

Christian Experience

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[0:00] We are continuing to study feelings and faith, cultivating godly emotions in the Christian life by Brian Borgman. Last week we saw that the Lord, our God, is the Lord of our emotions. God cares about and commands how we are to feel.

Just like He commands us to think, just like He commands us to will, God commands us to feel. Feel certain things. The emotions are not off limits to God's authority and to God's Word. And so we saw some of the emotions last week that God commands. And so as a way to sort of get us thinking, what were some of those emotions, different emotions, that at different times God commands us to feel?

That's a question for you. We're to feel hatred for sin. Hatred can be a godly emotion if it's directed at the right object.

So we're to feel hatred for sin. Yeah. Yeah. Fear of God is fruitful. It is all of God.

[1:15] And let's also, you know, that He is awesome and fearful. Yeah. Yeah. It's a consuming fire.

Fear. We are to fear God. And that is, fear is an emotion. You can't just reverence God in your thoughts. Reverence is something that comes out of your heart.

It's an emotion. What else are we, what else does God command us to feel? Compassion.

Tenderness. Compassion is not just doing compassionate things.

It's Jesus saw the masses and He had compassion. His heart was stirred up as He saw them. And we're commanded to feel the same way. Mom, we are to consider it pure joy.

And in that context, it's in the middle of trials, in the middle of difficulties. In that difficult situation, God commands us to feel joy. We're to mourn with those who mourn.

[2:18] We're to rejoice with those who rejoice. We're called to forgive from the heart. So those are all different emotions that God commands us to feel.

And then we saw next that our emotions are to have as their foundation, where they spring from, the seedbed, truth. Truth has priority with our emotions.

Our emotions must be in line with the truth. And then we looked at three areas, three truths that we have to be saturated in if we're going to have emotional holiness.

And what were those? There were three of them. Roger. The character of God. We've just come out of a series on Psalms 1 through 12.

And didn't we see that repeatedly the psalmist went back to who God was. And he used that truth to bring his emotions in line with that truth, the character of God.

[3:29] There was two other things, two other truths. Justification by faith alone. If we understand that our standing with God, our right standing with God, is dependent on faith alone and Jesus Christ alone, that is going to reap wonderful, a great harvest emotionally.

I mean, we looked at some of the areas where if you don't have that truth in line, you're going to be frustrated. You're going to be angry. You're going to be proud when you've accomplished something.

It's going to be very difficult to cultivate godly emotions like forgiveness. It's very hard to forgive someone if you feel like you've earned your righteousness and they haven't.

If righteousness isn't of grace, then forgiveness is very, very difficult to feel. And then there was a third one that we mentioned briefly.

Future glory. Future glory. Heaven. We saw that that's what Paul, the thought that, you know, the things that we're suffering now, they're not even worth comparing to the weight of glory that awaits us.

[4:43] So, future glory, justification by faith, the character of God. When we have a grip on those truths, they will change how we emotionally react to life, to things.

And so they're the fertile seedbed where godly emotions can grow. And remember, that's actually the main theme of this book, cultivating godly emotions.

It's not just about controlling emotions and having self-control as if emotions are just something that needs to be corralled. We are to grow these godly emotions, cultivate these emotions.

And so today we want to go a little deeper and we want to explore the biblical idea of Christian experience.

Of Christian experience. And we're going to do that by looking at three questions today. And the first one is, what is the Christian life supposed to be like?

[5:51] What is the Christian life supposed to be like? The second question is, what should I do when I don't feel like obeying? And then the third is, should I want an experience with God?

Should I want an experience with God? So first, what is the Christian life supposed to be like? What is it supposed to be like? What does the Bible portray as a normal Christian life?

What is the experience of a normal Christian? And this matters, and it matters a lot, because if we start off on the wrong foot, or we have wrong expectations about what the Christian life is going to be like, then we are going to have all these frustrations when our life doesn't match up with our expectations.

