

Emotions - Week 1

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[0:00] A very good morning to you all. Please join me in your copy of God's Word in the book of Malachi. I hope that you're as grateful as I am to be part of a church that sings songs the way that we do them, the types of songs that we sing, whether you recognize it or not, or feel it to be good or not.

We just sang a song that was a systematic theology of suffering. What a wonderful thing to be taught as we sing together. Now, if you're being astute this morning, you'll notice in your bulletin that this is not the text that's in your bulletin.

And so I want to speak a little bit to our preaching plans and why I'm here and why we're not doing what was previously planned. We have in our intention, Clay Naylor's been preaching on the life of David through some selected texts.

I believe the bulletin says 1 Samuel chapter 16. I can tell you that I was looking forward to hearing on that passage today.

However, he is not well. His family has had the flu this past week. We were praying that he would be spared from it. And last night he texted me, 101 fever and shivering.

[1:16] And I said, please stay home. So he's not here with us this week for that reason. He also, as part of the original plan, was not going to be with us for the next two weeks.

One a trip to go see some dear friends of our church as they get ready to head overseas. And another in recovery from a minor surgery that he's going to be having. So we already had planned for two weeks that I was going to step in and interrupt the life of David work that he's doing.

And now I'm just adding to that today. So in the following two weeks, I want to explain what the Bible says is the improper and the proper place of emotions in the life of the Christian.

We generally want to preach through the Bible. We generally want to preach through the Bible, verse by verse expositions. But it's good from time to time to stop and think. What does the Bible say about any given subject?

And so we're going to labor to do that over the next two weeks. What is the place, improper and proper, of emotions in the life of the Christian?

[2:27] This morning, with the responsibility of preaching added to my day at the 11th hour, I want to peel out a bit of that teaching and expand upon it for our benefit.

So this is my introduction as planned for next week, and I'm just expanding it a bit. It may be a bit brief this morning for that reason, but we shall see.

We're going to take some time in the coming moments to consider an oft-neglected attribute of God. You have likely never heard of this attribute, or if you have, heard very little about it.

The attribute I want us to think about is the impassibility of God. Now let me tell you immediately, before I tell you what it is, that this does not mean that God can't be passed by in some race.

The impossibility of God does not mean that. But before I define the attribute and tell you why it matters, we need to define some terms.

[3:35] Historically, careful distinctions have been made between the words emotions, passions, and affections.

Emotions, passions, and affections. You perhaps could add to that feelings, although I don't think that's a very good word. I feel things when I cut my finger that has nothing to do with my emotions. We tend to lump, though, those three words, emotions, passions, and affections, all together, and use them without any distinction at all.

However, it's important to draw from the Bible a more nuanced understanding of how the soul interacts with truth and experience. So let's talk in brief about the distinctions, and we'll work some of this out further in the next two weeks.

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

[4:42] All those feelings that work around inside of us. They can either be governed by truth and grace, or can be led astray by sin and the flesh.

The word emotion comes from the Latin word *immovere*, which translated literally means to move out, and from the following Old French *immouvoir*, which means to excite or to stir up.

I think that we do well to use this term in this broadest of sense, and to note that our emotions include passions and affections.

So passions. Secondly, passions are the more instinctual, bodily, and uncontrolled aspects of emotion.

We often use this term positively. He's so passionate. But often, and most often in history, it was used negatively.

[5:49] Passions are reactionary, often tied to the flesh, and can easily lead to sin when not disciplined by the truth and grace. The word passion comes from the Latin word *passio*, which means to suffer.

In its simplest form, it means to suffer, but its use is not limited to the emotion associated with grief or pain.

Richard Sibbes, a Puritan pastor, warned against unrestrained passions, which he saw as the enemy of Christian piety and self-control. He believed that passions must be subdued under the governance of the Holy Spirit to avoid sin.

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

The word affection comes from the Latin word *afficere*, which means to influence. Affections are the highest form of human feeling. Not mere reactions, but deliberate inclinations of the heart.

[7:06] Jonathan Edwards, in *Religious Affections*, argued that true Christian experience is marked by holy affections. Affections governed by the truth of God's word and the work of the Holy Spirit.

And so that's how we're going to use these three words across these coming weeks. Emotions, passions, and affections. Okay, so when we speak of God's impassibility, in the simplest of terms, we are saying that he does not suffer.

He does not have passions. But in broader terms, we mean that God's emotions are not acted upon by outside forces. Forces.

We're not saying he's unemotional. But what we're saying is that his emotions are not acted upon. He is never overwhelmed, controlled, or altered by anything outside of himself.

If you would like the fancy word for God's godness, it's his aseity. He is self-existent. Impassibility is a necessary aspect of God's immutability, which is his unchangeable nature.

