

# FAITH OVER FEELINGS – PART 1

## THE DIFFICULTY OF MANAGING EMOTIONS

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- We must admit that emotions play a crucial role in all of life...not a day goes by in which we don't feel some emotion...everything we do, say, or think is in some way emotional
- God has made us emotional beings...emotions are a gift of God in that they come as a result of being made in the image of God...they are to be a blessing in our life
- Imagine what any close relationship would be like without emotions...emotions make our humanity colorful rather than black and what...they add beauty and depth to our lives
- But emotions are a difficult thing...at times, it seems like we can't live with them...at other times, it seems like we can't live without them
- The difficulty in dealing with our emotions is evident in the extremes that many of us go to:
  - One extreme: rationalism = the avoidance of anything bordering on emotion; instead of emotions directing us, we must be guided by reason and logic alone; the Christian life is merely correct thinking
  - Other extreme: emotionalism = the avoidance of thinking too deeply about anything; this person is ruled by the pursuit of emotional pleasure and the aversion to anything painful
- In all likelihood, most believers are not a strict rationalist or emotionalist but they do have a tendency in one of those directions
- Some are led mostly by the head with little concern whether their hearts are engaged
- Others are led mostly by their emotions with little regard for how their minds are to be engaged
- Regardless of which category we fit in, we need to understand the relationship between thinking and feeling
- These extremes highlight the difficulty many have in dealing with their emotions
- "I regard it as a great part of my calling in the ministry to emphasize the priority of the mind and the intellect in connection with the faith; but though I maintain that, I am equally ready to assert that the feelings, the emotions, the sensibilities obviously are of very vital importance. We have been made in such a way that they play a dominant part of our make-up. Indeed, I suppose that one of the greatest problems in our life in this world, not only for Christians, but for all people, is the right handling of our feelings and emotions. Oh, the havoc that is wrought and the tragedy, the misery and the wretchedness that are to be found in the world simply because people do not know how to handle their own feelings! Man is so constituted that the feelings are in this very prominent position, and indeed, there is a very good case for saying that perhaps the final thing which regeneration and the new do for us is just to put the mind and the emotions and the will in their right position."<sup>1</sup>
- An example of how we have a difficult time managing our emotions: "Then the fight happened. I dug my heels in. I said some hurtful things. She didn't think she had done anything wrong. I was livid she wouldn't see my point of view. So, I (the marriage counselor, marriage educator, and marriage conference speaker) stormed out of the house. I violated virtually every principle I teach in my conferences. I knew better. My emotions got the best of me. Because of the growing resentment and distance, there was no desire to fix it. I just wanted to get away. Later that night, I returned home. After taking some time to sort through my own emotions and really process what happened, I knew I had messed up – badly! I knew I was mostly to blame."<sup>2</sup>

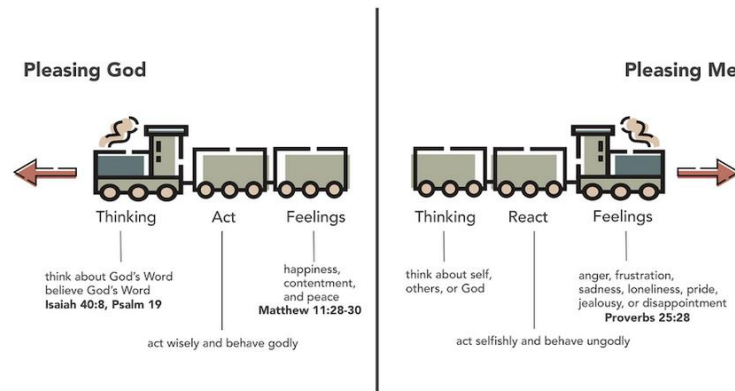
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<sup>1</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Its Cure*, 109.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pastorscenter.org/blog/pastor-dont-ignore-the-unhealth-in-your-marriage-part-1/>

- The difficulty is also evident in the fact that our society is preoccupied with trying to deal properly with emotions:
  - We live in a therapeutic society which is in search of mental and emotional wellness
  - Psychologists and psychiatrists exist to aid people in their search for inner peace
  - Numerous self-help books and institutes aim to produce emotional wholeness
  - Our culture tells us to live based on how we feel because that's the way to a good life...“Follow your heart...do what feels right to have the life you want”
  - There is even an Emotions Anonymous support group...a 12-step program which helps individuals improve their mental health and well-being...their mission is to support individuals with emotional difficulties in their efforts to live more manageable lives

