

Emotions - Week 2

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[0:00] Well, good morning. While I get myself settled in here, if you will take your copy of God's Word and turn to Proverbs 4 and verse 23.

In doing so, though, I want to make some introductory comments. First, I just want to take a brief moment to talk about our plans for Sunday morning preaching.

It may not feel this way to you. I can't say how you might feel, but it feels to me like we are kind of off to a herky-jerky start this year.

We do have plans, though, and I want you to know that initially our plan was to press through, kind of a hop-skip-jump through the life of David that Clay was presenting for us.

You know, two weeks ago that Clay was sick with flu A, and so I picked up a little piece of this plan that I'm doing now because Clay was going to be out of town last week and then had a surgery.

[1:21] This week, he was hoping to be back this Sunday. Turned out that he wasn't able to be back this Sunday. So we've just been trying to figure it out as we've been stepping along, and I'm in the process of preparing to start us through a verse-by-verse exposition of the Gospel of John.

So we're headed there. I feel like too often lately I've been saying that the regular habit of our church is verse-by-verse exposition. It just feels like we haven't been doing that much lately.

We want to be so careful as God's people that we don't spend a lot of time isageting a text, pulling out of it what we want to see in it, and therefore we think it's really helpful that we simply go verse-by-verse, careful, word-for-word, through a text together.

But at times, plans change. The Lord knows better than we do. We do the best that we can. And it's good for us to pick up topics occasionally and think more broadly about what the Bible may have to say about any given things.

And so that's where we find ourselves. Please know that we haven't abandoned our love of verse-by-verse exposition, and I do hope we'll get back there here very soon.

[2:41] Second, I want to remind you of a little that we considered two weeks ago when I was with you and then had intended to get into it more last week, and then I was home sick, and boy, what a 10-day stint it has been.

And Jordan prayed, as I'm recovering from a cold, I think it was actually the bird flu that I had and I'm recovering from, and I'm grateful for God's grace in the recovery of that.

But, ugh, stay away from people with the flu. It's not a good one at all. But what we talked about two weeks ago was the divine attribute of impassibility.

And when we speak of God's impassibility, in the simplest of terms we are saying that He does not suffer. He doesn't have passions. He does not suffer.

But in broader terms we mean that God's emotions are not acted upon by outside forces. He is never overwhelmed, controlled, or altered by anything outside of Himself.

[3:45] Impassibility is a necessary implication of God's immutability, His unchangeable nature.

If God were subject to emotional turmoil, He would be less than God. This is not a denial that God loves, rejoices, expresses wrath.

He has emotions, but rather a declaration that these are not reactions forced upon Him. They are the perfect, eternal expressions of His unchanging nature.

God is not becoming, He is being. You want to be very careful when anybody seems to be describing God as a thing that is becoming what it is meant to be, rather than it already being what

it is.

God is being. I mentioned that this is a good place for us to begin thinking about our own emotions. To be clear, we are not God in this way.

[4:57] This is not a communicable attribute. We are becoming. In the one sense, if you have repented of your sin, fled to the perfect work and sacrificial death and third day resurrection of Christ for the salvation of your soul, then you have, in one sense, already been made perfect.

You are in Christ. You're found in Him. All that He is, is granted to you. Your old self has died with Him.

You have been raised new. However, in another sense, you are being made perfect.

This is the doctrine of sanctification. You are becoming perfect. A work that will only be completed when you leave your mortal flesh.

So, why do I say all of this? Because it is important for us to recognize that while it is not wrong to have passions categorically, we will be affected by the circumstances in which we live, we're going to respond to the place in which we are, those passions can be sinful or they can be brought under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

[6:28] Our emotions can be sinful or our emotions can serve God. Thirdly, we need to define some terms, as I did for you just a couple of weeks ago.

Historically, careful distinctions have been made between the words emotions, passions, and affections. I really hope that you'll take up and read historical books.

We have so much to glean from Christians who have gone before us. You'll be very confused if you use the words that I'm about to define for you synonymously. They should not be seen as synonymous.

There's distinctions made. We tend to just lump them all together and use them without distinction in our day. In fact, I want to be careful this morning, but I just kind of doubt that I will.

I probably will use a word in one place and I shouldn't have used it. We mix these words together to talk about our feelings. However, it's important to draw from the Bible a more nuanced understanding of how the soul interacts with truth and experience.

