

# **Deliverance From the Idolatry of Emotions**

We live in a time when most people in our culture don't think. Instead, they "feel," and they believe that what they feel is truth. Most of what we see on television (both news and entertainment) and read in magazines, on blogs and in books is crafted to generate an emotional response and, in feeling it, to accept the feeling as truth. Critical thinking—objectively identifying what is right and differentiating that from mere visceral, emotional responses—is simply bypassed. This affects moral judgment, leaving us susceptible to moral compromise when such compromise "feels" right to us as a result of the constant conditioning we've experienced or when it promises some kind of reward.

This idolatry of emotions renders us vulnerable to believing any lie we're told, as long as the liar can make us feel something, be it excitement, anger, outrage, self-importance or even love. In the political world, for instance, the party that can best inspire emotion in the electorate prevails, regardless of the logic of the issues (or lack of it). In the church, morals and standards of righteousness have fallen into a wholesale state of deterioration because the idolatry of feelings tells us that what feels right *is* right, regardless of the clear teaching of God's Word.

The surrounding culture exerts relentless pressure, reaching into and subtly conditioning our doctrines, practices and sense of righteousness when the opposite should be true. We should be influencing the culture as leaven of the kingdom of God.

The result of this cultural influence and its idolization of feelings has been the inevitable shipwreck of so many lives

and ministries that we now have diminished moral credibility in the eyes of the world we seek to impact. The culture tells us there are no moral absolutes and that whatever you choose to believe is your own truth if it “works for you.” Thus, too much of the Christian world has adopted a standard based not on an eternal plumb line but on our own shifting moods and feelings.

In a recent discussion regarding a significant cultural shift now underway that flies in the face of a clear biblical, moral prohibition, someone asked my son and co-pastor, “Why can’t we just go with the culture?” My son gave a brilliant reply: “That was what got 6 million Jews exterminated in World War II.” In the absence of the absolute law of God embedded in Scripture, what the mass of people felt when the media of the day manipulated their emotions came to be accepted as truth. When societies divorce themselves from the standard of God’s Word, destruction inevitably follows.

Godly reasoning identifies the right and calls on feelings to follow after. Feelings are a good thing, a gift of God, but only when brought under the discipline of God’s eternal Word, every line of which is God-breathed love designed to ensure that we live well and avoid unnecessary suffering.

The prophet cried, “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9, NASB). How then should we function? The apostle Paul knew the truth: “For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16).

I would suggest that God gave us emotions to enjoy and to alert us to pleasures, dangers and the condition of our inner man—not for the purpose of making decisions. For decision-making, He gave us the capacity to reason in order that we might objectively identify the right thing to do on the basis of God’s Word and then discipline the heart to follow after. Under discipline, the heart follows the direction set by a

redeemed mind. Left to themselves, emotions generate delusion. Will we think with our feelings or with a Holy Spirit-inspired capacity to reason?

In short, in these crucial days God calls us to reject the emotional idolatry of the culture around us, to return to the plumb line of the Scriptures—to an accurate understanding of them—and to see in them the imprint of the Father's heart, His love and His blessing. "'Come now, and let us reason together,' says the Lord" (Is. 1:18).

This is not the spirit of religion, nor is this legalism. Revealed in every line of Scripture is the selflessness of the cross, the love of the Father and the way to live well, in wholeness and in peace. It is the gift of grace by the Holy Spirit, and it works.

Let us be the light shining in the darkness that Jesus calls us to be. Let us be a people who gather in and heal those damaged by the delusions of the world. Let's enjoy our emotions, and let's treasure what they bring us. But, unlike the culture around us, let us not make decisions by them to the detriment of our lives and our faith.

**R. Loren Sandford** *is the founder and senior pastor of New Song Church and Ministries in Denver. He is a songwriter, recording artist and worship leader, as well as the author of several books, including Understanding Prophetic People, The Prophetic Church and his latest, Visions of the Coming Days: What to Look for and How to Prepare, which are available with other resources at the church's website.*