## FEELINGS TRAIN



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- A variety of questions arise when considering how we deal with our emotions:
  - Where do they come from?
  - Are they morally neutral?
  - Why do they seem to have a life of their own at times?
  - Am I to control them? If so, how do I control them?
  - What is the relationship between truth and feelings?
  - Are emotions authoritative?
  - Is there a way that truth can affect emotions and emotions can affect thinking?
  - Can wrong thinking bring emotional harm just as sinful emotions can dramatically affect our thinking?
  - Does the Bible give any guidance on how to manage our emotions?

## MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT EMOTIONS

- Some common misconceptions:<sup>4</sup>

### Emotions are Bad and Should be Suppressed

- In this misconception, emotions are set against reason and, because they cannot be trusted, they must be subdued and suppressed
- Since emotions do nothing but mess us up, all that really matters is the mind and rational principles
- This results in a very cerebral Christianity, light without the heat

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.biblicalcounselingresources.org/work/crystals-cczet-w6d5y>

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from Brian Borgman, *Feelings and Faith*, 23-25 and Todd Murray sermon <https://gibcijupiter.org/pages/sermons/detail/sermon/15847>

## Emotions are Irrelevant and Unnecessary

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- This misconception is not as drastic as the first one but it nonetheless dismisses the emotions are largely unwanted and intrusive
- “The emotions are there, but they are like in-laws who have overstayed their welcome; they are a nuisance and best if ignored...the emotions are optional: They are untrustworthy. Our faith would function fine without them.”<sup>5</sup>

## Emotions are Uncontrollable

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- This misunderstanding of emotions results from believing that emotions are outside of us, are caused by other people, and are therefore what govern and control us
- This is usually seen in comments like, “you make me so angry...I can’t help the way I feel”
- Many relationships have been destroyed and all kinds of sinful behavior have occurred from holding to the sovereignty of the emotions
- This perspective has resulted in many people believing that emotions are simply external forces that force themselves upon us, leaving us at their mercy and without the ability to obey God

## Emotions are the Most Important Thing About Us

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- This has led many Christians to live for the emotional high...with little concern for truth or sound doctrine
- For many believers, they live for emotional experiences
- What is believed is determined by how it makes them feel: “I don’t believe *that* doctrine because it makes me feel bad” (i.e. election, hell, etc.)
- The thought that their emotions should be sanctified and brought under control of the Word is not something they consider

## Emotions are the Authenticator of Real Truth

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- Many think that their emotions are reliable indicators of what is true
- So, many live their lives on the basis of feelings...however they feel dictates what they do...they allow their emotions to dictate what they think is real and what is not real
- These supposedly flawless emotions are a powerful driving force in life for how we think and what we do
- However, often we cannot trust those feelings because they are tainted by sin
- It is similar to the conscience...it is a gift from God but it is not flawless...it is affected by sin...which is evident in the fact that sometimes it accuses us when there is no true guilt...and sometimes it excuses us when it shouldn’t
- Emotions were never intended to be the confirmation of truth...we don’t look within to confirm truth
- The truth of God’s Word is true regardless of whether we feel it or not...truth exists outside of our emotions
- “When we favor subjective feelings over objective fact in God’s Word, we have no way to determine what is really true.”<sup>6</sup>
- Even when we are struggling emotionally, we are still able to choose what’s right

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>6</sup> John MacArthur

## Emotions are the Evidence of Genuine Obedience

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- Many assume that obedience always should feel joyful, willing, and exciting
- However, obedience is often not accompanied by grand feelings and overwhelming emotions of victory
- Frankly, obedience sometimes just “feels” terrible since mortifying sin is never easy...the flesh resists it...it never wants to be starved...it wants to be fed
- We are to obey the objective truth of God’s Word whether we feel anything or not
- This is where the Gospel-centered movement was off...promoting the idea that we ought to overwhelmingly delight in the indicatives of the Gospel that would motivate our obedience to the imperatives of the Gospel
- This has led many to think that they have to obey with passion, otherwise they are faking obedience (sadly this has resulted in antinomianism for many)
- If obedience must be compelled by high emotions, then Jesus was a failure at obedience because he was grieved to the point of sweating drops of blood but still submitted his will to the Father

