

The Character of God

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[0:00] Well, true or false, God made us emotional creatures.! Alright, everyone says true.

! Sometimes we're not sure whether that's something good or bad.! Whether it's curse or blessing, friend or foe, these emotions, because sin often wreaks havoc upon us through our emotions.

And emotions sometimes lead us into sin. But as troublesome as they be, what would life be like without them? It would be pretty blah, wouldn't it?

It would be like going back to black and white television. All the color would be drained out of life. Dull, dry.

And indeed it would be subhuman. It would be less than human to be without emotions, because God has made us emotional beings.

[1:07] And so there's something to thank God for. But they're also something that needs to be rightly understood and controlled. So we want to know, in this study that we undertake this morning, what are the emotions?

And what role should they play in a healthy Christian life? And so, Lord willing, for the next three months, we'll be turning to the Scriptures to answer these questions as we make our way through a book that's entitled, *Feelings and Faith, Cultivating Godly Emotions in the Christian Life*, by a pastor of a Reformed Baptist Church in Minden, Nevada, Brian Borgman.

Feelings and Faith. She was angry. She was hurt. She was trying unsuccessfully not to cry.

Gripping the tissue in her hand like a child's security blanket, she said, Pastor, you don't understand. You don't know how it feels. The thought of his being with that woman grips my mind like an iron claw, and it will not let me go.

I pray, I cry, I pray again. I do not want to think about it, but I can't help it. The thoughts create a hurricane of emotions, and by the time he gets home from work, I hate him all over again.

[2:35] I don't want him near me. I want him to die. I can't stand the way I feel. Or another, the defiance was frightening.

I know what you're thinking. I know what you're going to say, but I can tell you right now that nobody has ever loved me like he has. Nobody has ever cared for me and listened to me like he does.

The pastor gently yet firmly replied, but he is not in the Lord. And you know what the Word says about being unequally yoked. The rebuttal was undaunted.

I love him, and we are getting married. What do you expect me to do? I'm in love. I can't help the way I feel. And he goes on to give other examples, and to show that emotions play a powerful role in the lives of people, sometimes too powerful of a role.

It's not a minor area of life that we only deal with occasionally. Rather, emotions are a daily and a constant aspect of living.

[3:59] We can't live without interaction with our emotions. To live is to emote. We experience the tears of joy when singing God's praise, perhaps.

Or the conviction of sin when reading or hearing God's Word. The love of holding your spouse in your arms. The thrill of seeing your son hit a home run. The satisfaction of a job well done.

The fear of what others might think of you. The peace that flows from knowing God is in control. The anger for being mistreated. All these and many more involve our emotions.

Now, Pastor Borgman gives us a quote from Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones. And I think it's a helpful summary of this point on the importance of the role of our emotions in life.

Dr. Lloyd-Jones says, 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.

[5:14] But though I maintain that, I am equally ready to assert that the feelings, the emotions, the sensibilities, obviously are of vital, very vital importance.

We have been made in such a way that they play a dominant part of our makeup. 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.

So think about some of the things that have caused you trouble in just the past week or the past couple weeks. And I'll bet that you're not far from your emotions, either in the thing that caused you trouble or in the response to the trouble that came to you, that your emotions are right in the mix, aren't they?

I found it to be so in my own life. Our emotions are as much a part of us as our thoughts, as our wills, our decisions.

[6:32] And so if we are to be increasingly sanctified, then our emotions are to be increasingly sanctified. If I am to become more and more like Jesus, then I must become more and more like Him in my thoughts, my will, and my emotions.

All that I am, body, soul, body and soul, that is mind, will, and emotions are to be transformed into Christ's likeness. Jonathan Edwards wrote a treatise on religious affections, and he says, and the main premise of that treatise is that the nature of true religion consists in holy affections.

What is true religion? Well, you can boil it all down and say it's holy affections, holy emotions. So we can't ignore this important area of life called the emotions.

And bringing them into their rightful place begins with a biblical understanding of them. We're going to be dealing in this class with some of the several emotions that we all deal with.