We're going to have these false expectations, dashed dreams, when the things that we had hoped would happen in our life don't happen. And godly emotions, it's going to be impossible to grow those in that environment where we're off on the wrong foot to begin with.

And so let's begin with some wrong ideas about Christian experience. These are wrong ideas about what the Christian life is supposed to be like.

[7:11] And we're going to begin with two that are completely opposite of each other. They're both wrong, but they're completely opposite. So on this side, we have John Wesley. And John Wesley taught a doctrine called perfectionism.

And he taught that some Christians in this life, in this world, can, for all intents and purposes, be perfect. They could be perfect.

He didn't think it was common. He didn't think that he had achieved it. He thought it was something rare. But he did think it was possible. And so that, and that was completely wrong.

That's expecting something that the Bible only says will happen in heaven. It's expecting that now, here and now.

And so let me ask you, if you had that conception of what is possible for this Christian experience here and now, what would that do to you emotionally? So we have this earnest, sincere Christian, and he thinks that if he works hard enough, or God is gracious to him in a special way, that he can have a perfect life.

[8:26] Dad. Right. Disappointment. Frustration. Dale. Dale. Right.

Does everyone understand that? If, if, if, if, and this is how they say, if you have the second work of grace in your life, then you, you could be perfect.

Well, here you are struggling, and you're asking for this, and, and you just keep on sinning. Well, it's going to be really hard to keep hoping, to keep loving God when he's denying the things that you think he's promised you.

And that's a perfect life here and now. So, okay, that's on the one side that, you know, you could, you, you could assume that, you know, maybe I can't achieve it. Now, what about this earnest, sincere Christian thinks that he has achieved it?

That he has reached perfection? What's going to happen to him? He could be a Pharisee. He could be very proud. And he could be very harsh.

[9:35] I mean, that was one of the defining characteristics of the Pharisees. They were very harsh on people. It's hard to be humble. It's hard to be forgiving. If you think that you have achieved perfection in this life, is there anything else?

Okay. Well, that's one side. That's John Wesley. Remember, we're talking about two extremes that are both wrong. John Wesley said there's this possibility, it's rare, that you could be perfect for all intents and purposes.

Now, here on the other side is Charles Ryrie, and maybe some of you have heard of him. He's just one of many. I just sort of picked him out. He's one of many who teach the possibility of a person

being a carnal Christian.

That now, instead of being perfect in this life, on this side it says, you know what, it doesn't mean anything to be a Christian necessarily.

There's no necessary change before and after conversion. You could be as sinful as you were before, your conversion, after your conversion.

[10:45] And so, that means that being a Christian doesn't necessarily mean that there is a distinct Christian experience. That here I am, I'm a Christian, and here that guy is, he's not a Christian, and we could live exactly the same lives, and feel and experience the same things.

And so, those are two extremes. And I hope I don't have to show you that that's wrong. The Holy Spirit has been given to all Christians to write God's law in our hearts, to make us willing, to change, to make substantial changes in our personality and the way that we live.

And so, that truth, that we're neither going to be perfect, and there is actually going to be real change, that truth needs to affect our expectations about what life is going to be like.

Well, then we have a third wrong idea. And this isn't really related to either of those. And I think this one is wrong in a different way. Joel Osteen teaches another wrong idea about Christian experience.

And you've probably seen his books at Walmart and things. He preaches that God wants us to prosper. And that if we believe hard enough, that we will prosper physically.

[12:12] And suffering is a sign of imperfection. Suffering is a sign of a lack of faith. And I hope I don't have to explain to you that that's miles away from what biblical Christianity says.

The fact is that the experience of most of you, the experience of solid, mature Christians throughout the ages, has been one of suffering.

Some of God's best servants have suffered the most. And actually God's best servant, Jesus Christ, suffered the most. And so what did Peter say?

Dear friends, do not be surprised. Do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering as though something strange were happening to you.