## Emotions are the Proof of Robust Worship

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- Yes, we should worship in spirit and truth...meaning our hearts are to be engaged in worship of the Lord
- We should not offer robotic, emotionless worship
- But emotions were never meant to validate whether our worship is credible
- Emotions are not what drive our worship of the Lord...truth drives worship...in fact, often our hearts are overwhelmed by the trials and the hardships of life which make worship difficult and it is the truth that buoys our soul in the absence of high octane feelings

## Emotions are a Source of Authority

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- Many believe that their emotions and feelings carry as much weight if not more than the truth
- This sets up our emotions as a rival authority...like Catholicism with 3 sources of authority: Pope, tradition, Bible
- But emotions were never meant to be a guide or another equal authority alongside the Word
- Scripture is the ultimate source of truth and that’s what we line everything up against
- These misconceptions demonstrate our need to think correctly about emotions
- “If our emotions are to be sanctified, if our emotions are to be conformed to the image of Christ, then we must have a grasp on what the Bible says. If we are going to successfully cultivate our emotions for greater godliness and put to death those destructive, ungodly emotions, then we must have a handle on what the Bible says about them. A biblical theology is foundational for us if we ever hope to understand our emotions and grow spiritually...To think erroneously, that is, unbiblically about the emotions is to be held captive by wrong thinking and to remain powerless to overcome wrong feelings and cultivate right feelings. To have a biblical foundation for understanding the emotions is to think rightly about them...To have a theologically robust perspective on the proper use of the emotions is to enter into the greenhouse of spiritual growth.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Borgman, *Feelings and Faith*, 22.

- What are emotions? → a definition: “The emotions are an inherent part of what it means to be a person; they express the values and evaluations of a person and influence motives and conduct. The emotions are more than feelings; they tell us about what we value and what we believe, producing desires and inclinations that affect our behavior...This does not mean that all emotions are rational. They often are not. But it does identify the fact that the emotions are responses to our perceptions, which may be right or wrong, real or imagined.”<sup>8</sup>
- Emotions are a gift from God...God created emotions...they are part of being made in the image of God
- God created them to be a blessing in our life and a way that we can experience humanity in a colorful way, in a way that is beautiful and profound
- But they are complex feelings that are a result of our beliefs and convictions...they are linked to our thoughts and volition
- They are not amoral or neutral...they are not simply impulses...rather, they are indicators of what we value and believe
- They express and reflect what is on the inside because they arise from our beliefs and concerns
- They have an object in that they reveal the heart, the soul, the mind...they reveal what we believe
- In other words, “you feel what you feel because you believe what you believe” (Todd Murray)
  - Sinful fear and godly fear both stem from beliefs
  - Sinful anger and righteous anger both stem from beliefs
  - Compassion and bitterness both stem from beliefs
- This is why Esau, Pharaoh, Saul and Judas were filled with sadness over their sin (i.e. remorse) rather than being convicted that their sin was an offense to a holy God
- On the other hand, this is also why Joseph wasn’t bitter when his brothers came to visit him...because for years he had been rehearsing the fact that what they intended for evil, God intended for good
- This is also why John the Baptist was not bitter when his disciples informed him that some of other disciples were leaving him to follow Jesus...for years he had been telling himself that he was the forerunner of Christ

## **EMOTIONS AND THE CHARACTER OF GOD**

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- Does God have emotions? → In one sense, we must answer the question with a “no”...he is impassible... he has no passions
- By this we mean that God is unchanging in his nature...impassibility means that God does not experience emotional change in any way...he does not and cannot suffer
- It is the notion that God cannot be acted upon or moved by any other source or external force
- It is that divine attribute in which God does not experience inner emotional changes of state, whether enacted freely from within or effected by his relationship to and interaction with human beings and the created order
- God is not subject to shifting moods, flashes of temper, fluctuating dispositions, or seasons of despondency
- There is a close connection between divine immutability and divine impassibility as impassibility is a corollary to immutability, flowing inevitably from the fact that God is unchangeable
- An unchanging God cannot, by definition, have passions, which in the technical language of theology are emotional states that can be affected or changed by external forces

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 26-27.