Sinful anger, unforgiveness and bitterness, fear, anxiety, worry, depression, on and on, the role of emotions in worship and in relationships and so on.

[7:51] But before we get to those specifics, Borgman lays the foundation of what the Bible has to say about this matter of emotions.

Now, when we turn to the Bible, we find that God has a lot to say about emotions. And so if God has spoken so much about this, we can see it's important that we listen and learn.

Now, before coming to the scriptures, Borgman tells us about some of the common misconceptions about the emotions. Because if we think improperly about the emotions, then they can hold us captive and we can remain powerless to overcome wrong feelings and emotions in our lives.

And he points out how we live in a psychologized culture that's preoccupied with emotional wholeness. We're a therapeutic society in search of wellness.

We have a support group called Emotions Anonymous, and they advertise on their website that they are a 12-step program similar to Alcoholics Anonymous.

[9:04] Quote, Our fellowship is composed of people who come together in weekly meetings for the purpose of working toward recovery from emotional difficulties. The only requirement for membership is a desire to become well emotionally.

This is front and center in the world that we live in. It fills our music. It fills talk shows and all sorts of expressions in life today.

And Borgman says there's two extremes to avoid as all the counsel comes down to us. And both of these extremes are not only in the secular society, but they've also bled into the church.

And that is to become pure rationalists on the one hand and to make too little of emotions and to become pure emotionalists on the other hand and to make too much of emotions.

First of all, he talks about the rationalists who tend to belittle or deny the importance of the emotions. Reason and logic are king and emotions are viewed as the enemy and are frowned upon.

[10:16] To them, the Christian life is little more than correct thinking and correct actions. So, think and do are what's important. How you feel, what's going on in the heart is not really important.

That's really the enemy there, those emotions. They're bad and need to be suppressed and denied and pushed down. And that's nothing new. You can read about the Stoics in the New Testament.

And that whole philosophy of keeping the stiff upper lip and just denying emotion has been with us a long time. But its expressions are seen in the church today as well.

Some don't go so far as to teach that emotions are bad, but they would say they're irrelevant. And they're unnecessary. One tract put it this way. It had a picture and it said of a snowmobile pulling a sled.

And the snowmobile is fact and the sled is feelings. And the tract said a snowmobile will run fine without a sled. Inferring that you can live fine without feelings.

[11:20] Just deal with facts. Don't care about feelings. Now, if these tend to downplay the importance of emotions, the other ditch gives a place to emotions that it should not have.

The emotionalists let themselves be guided by their emotions. That was one of the illustrations. I can't help it. This is the way I feel. And so, yes, I'm going to marry him.

What else can I do? Feelings are king. And thinking deeply about things is unspiritual. You need to follow your heart to go with your gut feeling. Michael W. Smith's written better songs than his Move In Me, which encourages us to stop thinking with our heads and start listening to my heart.

That's dangerous when we stop thinking with our heads and start listening to our hearts. Because our hearts will tell us all sorts of things, won't they?

And so the Proverbs say here, the man who trusts his heart is a fool. Because the heart's deceitful and will surely trick us. No, emotions are not to be given the steering wheel and allowed to govern and control us.

[12:37] This is a victim mentality toward emotions. I can't help the way that I feel. And it's used to justify hatred, divorce, infidelity, anger, bitterness, and all kinds of sin.

If these emotions that are so sovereign are just thrust upon me, what am I to do? I'm just the victim of them. And so emotions are viewed as the weather.

You just go with it. You can't change it. And so emotional highs are sought. And often being led by the Spirit is nothing more than doing what you feel like doing, doing what your gut instinct is in the situation.

Emotion and even doctrine is made to bow to feelings and is determined by emotions. I just don't believe that doctrine because it makes me feel uncomfortable.

I just don't feel right about it. That's when emotion has the upper hand over thought in God's Word. It just doesn't feel right to me that God would send people to hell forever.

[13:48] So we don't believe it. So the emotionalists choose churches based upon, purely upon emotion. How does it make me feel? Did I laugh at the funny stories?

