

SELF PART 5



In Mark 8:33-38, Jesus gives us an ultimatum: die to self – or being controlled by our feelings/emotions or we cannot “come after [Him]” for salvation¹. The reason Jesus possessed such a negative view in relation to self or our feelings, is because He knew them to be severely compromised by sin and easily manipulated by Satan and the world. To be controlled by them will therefore result in us becoming no better than Satan, led astray by the world, denied by Jesus and losing our souls in hell forever (Pro 25:28). Self – or once more, being controlled by our feelings/emotions is therefore sin and humanity’s biggest problem (not Satan, not God, but self). The end of history will see humanity divided into two categories: 1) those who lived controlled by their feelings (and are now in hell), (and) 2) those who crucified their feelings and were instead controlled by God/Christ (and are now in heaven) (2Co 5:15 [“for themselves” = Self/the flesh/controlled by their feelings]; Gal 5:24).

The power to do that (to live crucified to our feelings and follow Christ) was granted at our baptism. In those waters we were set free from slavery to our flesh (feelings controlling us) (Rom 6:1-7). However, we must still do the work of applying that power if such freedom is to be realized. And to this task we are obligated as part of our covenant vows to follow and give full control to Christ (Rom 6:8-13 w/8:12-13).

How to be free/take control away from your feelings (and give full control to Jesus):

1. REPENT

The number one reason people will not deny or die to self/their feelings and (as a result) fail to follow Christ is because they refuse to truly repent when they sin (and that includes the sin of being controlled by their feelings).

What that looks like (according to 2Co 7:10-11) = Ownership (no excuses, no victim mentality, no feeling sorry for yourself), a declaration of war against self (you no longer trust self) and the mindset that failure is not an option (we *must* win, being in the fight is not enough; not winning is sinning; not winning means going to hell; Eph 5:5-9 “Let no one deceive you” = Let no one cause you to think that salvation was granted even to those who do not conquer their sins [“disobedience]; who do not take control away from their sinful feelings. We must win the war and “walk as children of light” [i.e. live in obedience to the truth – not our fallen/sinful feelings]).

2. RISK ADVERSIFY YOUR LIFE

Another major reason so many people fail to have victory over their feelings is because they are under the impression that such success can be realized while still practicing, possessing, participating in – or living in close proximity to those things that most encourage or entice self (or our flesh) to indulge in its cravings (e.g. going on a diet with an ice-cream filled fridge and a cookie filled pantry). The secret to success is not becoming more self-disciplined, but more risk-adverse.

“If you are overweight, a smoker, or an addict, you’ve been told your whole life that it is because you lack self-control. The idea that a little more self-discipline would solve all our problems is deeply embedded in our culture. Recent research however, shows something different. When scientists analyze people who appear to have tremendous self-control, it turns out those individuals aren’t all that different from those who are struggling. Instead ‘disciplined’ people are better at structuring their lives in a way that does not require heroic will power and self-control. In other words, they spend less time in tempting situations. The people with the best self-control are those who have to use it the least.” – James Clear (*Atomic Habits*)

The irony of risk-adversion = Many who view themselves as risk-adverse are actually the most reckless. The problem is that they are risk-adverse in relation to the wrong things. They are so concerned with minimizing loss in the present (or in relation to temporal things/relationships), that they become reckless in relation to the loss of future (or eternal) things (i.e. their soul). This is true of too many in this church (e.g. fail to act boldly w/your family to stop the rebellion because you are afraid of losing the relationship and as a result you are losing all credibility with Jesus come judgment day – Mat 10:32-38). Being controlled by one’s feelings makes a person susceptible to this awful irony. Why? Because the future (or future risk) cannot be felt (only the present). If therefore you are a person operating and making decisions based on your feelings, then you are person who can only risk-adversify in relation to the present (since once more, it is the only thing you can feel). Which means you are (in reality) living a very reckless life (spiritually), one that will most likely end in eternal hell.

The feeling most hostile to risk-adversion (and repentance) = Complacency (laziness/lack of urgency in relation to needed change).

What complacency communicates about our view of God and how He responds = (Zep 1:12)

¹ Paul gives the same ultimatum in Rom 8:12-13 using the word “flesh” to identify what Jesus means by “self”. The Scripture uses several terms (e.g. when used in the negative sense: self, flesh, body, passions, heart) to refer to the fallen physical person – i.e. our sinful or selfish feelings, which are constantly soliciting us to live according to their desires, to essentially become their slave (2Ti 3:6; 2Pe 2:18-19; Hence 1Co 9:27).

What those who are truly risk-adverse do: (They...)

2.1. Find the wise and hang with them 1) How wisdom helps me be truly risk-adverse/conquer my feelings = Wisdom gives me the ability to discern what are the situations posing the greatest risk to my relationship w/Christ and eternal destiny and the desire to avoid them. It makes me careful and cautious to fear the Lord in or w/all things (Pro 14:16; Pro 22:3; Pro 9:10; Eph 5:15-17), 2) Why seeking and hanging w/the wise helps to accomplish that goal = We are the product of who we hang out with – who we are spending the most with (Pro 13:20, 24:6; Act 4:13 = Jesus' wisdom rubbed off on the apostles because of the time they had spent w/Him).

Example(s) of what this looks like: Identifying the wise in the Body of Christ and making a point to spend the majority of your free or fellowshiping time with them (in person, on the phone, through social media, etc.). This means being pro-active to reach out and set up times to talk and hang out.