[7:44] So, just briefly in distinctions. Emotions, or I want to use feelings in the place of emotions at times, but I'm not talking about physical feeling.

Like, this morning I feel low energy because I'm still recovering a bit from a sickness. I'm not talking about that kind of feeling. I'm talking about emotional feelings, if I say feelings.

Emotions are the broadest category encompassing all of those human feelings, both the rational and the irrational, the fleeting and the enduring.

They can either be governed by truth and grace or led astray by sin and the flesh. I think that we do well to use this term in this broad sense and to note that our emotions include our passions and our affections.

So, our passions are the most instinctual, bodily, and can tend to be the most uncontrollable aspects of emotion.

[8:56] Passions are reactionary most often, often tied to the flesh and can easily lead to sin when not disciplined by the truth and grace.

This is the knee-jerk reaction that we often feel to something happening to us, a word spoken, a thing witnessed. The word passion comes from the Latin word *passio*, which means to suffer.

So, this is what we're talking about when God's impassibility. We are passible. That means we walk in a world in which things are happening to us and we respond emotionally to those things, those inputs into us.

But again, not limited to the emotional association with grief or pain. We can have positive passions as well.

So, affections are emotions of the will. They are rooted in the soul and directed by the truth and grace.

[10:07] The word affection comes from the Latin word *afficere*, which means to influence. So, influence from the will. Affections are the highest form of human feeling.

Not mere reactions, but deliberate inclinations of the heart. So, it's good for me to say that I am affectionate toward my wife.

To find this way, I have made a decision, an intention of my will to care for Sam's highest good. And my passions follow my affections.

That I have set myself to love her in this way means often, not always, but often that I feel impulsively, like I'm compulsive towards her in my passions.

I care for her in that way. Sometimes Sam and I say, I don't always like you, but I'll always love you. But isn't it good when we both love and like the person that we're married to?

[11:24] All right. So, those distinctions, I'm not going to walk through those distinctions a lot. I'm just going to speak this morning in terms of emotions broadly. But I think we need to determine and distinguish these things as Christian thinkers about our emotions moving forward.

So, with the groundwork in mind, let's spend a few minutes looking at the verse that I had you turn to and then I'll give you an outline and we'll press on this morning. So, this is Proverbs chapter 4 and verse 23 where we read, Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flows the springs of life. The heart in this text refers to the inner self, that immaterial part of us. We believe that mankind, man is made up of two parts.

We are body or we are soul, spirit, heart. Words are used interchangeably in the Scripture. So, not the flesh physical part of us, but that part that is immaterial in us.

This includes our mind, our will, and our emotions. Proverbs 4 verse 23 teaches us that the way of wisdom is to vigilantly guard our hearts because our lives issue from our hearts.

[12:57] Who we are, the immaterial who we are, produces our thinking and our activity and the things we say comes out of us.

Matthew Henry in his commentary on this verse wrote, In general, all the actions of the life flow from the heart and therefore keeping that is making the tree good and healing the springs.

Our lives will be regular or irregular, comfortable or uncomfortable, according as our hearts are kept or neglected.

So we should be diligent in this work of keeping our hearts, protecting our hearts. lest we think this is a task that doesn't require diligence.

Jeremiah 17 verse 9 tells us that the heart is deceitful above all things. We are complicated creatures.

[14:03] I wish we were much more simple than we often are. Image bearers of an infinite God granted much, certainly not all, but much of his capacity for thought and feeling, but living in a cursed world are complicated.

As people who have been saved by God, we desire to please him and to walk according to his ways. But if we are not careful, we may miss that this desire should extend into our emotional lives. God will have every bit of us. All of us is to be ordered by God.

Emotions are a gift from God. Nobody this morning is making a case for us to not be emotional. We will necessarily be emotional.

Emotions enable us to love, to grieve, to rejoice, and to respond appropriately to the world around us. However, our emotions can easily become disordered, leading us away from faithfulness to God's Word.

[15:25] You may not realize the great pressure that you are under every day to let your emotions rule the day. This is happening to you constantly.

Our world is presently ruled by emotions. Epistemology is the theory of knowledge, and we have been on an epistemological slippery slope of great decline in these past decades.

The modernists wanted to understand truth by empirical data. They say an objective truth should be established by repeatable experimentation.

