

Choose to Be Spirit-Filled

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All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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INTRODUCTION

Most of the situations we go through and the counseling we receive relate to choices we make day by day and moment by moment. The problems that push people into negative soul-power cycles and internal conspiracies have to do with the fact that God puts the truth in front of us, and we have to make a choice, even if it is unconscious, for or against the truth.

So much of human response is unconscious or involuntary. For example, breathing: We don't think about it, we just do it. It is a function of the autonomic nervous system, and without that function, we would not be able to survive. Most of what we do, however, is the result of conscious, voluntary decision making. We choose to open our eyes, sit up, and put our feet on the floor each morning. Though there doesn't appear to be much thought involved, from the moment we wake up, we make thousands of choices before we actually begin the work day.

Proper choices that appear to be automatic are usually preceded by a series of consistent deliberate choices. Those decisions, such as getting up every morning, should not be based on what “feels” right but according to what *is* right. When God made man, He designed us to have healthy emotions. He gave us common sense and an ability to think clearly, even in tense situations. God has not “given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7).

For those with a “sound mind,” the filling of the Holy Spirit is simply a matter of choice—a decision to honor God. In ourselves, there is nothing that qualifies us to receive this great provision. But as children who have been purchased by the blood of Christ, we know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge, and we can be “filled with all the fulness of God” (Ephesians 3:19). In this booklet, we will see that this fullness enables us to love others with a love that goes beyond feelings—Calvary’s love.

Chapter One

THE FRAILITY OF FEELINGS

“And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15).

It took common sense to choose to get up this morning; for most of us, it wasn't very difficult. Likewise, common sense prompts a spiritual Christian to obey God in other areas—to go soul-winning, for example—even if he doesn't feel like it.

It is spiritual common sense that our love is not based upon feelings. Yet, some people are troubled when we talk about what real love is, what true forgiveness is, and the importance of making deliberate decisions in those matters.

The fact that we have love is not always re-

flected in our experience nor in our expression. I have been in hospitals with men who have been the best husbands throughout their lives. But when they were suffering with a terrible illness, I have heard them curse their wives. Never had they cursed their precious wives before they became ill, yet on their deathbeds they began calling them all kinds of names. The feelings of confusion, fear, and stress dictated to them what to say. Yet, each one loved his spouse with all his heart.

Love may be felt on many occasions, but love cannot depend upon feelings. It is so hard for young people to understand that feelings, or the lack of them, do not reveal whether or not they are in love. We may have great feelings and an attraction toward someone we love. Among friends, we may have good feelings and mutual interests. Yet, many people seldom express feelings of love until they are separated or one of them becomes sick. If something bad happens in a relationship, negative feelings may be expressed and feelings may be hurt, even if real love is there. But God's heart comes through if His love is ruling.

How Did Jesus Feel?

When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, blood came through His pores as He agonized alone in prayer. On the Cross, the Lord Jesus was naked as He hung there, mocked and despised by the crowd who were watching. His face was disfigured, and His body was scarred from the beatings. Do you think He *felt* love for those people? No, He did not.

Do you think He *felt* love for anyone at that point? No, he did not.

Do you think He *felt* love toward God the Father? No, He did not feel love for God the Father.

Did He love the Father? Yes.

I fear for those who have only great feelings about their love affairs. I am not denying that feelings are involved. Of course they are. But feelings are changeable, depending on circumstances. True love, however, is a fact. It is the nature of God—it is who God is.

When Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34), He wasn’t saying it because He felt love for the people He was dying for; He died for the people because He loved them. It is so difficult for us to really grasp this: He died for the people because

He loved them, not because He had feelings of love toward them.

Years ago, I knew a couple who were madly “in love.” After they were married, she came down with a terminal arthritic disease. She was a very beautiful woman, but within a year after the disease hit her, the husband who was so madly in love with her figure and her beauty divorced her. The disease hit at age 26, and before she turned 29, she died.

When he first met her, he said, “This girl’s the greatest thing that was ever born.” Her beauty and the way she responded to him produced feelings he called “love.” But when she had to be in a wheelchair and gained weight because of her condition, those feelings were gone. Her illness revealed the fact that he did not love her.

Feelings Do Not Define Love

Though it can be expressed in feelings, love is not about feelings. Feelings do not define love; feelings define mutual interests.

There is never a place in the Bible where God mentions feelings in relationship to love. He wept over lost souls because He loved them while they were still lost (see Luke 19:41; John

11:33, 38). Yet, there was nothing in those people to stir up His feelings. People seldom responded to His love and often reacted violently. Yes, Jesus wept, but not because there was something going on in mutual response patterns through His feelings. It was because He loved the lost and knew they were going to hell.