2.2. Forget those who are self-serving (2Co 6:14-7:1 “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers...lawlessness... darkness... Belial...idols” = Do not have relationships w/people who are not seeking to be righteous or serve God [who are instead serving self/their flesh and feelings]. We must “separate” ourselves from such people not only to have God as a “father” who will “welcome” us as His children, but also to “cleanse” ourselves from the “defilement” it will bring to our bodies – i.e. because it opens us up to the temptations of our feelings/flesh [the self/flesh serving attitude/behavior/thinking seeps into us – 2Pe 1:4 = The “world” – a reference to unbelievers who are unwilling to seek God or righteousness, is the people we must “escape” from if we are to avoid the “corruption...because of sinful desire” – i.e. the soul/spirit becoming infected by the sin of our flesh/feelings]. How then do we evangelize such people? 1Co 5:9-10 = Through “association” *not* relationship [and for the apostate, no association or evangelism at all = v11]). We cannot have relationship until people are those welcomed by/ “acceptable to” God (i.e. we are to be imitators of God in our behavior w/them – Act 10:34-35).

Example(s) of what this looks like = No relationship w/unbelieving (non-apostate) relatives/children who are not seeking righteousness and open to listening to the gospel (no hanging out, no inviting them to parties, going to their parties, camping w/them, etc).

2.3. Flee from even the appearance of evil or anything illicitly sexual/romantic (Pro 4:25-27 “do not swerve to the right or to the left...straight ahead” = No consideration of anything that is questionable; a pursuit of only those things that I am positive are righteous; 1Th 5:22 “abstain from every form of evil” = Literally, “keep far away from the appearance of evil” – i.e. from anything that gives the impression to others that something sinful might be happening [See Mat 15:8; Luk 9:29]; 1Co 6:18 “flee” = hasty/urgent retreat; 2Ti 2:22 “youthful lusts” = The cravings/passions/desires of young adults [e.g. sexual pleasure]; Eph 5:3 “not even named among you” = No one would ever accuse or be suspicious of you in relation to such things; How this makes me risk-adverse/helps conquer my feelings = Anything that appears like sin or sex w/b an encouragement/enticement to those very things – even though they themselves may not be [sin or sex]. Hence the reason for the careful language [“abstain”, “flee”]).

Example(s) of what this looks like: 1) In relation to the appearance of evil = Attending most rap or rock concerts (since most are known for lewd behavior, drug use, etc. Not only that, but when you can't pick the song set, you will inevitably hear songs which are sinful that you now appear to be celebrating w/everyone else who is there), 2) In relation to appearance of anything illicitly sexual/romantic = Dinner or drinks w/a co-worker of the opposite sex when you are married.

2.4. Filter what they watch and listen to (Mat 5:22-23 “your eye” = Idiom referring to what your spirit chooses to watch or listen to; “whole body” = Our physical bodies – including our feelings; “healthy...full of light” = If what you watch or listen to is morally good, then your flesh/feelings will be desirous of morally good/God-glorifying things [as the sinful part of our flesh is diminished]; “bad...great is the darkness!” = If what you watch or listen to is morally wicked, then your flesh/feelings will be desirous of morally wicked things [and your sinful flesh empowered! “Garbage in, garbage out”]).

Example(s) of what this looks like: 1) In relation to what you watch: No movies or tv shows with sexual nudity, filled with sexual situations or language (e.g. tv shows: Friends, Grey's Anatomy, Game Of Thrones, True Detective, Black Sails, Vikings, Westworld, Peaky Blinders, Love Craft Country, Narcos, Orange is the New Black, Altered Carbon, Outlander, All soap operas) or promoting/glorifying crime (Breaking Bad, Sons of Anarchy, Mayans M.C.), 2) In relation to what you listen to: Most rap music (all about drugs, sex and crime).

2.5. Forfeit those things which they already know to be temptations to their flesh (or cause sinful feelings to rise up in them) (Heb 12:1 “lay aside = Get rid of, throw out, remove; “the weight...the sin that clings so closely” = Those things in our life that can cause us to easily fall prey to our sinful flesh/feelings).

Example(s) of what this looks like = Quitting social media sites such as Fb, TikTok or YouTube because they tempt you to folly and dissipation; Quitting the gym which doubles as a soft-porn club for men.

CLOSING CONTEMPLATION: In May of 1971, two congressmen Robert Steele from Connecticut and Morgan Murphy from Illinois, went to Vietnam and returned with this news: almost half of the soldiers had used heroin, and at least 15% were addicted. This was extremely disturbing, given that heroin was (at that time) considered the most addictive drug in the world (once addicted, it was nearly impossible to escape, relapse ~ 100%). In response to this report, President Nixon appointed Dr. Jerome Jaffe and researcher Lee Robins to determine what happened to these addicted soldiers when they came back to the states. Their research yielded unexpected findings: 95% of those soldiers once addicted to the most addictive drug on the planet were no longer using or addicted. Returning to the states had allowed them to kick the habit. Why? The answer was also unexpected. Their environment had changed. They were no longer in the place associated w/their former use. Which meant the feelings triggered by that environment (i.e. the desire to use heroin) were no longer active – or greatly diminished. The radical change in environment - the drug-filled jungles of Vietnam, to the lawful and ordered world of America, gave them the power needed to win in their war on drugs. Risk-adversifying our lives to win the war over self/feelings is based on the same principle. Consider each of the discussed points. They are all (some more than others) about changing our environment - from one that fuels our flesh to one that doesn't. From one that encourages flesh/feelings to be king, to one that starves those feelings and instead makes Christ our king.

CLOSING CHALLENGE: (Rom 13:14) “put on the Lord Jesus Christ (His environment, His people, His ways) and (through that) make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires (i.e. get out of that environment).”