Did I cry at the touching ones? Did it give me comforting, reassuring, positive emotional experiences? And any truth that disturbs this emotional response is unwelcome.

It's not for me. Now, Borgman says both views are unbiblical and dishonoring to the Lord. We probably are not represented by either view in its extreme position, but Borgman suggests that we each have a tendency to go one way or the other, to either give emotions too big of a place in our life or to give them too little of a role.

And sometimes it may be just in different areas of our life. In some areas of our lives, we let emotion run rampant. And in other areas, we may be squelched and make too little of it.

But he says emotions are not amoral. This is a moral issue because the Bible commands us to have certain emotions and it condemns us for other emotions.

[15:07] So we are responsible for our emotions and are expected to exercise self-control over them. So, he gives us this working definition of emotions in three parts.

Number one, the emotions are an inherent part of what it means to be a person. Emotions are part of our personhood. So we accept that. And we move on to the second part.

Emotions express our values and beliefs. In other words, emotions are tied to thoughts and values. They're not just chemical impulses running around as a hangover of evolution. No, those emotions are based upon beliefs and standards and judgments and evaluations and concerns and thoughts. And so they become indicators of what we believe and what we value is most important to us. So the thought of losing a spouse produces some emotion of fear because our spouse means a lot to us and we can't imagine losing them.

[16:17] I experience joy over a daughter's achievements. And that reveals how I value her because I don't have the same emotional experience about somebody else's achievement, perhaps.

Emotions express our inner man. They tell us about ourselves. They're windows to the heart. They are the language of the soul, as someone has said. So emotions are part of our humanity.

They express our beliefs and our values. And thirdly, they influence motives and conduct. They not only are an expression of our heart, but they actually move us to do certain things and to not do other things.

Indeed, God gave us emotions to be a catalyst for action, to energize godly behavior. Now, Borgman says that doesn't mean that all emotions are rational. They're often not. And it doesn't mean that it's always easy to analyze them. But he's saying that they are responses to our perceptions of life and the way things are.
[17 : 33] Whether our analysis of reality is skewed and wrong or whether it's right, our emotions reflect what we're thinking.

And they're given to us so we can properly relate to God and glorify Him. So with that introduction, he comes to chapter 1, the character of God.

Now, he's laying the foundation then for a biblical understanding of emotions. Chapter 1, the character of God. Why would Borgman start with a study of God's character?

Think about that. We're going to talk about human emotions. Chapter 1, the character of God. What's the connection? Human emotion, character of God.

There? Okay. All right. So the connection is that man is created in the image of God. So if we want to learn about emotions, where should we start?

[18 : 38] Well, let's start with the study of the character of God. And that's exactly his reason for doing so. What is God like? Does God have emotions and feelings?

Can you prove it from the Scriptures? Pleasures. Now, as I got going on this chapter, I couldn't help but see that we've already covered much of this ground.

We just came through not long ago a study of John Piper's book called The What of God? The pleasures of God. That's emotion, isn't it?

So, we've been through much of this ground where the Scriptures teach us that God has emotion. But let's cover the ground quickly again this morning that we might see it afresh in the light of this new angle in which we're coming at it.

There we were studying the pleasures of God to learn more about God Himself, to see what He's like, what a man delights in, shows us his heart. Now, we're coming at it to learn, well, what am I like?

[19 : 42] And what role is the emotion, are emotions a part of what it means to be human? And do we see it in God in whom we've been made in His image?

So, first of all, we look at God's delights. The fact that God delights and rejoices. Now, again, this is the review part. What does God delight and rejoice in?

Let's list some of the things. What does He delight and rejoice in? His Son. Let's just stop there. Remember, this is My beloved Son, in whom I am what?

Well pleased, I have great pleasure in Him. Here is My servant whom I uphold, My chosen one, in whom is all My delight, Isaiah 42.1.

So, God bears witness at the baptism of His Son to His pleasure in Him. Nothing in Jesus, but what stirs pleasure in God the Father.