The postmodernists want to define the truth by their own experiences. They say, my truth is just as valid as your truth because I experience it to be true.

The post-postmodernists isn't confident that any truth can exist. exist. How can we possibly know that anything is true?

[16:36] Therefore, they say, if I feel something to be good, then it must be good. And if I feel something to be bad, then it must be bad.

More of you tend to process the world this final way than you realize. And I don't think any of us are immune to it.

Beloved, this is not the way of the Christian. The Christian, by the grace of God, through the truth of God, is becoming all of our lives, including our emotional lives, are to be brought under the full authority of God's Word.

God's emotions have a place in our life, but not the ruling place in our life. So here's our quick outline for this morning.

I've got four points, and these are going to be short, so if you're already thinking, oh man, here we go. Number one, our emotions must not define the truth.

[17:47] Number two, our emotions must not control our decisions. Number three, our emotions must not direct our worship.

And number four, our emotions must not excuse our sin. Number one, our emotions must not define the truth.

And here I want to think in two categories. Number one, just doctrine, Bible truth. Our emotions must not define doctrine.

Paul writes to Timothy in 2 Timothy chapter 4, verse 3 and 4, for the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

One of the greatest dangers in contemporary Christianity is allowing emotions to shape our theology rather than submitting our emotions to biblical truth.

[19:04] Many reject difficult doctrines simply because they feel uncomfortable. They say, that can't be true. It doesn't feel good for it to be true.

Some examples of emotionally driven theology. Many people want to compromise on sin, deny clear biblical teachings because it makes them at odds with others, makes them feel judged or judgmental.

So many churches these days don't practice church discipline because they would say, oh, how could we possibly, well, the Bible commands you to.

Redefining God's love, many embrace a sentimental view of God's love that ignores His holiness and His justice, makes tiny God's wrath, maximizes God's love, and He is both things fully at all times.

Many people will elevate their experience over the Bible. Seeing something to be true makes it necessarily true. Some prioritize spiritual experiences and feelings over the authority of God's Word.

[20:34] And this should not be true. Our feelings do not define the truth of the Bible. The right response, Proverbs 3, 5 says, trust the Lord.

We must let Scripture, the black and white on the page, not emotions define what we believe.

The wrestle with difficult things in the text and bring all of ourselves in submission to it. The second truth that our emotions must not define is situational perspective.

And church, it is at this point, if you don't hear anything else said this morning, that I want your full attention. Some of you allow your emotions to define others' intentions.

Something happens or doesn't happen and your emotions get running out ahead. And rather than stopping, honestly assessing what can be known, you back fill your emotions to justify them, and you impute intentions onto others that are just unfair.

[22:03] You assume the worst of others because you have feelings and your feelings must be true. And so you make them true by filling in the blanks.

If there is a single identifiable issue that most tears at the seams of unity, in a church, I think it is found here.

We all feel, every one of us, at some point, negative emotions, relational, whether real or just felt.

Let me give you a really simple example in my own life. Every year, for some years, members of our church have coordinated together a daddy-daughter dance.

I think it is a precious thing. On the front end, let me say I'm so glad for all of the effort that goes into that. I'm not being negative about it for a moment. I think it's so good that you all do this together. [23:11] It's good for the dads to get their daughters out, to dress up, and to dance with them. What a wonderful thing that you all do. I don't have a daughter, and I wish I did.

That's a blessing that God has not seen fit to give to our family. Three precious sons, right? This does not minimize my thankfulness for them at all, but I do wish that I had a daughter, and God has not given me one.

And every year, when it's announced, and it happens, and the adorable pictures are posted, I feel a twinge of sadness. Man, I wish I was going to the daddy-daughter dance, and had a daughter, to be clear, and had a daughter to bring.

I know some of you are going to invite me after this to come, and brought my own daughter to the daddy-daughter dance, and what I could do with that emotion, is I could allow myself to feel excluded.

Is everybody doing a thing for me that doesn't apply to me? They get to all have fun, and I don't get to have fun. I could begin to think that no one is sensitive to the fact that I don't have a daughter, and I could go, well, most of them don't know, but I have told some of you, we've had conversations, I have shared and expressed that I would like to have a daughter, have they just forgotten about my feelings about this?

