

Toward a Theology of Emotion

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Introduction

Scripture is replete with emotion, both God's and man's. The Bible is a collection of books, addressed to persons by a Person. It is the revelation of a personal God to human persons made in his image. Since emotions are an important component of personhood, the Bible deals with the subject of emotions. The Bible frequently reveals God's emotions so that our lives, including our emotions, might fully honor and glorify him. For example, Scripture speaks frequently of the wrath of God. In no uncertain terms, God wants us to understand not just what he thinks about sin but also how he feels about it. Why is this? Clearly, it is so that we might know the Lord better and in particular improve our understanding of his holiness and his love. The Bible speaks of God's wrath so that we might apprehend, rationally and emotionally, our moral dilemma before his holy justice and so that we might experience the depth of his love for us when he poured his righteous wrath out upon his Son instead of us. "Scripture not only speaks about emotions, it also speaks to and through our emotions. The Bible itself is emotional literature, filled with emotional expression and designed not just to communicate with our rationality but also to stir us emotionally, thus affirming our emotionality."¹

Although some theologians, in order to preserve God's immutability, have understood the plethora of references to God's emotions as anthropomorphic, this paper will contend that it is more accurate to view man's emotions as theomorphic. Good the-

ology should lead us not only to think God's thoughts after him but also to feel God's feelings after him. If Christlikeness is our goal as his followers, that would include not only Christlike behavior and thoughts, but also Christlike emotions as well. Compassion, the emotion most frequently attributed to Christ in the Gospels,² facilitates the fulfillment of the "one another's" of the New Testament. Jesus invites us into his joy in the Gospels and promises us (in the Psalms) that at his right hand there are pleasures forevermore (16:11). The fruit of the Holy Spirit is characterized by attributes—love, joy, peace, kindness, and gentleness—which are riddled with emotion.

Unfortunately, contemporary evangelicals have paid little attention to the development of a theology or biblical anthropology of the emotions, affections, and feelings. As a result, when the emotions are addressed personal opinion, denominational or cultural prejudices, and pop psychology are the dominant voices. Even worse, these voices are rarely questioned or justified with biblical warrant. We seem to function as if Scripture is silent on these matters.

Scripture contains the norms not just for our behavior and thinking, but also for our emotions and affections. St. Paul told the Corinthians that he aimed to work for their joy and then admonished them for having restrained their affections for him. Both the Old and New Testaments frequently enjoin their listeners to "Rejoice" and "Be glad" (Ps 100:2; Rom 12:15; Phil 4:4; 1 Thess 5:16). Peter tells us to cast all our anxieties on

God, because he cares for us (1 Pet 5:7). “Fear not,” is a recurrent command in both the Old and New Testaments (Deut 31:6, 8; Josh 1:9; Matt 10:26; Luke 12:4). Scripture tells us that a righteous man hates evil (Prov 8:13, 13:5; Rom 12:9). Moses tells the Israelites that they will be judged “because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and gladness of heart for the abundance of everything” (Deut 28:47).

Whether we are conscious of it or not, we have theories and operating principles about emotion. It should be no surprise that when Scripture does not form our thinking, especially about a matter such as emotion which is so much a part of the nature of persons, something else will. Christian ministry cannot occur without a set of beliefs and concepts about persons, a psychology if you will, which necessarily entails beliefs about emotion.

Fortunately, God’s written Word is anything but silent about emotion. Practical biblical wisdom about emotion is available in the Scriptures, if we will but take the time and make the effort required to mine these latent riches of the wisdom of God.

The purpose of this article is to posit biblical parameters and offer a few modest proposals toward the development of a theology, or maybe more properly, a biblical psychology of emotion, affections, and feelings. The ultimate purpose of this article is to consider the reality of our emotions as a manifestation of the image and glory of our great God.

Distinguishing Feelings, Emotions, and Affections

Confusion and imprecision abound in the use of these three correlated words: feeling, emotion, and affection. This is difficult to avoid entirely, since their meanings overlap and they share much of the same

semantic field. In addition, they are often used interchangeably in common parlance. However, some definitions are essential as a starting point. The following definitions are proposed.

Feeling—the sense perception of an internal or external event, which is typically classified into binary categories of experience: good/bad, pleasant/unpleasant, smooth/rough, hard/soft, hot/cold; or, the subjective experience and report of an emotion. Often, in common language usage, the word “feeling” is coterminous with the word “emotion.”

David Powlison describes four different uses of the word “feeling”: to describe sense perceptions; to express emotion; to communicate desires; and to communicate thoughts, beliefs and attitudes.³ The first two uses that Powlison describes are similar to my definition, have the potential for greater precision, and avoid confounding human faculties and capacities.

Powlison’s first use and my first definition provide us with a concept that describes broad categories of human experience: pleasure or pain, hot or cold, etc. “I feel good/bad” or “That feels good/bad.” God has designed us so that we desire our own good; we naturally seek that which we perceive will lead to life, happiness, and pleasure, and we avoid that which we perceive as bad, aversive, painful, or unpleasant. The pursuit of pleasure or happiness and aversion to pain and suffering is a basic principle of life, and in itself, begotten by God. It is because we are created in this way that God frequently motivates us in Scripture with promises of blessing and threats of punishment. For example, in Deuteronomy 30:15-20, we read

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; in that I command you

today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You will not prolong your days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to him.

