King.

Ours is a disillusioned culture in which the philosophy of existentialism has produced the “Me Generation,” its motto reflected in a Jane Fonda ad for an exercise machine, in which she said, “I gotta feel good about myself.” Everything from swimming pools to

blue jeans are marketed on the promise of that good feeling. It is not surprising that the secularized church should do the same.

Shouldn't everyone feel good about themselves and be joyfully aware of God's presence? Yes, this would be ideal. But these emotions say nothing of God's purpose nor of our being in harmony with Him. One may feel good and be overflowing with joy, and still be traveling the opposite direction from God. God cannot be discovered by induced feelings. In fact, creating for a person a simulated joy may keep that person from seeking the true joy that can be found only through contrite sorrow and repentance.

It is true, indeed, that God's presence gives one a wonderful feeling of peace and joy, fellowship with other Christians, and joining in worship with them, also promotes a rich feeling of joy and love. But such feelings of themselves are no evidence that one's sins are forgiven and that he is right with God.

Forgiveness takes place in the mind of God” and how we feel does not indicate how He feels. We can be assured of forgiveness only because He promised it and we have the promise on record. Jesus said, “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.” I believe and have been baptized, and thus come under the promise. Faith in this promise is the basis of a feeling of freedom, peace and joy, but even when the feeling is absent, the assurance of His presence is still there, because of His promise.

What then, of the popular trend to build self-esteem and have everyone “feel good' about themselves? This idea is a carry-over of the Freudian theory that one is not responsible for his or her failures and problems. Blame parents or society, but whatever you do, you must get rid of guilt and feel good about yourself. Such a feeling may be simulated through the use of music and manipulation by church leaders. But one does not need these helps to experience God's presence and to enjoy the peace and comfort God gives. What he really needs is to firmly believe the truth God reveals.

Before a genuine sense of peace and joy can be experienced one must come to terms with the reality of sin, and this means a deep sense of guilt. The first step to feeling good is repentance, repentance that is produced by believing the truth as God has revealed it.

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would “convict people of sin, righteousness and judgment,” not create an emotional frenzy to make one feel safe in God's presence while still in sin. When one realizes that he is totally unfit-for God and deserving of nothing but judgment and death, there is no use in trying to make him feel good by exciting music, entertaining activities, or emotion-stirring drama. The solution is provided by God in the Gospel, and once it is believed and fully received there is a total change in one's feelings. Where once there was the bitterness of guilt, there is now the freedom of forgiveness; where there was the burden of sin, there is now joy in being clean; where there was the dread of judgment, there is now the glad hope of immortality; and where there was the painful alienation from God now there is sweet fellowship with Him and His people.

Feelings are not to be the criteria in interpreting Bible teaching on difficult questions. A college professor once told me that the subject of the final death of the sinner was such an “emotionally laden subject” that it was not possible for him to bring it forth in open discussion. On the subject of baptism a friend said to me he believed immersion was what the Bible taught, but that since his mother was a good Christian and had not been immersed, he felt it would not be right for him to do it. Revelation of truth is put aside in favor of personal feelings.

Jesus had a lot to say about truth. He said “If you remain in my word, you are truly my disciples and you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free” (John 8:31.32). When Jesus spoke of faith, it was not subjective faith generated by emotion, but faith in objective truth which He revealed and which is revealed in scripture.

In Crudens Concordance one can find 144 Scriptural references involving the word TRUTH. This truth is not a philosophical concept at which one arrives through his feelings. It is given fact – reality. Such truth includes everything God has done or said, and everything He promises. It doesn't depend at all on our feelings: the truth remains, no matter how we feel about it. This is especially beneficial at times when we do not feel well, or when we have suffered a great disappointment or heartache. Even if we do not “feel” God's presence, we know He is there, because He promised and His word is true.

Feelings may be generated that give one the sense of freedom, of forgiveness and closeness to God. But feelings tend to be deceitful. Millions of people are emotionally stirred each Sunday morning and made to feel that they are in a spiritual fellowship with God, only to find on Monday that the feeling is gone, and they have no power to live the faith of a new creature in Christ. Their faith has not been rooted and grounded in truth, but in their own emotions. It is only the truth of Christ that can set us free from sin and deception, and bring us into true and rewarding fellowship with Yahweh, our God.

Truth is found in the Bible” and it is in learning this truth that faith and trust are developed so that one may truly live by faith.

Instead of seeking esoteric experiences in order to gain a spiritual feeling, one should seek the truth, that he may bear the fruit of humility and obedience.

The apostle John emphasized the place of truth in the Christian's life. He wrote. “Greater joy have I none than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth” (3 John 4).

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