[20 : 43] Alright? What else does God the Father delight in? We're going to look at Christ next week, Lord willing. So, let's stick to God the Father and perhaps God the Spirit.

But we'll leave the Son for the study tomorrow. What else does God the Father delight in? His creation. Alright? Alright? Good. We see His joy in creation.

What else? Joy in His people. Those precious texts that we saw.

That He rejoices over us with singing. That He not only does us good, but He rejoices to do us good.

He does it with all His heart and soul. His emotions are in it. When God does good to His people, His whole heart, His whole emotion is in it. And He rejoices to do them good. He rejoices over us with singing.

[21 : 45] Isaiah 62.5. Look that passage up quickly because it's critical for us in this study of emotions because God Himself likens His own emotional response to human emotion in this passage.

Isaiah 62 and verse 5. We have God speaking.

And He says, As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you. As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.

So, God Himself, when telling Israel of that joy that God takes in His people, likens it to the joy of a bridegroom over his bride on their wedding night or their wedding ceremony.

He draws that parallel between a young man who's a bridegroom rejoicing over his bride. So, will your God rejoice over you.

[23:01] So, there's something analogous in God with human emotion. The kind of emotion that a bridegroom has in his bride. This language throbs with emotion to capture God's deep feelings for His people.

Creation, His people. What else does God delight in? Ed? Okay. He delights in repentance and in salvation.

He loves and delights to save sinners. Good. Anything else there? Heart obedience. He delights in His people's obedience when it comes from their heart.

Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you're doing now. We ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. To do what?

To do what pleases God. What brings Him pleasure. And it's that obedience from the heart. The Philippians' financial gifts sent to Paul are described as a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

[24:14] The very monies that they gave to sustain missionary endeavor in the world was pleasing and brought pleasure to God. Righteousness is something God delights in.

We've seen that in the opening Psalms, haven't we? The Lord is righteous. He loves justice. Upright men will see His face.

Justice is not only something He is, it's something He delights in. He loves it. He has an emotional attachment toward it. God is no impersonal being. The Lord abhors dishonest scales.

But accurate weights are His delight. Honesty, righteousness is something He feels deeply about. So, God delights and rejoices.

He also grieves and has pain and sorrow. What does God grieve over? What makes God's heart heavy? Sin. Sin.

[25:17] In short, isn't it? When He saw the whole world sunk in sin in Genesis 6, He grieved His heart to see what man had become such that His heart was filled with pain.

Those words, grieved and filled with pain, are spoken of God in Genesis 6, 5 and 6. Psalm 78, 40 and 41.

How often, speaking of the Israelites, how often they rebelled against Him in the desert and grieved Him in the wasteland. Again and again they put God to the test.

They vexed the Holy One of Israel. As the New Testament tells us, do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God with which you have been sealed for the day of redemption.

Ephesians 4, 30. So, God is grieved at sin, at unrighteousness. Just as He rejoices in righteousness, He grieves at the lack of it.

[26:17] And we see His pain, even in having to discipline His people. You parents have said to your children, this is going to hurt me more than it will hurt you.

You're expressing your pain in disciplining those you love. And that has an analogy in God Himself. Hosea 11, how can I give you up Ephraim?

He's about to hand them over for judgment to the nations. And there's this turmoil in His heart. How can I do this?

How can I give you up Ephraim? How can I hand you over Israel? How can I treat you like Adma? How can I make you like Zeboam? Those cities that were destroyed in the plain. My heart is changed within me.

All my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger. Nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim. For I am God and not man. The Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath.

[27:19] And there's this turmoil in the heart of God. Even as He disciplines Israel. So, He's pained to see His people rebel against Him.

And remember our study in Hosea? What does God compare His people running off after other idols to? The pain that He feels.

It's spiritual adultery. And that whole story of Hosea is given to us to instruct us in the heart of God. What is God's heart when His people run off after other idols?

Oh, it hurts Him. It hurts Him like it hurt Hosea to see his wife play the harlot. God is grieved. He experiences sorrow and pain.

