

Shall the Just Live by Their Feelings?

Learning to Obey when God Feels Far Away.

The fall harvest revival had come. The preacher prayed. The choir sang: "God is still moving. I can feel Him in my soul." One choir member raised her hands and shouted, "Hallelujah, God have mercy," to which the congregation responded, "Praise the Lord. Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Jesus!"[1]

God is still moving. I can feel Him in my soul. We too should be grateful for those moments when we sense God to be especially near and precious to us--those times when we received direct and dramatic answers to prayer, those times when we knew he protected us from physical harm or cured us from illness, and so on. But then there are those times when we might not feel God's presence. Where are you God? In the spiritual deserts of life, we sometimes wonder if He's moving at all, and like David the psalmist we cry out questioningly, **"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent"** (Psalm 22:1-2, KJV). So how are we to cope with our Christianity when God seems distant to us, when He doesn't seem to be moving, and when we don't feel His presence? Might it be that such times in our lives have something in them to teach us spiritually about God?

In such times we can find consolation from the example of the life of our Lord. Truly Jesus became a man, and **"took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"** (Philippians 2:7-8). And being truly human, Jesus was **"touched with the feeling of our infirmities"** (Hebrews 4:15). So we can be encouraged if at times in His life Jesus felt the same way about His and our Father. In His most stressful moment when He felt utterly estranged from his heavenly God, he cried out quoting the opening words of the twenty-second Psalm, *Eli, Eli, la'ma sabach'thani* ("**My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?**") (Jesus quoting Psalm 22:1 in Matthew 27:46).

There are times in life when like our Lord and David--who was a man who sought after God's own heart--we feel separated from God. Their experience teaches us that we can expect, on some occasions, to experience the same estrangement. And if we do, does that mean that it's our fault and we are out of God's will?

A thousand times, "No!" On the cross, Jesus submitted totally to the will of the Father. He was **"the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world"** (Revelation 13:8). Even though He was the appointed Lamb, Jesus prayed, **"O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt"** (Matthew 26:39). So how ironic it is that at the moment Jesus submitted to the Father's will, He felt estranged by Him. So why did Jesus experience this perceived desertion? Hebrews tells us that, **"Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered"** (Hebrews 5:8). Herein lies a lesson

for us: Never is God closer to us than when perhaps we feel Him to be farthest away, and amidst the experience of our perceived desertion by Him we learn to obey anyway, even when we don't feel like it!

People become atheists because they cannot see God. To them, "seeing becomes believing." But living amidst the emotive culture and church that we do, sometimes I wonder if a great mass of professing Christians might one day become atheists for reason that they can't or don't feel God, because in their perception of the Christian life, "feeling is believing." I once heard of a preacher who said that any God who was not worth feeling was not worth believing. Perhaps this is why so many Christians suffer from spiritual burnout. Their feelings flame out. But we cannot, we must not, always go by what we see or feel. For after all, the Bible says, "**The just shall live by faith**" (Romans 1:17). Walk by faith through the spiritual deserts of the Christian life, take a long cool drink at the well of obedience, and eventually the Lord will see us through. God is near not because you might feel that He is, but for reason of His promised presence-- "**for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me**" (Hebrews 13:5-6).

ENDNOTE

[1] Ron Ira Steele, "Hallelujah! A House of Joy," *The Indianapolis Star*, November 9, 1991, D-1.