In a similar manner, Pascal wrote,

All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every man, even of those who hang themselves.⁴

The second part of my definition of feeling, like Powlison's second use, simply uses the word as a predicate to consciously experienced emotion. "I feel happy, sad, disgusted, afraid, etc."

Emotion—a fully personal (involving thoughts, beliefs, and judgments made about the environment and oneself) and somatic response to internal and/or external experience, subjectively experienced as some variety of feeling, which prepares the body and mind for action. Emotions are normally psychosomatic, body and soul, for human beings. Emotions, however, are not necessarily mediated by a body.

The words "emotion" and "motive" are

derived from the same Latin root,—*mov-ere*, which means, "to move." Emotions are both responsive and preparatory. They are part of our response to our experience and also motivate us toward particular ends. And, specific emotions have a specific purpose and function. Therefore, we naturally and correctly speak of an emotion as being warranted or unwarranted, rational or irrational, realistic or unrealistic, sensible or ridiculous. Emotional experiences are not neutral; they are either facilitating the individual's, and more importantly God's, purposes and functions or they are not (of course in varying degrees). *Coram Deo* (before the face of God), specific emotions in specific contexts are either sinful or righteous.

Particular emotions have particular functions or serve particular purposes. Any definition and specification of the role of particular emotions must attend to the intrapersonal, horizontal/interpersonal, and vertical/spiritual/moral dimensions.

Affection—deep and abiding emotional/motivational vectors of the soul, which move us toward or away from something, contingent upon moral evaluation. McDermott, following Jonathan Edwards, differentiates affection and emotion by noting that affections are strong and powerful and ultimately determine our choices, while emotions are comparatively weak and fleeting.⁵

Jonathan Edwards was careful to avoid separating the affections and the will. In *Religious Affections*, he stated,

The *will*, and the *affections* of the soul, are not two faculties; the affections are not essentially distinct from the will, nor do they differ from the mere *actings* of the will and inclination, but only in the liveliness and sensibility of exercise . . . what are commonly called affections are not

essentially different from them, but only in the *degree* and *manner* of exercise. In every act of the will whatsoever, the soul likes or dislikes, is either inclined or disinclined to what is in view.⁶

About one hundred years before Edwards, the English Puritan, William Fenner wrote with insight and graphic imagery about the role of the affections and their necessary connection to the moral sense.

The affections are the forcible and sensible motions of the heart or the will, to a thing or from a thing, according as it is apprehended to be good or evil. . . . The affections are the feet of the soul: for as the body goes with its feet to that which it loves, so the soul goes with its affections to that which it loves. The soul hath no other way to come at that which it loves, but only by its affections. . . . The affections are the soul's horses, that draw her, as it were, in a coach to the thing that she affects: a man is moved by the affections. By anger he moves out to revenge; by desire he moves out to obtain; by love he moves out to enjoy; by pity he moves out to relieve. The affections are the motions of the soul. . . . The affections are directly related to the apprehension of good and evil. When there is little apprehension of good and evil, the affections are weak and may hardly work on the body at all. But, when there is great apprehension of either, not only the soul is deeply affected, but the body also.⁷

Our definition of affection includes emotion, which involves the intellect, "thoughts, beliefs and judgments," and our definition of affection includes moral evaluation. We can summarily dismiss reductive definitions of emotion or affection as merely somatic, biological disturbances. In addition, the definitions and descriptions that I have proffered do not

allow us to separate emotions or affections from reason, conscience, or volition.

The Doctrine of God

A biblical psychology of emotion must begin and end with God. John Frame has aptly noted that we cannot know other things rightly without knowing God rightly, "essentially because the doctrine of the knowledge of God implies a doctrine of the knowledge of everything."⁸ Calvin begins his *Institutes* with a similar acknowledgement: the knowledge of ourselves is inextricably dependent upon our knowledge of God, and vice-versa.⁹ Not so coincidentally, wisdom and knowledge about anything begins with a fear of God, a particular emotional response to him (Prov 1:7, 9:10).

Most psychologists and philosophers start in the wrong place when thinking about emotion because they do not proceed from a knowledge and fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom and understanding.¹⁰ Although they may provide helpful observations, collect useful data, or ask important questions, their conclusions are often superficial and always fundamentally flawed when the Creator, whose image we bear, is excised from their formulations. Even from a secular perspective, it has been argued that psychology's disengagement from philosophy, particularly metaphysics and ethics, at the end of the nineteenth century left it morally and spiritually vacuous, virtually ignoring the human condition.¹¹ Academic psychology is dominated by behaviorism (including the cognitive-behavioral variety) and biological reductionism. It excludes moral and metaphysical reflection, since these domains are not accessible to empirical methods. Psychology has become "behavioral science," and biological psychiatry,

the reigning paradigm in the mental health fields, typically reduces human experience to mere neurobiology.

God Is a Person

Directly or indirectly, every page of Scripture answers the question, "Who is God?" What type of being is he? One central answer to that question is that God is a person. God is portrayed in personal terms in the Scriptures.

