

5/18/2008

Cry of the Soul – Part 2

I. **Review:**

- A. There are two main views on our emotions:
 - 1. Emotions are amoral. It is what we do with emotions that counts.
 - 2. Emotions are moral. Some are bad and some are good. We should avoid feeling certain bad emotions. Feeling good emotions is a sign of faithfulness.
- B. Both of these major views are partially correct and partially incorrect.
 - 1. The fall affects our whole person, even our emotions. Therefore, it is sometimes wrong that we respond emotionally the way we do.
 - 2. Emotions are complex. Emotions involve a complex interplay between our bodies and our heart. We do not merely experience anger in our minds but also in our bodies physically. We cannot simply will ourselves to have certain emotions. This often leads to suppression and numbness to our emotions.
- C. Emotions are not amoral, but vocalize the inner workings of our souls and are as tainted as any other portion of our person.¹
- D. Therefore, we must learn to listen to our emotions to see what they tell us about our deepest questions about God.
- E. Horizontal relationships often trigger emotional responses that say something not only about our relationships horizontally but also vertically with God.
- F. Horizontally, people relate to us in three basic ways: attack, abandonment, and love.
- G. We respond to these three basic movements by either fighting or fleeing.
- H. These two basic responses produce different emotions that tell us about our questions concerning God.
 - 1. Attack:
 - a. Fight → anger = Is God Just?
 - b. Flight → fear = Can I trust God to protect me?
 - 2. Abandonment:
 - a. Fight → jealousy = Is God good and faithful?
 - b. Flight → despair = Will God leave me isolated and alone?
 - 3. Love:
 - a. Fight → contempt = Does God really love me?
 - b. Flight → shame = Will God love me when He sees who I really am?
- I. The gospel is God's answer to all of these questions.

II. **Thesis:** Emotions are not amoral, but vocalize the inner workings of our souls and are as tainted as any other portion of our person.²

¹ Allender, Dan, and Longman III, Tremper. The Cry of the Soul: How our Emotions Reveal Our Deepest Questions about God. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994, pg. 14.

III. **Outline of today's lesson:** Today we only have time to learn to listen to a few of our emotions. Today I want us to listen to our anger and our despair. In order to learn about how to listen to our fear, our jealousy, our shame, and our contempt, you will have to read the book.

IV. Listening to our Anger:³

A. Unrighteous Anger: A Demand for Justice Now

1. Anger is provoked when interference blocks what we believe will satisfy us. Anger is our way of attacking that which stands in our way. Anger is a response to a perceived injustice.
2. Anger is an emotion that stems from being out of control. We are forced to wait while our object of satisfaction is blocked.
3. Illustrations:
 - a. When we get cut off in traffic, we get angry that someone would interfere us from gaining the joy of a smooth timely ride.
 - b. When others murder, we get angry that someone is getting in the way of us having a safe and perfect world.
 - c. When someone gives me a bad grade, we get angry that someone is standing in our way of getting perfect grades.
 - d. When someone insults us, we get angry that someone is threatening us from having a good reputation which we value.
4. Psalm 109:1-3,6-10 – David is angry at evil men who destroy his reputation and attack him. He calls for them to be destroyed. Look at the intensity of his anger.
5. Anger is unrighteous and unjust when we get angry over something that is not an injustice.
 - a. If you make a bad grade because you did not study, and if the teacher grades fairly, you have no reason to be angry with your teacher. This is unrighteous anger.
 - b. If you get angry for being punished for doing something wrong, your anger is unjust for you deserve the punishment.
6. But, anger is also unrighteous when it moves us to destroy others. God has given us anger to energize our passion to destroy sin and injustice. Anger can be lovely and redemptive or it can be ugly and vindictive.
7. How do we recognize unrighteous anger?
 - a. Unrighteous anger seeks to force its will on others destroying freedom for others.
 - Outbursts of anger are usually attempts to squash opposition and force conformity to our will. Raging tempers seek to control others and eliminate their freedom to act as they see fit. Everyone becomes scared to set you

² Ibid.

³ Allender, Dan, and Longman III, Tremper. *The Cry of the Soul: How our Emotions Reveal Our Deepest Questions about God*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994, chs. 4-5.

off, and so they tip toe around trying to do as you please so that you never get set off.