- Because he cannot be affected or changed by external forces, God cannot experience passions
- God is never moved by something that would provoke a change in him...nothing in God's creation exerts a force on him that causes him to move toward a perceived good or away from a perceived bad
- God is the one true constant in the entire universe, unchanging in all his ways

**Malachi 3:6** ~ For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.

**James 1:17** ~ Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

- We must state clearly that God's emotions are not dependent on anything outside of himself
  - He is never emotionally vulnerable...never overcome with emotion
  - His emotions are perfectly righteous in their essence and in perfect harmony with all his other attributes
  - We can't say that God has emotions like we do...because emotions don't sweep over him involuntarily like they do for us
  - Not only is God's character immutable so too is God's inner life...he is never passively acted upon
  - God is never overcome with rage...he never falls in love...he does not get frustrated
  - Emotions do not just happen to him such that he is forced to act in a certain way in order to make himself happier or change his mood from bad to good...he is completely free
  - He makes decisions based on his own unchanging will and purpose, not on changing emotional states
  - This is what separates God's emotions from ours
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- But God does have an emotional life...he responds and is moved by human events
  - He is grieved...he is angry...he rejoices...he is full of mercy...he is overflowing in love
  - Clearly, Scripture demonstrates that God has emotions...we should not be afraid to speak of God in this way
  - He is a God who has and expresses perfect emotions

## God Grieves and Demonstrates Sorrow

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**Genesis 6:5-6** ~ Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

**Psalm 78:40-41** ~ How often they rebelled against Him in the wilderness And grieved Him in the desert! 41 Again and again they tempted God, And pained the Holy One of Israel.

**Ezekiel 6:9** ~ Then those of you who escape will remember Me among the nations to which they will be carried captive, how I have been hurt by their adulterous hearts which turned away from Me, and by their eyes which played the harlot after their idols; and they will loathe themselves in their own sight for the evils which they have committed, for all their abominations.

## God Experiences Anger

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**Psalm 7:11** ~ God is a righteous judge, And a God who has indignation every day.

**Proverbs 6:16-19** ~ There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: 17 Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, 18 A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, 19 A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers.

**Malachi 2:16** ~ "For I hate divorce," says the LORD, the God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with wrong," says the LORD of hosts. "So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."

## God Delights in Himself

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**Psalm 115:3** ~ But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.

**Ephesians 1:5** ~ He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of his will

## God Delights in His Son

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**Isaiah 42:1** ~ Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations.

**John 17:24** ~ Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

## God Delights in Righteousness

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**Psalm 33:5** ~ He loves righteousness and justice; The earth is full of the lovingkindness of the LORD.

**Isaiah 61:8** ~ For I, the LORD, love justice, I hate robbery in the burnt offering; And I will faithfully give them their recompense And make an everlasting covenant with them.

**Jeremiah 9:24** ~ but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,” declares the LORD.

## God Displays Compassion

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**Exodus 33:19** ~ And He said, “I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.”

**Psalm 103:13** ~ Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him.

## God Shows Love

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**Jeremiah 31:3** ~ The LORD appeared to him from afar, saying, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness.

**John 3:16** ~ For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

**Romans 5:8** ~ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

**1 John 4:7-8** ~ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

- “God is not a static being (immutability does not mean static); he is a dynamic, personal being, possessing within himself perfect knowledge, a perfect will, and perfect emotions. He loves, he hates, and he rejoices. He is pleased, displeased, grieved, and angered. He has compassion, love, and pleasure. He interacts with and responds to his people within the framework of both a sovereign decree and perfect emotions, which reflect his values and evaluations, and influence his conduct toward them.”<sup>9</sup>
- And as those who have been made in his image, we also have emotions

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 41.