Because God is love, God does not have to choose to love. God does have to choose to fellowship with us through His love; He does choose how to respond if I love Him; and He does choose how to respond to my prayers. But God is love, and He does not have to choose to love.

Chapter Two

THE SECRET OF LOVING

It is so vital to understand that the anointing breaks the yoke of bondage in relationships, and it is how we receive deliverance. I am not talking about having an experience; I am talking about receiving.

From the soles of our feet to the top of our head—this includes the mind—there is no soundness in us (Isaiah 1:6). That is a humbling thought. It means that we have to be Spirit-filled every day. We must choose to be filled with God every day—with God’s viewpoint, God’s attitude, and God’s power—because there is absolutely no soundness in us.

Our old sin nature is not one bit better today than it was the day we were born. Salvation came and redeemed us, and now as the creatures, we honor the Creator as our Redeemer. But we must purpose to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

After having little sleep and with a full

schedule ahead of me, when I get out of bed in the morning, I don't always "feel" in love with God—and I don't feel out of love with God. Still, I love Him.

So, to wake up fully, I take a shower, *then* I get on my knees and say, "God, I purpose to be filled with Your Spirit today." I purpose in my heart to bless people, to receive and to honor them, no matter who they are or where they are, no matter what time it is. I choose to love my wife on purpose, by doing little things just to bless her.

I say to God, "I know that the answer for this day is that You would fill me with Your Holy Spirit right now, before I leave this room."

When I am filled with the Holy Spirit, I don't have to consciously choose to love, because the Holy Spirit sheds the love of God abroad in my heart (Romans 5:5). Then, the Spirit takes that love and manifests it through me. Psalm 46:4 describes a river, "the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God." That river is love. And when we choose to put God first, He is in the midst, and we shall not be moved (Psalm 46:5).

Choose to Overcome Self-Consciousness

We have to choose to be filled with the Holy

Spirit. God is love; His Spirit is love; so when we are filled with the Spirit, even though we have to make constant voluntary choices to do it, we love. If we stay filled with the Spirit, we love. That is the secret to loving. It is the secret to loving God, the secret to loving yourself, and the secret to loving one another in the Body of Christ.

We do have to choose to be filled with the Spirit, and we do have to pray to express that love through God's nature. But the Spirit is love, and God is love. Therefore, love does not have to *choose* to express itself because it already is love.

So many problems between husbands and wives happen because one of them was deceived at the Tree of Knowledge concerning self-knowledge and emotional goodness. In practical application, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is the conscience. Prior to Adam and Eve eating from that tree, man did not have a conscience. As soon as they ate of its fruit (Genesis 3:6), the conscience began to function. Before that, Adam was only God-conscious. Now he was self-conscious, which fights God-consciousness. Self-consciousness makes us aware of our nakedness, of what we lack, and causes us to seek a covering of fig leaves. But a natural covering is inadequate.

Now, because of Adam, we have knowledge about ourselves and our needs. Our knowledge can produce good feelings if we choose to favor and fulfill ourselves. When that is the case, we try to take that knowledge and those emotions and harness them together. The result is a “good” life that is natural but not spiritual.

Demonized through Feelings

After thirty years of marriage and having several beautiful children, a woman left her husband to have an affair with a man who was young enough to be her son. After she got a divorce, her boyfriend took off, and she almost had a nervous breakdown. She had interpreted their sensual relationship as “newly found love.” Instead, it was a newly found demonic relationship.

It is so sad when people considering marriage take what is pure and let it become demonized (through fornication, for example), even when they really do care for each other. They are saved, but Satan gets in with a demon to distort the original purity of their relationship.

Confessing that you are “in love” does not please God. Faith pleases God. I love my wife; I would do anything in the world for her. But my

love is not just based upon feelings. Our love is first based on the objective love of God for us because of the value He places on us, and then on a subjective love for each other that does not depend on a response in order to be fulfilled.* Therefore, we are secure about each other because we are secure in Christ.

**For more about subjective and objective love, read The Love of God, by Pastor Carl H. Stevens, Grace Publications, 1998.*

Chapter Three

LOVE RESTS ON THE PREMISE OF JESUS CHRIST

“Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31*b*).

Whether you are serving God on the mission field or serving the Body of Christ in the local church, once you have been called by God, never relate to your feelings concerning the call.

In other words, when things are not going well, don't let your feelings drive you out of your call. Your call should never change because of the way you feel today about a situation. Don't let feelings take you away from a divine relationship and a divine purpose.