Don't be surprised when you suffer. Suffering is part of the Christian life. Peter says expect suffering. And so do you see why the prosperity gospel, where if you believe hard enough, God will prosper you physically, could cause all sorts of emotional problems and disappointments.

[13:30] It just is a recipe for an emotional train wreck. You're going to be frustrated. You're going to be angry. You're going to always be looking inside of yourself trying to figure out why you're still suffering.

So then, what is the general shape of the Christian experience? And I don't think this is anything new and profound to you, but we need to kind of gather all these things together and put it into our brains.

What is the general shape of the Christian experience? One, it's increasing obedience. It's increasing obedience. But it's not perfect obedience.

It's suffering. It is suffering. We shouldn't be surprised when we suffer. But on the other hand, it's not just pure suffering. It's joy and peace and fellowship with Jesus Christ.

Paul said it, the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. And so when we put all the biblical data together, we find that the Christian experience is going to be a mixed bag.

[14:41] There's going to be suffering, but there's going to be joy. There's going to be disobedience and failure. And there's going to be obedience. And it's going to be increasing obedience. And so if we have false expectations about what my life is supposed to be like, then I'm going to be emotionally not able to cultivate godly emotions.

But when we understand the broad picture, when we have this panorama view of what my Christian life is going to be like, I'm not going to be easily upset.

I'm going to have patience. I'm going to see that it's by grace that I'm saved. And so it's going to be the fertile seedbed, like I said, of godly emotions.

And we're going to be able to cultivate those things. Now, that's the first question. Here's the second question. What do I do when I don't feel like doing what I should do?

What do I do when I don't feel like doing what I should do? And this should be relevant for all of us. Because there's always some time, and it's probably happened already today, where you didn't feel like doing what you were supposed to do.

[16:09] And so God commands me to forgive my brother from my heart. He sins against me, but I don't feel like it. I don't feel forgiving. I don't feel like forgiving.

I'm still angry with him, even if I'm not bringing it up. Well, what do you do then? Or, let's say you have a miserable week. You've just been so busy this week, we'll say.

And Sunday comes around, and you're exhausted. And you know, there's a connection between us physically and us emotionally. And so here you are, you're exhausted. You're emotionally dead. You just want to stay in bed. I mean, the Sabbath doesn't seem like a delight, because what would be a delight is just sleeping in. And so you're sad, you're worn out, you don't feel like going and worshiping God.

You probably have had Sundays like that. So what do you do then? Well, is that an excuse not to do what you're supposed to do? No.

[17:08] And you probably know that. That's not an excuse not to do what you're supposed to do. Not at all. If God commands us to do or feel something, and we don't do it, what is that?

What is that? Sin. It's sin. It's sin. And so what do we do with sin? We confess it.

We repent. If God commands us to worship with joy and gladness, and we don't feel that way, it's sin.

But it's not like this is a sin that can't be dealt with. You deal with it in the same way that you deal with any other sin. So if God commands you to worship with joy, if God commands you to forgive your brother from your heart, and you don't feel like it, that's sin.

But what do you do with sin? You repent. You confess it. You bring forth fruits of repentance. And in those situations, it means feeling differently.

[18:13] Bringing yourself under control. Bringing yourself under the truth. And feeling differently. So you rejoice. And you forgive. And so the emotions aren't take it or leave it.

God's emotional commands to our emotions are not just sort of like, you know, down here, that if you get to them, that's good. But if you don't, then that's okay.

And someone might say, but that's really, that's not fair. How am I supposed to just change the way I feel? You feeling that?

How am I just supposed to change the way I feel? How am I just supposed to turn on joy when I don't feel joyful? How am I supposed to turn on forgiveness when I don't feel forgiveness?

And again, my answer is the same. Emotional sin is not in a special category of its own. It's just like any other sin. You take it to God. You take it to Christ.

[19:13] And you say, without you, I can do nothing. I'm supposed to be happy right now, but I don't feel happy. I'm supposed to rejoice in you, but I don't feel like rejoicing.