[8:18] If God were subject to emotional turmoil, he would be less than God. This is not a denial that God loves, rejoices, or even expresses those emotions along with wrath.

But rather a declaration that these are not reactions forced upon him. They are the perfect, eternal expressions of his unchanging nature.

The church fathers upheld this doctrine. The reformers defended it, and the Puritans cherished it. It is a doctrine often denied today.

One of my favorite systematic theologies. In the section on immutability, the author just flatly denies impassibility. And his simple explanation is, because God has emotions. And I don't think he, tragically, didn't take the time to define his terms and understand what is meant by the doctrine of impassibility.

I think because people don't want to think that God does not have emotions, because the definitions of the affirmation words have just been flattened in our cultural moment.

[9:31] It is a doctrine that we must reclaim, because it is essential to our understanding of who God is, and I think it is an important place to begin our thinking about our own emotional lives.

Now, I want to be clear, just for a moment, this is not a communicable attribute. So I just want you to know, over the coming weeks, I'm going to not make the case to you that we should be without passion.

There's a proper place for it in the life of a Christian. We're not trying to emulate God and his impassibility, but the fact that he is impassible is a really great place for us to begin thinking about emotions in our own lives.

So Malachi, chapter 3 and verse 6. This is where we'll start. This is not a complete exposition of this passage.

Much more could be said about it. We'll need to go to some other texts as well, but we'll start here. Before I read it, let me remind you, beloved, that this is God's word to us, written for his glory and our good, that we might believe its promises, obey its commands, and have affection for its author.

[10:47] May we hear it and respond accordingly to it. Malachi 3 and verse 6 says, For I, the Lord, do not change.

Therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. And what's been going on in this chapter in Malachi, as a judgment is being declared, God will come and he will judge.

And there's language about bringing Israel back into conformity with his will. And then the nations that will be judged because they're not in conformity with his will.

And he roots that, right? God's people will not be consumed because God does not change. He has made promises. And he is sure to his word.

And so I have a four-point brief outline for us this morning. I'm going to repeat these points. They're a little bit wordy. But I want to run through it so you know where we're going and then we'll get right to it. Number one, the unchanging nature of God.

[11:56] Number two, the nature of divine emotions. Number three, the impossibility of God in Christ.

And number four, why this doctrine matters for us today. So let's think together first about the unchanging nature of God.

There in Malachi 3.6, God himself declares, I, the Lord, do not change. He is static.

He is immovable. Nothing acts upon him. He acts, but nothing upon him. He doesn't derive his power from anywhere else.

He is self-existent. Plugs into nothing, but everything plugs into him. Another place, James 1, verse 17.

[12:51] James says, Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

No variation or shadow. No changing in God because of the circumstances that surround him. God is immutable. Immutable is that term again for you.

Immutable. He does not change in his being, his purposes, or his promises. If he did, he would cease to be God.

Impassibility is a necessary inclusion of immutability. It is part and parcel with it. When God declares in Malachi 3, 6, I, the Lord, do not change, he is also talking about his emotions.

A being subject to fluctuating emotions or reactions would be a being in process. If he is being changed by outside forces, he would be a being in process.

[14:03] And there is a theology called process theology, and it is a heresy, right? God is not in process. God is complete. It's accomplished who he is.

He's the eternally perfect, self-existent, and self-sufficient God that we see in the Scripture. God is not becoming.

He is being. If God could change in his love, his mercy, or his justice, he would not be reliable.

He would not be reliable. We could not trust anything that he says if he changes. The very foundation of our faith rests on the fact that he is always as he has always been.

He is always as he has always been. This is why Malachi 3.6, there God assures us that we, God's people, are not consumed because his faithfulness does not waver.

[15:16] I think as a church, we generally wrap our minds around this concept of God's immutability and appreciate it. But we want to press beyond to the implication that God is also impassable.

God is impassable in his nature. Secondly, let's think together about the nature of divine emotions. In Numbers chapter 23 and verse 19, we can read, God is not man that he should lie, or a son of man that he should change his mind.

Has he said and will he not do it? Or has he spoken and will he not fulfill it? And in 1 Samuel chapter 15 and verse 29, and also the glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man that he should have regret.

The Bible often speaks of God's emotions, his wrath, his love, his joy, his grief. But we must interpret these descriptions in a way that is consistent with his divine nature.

[16:32] When scripture attributes human-like emotions to God, it is using anthropomorphism, a way of speaking about God in human terms so that we can understand him.

God, however, does not experience emotions as we do. God's love is not a reaction, but an eternal attribute.

The last part of 1 John chapter 4 verse 8, there John declares, God is love. It's who he is. Not because we're lovable does he love us, but God is love and therefore he loves.

His wrath is not an uncontrollable passion. Praise God. But his settled opposition to sin.

