

Knowledge and Feelings

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This week I was listening to a Bible discussion between friends of mine. They were talking about the disciples and the fear with which they struggled. Then someone raised the issue of the relationship between our feelings and what we know.

It was stated, "There is no direct connection between what you know and what you feel." The person who made this comment stated that sometimes he thinks people want him to feel guilty if he has fear, but, he went on to say, fear is a natural reaction that is not related to what we know; therefore, there is no need to feel guilty for having fear.

As I heard this discussion I realized there is much misunderstanding regarding how our minds work, the relationship between what we know, or think we know, and our emotions, particularly the emotion of fear. There is also confusion about guilt, should we feel guilty if we have fear? I have many Christian patients who feel guilty for having worries, anxiety and fear, believing that their fears are evidence of weak faith.

Imagine you were walking alone at night and you saw a strange man coming straight toward you, might you feel "afraid"? But what if you realized the man was your loving father or husband? Would that knowledge change the way you feel? Would your feelings be connected to what you know?

What if you had cancer but didn't know it. How would you feel? Would you have a change in feelings when you found out? Would your feelings be connected to what you know? And then what if you found out the cancer is benign, would that knowledge change your feelings?

A story has been told of a person being taken against his will, hands bound, and placed on a helicopter. The helicopter lifted off to several thousand feet in the air and then the bound man was blindfolded and pushed around a little bit. While the man was being pushed around, the helicopter dropped altitude until it was only six inches off the ground and then the bound and blindfolded man was pushed out of the helicopter. The man died of a heart attack. Do you think he might have "felt" differently if, when pushed, he would have known he was only six inches off the ground? Is there a connection between what we know and our feelings? Absolutely!

The Bible tells us that in Eden, before sin, there was no fear, but as soon as Adam and Eve sinned they ran and hid because they were afraid. The Bible also tells us, "There is no fear in love, perfect love casts out all fear" (1John 4:18). Our minds were not created to experience fear; fear is part of the infection of sin. As such, it is true we don't need to feel guilty for having fear, for we are all born in a fearful state. Imagine that an HIV infected man and woman get together and have a child and the child is born HIV infected. What did the child do wrong? Does the child need to feel guilty? No, but does the child still have the full weight of the disease to deal with? Yes. This is our condition. We are born infected with fear and selfishness (a.k.a. sinfulness). It is not our fault and, therefore, we don't need to feel guilty that we have these propensities, but we still have to deal with the full weight of the problem.

Christ came to cure this condition, to remove fear and selfishness and restore in us His perfect love. As such, He was tempted in every way just like us, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). The Bible says we are tempted by our feelings (James 1:13), thus Christ experienced such temptation, but temptation is not sin, so there is no reason to feel guilty for it. However, Christ came to reestablish His perfect character of love in the species, in order to rid our hearts and minds from fear and selfishness and restore us to perfect unity with the Father. Thus we read about those who are ready to meet Jesus when He comes again as those "who do not love their lives so much as to shrink from death" (Revelation 12:11). Perfect love has cast out their fear and they no longer shrink back trying to save self, but instead are willing to give self in love for others.

We are all born infected with fear and selfishness and our feelings of fear and insecurity tempt us. We are afraid of rejection, fear financial failure, worry about not getting the highest grades, fear not being loved or going hungry or being killed and more. There is no end to the list of fears with which people struggle. We must remember that fear is part of the infection of sin and God has a plan which, when complete, will rid our hearts of fear. As we come back into unity and oneness with God our fears will be cast out and love will be restored within.

Yes, it is true, we don't need to feel guilty for experiencing feelings of fear, but we shouldn't accept such feelings as normal, but instead long for the day God's "perfect love casts out all fear" from our hearts!