[24:43] Why has nobody reached out and told me they're sorry I don't have a daughter, even though we're having the daddy-daughter dance? I could go through that whole process and I could justify that feeling, you guys are making me feel this way, or I could just stop for a moment and go, why is it that I feel sad?

Oh, it's just a reminder of a good thing that I've desired in my life that God has decided not to give me. God is sovereign over our children, and I'm grateful for what he has given me, and if I take the time, I just find myself rejoicing in the fact that I have three wonderful, beautiful boys.

I love them, and I love our house, and the dynamic of it, and the crazy that we get into together. I could assume the best of everybody.

You're not doing this thing to hurt me, you're doing it to have fun, and rejoice, and enjoy your daughters, and then I can join you in that. I can rejoice with you in the process of doing that. You see? Bring those emotions under control. Get some clear situational perspective. Perhaps somebody says something to you that feels offensive, you're suffering a loss, and they say something that seems unkind.

[26:15] You could assume the worst of what they mean, or you could instead assume the best of them. I find when I assume the best, I'm never disappointed because often it's true, and if it's not, then at very least, I hoped that the best was true in a given situation.

God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another.

Hear him there. He's saying people are going to make mistakes. If we're going to live in relationship with other people, it is inevitable that it's going to happen. And we're to bear with one another through that.

If one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

forgive. So rather than feeling something and then back filling it to justify the feeling, stop for a minute and know what's actually true and then think, do I need to go get the real information for the situation?

[27:48] And if I do, then go to the brother or sister and talk to them. Ask them what they meant. did they mean to exclude you?

Assume the best of them in the process and forgive them when they apologize. If not, just bear with them.

We're all going to say stupid things and make mistakes and misinviting somebody to something when we should have invited them and we would have wanted to if we just didn't have so much going on.

Right? Our emotions must not define the truth. The truth, the truth needs to stand on its own. Secondly, our emotions must not control our decisions. Proverbs 29 and verse 11 says, a fool gives full vent to a spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back.

[28:56] A fool when he has emotions rushes off, right? Blows up, but a wise man is restraining. Many people make massive life-altering choices based on temporary emotions rather than on biblical wisdom.

This is so dangerous because emotions fluctuate and easily mislead. I can feel one way about something one day and an entirely different way about it the next.

You'll often hear things like, I just don't feel a piece about this or the opposite. I just feel a piece about it. Nowhere in the Bible are we told to make decisions based on our emotions.

some examples of emotionally driven decisions. We can often react in anger. Moses struck the rock in frustration rather than obeying God's commands.

Numbers chapter 20 and oh the trouble that ensued as a result. We do things often out of fear of man over the fear of God.

[30:11] King Saul disobeyed God because he feared people's opinions more than he feared the Lord. 1 Samuel chapter 15 Anxiety leading to unbelief instead of trusting God's provision.

Many worry and make rash decisions. The right response to our emotions is that we must rule over them rather than allowing them to rule over us.

We ourselves are not the authority by which we rule. We bring it under God's word. We say in our home all the time with a mantra in our house, do not let your emotions control you.

2 Corinthians chapter 10 verse 5 calls us to take every thought captive to obey Christ. So making decisions we should seek wise counsel.

Proverbs 24 verse 6 tells us by wise guidance you can wage your war and in abundance of counselors there is victory. And if you seek counsel you should actually receive the counsel.

[31:28] Don't go to enough people and then one of them agrees with you the thing you already wanted to do and do! that thing right? What do many counselors have to say about the situation you're in?

We should be sure to persist in the clear commands of God as we navigate the particulars of our lives. Our emotions must not control our decisions.

Thirdly our emotions must not direct our corporate worship. Jesus says in John chapter 4 verse 23 and 24 but the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the father in spirit and truth.

For the father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. And he's not there saying in emotions and truth but he's saying in the inner man like all that is included in the inner man which is in part our equate true worship with emotional experience rather than a heart directed by truth.

We want the truth to lead the charge in our gathered times together. So we will speak and pray and sing and preach and see and hear the truth and we will hope that our emotions catch up to the truth.

[33:05] This is what we're attempting to do together. This is why when we sing songs together they are wordy songs. True deep songs because we have a limited amount of time together and we want those songs to be true.

We want it to be clear. Just last year I went to a large megachurch in our area when I was on sabbatical and they sang and there was a lot of emotion and the songs said nothing of any substance.