Yahweh (OT) and *Kurios* (NT) are the names that God gives to Himself and these are personal names, proper names, with various levels of meaning.¹²

He is the only self-existent, totally independent person. He is Absolute Personality, depending on nothing for existence or definition. "Only Scripture presents consistently the reality of a God who is both personal and absolute."¹³ He is not a mere life force, or a rational or moral ideal, or a transcendent ethical principle. Although he is the Creator and omnipresent sustainer of life and all things on this earth, he is not identical to, nor does he share a common identity with, anything he created. Although God is holy and God is love, the reverse is not true; neither holiness nor love is God. Although he has attributes, he is not an attribute; he is a Person with attributes.

From the beginning in the Scriptures, God acts like a person. He thinks and chooses and feels, speaks and expresses pleasure and displeasure, expresses delight and wrath, and both loves and hates. In other words, he acts like a person because he is a Person. God is Father. God is Son. God is Holy Spirit who grieves and knows and to whom one may lie (Isa 63:10; Acts 5:3; 1 Cor 2:11; Eph 4:30). He is a Personal Lord, and because of this we can have a relationship with him (on his terms of

course; he is Lord) as fellow persons, but we must do so as servant persons. He is the Person who creates; we are the persons He has created. He is Father; we are his children in and through Jesus Christ.

Since he is a person, not only can we engage in a relationship with him, but we can also understand ourselves through an understanding of him as he reveals himself in Scripture and in Jesus Christ. By knowing the Father and the Son, we come to know who we are as persons and to know what kind of persons we should be. God is the prototype for personhood and personality. He is also the Holy One, perfect Personality. Therefore we should look at him to understand what it means to be a person, a being characterized by personality.

Alvin Plantinga asks,

How should we think about human persons? What sorts of things, fundamentally, *are* they? What is it to be a human, what is it to be a *human* person, and how should we think about personhood? . . . The first point to note is that on the Christian scheme of things, *God* is the premier person, the first and chief exemplar of personhood . . . and the properties most important for an understanding of our personhood are properties we share with him.¹⁴

Therefore, in order to understand ourselves as persons with emotion, we must understand God as a person with respect to emotion. We are made in his image and likeness. A theology of emotion must begin with God and his self-description in the Scriptures because he is the eternal and Absolute Person, the Creator, the original whose image we bear. Ultimately, all emotions are intended to end with God as well, to return to him for his exaltation because, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and *enjoy* Him forever."¹⁵

God as a Person with Emotions

The assertion that the God of the Bible experiences emotion would seem to go without saying, were it not for the early influence of Plato and the Stoics upon theologians. The contrivance of an impassible, unemotional God stems from a pejorative view of emotions as inherently unruly and capricious. The emotions were viewed as irrational and intemperate and as a sign of weakness, dependence, and contingency. As a result, the Stoic ideal of *apathēs* became the ideal and this idea was imposed upon God.

McGrath cites the challenging and modification of the concept that God is impassible as an example of the way in which theology is affected by prevailing cultural and philosophical assumptions, noting, "Patristic reflection on whether God could suffer were significantly influenced by the prevailing philosophical consensus that a perfect being could not change, or be affected by outside influences."¹⁶ In order to preserve the divine attributes of transcendence, immutability, and aseity many of the patristic theologians believed it logically necessary to posit that God is impassible—he is incapable of experiencing "passions," negative emotions or suffering.

The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England and the Westminster Confession of Faith described God as "without body, parts, or passions." The plethora of biblical verses that seemed to ascribe emotion to God was deemed anthropomorphic or, more properly, anthropopathic. In other words, in Scripture God merely represented himself with emotion in order to communicate meaningfully to emotional human persons. However, as Bruce Ware notes,

in all of Scripture's references to emotions as these relate to God, there does not appear to be any instance in which it is said that in reality God transcends these emotional qualities. There seems to be no clear direction, then, as there was with regard to the question of divine repentance, for taking the ascriptions of divine emotions in any way other than at face value.¹⁷

D. A. Carson also criticizes the hermeneutic for impassibility.

The methodological problem with the argument for divine impassibility is that it selects certain texts of Scripture, namely those that insist on God's sovereignty and changelessness, constructs a theological grid on the basis of those selected texts, and then uses this grid to filter out all other texts, in particular those that speak of God's emotions.¹⁸

Several modern theologians since the middle of the twentieth century acknowledge that God does indeed experience emotion.¹⁹ Bruce Ware reformulates the doctrine of immutability by denying that God is "absolutely immutable" but asserting that God retains ontological and ethical immutability or "onto-ethical immutability." In other words, God is unchangeable and self-determining in his holy and eternal being (or intrinsic nature) and also unchangeable in his moral perfections, including his utter reliability and faithfulness in keeping his Word. However, Ware contends that God is relationally and emotionally mutable, *so that his ethical and ontological immutability are preserved*. He states,

when rightly understood the relational changes that occur through God's interaction with his creatures, so far from conflicting with his immutable character, actually express it . . . because God's intrinsic moral nature is unchangeable it must always and without fail

express itself in ways appropriate to the moral state of any given situation. Thus when the human moral state changes (e.g. from rebellion to repentance) the immutable divine nature must now reflect itself in ways that are appropriate to this new situation. Hence, changes in God's attitudes and actions are naturally brought about as God consistently applies the standards and requirements of his constant moral nature in ways that correspond to the moral changes continually undergone by his creatures. Barth was right then to speak of a "holy mutability of God" whereby God is understood to change in his attitudes, conduct and relationships with humans in ways that both accord with his changeless intrinsic moral nature and properly confront the human moral situation.²⁰