Feelings are a terrible way to guide a person into objectivity. Emotions without the Cross and without the Holy Spirit's affection are never objective. Emotions are always subjective, and if the Holy Spirit is not ruling in our minds, then our emotions will try to make decisions. We may

call it our mind, but it is not the mind operating at all: It is the emotions. Emotions were designed by God to respond to and appreciate truth. They were not designed to think, yet many people are caught in a vicious cycle of trying to reason through their feelings.

How many times have you heard someone say, “I don’t *feel* good about this”? We should never confess how we feel regarding issues of spirituality and obedience to the Word of God.

“But I *have* feelings,” you say. “I have emotions.” We all do. But emotions have nothing to do with the premise of our spirituality. Never let anyone tell you that they do. Emotions are the center for appreciation in a well-balanced soul. They are the means of enjoying the premise of a thought. Our premise for spirituality is Jesus Christ. It is Jesus Christ and His words that become life through the Spirit.

If I heard that my wife had become very ill, I would immediately weep. The love that I have for her would be expressed through my tears. I would actually feel that love in my emotions. A similar godly expression is shared in a sexual relationship between a husband and his wife.

Christians need to have this premise rooted in our hearts: We do love, but we don’t always

feel love. We love because Love is in us.

Who Is on the Lord's Side?

The children of Israel had been wandering for some time in the wilderness, and they didn't "feel" good about God's leader nor His provision. In fact, they felt that God had forsaken them, and they began to think with their emotions. They rebelled and began to worship idols while Moses was on the mountain (Exodus 32:1). When Moses came down and saw their wickedness, he said, "You that love the Lord, get on the right side" (Exodus 32:26). They had to make a choice, and the Levites chose God.

At the end of Joshua's life, he addressed the nation of Israel, saying, "...choose you this day whom ye will serve..." (Joshua 24:15). Again, God's people were required to make a choice. He didn't say, "Choose you this day whom ye will love"; he said, "Choose you this day whom you will *serve*."

Our choices reveal our love. If we love God, then we won't do things that hurt God and grieve the Holy Spirit. Our choices will reveal our obedience and our love for God. This is how it ought to be.

If I love my wife, I will never intentionally

hurt her, because my choice will be to honor her through the love that I have. That love is expressed and experienced through choices.

If children learn to love God and love their school, then they will make right choices to honor and respect it no matter how they feel when things aren't going so well for them. Occasionally we see young people, even from godly homes, make choices to represent the world in their fashions and lifestyles. They are choosing a love for the world, and they need to understand that though the choices are theirs, the consequences are up to God.

With God, it is not important how much I love but how much I have faith in God who gives me His love. In its eternal sense, in the sense of the Cross of Jesus Christ, my love is revealed through my faith that serves by love (see Galatians 5:6).

The Spirit Gives Unconditional Love

Think of that woman with the crippling disease that put her in a wheelchair. After two short years, she died. If her husband's faith served her by Calvary's love from the Word of God and through the power of the Spirit, then he would have been right there wheeling her around, lov-

ing her, building her up, telling her how much he loved her. He would have expressed his love with his emotions more than before she became ill—not out of pity, but out of unconditional love expressed through the senses by the source of love, Jesus Christ.

The Spirit gives us unconditional love. We don't have it in ourselves. When we are filled with the Spirit, we have love. The objects of our love—our spouse, our children, a brother in Christ, a lost soul—need to have that love expressed. We can express it with great feelings. But notice the difference: Our love is not a feeling, though it is expressed in great feelings, because it is there all the time. But objective love now has feelings, because we are responders to the truth of the divine Source.

We were saved when we received Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9). That was a choice. The choice was made with faith. Right choices, faith, and allowing the Holy Spirit to work in us by love are the keys to maintaining our minds, our thoughts, and our feelings (which are genuine and real). We have the reality of a brand-new life.

Chapter Four

OBEY GOD, EVEN WHEN YOU DON'T FEEL LIKE IT

“How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me?

“How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?

“Consider and hear me, O LORD my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death” (Psalm 13:1-3).

Many people make choices based upon feelings, and often without realizing it. We may get so busy that we are tempted to stop being faithful to church—we are tired, and we just don't “feel” like going. When the details of life take priority, it is a result of not having a personal relationship with God by faith.

There will be many times when we don't *feel* God, even though we are in His presence. That is when we must learn to exercise our faith to-

ward God, when we don't feel Him. How do we do it? By obedience. How do we obey? By making choices. And what are we to choose? Faith, and not the sight of personal experience.

