**Think then Act, and Feel last!**

The experience of “getting the cart before the horse” has taught us that there is often a proper if not essential order to things that must be observed to fully benefit from them. This is true with regard to how the constituent elements of our *physical* being work in concert to determine our conduct. Think about the following carefully, please….

Do your ***feelings*** dictate your actions, and then your thoughts have to try to rationalize what has already been done, cf. Jas.3:8-12?

Do your ***actions*** simply *react* to stimuli without really thinking or feeling anything- at least until afterwards, cf. 2Pet.2:12? Or,

Do your ***thoughts*** determine your actions, and your feelings then emanate from them, cf. Jas.4:11-12,13-17?

Obviously, we all function in all of these various ways from time to time.

There are occasions when we react *emotionally* without really thinking through the consequences.

There are other times when we simply act *impulsively* without any real emotional or intellectual incentive.

But hopefully, there are also times when we act only after *deliberate consideration.*

While we may not be able to completely divorce our thought processes from *emotional* influences- nor should we necessarily, it is important that our heads come first in the “chain of command” to determine our actions rather than our hearts. Why is this true?

Hearts, and the emotions that come from them, are fickle things. They often vacillate widely from one extreme to the other, usually from temporary and external influences. “Following ones’ heart” thus often becomes a very winding road with many switchbacks and complete course changes. To illustrate this point, think of small children. One moment they’re crying almost uncontrollably, and the next they’re giggling equally uncontrollably. Why? They are immature, and are thus easily influenced by temporary and external motivations, cf. Eph.4:13-14. This is exactly how they should function since they are, after all, children.

But as we mature, the intellect is supposed to gradually take over the controlling influence of our activities from our emotions. Cognitive and reasoning skills should begin to override purely emotional decisions, which are really reactions rather than decisions anyway. This process is called “maturation,” or more simply, “growing up,” cf. Heb.5:11-14.

These things have specific application value in our spiritual growth and development. Consider Jesus’ words of Matthew 5:39, *“But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also.”*  First, please understand that a *“slap”* is an insult, not an attack on personal safety (see also Luke 22:36). But more importantly, who is able to fulfill Jesus’ command?

Is it the person whose emotions dictate their reaction to a personal affront, or the one whose deliberate thought considers the ultimate good of all concerned before reacting?

The first is a purely emotional reaction born of spiritual immaturity that will likely return *“evil for evil,”* see v.38; while the latter is a thoughtful reaction born of spiritual maturity which provides testimony to the offender and glory to God, see vv.40-48.

Stanley E. Jones correctly assessed, “Allowing a man to smite you on one cheek, and letting him have the coat, and submitting to him when he compels you to go one mile does little or no good. It is the other cheek, the cloak also and the second mile that does the trick,” (The Christ of the Mount, p.73; as quoted in The Gospel of Matthew; Chumbley, p.109).

Look at another application from James 1:19, *“This you know, my beloved brethren. But let every one be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.”*

If we are spiritually immature, we might be inclined to react to this verse with, “I can’t do that- it’s just not who I am; I just say what’s in my heart, and if others don’t like it, that’s just tough.”

But again, let’s think this verse through a bit before discounting it as an impossible goal. First, God says, *“be quick to hear.”*

This involves a readiness to not only listen, but to hear and consider. Such implies thoughtful consideration of what is heard, rather than an immediate emotional reaction to it.

Second, God says to be, *“slow to speak.”* This hesitancy to instantaneously respond to what has been heard gives the brain, which typically functions a little slower and more cautiously than the heart, time to process and digest what has been said so that an intelligent (rather than emotional) and productive response can be given.

And third, God says to be, *“slow to anger.”*  While anger might indeed be the righteous response to what has been *heard,* such should only come *slowly* after careful deliberation has been given to not only what was actually said, but also to what actually should be said in response.

Thus, the *emotion* should follow the *thought* and the *action,* rather than precede them.

If we can learn to put our emotions **after** thoughtful consideration and appropriate action, we will be a lot more pleasing and productive in the kingdom because we will have spiritually “grown up.” We’ll feel better too because the right “horse” (of our intellect) will be pulling the cart of our activities instead of them being pushed by the “mule” of our emotions!

**Conclusions:**

1. God gave us an *emotional heart* because we need one- we need it to *temper* our *rational* and *logical minds* to keep them from the abuses of tyrannical pragmatism.
2. But He also gave us *logical* and *rational minds* to override our *emotional hearts* when need be to keep us from the fickle vacillation of emotionalism.
3. We must allow our *thoughtful, reasoned,* and *measured* heads to be tempered by- not controlled by our emotions, and act accordingly. Think first; act second; and let emotion follow.