- Outbursts of anger offer a dose of pain in order to compel or force others to change.
- b. Unrighteous anger seeks to consume others.
 - Sometimes anger seeks to acquire what we feel is being lost or interfered with. Anger is then a desire for possession.
 - This is often when anger turns violent. If someone is physically getting in our way of what we want, then we physically and violently respond to restore what is being threatened. Guys, we see this a lot in sports.
- c. Unrighteous anger seeks to condemn others.
 - Finally, anger often seeks to destroy others.
 - This is, in an extreme form, the anger that leads to school shootings.
 - But, to a lesser degree, this is the anger that results in insulting and condemning those who hurt us. It is an attempt to regain power or safety that is lost in the attack of others.
 - When others reject us, this injustice is met with return insults and vengeance. We seek to humiliate those that stand in our way of friendship, possessions, reputation, or whatever.
- d. Unrighteous anger ultimately questions God's goodness and justice. It demands justice in our time and it denies God's sovereignty. It takes vengeance into its own hands and does not trust God.
 - Psalm 2:1-3
 - Ultimately, anger that is unrighteous is a frustration with God for allowing an injustice to occur. It is a demand for justice NOW. It refuses to wait on God's timing.
 - It essentially attacks God as creator and sovereign and seeks to promote ourselves to the status of god.
 - But, our anger against God is not met with Him destroying us, but rather Him judging His Son on our behalf. His anger at our injustice and refusal to wait on Him is met with redemptive grace. His anger with us moves Him to attack injustice at great cost to Himself.

B. Righteous Anger: An Assault upon Injustice

1. Righteous anger is an anger that is willing to go to God with our questions and wait. Righteous anger questions God's justice but waits in hope trusting in God's faithfulness.
 - a. Psalm 82
 - b. The Psalmist questions God's justice but trusts that He will eventually judge the wicked.

2. Often, in waiting, God intensifies our desire for whatever is being interfered with. In waiting, God intensifies our desire to take vengeance on the one who attacks us.
3. This waiting exposes our lack of control and reminds us of our finitude. We can either trust God at this point, or attempt to assert our power, ignoring our finitude.
4. Waiting and hope are linked together in the Psalms. To wait on God is to have confidence that he will bring justice.
 - a. Psalm 27:14 – All translations
 - b. Psalm 33:20 - NIV
 - c. Psalm 130:5 – All translations
5. Righteous anger sees injustice and remains angry, but turns to God in hope with patience.
6. Righteous anger also reflects something of God’s anger.
 - a. God gets angry when He sees injustice. His anger rightly leads Him to judge sin. This has gone on since the beginning in the Garden. God is angry with sin and there is destruction and death as a result.
 - b. So our anger that seeks to destroy and annihilate others who attack us or interfere us from getting what we want reflects the anger of God.
 - c. This is why so many of the Psalms are full of anger calling down judgment upon those who act unjustly.
 - Psalm 69:14-29
 - Psalm 137:7-9
7. So, it is good and right to be angry at injustice. It is even good to desire to see the destruction of evil and sin. When we get angry at true injustice, we join God in His fury against sin.
8. But, we must remember that God’s anger not only seeks to destroy and judge evil, but it also leads Him to redeem and restore.
 - Psalm 78:49 – “God let loose on the Egyptians his burning anger, wrath, indignation, and distress, a company of destroying angels.”
 - Psalm 145:8 – “The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.”
9. God’s anger was ultimately poured out upon His own Son, who bore the wrath of God on the cross. This act of love and mercy for us was also an act of hate and anger on Christ.
10. So what are we to do with our anger then?
 - Be still and wait: Psalm 37:7-8
 - Ponder and be silent: Psalm 4:4
11. This waiting, stillness, pondering, and silence gives us time to reflect on our own hearts and ask not only God questions, but ourselves as well.
12. We can ask ourselves if our anger is just or unjust. We can ask ourselves if there is sin in our own hearts that we hate as much as the sin we see in others. We can think about God’s anger delivered against His Son Jesus Christ. This then puts us in a position to then act appropriately.

13. Righteous anger then results in:
 - Warning, inviting change, and wounding others for the sake of bringing change.
 - Exposing injustice so as to warn the wrong doer of the danger of their sin.
14. Righteous anger does not result in:
 - Taking away people's freedom or choice
 - condemnation and destruction
 - punishment
15. Righteous anger wounds people, confronting the injustice, with the purpose of inviting repentance.
16. This means that Christians can be angry when others hurt them, but that this anger must result in confronting the person and calling them to repentance, not out of self-righteous pride, but out of sincere concern that justice be done and that the person turn from sin.
17. Righteous anger will lead us to hate sin and injustice not only in the lives of those who attack us, but in our own life as well. Anger will be a fuel that leads us to live more holy lives.
18. Righteous anger results in a deep trust in and patience with God as we wait to see Him bring justice in His timing.