We choose life. We choose love. We choose light—the Bible, the Word of God. We choose these things. Once we are filled with these things, we simply express them through the operation of God, or *energeia* (Ephesians 1:17-19). The power of the Holy Spirit transfers the Word into our hearts, and we are able to be ministers of His life. It almost becomes involuntary at times, an overflow of who we are through the filling of the Spirit and the Word of God.

Commit Others to God

The Psalmist wrote, "I am sorrowing, I am sick and tired, and I have the pain of my own soul counseling me" (see Psalm 13:2). How many people would be helped if they would believe this message instead of letting their own feelings counsel them!

A lot of people go through trials and fail. And if we know someone who fails or sins against us two or three times a year—or even seventy-times-seven times—we are not to put him on trial. Why should we? When a believer

in Christ fails, instead of putting him on trial we should let it be a trial of *our* faith. In God's eyes, the one who is weak is not on trial. Instead, God delivers *us* up to be "rubbed the wrong way" so that His life can flow out of us to those who need it (2 Corinthians 4:12).

God will test us through the trials of our faith, which will add degrees of glory to our soul bodies. That causes our light to shine, and people in the world see a difference. Those degrees of glory will be added to our glorified bodies in heaven, should we pass the trial.

Just agree with God and choose to let Him handle the situation. Communicate what is necessary and choose to trust God for that person's life. Then trust the person by trusting God for the consequences of your faith.

A Heavenly Trust

"But, I don't trust people," you say.

I trust people because I trust God for people. This is what Jesus meant when He said He didn't commit Himself to men (John 2:24). In John 17:6-26, Jesus committed all those who would believe on Him to the care of the Father. In so many words, He said to Peter, "I am still going to let you be an apostle and, when you are older, you

will be a good one" (see John 21:18).

The Lord made a commitment to Peter, and He didn't take away Peter's rank even in the midst of his failure. "I know you will not serve properly now," He said to Peter, "but when you are an older man, you will die for Me."

Some scholars teach that Jesus didn't trust people. But in fact, He did. He committed men to the Father's trust; and because He trusted the Father and what the Father would do, Jesus could trust the man. That is how He trusted Peter. Jesus looked beyond Peter's failure and saw his potential; He looked beyond his fault and saw his need. Furthermore, Jesus never seeks a divorce from a believer, nor does He put a believer on probation. He will never ever leave a believer (Hebrews 13:5).

If your love relies on feelings, it is not God's love, and it is not of faith. You do not have a faith that serves by love, which is the faith of Jesus Christ, not your own. You can rationalize it away, but you cannot go against the truth. These are absolutes from the Word of God.

Regardless of how much you "feel" or don't feel it, just choose to respond to God's love. Choose by faith to love God. Choose to obey Him by faith, and you will realize that you are

in Love.

We don't have to go to a seminar to learn how to love with God's love. We only need to choose to be filled with the Holy Spirit and we will have love. Come whenever the Word of God is preached and hear it with an open heart. Then go away saying, "Yes. I accept what God says." Choose to be Spirit-filled.

CONCLUSION

A woman once said to me, "I haven't loved my husband for thirteen years."

"You are not telling the truth," I responded gently.

"I am trying to be honest with you, and you call me a liar?"

"Listen to me," I said. "You have put up with him for all these years. You have held two jobs while he was drunk half of his life. No one else has shown him the kind of love you have shown. You didn't even leave him when you had every right to leave him."

"Oh," she said.

"Of course, maybe you don't 'feel' that you are in love with him. God loves him, but even God doesn't feel in love with him the way he is."

I explained that God is love, but we don't see Him expressing love to Satan or to the demons. They are out of His plan forever. The unsaved will go to hell, and hell is a horrible place filled

with terrifying emotions, “where their [conscience] dieth not, and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:44, 46, 48). But hell doesn’t touch the emotions of God. Because of His perfect justice (which included a plan for every soul to be saved), He will laugh when He sends people to their final judgment—but only after they reject the Savior who loved them and died for them on the Cross.

She said, “I have condemned myself all these years for not loving him.”

I started to weep as I said to her, “I have never seen the kind of love you have. You *have* loved him. You just couldn’t feel anything for him. God also can’t have an objective love relationship with him, because your husband hasn’t wanted one. And that means God has no feelings to exchange with him.”

God died for that man and was ready to forgive him in a moment. His wife was ready to forgive him, too. She hadn’t forsaken him.

She went home and told her husband she was sorry for not ministering love to him. Filled with the Spirit, she expressed God’s unconditional love. Today, that man is saved, and together they are serving God faithfully.

They each made a choice. That is all it takes.