Surely this type of change in God's relationships with and attitudes toward his creatures would include various emotional changes. These various emotions would be a necessary expression of God as an utterly holy, loving, wise, and morally perfect, personal being. God is made neither better nor worse by such emotional changes which are consistent with and even necessary to express his supreme perfections. Ware concludes, "The abundance of Scriptural evidence of God's expression of emotion and a more positive understanding of their nature lead to the conclusion that the true and living God is, among other things, a genuinely emotional being."²¹

That God is a Spirit being, without a body but with emotions informs us that emotions are not essentially material or somatic. In addition, we see evidence for the essentially spiritual nature of human emotion in the Scriptures where individuals who have physically died are described in the intermediate state. In Revelation 6:9-11 the souls of the martyrs cry out with righteous indignation for the Lord's justice

to be meted out. In the parable of Luke 16:19-31, Lazarus receives comfort while the rich man is in torment and agony. (Granted, we are not sure how far we can rely upon every point of the parable, but it is very consistent with other accounts of the suffering that will accompany eternal punishment in hell.) What is relevant here in this parable is that these disembodied persons are conscious and that one soul experiences the emotion of suffering while the other receives comfort.²² According to John Piper, "Philippians 1:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:8 teach that after a Christian's death, and before the resurrection of the body, the Christian will be with the Lord and capable of joys 'far better' than what we have known here."²³

Finally, some support for the contention that emotion does not necessarily require a physical human body can be inferred from the biblical descriptions of angels, who are essentially non-physical, spiritual beings. For instance, in Luke 2:8-14, the angel who announces the incarnation of the Messiah to the shepherds brings "good news of great joy." The heavenly hosts who praise and give glory to God do not sound like apathetic robots. Luke 15:10 suggests, at least, some sort of emotional capacity in angels, "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." Furthermore, it is difficult to imagine heavenly angels in the very presence of God worshipping him unceasingly but unemotionally. Surely they delight and tremble in his presence.

The Doctrine of Man

When it comes to addressing the nature of human persons, science is largely incompetent either to frame the correct questions or to provide answers. The hard sciences are at their best when they describe how

physical systems work, but they are largely incompetent when settling questions about the nature of consciousness, intentionality, personal identity and agency, and related matters.²⁴

Since emotion is essentially a personal and spiritual phenomenon, a biblically grounded theology and philosophy are “at their best” when “settling questions about the nature of consciousness, intentionality, personal identity and agency, and related matters.” The historical-redemptive paradigm of Creation, Fall, and Redemption will serve to organize and focus the discussion of emotion as it relates to the doctrine of man.

Creation

“We should not be surprised that when a society denies the reality of the God of creation it is filled with individuals who do not know who they are and cannot explain why they do what they do.”²⁵ Realizing that emotion is an important aspect of our nature as human persons created by and like and for an absolutely Holy and Personal God delivers us from several of the prevailing misconceptions about emotion. The Stoic contention that emotion is mindless passion that disturbs rational thought and impedes good choices, along with the “Christianized” version of Stoicism that asserts that God does not care about our feelings but only about our holiness, can be contested on several grounds.

First, our emotional capacities are part of our nature as personal beings created in the image and likeness of God. Contrary to the Stoic tendency to view emotion as a nuisance are many biblical commands to experience particular emotions. We are instructed to hate evil, rejoice always, delight and be glad in the Lord, weep with

those who weep, not grieve like those who have no hope, and fear God (Ps 97:10; Phil 4:4; Ps 37:4; Rom 12:15; 1 Thess 4:13; Luke 12:5).

Second, the capacity for emotional response is part of God’s original pre-fall design, which was declared “very good” by the Lord. The second chapter of Genesis provides three direct references to man’s emotional capacity. First, God made trees with fruit that was pleasant to the sight (v. 9). He could have placed soylent green bio-tablets in a hermetically sealed dispenser but in his wisdom, he made food with an attractive and pleasant appearance. Second, Adam’s poetic exclamation, after God made and then presented a female companion to him, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh,” drips with relief and exhilaration (v. 23). Finally, the creation story ends by informing us “the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” (v. 25). We can reasonably infer that Adam and Eve were not only naked and unashamed but that positive feelings were correlated with their naked state before God and each other.

Third, particular emotions such as fear and joy and delight are essential components in fulfilling the primary purpose of our existence: serving and glorifying God. Only fools have no fear of God. Fearing God is a natural and necessary response to his holiness and power. Even Jesus Christ, the perfect Man, experienced and delighted in godly fear (Isa 11:1-3; Heb 5:7). “Serve the LORD with fear, And rejoice with trembling” (Ps 2:11). Serving God rightly requires right emotions. “Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything, therefore you shall serve your enemies, whom the LORD will send against you” (Deut 28:47).

