

### **Hebrews 13 (5-6) – This is How to Feel Different**

There's a sense in which our emotions are the target of all we do. We want to go to heaven because it's the place of eternal happiness. We don't want to go to hell because it's the place of eternal sadness. Even the most intellectual person's mind can become a slave to their passions, and many of the advances in science, technology, sociology and psychology and are made so that we can enjoy things and have a sense of comfort. Cell phones, social media, movies, sporting and musical events, vacations, etc., we are feeding our need for feelings. Even in a state like Florida where gambling is still for the most part illegal, we have all these sweepstakes and gaming rooms popping up all over the place. Why? A downturn in the economy fuels an upturn in our need to feed our feelings of financial hope. That's twisted logic, for sure, but look at the explosion and you will see the emotion. We play the game because it feels good to us.

So, how important are emotions to a Christian? I and many other Christians have tended to demote or dismiss feelings as secondary and unreliable. The main thing is right belief and right behavior. However, right feelings are part of good processing. Emotions are an important vehicle for valuing or devaluing things. How we value something affects how we feel about it. For example, love is a way of valuing something, and hatred a way of devaluing something. If you love someone, and they betray you, that can quickly turn into hatred. If it's someone you don't know, it may still hurt but it doesn't have the same effect. Also, the person who hurts us but doesn't know us won't feel the same regret as the person who hurt us but loved us.

Emotions are about values. We feel sad if we lose something or can't have something we value. We yearn for what we value. We feel envy if somebody else has something we value but we don't have. We feel jealous if a rival poses a threat to something we value. We fear the loss of position, possession, affection, or admiration. We are anxious about losing, or never having, something we value. We feel relieved if the threat to what we value is gone. We are angry if our efforts to seek or keep what we value are frustrated. We resent people, situations, or things that keep us from what we value. We are frustrated when we can't attain or maintain what we value. We feel disappointed if we were hoping for something we value, but it doesn't happen. We feel satisfied or contented if we have what we value. We feel bitter, alienated, or depressed if we are trapped in something we devalue, or we despair of never having what we value. In pity or sympathy, we identify our values with the values of another.

Our emotional life will mirror our values. Whether emotions are good or bad all depends on what we value or devalue. Where is your treasure? Do we value the right things? Do our values align with our God-given design? There's nothing wrong with living for your feelings as long as your feelings value the right things, or devalue the wrong things. At the same time, it's a mistake to focus on feelings rather than the underlying source. The way to cultivate right feelings is to cultivate the right source of right feelings. Learning to prize what matters is a process.

We see what the Bible says we should do, but we often don't do it until we feel like it. While we may use reason to steer the car, the gas that's running the engine is emotion. This is why we must discipline our feelings, not by grinning or gritting our teeth and bearing it, but by changing how we feel about things. This passage of scripture gives us a framework for doing that.

## **5a – repent to God (destroying idols)**

The love of money is a gigantic idol in many people's lives, but this represents any idol we have, when we are not content in God (covetousness – cf. Ephesians 5:5 / Colossians 3:5). There is as much idolatry today as ever. Idolatry is assuming God to be something He is not. It is to have either unworthy or erroneous views of God. Idolatry is a sin that contaminates our minds and clouds everything we do. The first 3 of the 10 Commandments are all directly related to idolatry. Idolatry distorts our perspective on God, and it had disastrous results for anyone engaged in it. Sanctification, in part, is a process of rooting out the idolatry in our lives. The truth is that if anyone or anything besides God gets our best thoughts, feelings, and energy we're idolaters. When we discover that we have an idea about God that is not true or unworthy of His character, we are to flee from it (1 Corinthians 10:14). It pleases God for us to separate from idolatrous practices and thoughts (cf. 1 John 5:21).

We are all guilty to some degree. However, this doesn't change the truth that we should be growing up in God and learning to leave our idols behind. If you knew that there was a monster chasing you, you would not try and talk to the monster, or talk to others about the monster. You wouldn't stand there and complain how unable you are to get away from the monster, the first thing you would do is run as far and as fast as you could, to the best of your ability, and then warn others about the monster. There is a monster chasing you...think about it.

Regrets are killing the faith and life of Christians everywhere. They always feel bad, or have this overarching sense of doom in their lives. Many times it is because they have an idol, themselves. For many it feels so right – so spiritual – to live with regrets. It means you feel bad for the wrong things you have done or think you have done, and that sounds like a good thing. If you forget those wrongs, you are acting like they were no big deal. Biblical counselor Ed Welch identifies 3 main categories of regret.

1. Things you did that were shameful, and became public.
2. Things you did that either purposefully or (more often) unintentionally hurt someone else.
3. Things you think you could have done to avoid a catastrophe.

People get so filled with regrets that the burden of feeling sluggish and tired all the time goes without notice, it's just normal, so you think. We live with regrets because we think we should. We think it's the right thing to do, but it is God's will that you get past your past regrets. They only make you feel unqualified and, therefore, unfruitful.

The legal guilt is real, but God has canceled that for us in Christ (Colossians 2:13-14). Once we are believers, the problems we deal with are about emotional guilt. Maybe you believe your regrets will be your way to help make sure you don't repeat past sins. That makes sense and sounds spiritual, but it's a false gospel. It is the sweet mercies of God that compel us to fight sin (Romans 12:1-2). One way to identify the nefarious nature of regrets is that they do not give mercy the prominent seat at the table. These regrets might be so stubborn that they will only leave through repentance. You may realize that but repent of the wrong thing. You keep repenting of your perceived contribution to past regrets, but you need instead to repent of your

unbelief that God doesn't cover your past, and you lack of confidence in His goodness and hope for tomorrow. Call it unbelief or pride, but you believe yourself rather than the Lord. Repent.

