

Personal Feelings and True Religion

The basis for our religious faith and practice is of primary importance. We must determine to what extent personal feelings should influence our faith and practice. Let us consider several points.

First, in recent years, many place great emphasis upon feelings, experiences, and subjectivity in religion. Some say, "I am a born again spirit-filled Christian. Let me tell you about my experience." Many think such marvelous religious sensations are proof of salvation.

Second, feelings are an important part of true religion, but feelings alone are not sufficient. The book of Acts shows that people enjoyed peace of mind and heart only after they had obeyed the gospel. In Acts 8:39-40, after the Ethiopian nobleman received baptism, he "went on his way rejoicing." The Philippian jailor "took them the same hour of the night . . . and was baptized, and he . . . rejoiced greatly, with all his house (Acts 16: 33-34)." Emotional experience cannot replace God's word and obedience to that word. Heb. 5:8-9 teaches, "Though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered . . . he became unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation." Saul felt good while he persecuted the church (Acts 26:9), illustrating that feelings can be deceptive.

Third, the only safe standard for victorious and happy life is the word of God (Psalms 119:105, 130; 2 Peter 1:3-4). Today, many have discarded the objective standard of God's word and have substituted for it the subjective standard of feeling and experience. Bible obedience is not a matter of following uncertain voices within our own hearts, confusing human impulse with the working of the Holy Spirit. The knowledge of God and obedience to the Gospel transcend our personal feelings. Paul taught that the Lord Jesus will come "rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus (2 Thess 1:7-9). Knowing God and obeying the gospel transcend any personal feelings and emotions in determining religious faith and practice.

Finally, the Holy Spirit made known the word of God through inspired men (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 Cor2:10-13; Eph. 3:3-4). The word of God is the absolute standard in religion. Assurance and joy come from obedience to God's word (Gal. 5:6; John 14:15; 1 John 2:3-4). Often, people are infatuated with emotional and exciting experiences that they call, "Love for the Lord." The Bible teaches that keeping God's commandments expresses real love (John 14:2-24). "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: (1 John 5:3)."