John Piper's concept of "Christian Hedonism," echoing themes found in other Christian thinkers like Augustine, Pascal, Edwards, and Lewis, contends that the pursuit of joy is not merely popular or only one option among many in life, but is rather the essence of our duty to glorify God by enjoying him. "The pursuit of pleasure is a necessary part of all worship and virtue."²⁶ "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him," is an axiomatic theme for Piper.²⁷

Therefore, God gives emotions for a specific purpose. They are necessary for us properly to know and relate to and glorify God; they are designed to facilitate the fulfillment of the Great Commandments: loving God with all we are and do, and loving our neighbor as readily as we love ourselves. The capacity for emotions is designed by God and is part of his divinely ordered plan for us as servant persons. Understanding God's designs and order for emotion is an essential prerequisite, without which we cannot understand emotional disorders.

One of the most common contemporary explanations for why people do what they do and for personal and social misery is that they suffer from a "Mood Disorder" which is a diagnostic category in the DSM-IV,²⁸ or simply that they have an "emotional problem," such as depression or anxiety. However, the secular mental health professions do not adequately define and understand affective disorders or emotional problems because they ignore the divine order and the Divine Orderer. It goes without saying that a prerequisite for defining a disorder is a prior apprehension of the proper order. To understand what is disordered, you must first understand the right or ideal order. For example, from a biblical perspective, people who experi-

ence no fear of God and no anxiety about their eternal destiny are more disordered than those who have panic attacks subsequent to conviction that they are guilty before a Holy and Just God and bound for hell outside of Christ. In both cases, their emotions cannot be correctly deciphered until their status before God, who never sleeps or slumbers and searches every heart, is apprehended. When emotions are isolated from the "one with whom we have to do," they cannot be understood and in fact may be tragically misinterpreted and often medicated or otherwise falsely assuaged.

In a similar vein, Christian counselors sometimes refer to "wounded" or "damaged" emotions as the source of a person's problems in living. This manner of speaking, while making some experiential sense, is misleading because the emotions are reified and separated from the inner person, or heart. As a result, counseling focuses on healing emotions rather than addressing the heart out of which these emotions spill. The biblical diagnosis is not that we have wounded emotions or emotional problems, it is that we have "me" problems or heart problems. "This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing happens to all. Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live." (Eccl 9:3) Jay Adams asserts,

The fact is that there are no damaging or destructive emotions *per se*. Our emotional makeup is totally from God. All emotions of which He made us capable are constructive when used properly (i.e., in accordance with biblical principles). . . . All emotions, however, can *become* destructive when we fail to express them in harmony with biblical limitations and structures.²⁹

And this is where the rub lies.

Fall

Derek Kidner offers the following comment on Genesis 3 regarding Satan's tempting proposal to Adam and Eve, "The climax is a lie big enough to reinterpret life . . . and dynamic enough to *redirect the flow of affection and ambition*. To be *as God*, and to achieve it by outwitting him, is *an intoxicating programme*."³⁰ Adam's and Eve's emotions are incited and directed against God rather than for him. Emotion, like eating and drinking and whatever we do, should be to the glory of God. But, fallen emotions appear quickly in human history. Adam and Eve experienced a panoply of negative emotions only after they yielded to their own lusts in accord with Satan's "intoxicating programme." They became ashamed, worried, anxious, and fearful soon after disobeying God. In Genesis 4, the first murder is in a context of ungodly emotion: sinful envy and unrighteous anger.

One of the most popular and pernicious myths about emotions is that they are neither good nor bad; they are neutral. On this view, emotional experience occurs within a morally neutral, value-free zone where concepts such as good and bad, right and wrong, godly and sinful are systematically avoided or at least minimized.

Carl Rogers was the most prominent twentieth century proponent of this view, which pervades clinical, counseling, and educational psychology and clinical pastoral education, and which has crept into Christian counseling. A primary focus of Rogerian (AKA non-directive or person-centered) therapy is on carefully listening for, accepting, and empathizing with the counselee's feelings. "Objective facts are quite unimportant. The only facts which

have significance for therapy are the feelings which the client is able to bring into the situation."³¹ The goal of therapy is to reduce estrangement from one's own experience and feelings and facilitate congruence by helping them get in touch with their true feelings. Negative feelings like anxiety and depression result from incongruence with and lack of acceptance of one's true self. In order to facilitate congruence and self-actualization, the counselor simply draws attention to and empathizes with the counselee's emotions. People will function as fully human beings if they are free to experience, express, and satisfy their inner nature, which is positive and rational and basically good. Moral evaluation and directive advice would only inhibit the actualizing process. Emotions are to be accepted without conditions or judgments.