What other emotions does God have? Anger? Hatred? Wrath? Have we not seen that clearly in the opening chapters of Psalm?

[28:25] I don't think we need to deal long with that. It definitely needs to be a note sounded in these days that don't like to think about God being a God of wrath.

But we have been through that and covered that recently. And it's not an attribute God is ashamed of. He speaks about it often. And says there are six things that the Lord hates.

Seven that are an abomination to Him. And He tells us what they are. I hate divorce, says the Lord God of Israel. I hate a man's covering himself with violence. For 40 years I was angry with that generation.

I said there are people whose heart goes astray. They have not known my way. So I declared on oath in my anger, they shall never enter my rest. He hates robbery. He hates wrong. He hates all who do wrong.

He's a God who expresses His wrath every day. But turn to 1 John chapter 4. Because though God hates the wicked, His emotions are a little bit different.

[29:28] And I say that tongue in cheek. His emotions are quite different than ours. He's a more complex being than we can comprehend. Here in 1 John chapter 4, in verse 10, we find it's a passage on God's love.

But in the same context in which it speaks of God's love, it speaks of His hate. His wrath. And they're both directed to the same people.

We have a verse here that speaks of God's wrath and God's love being set on the same people at the same time. So, let's read it.

1 John 4, verse 10. And notice the two emotions of love and wrath. This is love, not that we love God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice, a propitiation for our sins. That's it. Okay? Read it again. And find love and wrath in this verse for the same people. This is love, not that we love God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice, a propitiation for our sins.

[30:48] Now, we see the love. It's on the surface of things. But where is the wrath of God in this verse? Dale? And why do we need atonement for our sins?

But, so what? We're sinners. And you tell me, I need atonement for my sin. Why? What's God's attitude, Jack? Okay, so, our sin is against God and God cannot help but recoil in wrath of sin wherever it's found.

And, how does God turn that wrath away from us? By pouring it out on His Son in our stead. So, Jim, it is an atoning sacrifice.

It's a death under God's wrath so that we don't have to suffer it. It's the, it's the, that turns away God's wrath.

And that's, that's where propitiation is an important word because it propitiates, it satisfies, it pacifies God's wrath. That's what this atoning sacrifice does.

[32:00] And so, Christ bore Himself. So, in this verse, why did God send His Son? to be a sacrifice because He loved us, right?

That's how we know what love is. He sent His Son. He loved us. But how did He show that love? Well, it says that He sent His Son to be an atoning sacrifice, a propitiation to turn away His own wrath.

Oh, so He not only loved me, He also had wrath for me. Yes. He had so much wrath for me that only the death of His own Son could take away His wrath for me.

And so, He sent His Son because He loved me and because He had wrath for me. Now, if that stretches your mind a bit and you say, boy, I don't know that I love and hate the same people, how can God do that?

Just remember, He's God. And we'll come to this again next week that we need to be careful in this whole matter of thinking, well, I'm made in the image of God so whatever I feel, God must feel.

[33:17] God is infinitely above us and beyond us and here we find out that yes, He has wrath but He also has love for the same people of His wrath.

There are those of His wrath that He loves and expresses it by sending His Son to die to take away that wrath. So, God has wrath.

He also feels pity and has compassion. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. Psalm 103.13.

Now, that verse again is important because God is telling us that His compassion is like a human compassion. it's not only like a bridegroom's for His bride but now we're being taught it's like a

father's for His children.

So, though God is different from us, yet there's this likeness to us in that the way we pity our own children, God pities His. And this word for pity, compassion, is an emotional word.

[34 : 24] Compassion is stirred within Him. It's felt within. Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has born?

Though she may forget, I will not forget you. See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.

Your walls are ever before me. So, His love is like a father's.

His compassion is like a father's to His children. It's even greater compassion than a mother toward her children. Because though she might forget, I never. So, His pity is not less than man's.

It's greater than man's pity. So, whatever you do with this emotional language, you can't diminish the pity or drain it of its emotional content.

