

## Scripture Over Feeling

by Jovan Payes

The book of Proverbs emphasizes the importance of a reverence for the Lord as the governing dynamic for how the emerging wise person interacts with themselves, their family relationships, the community relationships, and their earthly relationships. One of the components of this instruction is the following verses:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. (Proverbs 3:5–6 NASB)

Seems obvious enough. All I have to do is “trust in the Lord” with my heart and I am on my way to a proper relationship with Him. This is, however, only a partial truth. If we trust in God completely, and if we do not support ourselves with our own understanding, but acknowledge God’s ways, then -and only then- will He make our paths straight.

Indeed, “trust in the Lord” is parallel to the foundation of biblical wisdom, “fear of the Lord” (Proverbs 1:7). For this very reason, Proverbs begins with a call to education in the wisdom that comes from God. To enter into a relationship with God is not an emotional experience. There will be emotion, but feelings are not the sole basis for following God.

Let us explore the issue together.

### The Basics of God’s Revelation

Let us lay down some basics. God has communicated to humanity in two significant ways, one general and the other special. First, God shows his presence in creation where we are able to detect certain attributes about God. This is what the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:18–21. Notice that God’s “invisible attributes” are “clearly seen” in the fabric of creation. These invisible attributes are his “eternal power and divine nature” and these attributes allow humanity to “know God.” This knowledge of God which emerges from creation is often called *Natural Theology*; that is, God’s fingerprint seen on the canvass of the universe.

But Natural Theology has limitations. It only provides knowledge of God in large chunks of generalizations. God may be *the* necessary Being to adequately explain the origin of all the complexities and intelligence inherent in the universe, and the moral sense of good and evil, but it does not give us specific instruction on how to enter into fellowship with God, how to remedy our moral failures (sin), and how to continue our relationship with God in worship. Creation only points to a God it does not provide a specific program on how to follow Him (Psalm 19).

Second, God does seek to engage with His creation through *Special Revelation*. This is the use of prophets (and other means) to speak and write specific words from God. The Bible is the result of this specific revealing of God's Mind. The apostle Paul is again helpful to understand this process (Ephesians 3:1–7). In 1 Corinthians 2:10–13, Paul says that only a person's spirit knows the thoughts inside our head, and so, in a similar way, only God's Spirit knows God's thoughts. Then Paul asserts, "we have received... the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God" (v. 12).

Thus, God has not chosen one's feeling as the primary way to reveal Himself (no emotional experience). Indeed, we may be overwhelmed by the grandeur of creation and get a sense of Who our God is. But these are broad strokes. God has not left us with an ambiguous way to come to Him. He has communicated by means of prophets, and those prophets have penned God's will on paper. These are "the sacred writings" of the Scriptures which God has "inspired" for salvation and the spiritual formation of those that seek Him (2 Timothy 3:14–17).

### **Expectations from God**

When God entrusts His word to His people warns them not to add to it or remove from it. In Deuteronomy 4:2, Moses calls upon Israel in a sermon, "You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you." To his successor, Joshua God said similar words (Joshua 1:7–8). This is not an Old Testament concept. Jesus affirmed that even "the smallest letter or stroke" of the Hebrew alphabet are not to be tampered with (Matthew 5:18). Revelation also uses this language to safeguard the meaning of its metaphor-filled prophecies (22:18–19).

*God expects His written word to be the source of our spiritual formation.* Spiritual growth is dependent upon His word. This is quite an important point. Jesus said clearly says that access to the Father is through sitting at the feet of the teaching of Jesus. "It is written in the prophets, 'and they shall all be taught of God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me" (John 6:45). Christianity is a teaching religion, and Jesus' word is the standard by which we have fellowship with God the Father.

*God expects His word to take priority over our religious traditions.* In Mark 7:1–23, Jesus is recorded as addressing religious traditions that displace God's authority in His word. The Jewish sect, the Pharisees, were big on religious traditions passed down from early Jewish times. At various times, these traditions were treated more authoritatively as God's word. So Jesus condemns them for their lip service to claim devotion to God. Devotion to religious traditions over God's word actually invalidates the word of God (7:13). No matter how loved the religious tradition is, when it conflicts with God's word we must abandon it.

*God expects His word to be obeyed even when it is “hard” to live out.* Jesus was asked a tough question regarding divorce (Matthew 19:3). Jesus teaches that marriage was never intended to be dissolved, but God only allows divorce and remarriage on account of adultery (19:4–9). The disciples react negatively to it by saying, “it is better not to marry” (v. 10). This was an emotional response. Jesus then acknowledges the hardship of his teaching by saying, “not all men can accept this statement... He who is able to accept this, let him accept it” (vv. 11–12). Some teachings are hard to absorb emotionally, but we have no authority to dictate to Scripture. God instructs us, not the other way around.

## **Concluding Thoughts**

Emotions and feelings are not fundamentally at odds with obeying God. The Bible speaks to the heart as well as to the logical nature of the mind. But, God’s use of the written word is an emphasis upon a standard of redemptive teaching (Romans 8:17). There is no other way to know God than by understanding His word. Our emotions are often slaves of the moment, but God’s word abides forever (1 Peter 1:25). As Jesus himself affirms, “He who rejects me, and does not receive my sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day” (John 12:48).