Another way in which the moral valence and spiritual nature of emotion is either denied or minimized is through biological reductionism. In other words, emotion is reduced or completely attributed to the body, usually brain physiology or genetic inheritance or some combination thereof. This is a difficult point, since emotion as we currently experience it is undoubtedly psychosomatic, soul and body. The body is indeed the channel through which we experience emotion, and no one can question that our bodies and brains influence our emotions. A biblical psychology of emotion can acknowledge the somatic mediation of emotion and a close interaction between psyche and soma but must hold that emotion is essentially personal and spiritual, and normally but not necessarily or essentially somatic. Commenting on the relationship between body and soul, Jonathan Edwards wrote,

Such seems to be our nature, and such the laws of the union of soul

and body, that there never is in any case whatsoever, any lively and vigorous exercise of the inclination, without some effect upon the body. . . . But yet, it is not the body, but the mind only that is the proper seat of the affections. The body of man is no more capable of being really the subject of love or hatred, joy or sorrow, fear or hope, than the body of a tree, or than the same body of man is capable of thinking and understanding. As it is the soul only that has ideas, so it is the soul only that is pleased or displeased with its ideas. As it is the soul only that thinks, so it is the soul only that loves or hates, rejoices or is grieved at, what it thinks of.³²

A biblical view of emotion, while maintaining that the capacity for emotion is good, must account for sin, which has corrupted every part of our being and experience. The fallen human heart is evil, deceptive, and rebellious; therefore, its products are inevitably tainted with the stain of sin. Sin infects our whole being and every capacity or faculty has been tilted away from God. Our emotions are no longer naturally oriented in such a way that they contribute to honoring, loving, and obeying God. Instead, our emotions have become self-serving, our affections idolatrous, and our passion is for our own glory rather than God's. We tend to seek happiness in what cannot last; delight in evil; delight in ourselves, fear that which God forbids; become angry when we should be patient; grieve hopelessly; and hate that which is good. Pervasive, holistic depravity means that not only do we choose and think the wrong things but also that our emotions are wrongly oriented.

At this point, we must reiterate that all our primary faculties or capacities (intellect, will, conscience, and emotion) are equally involved in imaging God and equally corrupted by sin. This is important

because,

It is sometimes argued that unless one asserts the primacy of the intellect, one may justly follow any or every sort of emotion. But this would be true only in the non-Christian concept of the nature of man. Only in the non-Christian concept of man are the emotions inherently unruly; they have become unruly only because of sin. But, when sin has entered into the mind of man, the intellect is as unruly as are the affections. The whole man refuses to subject itself to the rule of God. When a saved sinner learns to control his passions, the reason is not primarily that he has understood the meaning of the primacy of the intellect as a psychological truth, but the primary reason is that in the whole of his being he is born of God.³³

Likewise, John Frame notes, "the fall was not essentially a derangement of faculties within man. It was rebellion of the whole person—intellect as much as emotions, perception, and will—against God. My problem is not something within me; it is me!"³⁴ Fortunately, that is not the end of our story.

Redemption

Because of God's grace and his redemptive purposes realized in Christ and by his Spirit, the pervasive effects of sin upon the image of God in man are not irreversible. Every one of our capacities or faculties is corrupted but they can likewise be restored. In Christ, we find hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge and truth (Col 2:3, 3:10; Eph 4:21), thus the good of reason is restored. In Christ, our conscience is renewed (Heb 5:11-14, 9:8-14, 10:22; 1 Pet 3:21). In Christ, we are empowered to choose that which is good (Eph 2:10; Titus 2:14, 3:8; Heb 9:14), thus our volition is renewed. In Christ, our emotions and affections are redeemed and become allies

in loving God and others (Phil 1:7-8, 2:1-5; Col 3:5-12; 1 Thess 2:7-8). In addition, Jesus Christ can restore the harmonious interaction of reason, conscience, volition, and emotion, which dis-integrated in the Fall. "It is best to think of intellect, will, and emotions as interdependent. Each affects the others, and none can function properly apart from the others. When we try to employ one without the others, the result is distorted understanding, choices, and feelings."³⁵

A failure to recognize both the fallenness and the potential for redemption of emotion has resulted in a couple of contemporary fallacies. For example, Jay Adams's concept of feeling-oriented vs. commandment oriented³⁶ living is frequently misunderstood (and probably could have been nuanced more fully by Adams to avoid the abuse of his concept) by falsely dichotomizing emotions and obedience. Likewise, the well known Campus Crusade train illustration from the Four Spiritual Laws, wherein feelings (particular emotions) are the caboose following faith in the facts of salvation, conveys both truth and error. Adams's dichotomy and Crusade's train illustration are true in the sense that following particular emotions (i.e., ungodly fear or guilt) while failing to attend to biblical promises and commands is foolish and sinful. However, God's Word and Spirit address the whole man so that the intellect is challenged to think truly, the emotions are kindled toward God, and the will is stimulated to act in ways that please God. These "Christian" versions of the popular admonition that "one should never follow feelings" fail to take into account the effect of both sin and redemption upon the whole man, upon each and every one of our capacities or faculties. As I review my own

sinful history, it is apparent that my thoughts, decisions, and actions have caused me a lot more trouble than my emotions ever have. In fact, nagging "negative" emotions such as despair, guilt, shame, and fear best reflected my true condition and kindled a return to God's Word as the source of truth and Christ as my only hope.