I'm supposed to be mourning over the sin. And I don't feel bad about it. So please forgive me.

Please help me to obey. And it's what you do with any other sin.

So, then the question is, what do you do when your emotions don't come around right away? Well, you obey.

And you repent for your heart. You will to obey. And you confess the difference. You say, Lord, I will obey.

But my heart is having a hard time getting into this. My heart's not following along. I will to obey, but forgive my slow heart. And what happens is that God begins to work on that.

[20:15] When you go to him for grace and for mercy, God changes the way you feel. So you shouldn't expect all the time this instantaneous, like you turn on the lights and then there's joy.

Our hearts, we need to take them to Christ. And so what do you do if you don't feel like obeying the way you're supposed to? You repent. You repent. And then you run to Jesus.

And you, for mercy and for help, you run to him and you get the help that you need to feel the things that you're supposed to be feeling. You don't wait around passively.

You don't wait like, well, I've done my part. Now, God, you need to come and change my emotions. You go to Jesus. You strive to obey.

And then you, as you're obeying, you're depending on his strength and his mercy. Obeying emotionally is no different than obeying in any other way.

[21:17] Are there any questions? Any points? Dave? Right. We're actually, I mean, in the, in the next coming chapters, we're going to be talking about mortifying evil emotions and cultivating godly emotions.

They might come. It might not. But the truth is what is important. And I think that's what he's saying when he said, well, experience became, you know, not only anathema.

[27 : 53] It's suspicious. He rejected that whole thing wholesale. Well, Borgman says, he balances these two. And he says both of those are wrong ideas toward experience.

He goes on. Then I discovered the Puritans and their heirs and realized that they thought much about Christian experience. But not in the same way I did.

My eyes were open to see that doctrine, truth, and experience were not enemies or mutually exclusive. And so Borgman says, what we need to do is see that the doctrine and experience are not opposed to each other in any way.

They aren't enemies. You don't have to pick one or the other. And we'll see how that is in a little bit. And so let's go back to the question.

The question is, should I want to seek an experience with God? And my answer is it depends then. It depends. We talked about this, about truth.

[28 : 56] Truth must have the priority. It depends then on if the experience is governed by the truth or not. So what kind of experience are we talking about?

If we just want experience for experience sake, then we're barking up the wrong tree. Because like Dale said, and I think some other people said, we can have all sorts of emotional experiences.

But if they're not according to truth, if they're not in line with truth, they don't come from truth, then the experience is worthless. If they're not centered on God and his word.

So I was in college and I went to Cedarville University. It was a Christian school. And they had chapel every day.

And on Fridays was SGA chapel, which is Student Government Association chapel. And the students put it on. You know, this elected group of people put it on.

[29 : 52] And every now and then, I guess the folks in charge, I don't really know who they were or what their motives were or anything like that. I guess they were feeling extra spiritual or something. I don't know.

And they would go for the experience jugular. And so we'd come into chapel and the lights would be down. And we would go straight for the music.

And we sang. We sang for an hour. Now, like I said, I don't know what the leaders' motives were. I'm not them. But when they did that, in some way, I felt violated.

Felt violated. They wanted to elicit an emotional response from me without using my brain. Without using my mind. Without truth. Now, let's be clear on some things.

We need to think carefully about this. There's nothing wrong with singing for an hour. It's chapel. It's not church. There's nothing particularly wrong with turning down the lights.

[30 : 53] I mean, you might have wrong motives about those things. But the problem was that they skipped the truth. They skipped the truth. They weren't feeding our minds with the truth to spur our worship.

And that's why I felt violated. They wanted me to dance on their strings. They didn't want to treat me like a human that has thoughts. Well, like I said, I don't know their motives.

But it seemed that they wanted experience for experience sake. That simply to emote, to feel good, is in and of itself a good thing.

But the word of God teaches us that we are to worship in spirit and in truth. Truth is supposed to govern our emotions.

It's the engine driving our emotions. And so what do we do with that? What do we do with that idea of experience for experience sake? Well, Borgman said that initially he overreacted to that.