God's wrath is not reckless. His love is not reckless. God is never reckless, to be clear. Romans chapter 1 and verse 18, For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against.

[17:46] It's pointed at something. His wrath is pointed at all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. It's not an uncontrollable passion.

It has a purpose to play out. God's love is not an emotional high. Excuse me. His joy is not an emotional high, but his perfect delight in himself and in his purposes fulfilled.

Zephaniah chapter 3 and verse 17. The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save. He will rejoice over you with gladness.

He will quiet you by his love. He will exult over you with loud singing. If God's emotions were subject to change, he would be vulnerable to external forces.

That would make him dependent on his creation rather than the sovereign Lord over all. This is why we must not sentimentalize God or reduce him to a being who merely feels things the way we do.

[18:54] Emotions like his love, his joy, his wrath are always expressed in perfect harmony with his character. Thirdly, let's think together about the impassibility of God in Christ.

I hope that some of your minds, as soon as I said that God is impassable, ran to Christ and said, but wait, but wait, what about Christ and his suffering?

That bears a dressing. He is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

He experienced everything we experience, and yet did not sin. Philippians 2, verse 6 and 7, Christ, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men.

Some argue that the incarnation disproves divine impassibility. After all, did not Jesus suffer and weep and feel anguish?

[20:18] He most certainly did. You have likely heard the life and death of Jesus referred to as the passion of the Christ. A phrase that long outdated the movie you may know of.

The answer to this question is found in the hypostatic union, the mystery of Christ's two natures. When Christ took on human flesh, He was, at the same time, truly God, 100% God, and truly man. 100% man. And it is a mystery. And it's a thing for us to marvel at and try to work out. In His divine nature, Christ remains impassable.

He's fully God and does not suffer as God. In His human nature, Christ experiences suffering and emotions.

[21:23] He truly weeps, grieves, and endures pain. Yet in both natures, He remains sinless and sovereign.

His emotions never control Him, nor do they compromise His divine nature. The impassibility of Christ, coupled with the passibility of Christ, makes His life and death all the more wonderful. A thing for us to just consider and mull over. The fact that Christ, in His humanity, suffered for us, is what makes Him the perfect High Priest.

Reference in Hebrews 4, and verse 15. He understands our frailties. Yet as God, He remains unshaken by them.

You see how the two work together in some mystery. The Scripture tells us that Jesus Christ is interceding for us.

[22:34] This means that when we pray, we come to an intercessor who is both transcendent and is near. He is both sovereign and He is sympathetic.

Christ knows how to pray on our behalf to the Father because He was both impassable and passable in His hypostatic union.

Fourthly, why does this today? God's love is unshakable. His love is not a fleeting passion but an eternal commitment.

Romans chapter 8, verse 38 and 39. Always working for our good. Regardless of how you might feel if you belong to God, God is for you.

God's justice is unwavering. He does not cool down over sin. He does not set it aside.

[23:46] If you belong to Him, He corrects us as a loving Father. Hebrews chapter 12. If you have been wronged, someday there will be proper punishment for that wrong against you.

Perfect justice will be accomplished because God's justice is unwavering and His wrath is perfectly just.

Revelation 19 and verse 15. We can know, we can rest in the fact that everything is going to be sorted out exactly as it ought to be.

I suggest to you that that sorting is going to far surpass our own perception of what might be just. God will make it all right in the end.

God's promises are certain. His faithfulness does not fluctuate with circumstances. promises. I need to be reminded of this all the time.

[24:52] God has said it, it is true, and it does not matter how I feel about it. Numbers 23 and verse 19.

God's comfort is secure. He does not grieve as man grieves. He remains our steadfast rock.

We can rely on Him. We can flee to Him. We can depend on Him for comfort in times of trouble. In a world full of uncertainty, emotional instability, and shifting sins, we need a God who is unshaken.

And as God's people, we ought to have a great confidence. The world around us is being shaken. We ought to stand firm because we stand on a foundation that is unshakable.

The doctrine of divine impossibility does not make God distant. It makes Him dependable. If God were like us, we would have no sure foundation, no rock to stand on.

[26:08] He is never taken by surprise. He is never overwhelmed. He's able to bear every one of your external forces.

Because of this, we can trust Him absolutely, without hesitation. Our salvation is secure, our hope is unshaken, and our worship is rightly directed to the God who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Hebrews 13 and verse 8. Let us rest in the truth that our God does not waver. You see, perhaps why I think this is a good place to begin thinking about our own emotions.

We have a God who is not passionate. That's a good place for us to start processing what is true and how that truth should be shaping how we feel.

God does not need to be rescued. He is the rescuer. He does not suffer loss. He is the giver of life. He is our rock, our fortress, our deliverer.

[27:22] To Him be glory now and forevermore. Amen. Let's pray together.