Particular emotions may in fact facilitate true thinking and righteous action. In 2 Corinthians 7, Paul writes that godly grief leads to and produces repentance, while worldly grief produces death. In other words, the problem Paul is highlighting is not "following your emotions," but following worldly emotions. John Frame observes,

It is true, of course, that people sometimes "follow their feelings," rather than thinking responsibly. But it is also the case that people sometimes follow rationalistic schemes that run contrary to what they know in their "guts" (feelings) to be true. God gives us multiple faculties to serve as a sort of internal system of checks and balances. Sometimes reason saves us from emotional craziness, but emotions can also check the extravagant pretenses of reason . . . [Sometimes] feeling guides my reflection; my reflection refines my feelings. Those refined feelings provoke additional reflection, and so on. The goal is a satisfying analysis, an analysis I feel good about, one with which I have cognitive rest, a peaceful relation between intellect and emotion. That relation seems to me to be involved in all knowledge.³⁷

Neuroscientist and physician, Antonio Damasio, likewise maintained, "Emotions are not a luxury. They play a role in communicating meaning to others, and may also play a cognitive guidance role . . . feelings have a say on how the rest of the brain and cognition go about their business. Their influence is immense. . . . Feelings

are a powerful influence on reason."³⁸

Emotions are designed, just as much as any of our capacities, to respond to God's Word and Spirit and are crucial for a wholehearted response to him and others. The Laodicean church of Revelation 3 is rebuked and threatened both because of their works and their apathy, "because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth" (v. 16). They are exhorted not simply to repent, but to "be zealous and repent" (v. 19).

Regeneration and sanctification don't necessarily make us any more emotional, although they certainly are intended to renew our emotions and kindle and redirect the affections so that, in increasing measures, the new man is able to love God and neighbor more wholeheartedly and to hate evil and sin. And of course, the event and process of redemption does not make us less emotional, although the renewed heart with increasing faith in Christ can and should experience diminishing measures of sinful emotion and idolatrous affection.

Galatians 5 presents a picture of the freedom that comes for the believer who places his faith in Christ alone (vv. 6, 13-14). In this passage, the redemption of emotions is apparent. In Christ and by the Spirit, the redeemed are empowered to avoid immoral and impure emotions like jealousy, anger, and envy that are closely associated with enmity, disputes, dissensions, and factions (vv. 19-20). Redemption means that evil passions and desires have been and can be crucified with Christ. (Surely this is a process; the tension of the "already" and "not yet" of the reign of Christ in our hearts is as true here as it is everywhere else. We must acknowledge two senses of sanctification, both a definitive past event and a progressive process,³⁹ as the Scriptures do.) To be in Christ sets

us free to live and walk by the Spirit, thus empowered to progressively manifest a renewed affective life of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control (vv. 22-24).

Jonathan Edwards emphasized the crucial role of affections in authentic Christian experience.

For although to true religion there must indeed be something else besides affection; yet true religion consists so much in the affections, that there can be no true religion without them. He who has no religious affection, is in a state of spiritual death, and is wholly destitute of the powerful, quickening, saving influences of the Spirit of God upon his heart. As there is no true religion where there is nothing else but affection, so there is no true religion where there is no *religious affection*. . . . If the great things of religion are rightly understood, they will affect the heart . . . God has given to mankind affections, for the same purpose as that for which he has given all the faculties and principles of the human soul, *viz.*, that they might be subservient to man's chief end, and the great business for which God has created him, that is, the business of religion.⁴⁰

The transformation of our affective life requires supernatural assistance. John Owen recognized the power of affections, "It is vain to contend with anything that hath the power of our affections in its disposal; it will prevail at the last."⁴¹ God's redemptive activity in this domain is necessary and typical. As Lord over all, he sovereignly initiates a covenantal relationship with us through his law and his grace, by which we are transformed as we respond with faithful obedience.

A transformed affective life requires that we acknowledge, accept, and trust in God's Lordship: his loving presence, his power and authority, and his wise and sovereign

control over our lives and circumstances.⁴² It is our response to his compassion, his commands, and his control that mediates personal transformation, including our emotions and affections.

Compassion—It is because of a Stoic bias, not Scripture, that some say God does not care about our emotions, but only our holiness. It is his loving presence with us, by his Word and Spirit, that allays our anxieties, comforts us in our afflictions, and gives us hope when we grieve. He is the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our afflictions (2 Cor 1:3-4). He is a God of encouragement (Rom 15:5). We are told to cast all our anxieties onto him, because he cares for us (1 Pet 5:7). We need not fear evil, because he is with us and his firm hand comforts us (Ps 23:4). When we are afraid, we can trust in him (Ps 56:3). He puts all our tears in his bottle (Ps 56:8). His “love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” (Rom 5:5)

God’s loving compassion is most apparent in his Son whom he sent to die for us, even though we were undeserving enemies of him. Christ is the Prince of peace, who brings perfect peace to those who trust in him (Isa 9:6, 26:3). Compassion is the emotion most frequently attributed to Christ.⁴³ The compassionate presence of God with us and for us is essential for the transformation of any component of our lives. We need help to change our emotions; one way God provides this help is by caring for us.