[31 : 58] He overreacted to that whole idea. He said emotional experience, whether in worship or in life, it's not necessary. It's anathema. That means it's suspicious. It's, you know, it's no good.

And I think we have to be honest with ourselves. A lot of the stream that we come from in the 20th century, this Reformed theology, we've sort of leaned that way.

That the truth, we hold and love the truth. And sometimes we do that to the detriment of experience. But that's not right either.

And I'm not saying we always do it. I'm not making a generalization too much. I'm just saying we can lean that way. And that's not right either. Christianity isn't a philosophy where we just think.

It's not just merely believing the right things. It is a deeply experiential thing. So think about it. How did your Christian life start?

[32:58] Well, it didn't first and foremost start with data being entered into your brain and you believing that correct data. It began with an experience and it was a truth-driven experience.

My intention was for you guys to turn here, but let me just read it. 2 Corinthians 4.6 For God said, let light shine out of darkness. For the God who said, let light shine out of darkness, made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. So that's how we were saved. We were saved when we saw the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. When we saw light, God shined light into our heart.

And what was that light? He said it was knowledge. It was truth. But it was the truth of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And so when we were saved for the first time, we saw Jesus as glorious.

And you can't know Jesus. You can't understand that truth about Jesus as being glorious unless you experience him as glorious. Because glory without you feeling that it's glorious, it's really, it's not glory.

[34:20] And so he informed your mind about the majesty and the glory of God. And so it wasn't this mere doctrinal change. It wasn't just believing the right things.

It was an experience. And so that's how you were saved. It was knowledge. The knowledge about who Jesus is, what he's done. And it was a knowledge that made and created an experience.

And so those two things go together. Truth has the priority. It goes first. It governs the whole thing. But it doesn't have the priority necessarily in importance.

And what I mean by that is if you don't have an experience to that truth, then you can know all sorts of good things.

And it won't do you any good. Truth isn't just, isn't more important than experience. Because knowing the truth demands an emotional response.

[35:22] An experiential response. Truth without a fitting emotional response is really to not know the truth. And so to know Christ and not to love Christ is to really not to know him.

You don't really understand him. So listen to how Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones put it. Truth comes to the mind and to the understanding enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

Then having seen the truth, the Christian loves it. It moves his heart. If you see the truth about yourself as a slave to sin, you will hate yourself. Then as you see the glorious truth about the love, you will want it.

You will desire it. And so the heart is engaged. Truly to see the truth means that you are moved by it and that you love it. You cannot help it.

If you see the truth clearly, you must feel it. End of quote. So do you see that truth and experience are not at odds? They go together.

[36:28] We can't poo-poo experience as unnecessary, as whipped cream, as insubstantial. It's nice to have it, but you don't need it. God presents the truth in his word so that we will experience his glory.

So that we will feel things. So the Bible tells us about Jesus, not merely so that we know the facts about Jesus, but so that we will love him. We will give ourselves to him. And God tells us about the doctrines of grace, not so that we can have all our Calvinist ducks in a row and we can be better than everyone else, but so that we will worship him.

So we will have this experience of his glory. And so that we'll worship him alone. And so that's why John Piper, he said it like this, right thinking exists for the sake of right feeling.

Right thinking exists for the sake of right feeling. So why does God tell you to love the truth, to love the word of God, to grow in the truth? It's so that you feel, so that you adore, you love the right thing, so that you hate the right thing, so that you love him, that you hate sin, so you have the right desires.

And so God calls us to think hard about the truth, to think hard about the truth so that we can experience the right thing, so that we can love the things that he loves and hate the things that he hates, and so that we can glory in him, so that we can be like him.

[37:56] It's not just to inform our minds, it's to move us. And so let's go back to the question. Should I seek an experience with God?

And the answer is, it depends on what you mean by experience. Do you mean experience for experience's sake, without regard to the truth? Then no, not at all.