God loves as well. We've seen this in 1 John 4.10. We see it in John 3.16 and dozens and dozens of more verses. And we greatly distort the character of God if we bleed from the love of God anything of emotion and feeling in God's heart.

[35 : 38] Some people will say, well, love is just something that God does. It's His action. It was His action to send His Son. But don't think that there's some feeling in God's heart.

1 Corinthians 13.3 will not let us do that. Look at that verse. 1 Corinthians 13. That's the love chapter. But notice what Paul says about love.

God's love. Because that's the kind of love that he's talking about here. It's God's love in the heart of man and in the life of the believer. And verse 3 of 1 Corinthians 13.

If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames but have not love, I gain nothing. Do you see what he's saying?

That I can have all the right actions in place. I can give all I possess to the poor. That's an action of love we would say. And I could surrender my body to the flames in my sacrificial action.

[36 : 54] But, if I don't have love, I gain nothing. So love is more than action. Because you can have the actions and still be without the love.

So it tells us there's an emotional aspect to love. There are feelings involved in love and if you don't have that, then your actions are hollow. They're empty.

They don't even show up in the score keeper's book. Nothing was done when those actions are lacking.

The emotion of love, the compassion, the pity behind them. So God himself here in 1 Corinthians 13 distinguishes from the actions of love and the emotion of love.

But on the other hand, neither is it right just to say, well, I have this wonderful feeling in my heart for you, but I'm not going to provide for you, so be warmed and filled. No, our love is to be in action and in words or in deeds as well as words.

[37 : 58] But we see here that God's love has a strong emotional element to it. Charles Hodge, the Princeton theologian, said, love of necessity involves feeling.

And if there be no feelings in God, there can be no love. So the Bible, in the Bible, God presents himself as an emotional being, a God who feels with intense emotion.

Now, sometimes people say, well, maybe God's just using language that is kind of like anthropomorphic language, that the Bible says that God's hand is not too short, that it cannot save, or God's eye is on the righteous and the wicked.

But we know God doesn't have a body. He is spirit. And so, it's just using these terminologies to show us our hand is a hand of strength, the right hand is a hand of strength, and God is saying that he's strong.

And for God to have eyes, it's just saying that he's omniscient and he knows everything. No. Why can't we use that logic here and say, well, you know, God's just using this human language to express something different to us.

[39 : 10] And so, he puts it in terms of emotional words. Why can't we do that and take all the emotion out of God? Well, what do those things mean if they don't mean feeling?

What is it that God is trying to communicate by putting it in words such as he's grieved, he hates, he loves, he delights, he rejoices? Why is he using all that emotional language?

What is he wanting to say about himself if it's not that he feels deeply and intensely? Now, with the hand and the eye, we can see he's teaching us things about himself, that he's all powerful, he's all knowing.

But what are these words of feeling doing? What purposes do they serve if they do not reveal to us that God himself is a God who feels intensely? And that's why we feel intensely.

We are made in the image and likeness of God, Borgman says. In order for us to understand ourselves, we must understand God. And although there's an infinite distance between the transcendent, majestic, exalted God and us, his creatures, we can look to God and see the perfect, eternal one who possesses the glorious capacity to feel.

[40 : 24] In that capacity, he shows the dignity of his person and that we were made not only to think and do, but also to feel. Emotions are a good and legitimate part of man's character because they are clearly part of God's character.

So that's why we start a book on feelings with the character of God. We find it rooted deeply in God's own personality himself and we have been made in that likeness.

Now, our time is gone, so we'll begin with any questions that that's starting to percolate and a caution next week about this whole matter.

But let's enter into the worship of God, not just with our outward bodies, but let's bring our hearts and our love to him and ask him to warm us and to prepare us for worship.

Let's pray together. O great God, there is much about you that we do not know, but what we do know is what you've revealed to us and how we thank you that you have told us what you're like and that you have loved us with an everlasting love, we who are your people.

[41 : 38] And so help us to worship you with a fitting response of love this morning. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.