Command—As Lord, God is not only personally present with unfailing compassion, but also he has the right and authority to tell us how to live, including the emotions we should and should not feel. Even though we cannot command and direct our emotions in the same way that

we can our thoughts or actions, God does not seem to have any compunction about commanding and directing the emotions and affections of his people. He commands us to rejoice and be glad (Ps 100:2; Rom 12:15; Phil 4:4; 1 Thess 5:16); to fear him (Luke 12:5; Rom 11:20; 1 Pet 1:17); not to fear people (Josh 1:9; Deut 31:6, 8) or persecution (Luke 12:4-5); not to worry about circumstances (Matt 6: 25-34; Mark 4:40); to grieve and mourn with others and for our sin (Ps. 51:17, Rom 12:15; Jas 4:9); to let peace rule in our hearts (Col 3:15); to be kind and tenderhearted and compassionate toward others (Eph 4:32; Col 3:12); to hate evil (Ps. 97:10; Amos 5:15) and not to hate our brother (Lev 19:17; 1 John 2:9,11, 3:15). As Lord, he not only commands our emotions but he also questions (Gen 4:6; Jonah 4:4-9) and judges (Deut 28:47) them. His interest is not just in how we act with respect to our emotions but also in their motives and causes. His claims are not limited merely to what we do with our emotions but also extend to which emotions we feel and why.

As Lord over all, God’s designs and intentions for our emotions are normative. As the Supreme and Most High Being, he has a right to our allegiance in all things. Therefore, whether we are eating or drinking or getting angry or sad or feeling afraid or happy, all things should be for his glory alone. Thus, our Holy Lord lovingly provides norms for our emotions: what we feel (which would include even our motives for these emotions), what we do with these emotions, and their ultimate purpose and objective.

Control—Lords are, by definition, sovereign; our God does indeed reign over all things. All of the circumstances and events of our lives are under the control of his wise and loving hand. Our emotions and affec-

tions are intended to bring glory to him, and as we trust and rest in his sovereignty, we are enabled to orient them for him and to him. God's sovereign control over all things brings order, sense, meaning, and purpose to our lives, and our emotions. When we understand our emotions in the light of God's sovereignty, particularly when coupled with a wholehearted apprehension of his presence with and authority over us, our emotional lives are situated within ultimate and divine perspectives that temper, order, and direct them.

Conclusion

The God of the Bible aims to establish his Lordship not just over our actions and thoughts, but also over our emotions, affections, and feelings. "Religious affections are a subset of affections in general, and all affections are religious."⁴⁴ What is the source of my joy and happiness? What do I grieve and become sad about most? What is it that provokes my anger? Who or what do I fear most? Is he Lord over my emotions or do they rule me? Are my feelings for him or against him? Do my affections indicate that I love him above all other gods with all my soul, heart, mind, and strength? Who or what is the chief end of my affections? Our emotional states are windows into our souls, revealing the allegiance of our hearts. Let us endeavor to think God's thoughts after him, conform our actions to his Word, and experience emotions that reflect and honor him.

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Sermon: Today's Mercies for Today's Troubles; Tomorrow's Mercies for Tomorrow's Troubles

Matthew 6:34 and Lamentations 3:22-23

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Introduction

Sometimes I have reinforced a sermon by following it up with a STAR article (The STAR is Bethlehem Baptist's weekly newsletter). Today I want to reinforce a STAR article with a following sermon. The STAR article last week was called, "Today's Mercies for Today's Troubles; Tomorrow's Mercies for Tomorrow's Troubles." There were several points. One was this: Every day God appoints a measure of pleasure and pain for that day—like the old Swedish hymn says:

He whose heart is kind beyond all
measure,
Gives unto each day what he
deems best—
Lovingly, its part of pain and
pleasure,
Mingling toil with peace and rest.

Kind beyond all measure, the Lord gives pain and pleasure to each day as he deems best. We don't always agree enthusiastically with what God deems best for us. It is hard for us to feel that he is kind beyond all measure when he gives us pain. Causing pain is not generally equated with showing kindness, especially if God's measure for one day is a lot more than another day. But it's true, as we will see more fully in a moment. God gives each day his wise and loving measure of pain and pleasure. That was the first point of the STAR article.

The second was that there is fresh mercy

from God for each day's appointed pain. Today's mercies are not designed to carry tomorrow's burdens. There will be mercies tomorrow for that. Today's mercies are for today's burdens. But tomorrow? What about tomorrow? What will become of our children? Will they believe? Or will they forsake the way of righteousness? What will become of our health? Will we go blind or deaf or lose our memories? Who will take care of us? Will we spend the last 10 years of our lives out-living all our friends and family, abandoned, slumped over in a wheel chair at a rural nursing home? What will become of our marriages? Will we ever trust again? Will we laugh and play and pray and talk in peace? Will we be there for the children? Will we be there for each other? Will it be sad and strained and dissatisfying for 30 or 40 more years? What will it be like tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow? What will become of our church? What will tomorrow bring? Or Wednesday? Or next Sunday? Or a year from now? Or ten years from now? Will we be together? Will we be winning the lost, and standing for righteousness, and delivering the oppressed, and sending more and more missionaries to the unreached peoples, and resting in the care of 17 district elders, and worshipping with white-hot zeal for the glory and grace of our great God? What about tomorrow? Will we have the strength to live tomor-