

## **“The Squeaky Wheel” Colossians 3:1-10**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The squeaky wheel gets the oil. Almost all of you know that familiar old axiom and what it means. The squeaky wheel is some person or thing that is so demanding, forceful, and strong that it overshadows everyone and everything else around it. The result is that it “gets the oil.” That means that people are more attentive and responsive to it than they are to everyone and everything else around it.

Today, I’m going to preach about the squeaky wheel of your life and mine that gets the oil. Can you guess what that is? It’s our feelings. Turn to the passage I read, Colossians 3:1-10, and I’ll explain that.

### **FEELINGS ARE THE SQUEAKY WHEEL**

Let’s start with by defining what feelings are - three things.

First, they are sensations like hungry, thirsty, dizzy, achy, and sleepy. Some of you may be that last one right now, sleepy. Sermons seem to be conducive to that and it’s a sensation.

Second, feelings are desires. Notice the word “desire” in verse 5. It refers to wanting to do or have something badly. In this verse, Paul talks about evil desires, lusting for sex and money. But desires can also be good or even morally neutral. Some of you, for instance, want the Indians to win the World Series. That is an unfulfillable desire you have.

Third, feelings are emotions. Paul mentions two of those in verse 8, anger and wrath. Those are just two of many negative emotions. Others are jealousy, sorrow, anxiety, loneliness, and more. There are also positive emotions like compassion, happiness, contentment, and peace.

Now that we know what feelings are, let me make an observation about them. They are the squeaky wheel of our person and life that gets the oil. I pointed something out to you in a February sermon. As vital as our thought life is, we never ask people, “How are you thinking?” We always ask them instead, “How Are You Feeling?” Why is that? It’s because feelings are the squeaky wheel that gets the oil. Dallas Willard

says it this way, *"Feelings live on the front row of our lives like unruly children clamoring for attention."* He's right about that. The fact is that we're normally far more aware of and concerned for our feelings than we are anything else.

That's why feelings are what they are – the triggers of our life. As much as anything does, they initiate, prompt, or set in motion the things that we say and do. That is problematic of course when the feelings we have are negative ones. Negative feelings trigger negative acts.

A pastor I knew committed adultery with his secretary. When asked why, he answered that he felt alienated from his wife and lonely. Notice the sequence there. Feelings, alienation and loneliness, triggered action, adultery. I strongly suspect there was sexual lust as well.

That then is the truth about our feelings. They are the squeaky wheel that gets the oil. They are the triggers of our life. They initiate, prompt, or set in motion the things that we say and do.

## **NOT RESIST BUT REMOVE AND REPLACE**

Because they do, all of us need to develop an effective strategy for dealing with them. Let me tell you first of all what that strategy is not. It is not just to resist negative feelings.

I knew a Christian who was always quarreling with a co-worker of hers. She finally felt convicted about it and decided to quit. She explained how she was going to do that this way: *"I'm just going to control my anger and be nice to her no matter what she does."* You can see what her strategy was. It was to resist, to act contrary to, the feeling of anger she had.

That is not an effective strategy though. For one thing, we often aren't able to resist strong negative feelings when we're in the grip of them. For another thing, even if we are able to and do, going through life that way, with our teeth gritted, isn't a very happy way to live it.

There's a better strategy for dealing with our feelings and Paul gives it in verses 8-10. Notice the terminology that he uses here. Verse 8 –

*“put them all aside.”* Verse 9 – *“laid aside the old self.”* Verse 10 – *“put on the new self.”* The “old self” refers to person we were in our fallen state. The “new self” refers to the person we are in Jesus. The terms “put aside” and “put on” were used of taking off and putting on clothing. Last Tuesday night, I was called out to the hospital for an emergency. I had an old t-shirt and grubby pair of pants on when I was called. I then changed into my good black suit with white shirt and tie. That is the picture Paul is giving here. We remove the negative feelings that characterize the person we were in our fallen state. We then replace them with the positive ones that characterize Jesus.

That is God’s strategy for dealing with our feelings and believe me it’s an effective one. We don’t just resist the negative feelings we have. We remove them and replace them with positive feelings instead. It is a major step forward when we realize and try to do this.

That’s why I told that Christian who was always quarreling with her co-worker what I did. You do need to quit quarreling with her right now. But that isn’t your ultimate goal. Your ultimate goal is not to feel like quarreling with her in the first place. Remove the negative feeling, anger, and replace it with a positive feeling, compassion.

That then is God strategy for dealing with our feelings. Remove negative feelings and replace them with positive ones.

## **MAKE FEELINGS SERVANTS NOT MASTERS**

That’s our call and here’s how we answer it – by doing three things.

First, we put our feelings in their proper place. We make them our servants not our masters.

Doing that requires that we recognize and believe something. Not honoring our feelings isn’t an insult. Our culture says that we aren’t being true to our self if we don’t indulge our feelings. That is wrong. We must know and accept the fact that our feelings don’t have to be fulfilled. And we should spend very little time grieving when they aren’t.