The general theme of the songs is that we are victorious, that we are set free and that we are overcomers but never defined what we're victorious over, what we're set free from or what we have overcome.

Never defined it. at all. Lots of emotion about this, but what were people filling in the blanks with as they were being so emotional?

I couldn't tell you. I have no idea what was going on in that gathering. We are okay with emotional expressions during our time together.

[34:25] We tend to not be that kind of people. But we are okay with it. Your emotions can catch up to the truth. And we hope that it does.

Examples of emotionally driven worship. I mentioned it already, but the idolatry of experience. Some seek an emotional high rather than deep engagement with God's truth.

And emotional highs feel good. They'll carry you for a little while, love. But what you need across your life is substantive worship. We need to be together and we need to be reminded together of who God is and what he has promised for his people.

The older you get, I promise, I'm speaking to a largely young group, the older you get, the more you will appreciate the week in and week out, gathering of God's people, opening his word, and being reminded of who he is and what he has promised to us.

I guarantee this will be the case. Regular repetition, in and out of the truth together. I need this every single week.

[35:41] When I'm not here, I most deeply miss not being here, not because I love you guys, which I do, I like seeing your faces, I love seeing the kids running around, I miss all of the entrapments that are so wonderful about us together.

What I most miss is opening the word with you guys. Declaring the truth together. I need quiet rooms of people with Bibles open in their laps.

I get reminded of this when we gather together on Sunday morning. I need the word faithfully taught. Whether I'm in the role doing it or I'm sitting and listening to somebody else do it.

I need to hear you sing and rejoice in God's truth for you. So important. So important. Drives us on. We also can be tempted towards empty formalism, a suppression of emotion when we gather together, so much that we're just lifeless.

[36:49] we see a high church formality at places in American Christianity. We also see often emotional manipulation in the life of churches, services that focus on creating responses that are emotionally driven rather than driven by sound doctrine.

The right response is that biblical worship is heartfelt and rooted in truth. Number four, and lastly, our emotions must not excuse our sin.

One of the greatest dangers of unchecked emotions is they are often used to justify sinful attitudes and actions. Well, of course I did this.

He made me feel this way. James chapter four, verse one through three, James says, what causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?

Is it not this? We all want James to say that people do things to you. They're not fair and they're not thoughtful.

[38:08] He says, is it not this that your passions are at war? Within you? You're an emotional mess, is what James says.

That's why there are quarrels and fights amongst you. You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.

You do not have because you do not ask, you ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions.

Nobody can make you sin. Somebody doing something to you, saying something to you, cutting you off in traffic is not the cause of your sinful behavior.

It comes from within you. It's your emotions not brought under the lordship of Jesus Christ. It's your sin.

[39:17] So you cannot use emotions to excuse your sin. I dare you to stand before the judgment and try to justify your sin by your emotions.

People tend to want to justify their anger. Many want to believe that their anger is righteous so it gives them the right to speak or act sinfully.

Many will allow their fear to paralyze obedience. Peter denying Christ because he was afraid. Many will disguise their lust as love.

Think of David allowing a desire to lead him into grievous sin with Bathsheba 2 Samuel chapter. 11. We must submit our emotions to Christ and we must exercise self control.

Galatians 5 22 describes self control as a fruit of the spirit. But they must be sanctified by God's word.

[40:33] The key is not to suppress emotions. We're not looking to be emotionless. We are to have them but we should bring them under the

control of Christ.

We should be a people set apart in this way. We have to be so emotionally stable. We're going to react to the things of the world but we should react appropriately to the things of the world. Everything brought under the truth. So just briefly, practically to do this, we should be examining our hearts daily.

Psalm 139 23 says, Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. That we would pray, God, help me to see the reality of my emotions. Help me to understand when they're consistent with the truth and when they're inconsistent with the truth.

[41:40] And train your emotions through the scripture. If you don't know the truth, you're going to have a very difficult time knowing if your emotions are consistent or inconsistent with that truth.

Paul writes in Romans 12 and verse 2 that we are to be transformed by the renewal of our minds. We would know what is good and true and beautiful and that our emotions would be brought into conformity with that truth.

And may we be a people who are not tossed about by emotional instability, but anchored in the unchanging truth of God's word.

Let's pray together.