We also need to understand that a lot our struggles may be the result of incidences that are not your fault. We can struggle with false guilt because we were caught up in the circle of someone else's sin at some point. It may be a parent, a friend, a physical, mental or emotional abuse. But somehow, maybe even at an early age, you were caught up in the cycle of someone else's sin and you feel that you just can't get that out of your life. Maybe it was even one of your own children. You feel like because of what they have done, that's come upon your life. There are also times that false guilt is there because you just can't get past your past. This is what I hear people say when they're feeling this way. "I've asked God a thousand times to forgive me and I just can't feel forgiven." That's when you can't get past your past.

An example: I have counseled people who have had or made abortion decisions that are so tormented by their sin they don't know how to get out of the pit they are living in. They confess their sin of murdering their own children to God and believe that Jesus Christ's death has paid their penalty and secured their forgiveness. But they are not enjoying forgiveness, because even though they feel God has forgiven them, they could not "forgive themselves". I explain that they have become their own idol and the lord of their life. In saying Jesus had forgiven them but they could not forgive themselves, they are in effect saying they are a god above Jesus. Although the lesser God, Jesus, was forgiving, the highest god, themselves, was not.

John Calvin rightly said that the human heart is an idol factory. Repentance is an ongoing process (1 John 1:9); we have to keep going to the throne room (Hebrews 4:16). Thankfully, as we seek and smash our idols by the grace of God, our lives are transformed into acts of worship to God's glory, our joy, and others' good as we rightly enjoy and steward created things without deifying them, and love people rather than using them.

### **5b – renew your mind (developing values)**

In this passage we see a snapshot of what renewing our mind looks like. We take His promise of His presence, provision, and protection, and in the process our values are changed. We value what He is and what He gives us more than what we fear, and changing our values is what begins to change our feelings.

Which types of fears do you have: Natural Disaster / Finances / Marriage / Children-grandchildren / Singleness / Widowhood / Old age / Illness-suffering-death / others? Which "what if" thought do you think most often?

I don't know what I'm going to face tomorrow. We fear because we're think we're going to have to face something we don't understand, and we're going to have to face it alone. We fear because we think our needs or the needs of someone we love are not going to be met. Or we fear that the things we think are meeting our needs are going to be taken away from us. But there's one thing I know, He will never leave me. When you say, "I just don't have the strength", the omnipotent God says "I will never leave you nor forsake you." When you say, "I'm afraid of what is going to happen", the omnipresent God says "I will never leave you nor forsake you." And when you say,

“I don’t know what to do”, the omniscient God says “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” The deepest need of your heart can only be met in the Lord Jesus Christ.

When God says, “I will never leave you nor forsake you”, this doesn’t mean He will always coddle you with constant attention and enable you in your every whim. Remember the whole verse, and the next verse. *Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”* When finances, frustration, and fear assault you, God is still with you. We may fail, but He hasn’t and won’t.

## **6 – rejoice in the Lord (discovering victory)**

Why can we confidently say this, why can we have new faith and new feelings? Why can we worship the Lord with new vigor? It is because we repented of our idols and renewed our minds. We believe the promise because with the idol out of the way we can see it clearly now. We see it, believe it, and *act* on it, because we feel different about it. We look at Him, learn from Him, and we love Him. We worship because He’s won the war and we’ve won the victory over our faithless feelings. Right feelings means we can do what we want and it not be wrong because we delight in the Lord, and so we feel like doing the right thing!

This is a process! Don’t be fooled into thinking that because you know the last point that you can just skip by the others. This is about a lifestyle change; not just changing your feelings in this moment, although that can happen and hopefully is beginning to happen. However, this is more about changing what we value and therefore what we worship and what we feel all the time. This is about how to promote right feelings and how to process all our feelings, to feel different permanently. One sermon is not enough, it can help right now and give a framework right now for an ongoing thing, but that is the thing; it must be ongoing.

We can convince ourselves that we ought to do something and muster up the motivation to do it, once in a while, or for certain seasons of time, but we need to feel differently about something to act differently about something over the long haul. A lot of people will act heroic for a moment but Jesus isn’t looking for a statement of loyal willpower; He wants to change our hearts so that we trust Him when we don’t feel so heroic. Change is more process oriented (Mark 4:26-28) than crisis oriented (Mark 4:16-17). Change often involves a breakthrough, but lasting, concrete change includes the follow through. The longer you do it wrong (your way) the harder it will be to do it right (God’s way). It is hard to practice the truth if you don’t prefer the truth, and even when you prefer it, you must prioritize it. You can change in an instant but lasting change requires an investment. It is not a pang of conscience or a moment of willpower, it is a process.

We yearn for what we value (Philippians 4:4 / 1 Thessalonians 5:16). Learning to worship God in a deeper way, with a repentant heart and a renewed mind, this will give new feelings and revival in our soul, something every Christian needs. Go to God’s throne every day and ask Him to show you the idols in your life, ask for mercy and grace to smash those things down. Go to God’s Word every day to be continually molded into maturity, and as those idols come tumbling down His towering promises will be made manifest to your understanding. You can worship God with joyful confidence because He will love, help, and protect you for eternity, no matter what.