Making our feelings servants not masters requires something else.

We refuse to let them be the basis of what we say and do. As crucial as they are, they aren't fundamental to the nature of things. Insight, understanding, and the conviction of truth are. So, we make those things, not feelings, the basis of what we say and do.

I heard a therapist on an educational channel counseling a young woman who was trying to decide whether or not to marry her fiancé. The therapist advised, and the audience applauded it, that she should decide with her heart not her head. That's the culture's view but it certainly isn't God's. We should decide things with our head not our heart. We should not make feelings the basis of what we say and do

So, put feelings in their proper place. Recognize and believe that not honoring them isn't an insult. Also refuse to let them be the basis of what we say and do. Make them our servants not our masters.

## **REASON WITH OUR FEELINGS**

There's a second thing we must do to remove negative feelings and replace them with positive ones. We must reason with our feelings.

Listen to a significant insight about our selves. Thought and feeling always go together. When I say feeling in this context, I mean specifically emotions and desires. Thought and emotion and thought and desire always go together.

That means two things. First, there is no feeling without something being before the mind in thought. If we feel lonely, for instance, there is always the accompanying thought that we're alone. Second, there is no thought without some positive or negative feeling toward what is thought about. When I think about playing baseball at the schoolhouse as a boy, for instance, I feel joy. It's true. Thought and feeling always go together.

That shows us something that all of us need to know. Feelings don't just happen. They're caused. They're fostered and sustained by ideas, images, and thoughts in our mind. Ideas, images and thoughts in our mind are the primary (not "only" but "primary") source of our feelings.

Do you realize what that means? Our feelings can be reasoned with. We can remove and replace negative ones by bringing the right ideas, images, and thoughts to them. So, do that. The next time that you have a negative feeling, place your mind on ideas, images, or thoughts that are positive and relevant to the feeling. Scripture of course is our best resource for such ideas, images, or thoughts.

I sometimes feel worthless and insecure after I've made a mistake or failed. But I don't feel that way very long because I immediately reason with my feelings. I might recite John 17:23 and Romans 8:39, for instance, and dwell on what they mean. God the Father loves me just as He loves God the Son, Jesus. And nothing can separate me from that love. That stirring truth eventually routs the negative feelings I have.

Don't let negative feelings just happen. Reason with them instead.

## **CULTIVATE CONDITIONS**

To remove negative feelings and replace them with positive ones, we must do a third thing. We must cultivate the basic conditions that produce positive feelings. Dallas Willard discusses this in his book Renovation of the Heart. Most feelings are actually sensations and tones that accompany conditions. We have certain conditions and thus experience the feelings that accompany them.

That shows us one of our major mistakes when it comes to feelings. We try to deal with them without dealing with the underlying conditions that produce them. That is a futile thing to do.

So, let's cultivate the basic conditions that naturally exclude negative feelings and produce positive ones in their place. There are three such basic conditions and the Bible tells us what they are – love, peace, and joy. If we cultivate love, peace, and joy in our person, positive feelings will prevail in us.

But how do we do that? Paul tells us in verses 1-3.

First, according to verse 3, we die and hide our life in Jesus. That means that we become disciples of His. We decide to be with Him in

order to learn and do all that He says. Doing that makes the “things above”, that is God and the realities of His kingdom, accessible to us.

Second, according to verses 1 and 2, we relentlessly interact with these things above that are now accessible to us. Verse 1 and 2 say that we should “*seek*” and “*set our mind on*” them. Those phrases suggest engaging God and His kingdom with intensity.

We do that in two essential ways. First, we practice God’s presence. Second, we practice spiritual disciplines like solitude, silence, study, prayer, and more. I’ve explained both of those before and will do so again this year and next. If you’d like to know about them now, see me and I’ll help you.

Now, Paul tells us in verse 10 what happens when we do this. Our new self is “*being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.*” Simply put, the Holy Spirit transforms us over time into the image and likeness of God. He produces the conditions of love, peace, and joy in our person and life. Those conditions in turn cause positive feelings to prevail in us.

A month ago, a woman honked her horn at me and gave me the bad finger as she passed me in her car. Suppose that I have relentlessly interacted with the things above over the years. Also suppose that the Holy Spirit has produced the condition of agape love in me. If so, I won’t even have to battle negative feelings like anger because I won’t have them. I’ll naturally feel pity and compassion for this woman instead.

So, cultivate the conditions that produce positive feelings. Decide to follow Jesus. Then interact relentlessly with God and the realities of His kingdom. Positive feelings will eventually prevail if you do.

## **CONCLUSION**

I close this morning with this challenge. Don’t let your feelings be the squeaky wheel that gets the oil. Put them in their proper place. Reason with them. Cultivate love, peace, and joy. The Holy Spirit will fix the wheel if you do.