## EMOTIONS AND THE NATURE OF MAN<sup>10</sup>

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### Pre-Fall

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**Genesis 1:26-28** ~ Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” 27 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28 God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

- Man was made in the “image” and “likeness” of God...as such man’s attributes and characteristics are a reflection of the image of God in him
- Man also is to demonstrate the image of God in him functionally by ruling over his creation as a vice-regent, exercising dominion and filling the earth with other image-bearers
- Since God has emotions, we are also emotional beings
- “It seems safe to assume that before the fall all of Adam and Eve’s faculties (mind, will, and emotions) worked in perfect harmony with each other. In their original creation, Adam and Eve had minds that accurately perceived truth and reality. They had emotions that properly responded to truth and reality. They had wills that in turn were properly motivated by unflawed emotions.”<sup>11</sup>

### In His Fallen State

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- The fall rendered man totally depraved, with every faculty being infected by sin including the mind, the will, and the emotions

#### *The Mind is Affected*

**Romans 8:6-7** ~ For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so,

**Ephesians 4:17-18** ~ So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart;

**Colossians 1:21** ~ And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds,

#### *The Will is Affected*

**John 8:34** ~ Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.

**Romans 6:20** ~ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.

#### *The Emotions are Affected*

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<sup>10</sup> Adapted from Borgman, *Feelings and Faith*, chapter 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.



**Jeremiah 17:9** ~ The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?

**John 3:19** ~ This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.

- We resemble a circuit board that at one time functioned properly and reliably, with all the components perfectly integrated. But since the fall, instead of our charges following the right paths, they deviate because of sin and cause serious malfunctions. In other words, we short-circuit emotionally, mentally, and volitionally. Behavior, thoughts, and attitudes can be sinful, creating some serious malfunctions. Our emotions can also overpower or overcharge our thoughts, behaviors, and attitudes, blowing our fuses. The sad reality is that we are serious train wrecks. Our emotions can be downright toxic. They can put such a stranglehold on our whole psyche that our fuse box is blown by their misdirected power surges.”<sup>12</sup>

## **In His Regenerate State**

- When a sinner is redeemed, there is a transformative work that is done in every part of the person to reverse the effects of the curse
- Mind, heart, will, motives, desires, passions, and emotions are all radically reoriented by the power of the Gospel
- In the work of redemption, God begins to restore us back into his image which was marred in the fall

### *Our Minds are Renewed*

**Romans 12:2** ~ And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

**Ephesians 4:23** ~ and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,

**Colossians 3:1-2** ~ Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

### *Our Wills are Renewed*

**Philippians 2:12** ~ So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling;

**1 John 2:17** ~ The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

### *Our Emotions are Renewed*

**Romans 5:5** ~ and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

**1 John 2:15-16** ~ Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

**Galatians 5:22** ~ But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

**Ephesians 5:1-2** ~ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 52.

## EMOTIONS AND SANCTIFICATION

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- Although we have been redeemed and given a new nature through the work of Christ in our hearts, every area of our life needs the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit
- Because our emotions are still marred by sin (even though redeemed), they are in need of sanctification just like every other part of us
- They are part of our humanity that needs to be sanctified and brought under the authority of God's Word
- We need to repent of and put off sinful emotions...and we need to cultivate and grow in Christlike emotions
- Because our new nature is still housed in a fallen flesh, our emotions are still prone to being sinful and as such can still be tainted by sin
- For this reason, our emotions can lie to us and are therefore not always trustworthy
- Often our emotions reflect wrong responses to situations in life
- Thus, our emotions need to be sanctified just like every other part of us
- The Bible commands all kinds of emotions

**Matthew 18:35** ~ My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.”

**Romans 12:10** ~ Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;

**Romans 12:15** ~ Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

**Ephesians 4:32** ~ Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

**Philippians 4:4** ~ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!

**Colossians 1:15** ~ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

**1 Peter 1:17** ~ If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth;

**1 Peter 2:2** ~ like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,

- Clearly, God expects us to control our emotions and to bring them into conformity with his Word by the power of the Spirit
- No matter our personality or our temperament, we can put off sinful emotions and we can cultivate godly emotions
- How? → “There is nothing easy in what I am about to say. But where there is a desire to change for God's glory, and where there is truth relevant to the desired change, we are in the position to change. We can begin to understand the truth, reject faulty thinking, and learn practical biblical application. Under the Holy Spirit's power, we can begin to develop new, godly habits while putting to death the old, ungodly ones. When we stop believing the lies of the Devil – that certain parts of our life will never change – when Scripture begins to infuse us with the hope, and when we start practicing the truth we believe, there is change. Under the influence of the Word and Spirit, we really can begin to handle our emotions.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 65.