

FOLLOWING THE HEART



HBP

Introduction

Many times, we hear people give the advice, “Just follow your heart.” Perhaps the most troubling example I have ever seen of this phrase being used was in an editorial in the Lancaster New Era. The editorial was not troubling just because it was unscriptural, but also because it was written by a minister. This 2002 editorial was written by Rev. Paula Davis, who was then a minister with the (one size fits all) Unitarian Universalist Church. The editorial read, “Follow your heart in searching for religion.” Rev. Gable stated she does not understand why the Jewish, Muslim, and Christian religions cannot all be correct. One can see from this example that following one’s heart can lead to disastrous consequences.

Why do we hear the expression “follow your heart” so often? Perhaps some people use this expression because they don’t want to get involved in the details of helping someone else make a decision, or possibly they do not have an answer at all. Still, other people simply believe that each person is able to make their own decisions without help from anyone else, including God. It is also possible that well-meaning people simply do not realize what they are actually saying. Finally, following your heart is subjective and is

based on emotion rather than fact. In this lesson we will learn the destructive power of telling people to just follow their hearts.

Lesson

Metaphors

Ever since the dawn of civilization, man has associated the brain with logic and the heart with a vessel of emotion. Eventually, the association between the heart and emotions became a metaphor that sticks with us even today. Take, for example, Valentine's Day. I cannot help but think of how the heart is used as a symbol to represent the powerful need for love.

In college I studied Maslow's basic human needs. These needs are in five categories:

1. Physical needs—such as breathing, water, food, sex, sleep, homeostasis, and excretion.
2. Safety issues—such as security of the body, employment, resources, morality, family, health, and property.
3. Love and belonging—such as friendship, family, and sexual intimacy.
4. Esteem—such as self-esteem, confidence, achievement, respect of others, and respect for others.
5. Self-actualization—such as creativity, spontaneity, problem solving, lack of prejudice, and acceptance of facts.

Science also tells us that all humans have four basic emotions. These emotions are: happy, sad, afraid/surprised, and angry/disgusted. It is these emotions that react to our physiological needs. It is, however, man's conscience that forms our morality and influences our emotional response to our physiological needs.

The conscience

The conscience is part of our soul. The conscience is what separates us from the animals. Our conscience is what teaches us right from wrong. The Bible has different descriptions of the conscience, such as “clear,” “good,” and “weak.” Scripture also teaches us that all human beings have a conscience.

Romans 2:14-16 14..... “(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.)”

1. Gentiles who do not know of Christ have a law unto themselves.
2. This law, the rules of the conscience, is written on our hearts to help our emotions agree with our conscience.
3. Our conscience also judges our actions and makes us feel guilty if we do not follow the instructions given to the heart by the conscience.
4. Our conscience is a set of intrinsic instructions imbedded in our human nature, or perhaps even a set of natural instructions imbedded in our DNA.

The conscience is only a set of rules. There is no force to obey these rules. The Bible tells us that evil can cause us to completely ignore our consciences.

1. 1 Timothy 4:2..... “Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.”
2. Titus 1:15-16..... “In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted.”

The Holy Spirit

One should not confuse the conscience with the Holy Spirit. In contrast to the conscience, which is an innate set of rules, the Holy Spirit is an active part of God, who gives Christians the power to follow the instructions of their consciences. Moreover, both unbelievers and believers know right from wrong, but only Christians have the power of the Holy Spirit to help them follow their conscience. All Christians should realize they have more power than unbelievers to do the right thing. A Christian still has freedom to sin, but sinning is much more difficult with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Not everyone interprets their conscience in the same way. Sometimes, even Scripture does not always give us an answer on disputable matters. Dealing with such disputable matters is not part of this lesson, but one can study this issue in Romans, chapter 14.

The heart

Our heart (emotions) exists to benefit our physical bodies. It is for this reason that the heart is inherently evil. Scripture tells us that the heart is naturally evil and deceitful from childhood. We also are told that a heart can be hardened so as not to follow the conscience.

1. Genesis 8:21....."Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done."
2. Jeremiah 17:9-10..... "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? 'I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.'"
3. Matthew 15:18-19..... "But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.'

For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.”

4. Matthew 5:27-28....."You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

5. Exodus 7:13.....” Yet Pharaoh's heart became hard, and he would not listen to them, just as the Lord had said.”

We have just read Scriptures about how the heart is evil. Scripture also teaches us that the heart can be good. Prophetic Scripture tells of an inward circumcision of the heart that will replace the symbolic exterior circumcision of the flesh. The Bible also teaches us that the heart (the use of our emotions) can be made wise, sincere, pure, and full of love for God.

1. Deuteronomy 30:6-7.....” The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.”

2. Proverbs 2:10.....” For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.”

3. Proverbs 23:15-19.....” My son, if your heart is wise, then my heart will be glad; my inmost being will rejoice when your lips speak what is right. Do not let your heart envy sinners, but always be zealous for the fear of the Lord. There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off. Listen, my son, and be wise, and keep your heart on the right path.”

4. Hebrews 10:22-23.....” Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.”

5. Matthew 5:8..... “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”

Summary

As we have learned from this lesson, the heart is naturally evil. Telling someone to follow their heart is the same as telling them to follow their evil nature. The heart has a constant desire to fulfill Maslow's needs of the flesh. The powers of Satan influence man so he can ignore his conscience. The heart, however, has the capacity to be good. The Holy Spirit can give one the power to fill the heart with a Godly use of emotions.

Proper expressions for a Christian to help someone with their problems would be to say, "pray about it," "ask your pastor," or "follow the Holy Spirit." It is inadequate to say: "follow your heart," "just be yourself," or "follow your conscience" (which may be seared). These phrases apply to the secular world and leave God completely out of the picture.

I will leave you with a final message regarding the heart: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:5).

Review

1. Some people are clearly more emotional than others. In what ways might this affect their behavior?
2. Are some emotions or personalities bad, or is it just how we apply these emotions that make us good or bad? Explain how some emotions can be used in different ways.
3. Did you ever have reservations about telling someone to follow their heart? Has this lesson had an impact on your opinion regarding this expression? Explain.
4. Explain the relation between needs, emotions, conscience, and actions.
5. Explain how animals differ in actions verses humans.
6. Explain the difference between the heart and conscience of a Christian compared to a non-Christian.