V. Listening to our despair and depression:

A. Despair and the Loss of Hope:

1. When people abandon us, we can fight that abandonment and become jealous or we can flee from abandonment and despair.
2. Despair manifests itself with isolation, withdrawal, and attempts to not feel. This is why depressed people often abuse drugs or alcohol. This is why depressed people often sleep a lot. They are attempting to not feel. This is why suicide is the most climactic act of despair.
3. Despair and depression are emotions that reflect a refusal to feel anything, especially hope.
4. "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life." – Proverbs 13:13
5. Over time, the often-repeated cycle of desire aroused, hope disappointed, and soul deadened through despair leads to hatred of desire.
6. This is especially true of those who have experienced betrayal, whether that is by a spouse or by a good friend or by a parent.
7. It is easier to refuse to hope than to continue to be disappointed by those who abandon you.
8. This is why encouragement doesn't seem to help depressed people. See, you are trying to arouse in them the very thing they are trying not to feel.
9. Despair and depression is essentially a refusal to feel and especially a refusal to hope.
10. This is unrighteous despair. To refuse to hope is to question God. To refuse to hope in God is to state that God will abandon us as well.

11. I think in our day and age, another way we deal with abandonment and loneliness is through distraction. If we feel lonely, instead of living with hope that we can have intimate relationships, we isolate ourselves and entertain ourselves with television or the internet. We play video games or go shopping. We pour our lives into our studies which never abandon us.
12. This too can be a life of depression and suppressed emotion.
13. Despair refuses to dream, to hope, and to move with courage toward what we will one day become. It flees to an illusory safe harbor where, isolated, it holds onto whatever pleasure comes from the fantasy of nonexistence.
14. But, listen to the Psalmists who take their despair to God.
 - Psalm 22:1-2 – “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.”
 - Psalm 77:1-2 – “I cried out for help; I cried out to God to hear me. When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untiring hands and my soul refused to be comforted.”

B. Redemptive Despair and the Restoration of Hope

1. Righteous despair goes to God in trust when we feel abandoned by others or by Him.
2. God has promised us His people that He will always be with us and He will never leave us or forsake us. Righteous despair questions God by going to God in light of these promises. This questioning of God honors Him because it goes to Him which shows that there is still faith present.
3. Psalm 77:3-9 – The Psalmist confronts God with His apparent abandonment.
4. But, in going to God with these complaints, the Psalmist then remembers the mighty saving acts of God in history. He finds joy as He recalls God’s mighty deeds.
5. Psalm 77:10-20
6. The movement of this Psalm is important. Why? Because we should ask ourselves why God allows us or this Psalmist to feel abandoned by Him in the first place.
7. God uses despair to give us a taste of life apart from him. This is meant to give us fuel to pursue more passionately and intimately a relationship with Him.
8. This is righteous despair. This despair feels abandoned, cries out to God and trusts Him to bring us into deeper fellowship with Him by remembering his saving work in Jesus Christ.
9. We see over and over again in Scripture that God temporarily abandons His people in order to draw them into deeper obedience and intimacy.
10. The exile to Babylon and the persecutions of the surrounding nations constantly cause Israel to go to God in hope or to remain in despair alone.

11. This despair then ultimately leads to greater hope. Our hope is not merely a contentless emotion, but a confident assurance that we will see the glory of God.
12. We must remember that Christ experienced despair on the cross. In fact, he quoted Psalm 22 on the cross. He felt forsaken and abandoned, not only by his friends who fled, but by God. But, He took His despair to God in a prayer, and ultimately, before He died He expressed hope by saying, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”
13. Jesus experienced abandonment by God the Father so that we can have a confident hope that we will see the glory of God and never be alone again.
14. So, ultimately, righteous redemptive despair is experienced in community with God and with others. If we get depressed, we must share that depression with others and not flee to isolation and refusal to feel.
15. This means Christians, that we should not expect everyone to be happy all the time. We must be the type of people that are able to sit and feel sorrow with others so that we might help remember the Gospel.

VI. The Gospel: A final reminder of the Gospel

- A. On the cross, God judged injustice and evil. Because of the cross, God raised Christ from the dead and exalted Him above all things. Because He was exalted, He will return on the last day to judge the living and the dead.
 1. God will not allow injustice to go unpunished.
 2. But, we must remember that vengeance belongs to the Lord. Our anger over injustice should never be used to punish and take vengeance upon others.
 3. God’s anger brought about judgment, but it also brought about redemption in that Christ suffered on our behalf.
 4. Our anger must fuel our hatred of not only the sin of others, but our own sin.
- B. On the cross, Jesus experienced abandonment. The eternal fellowship of the Father, Son, and Spirit was broken on the cross so that we might by faith have hope that we will enjoy perfect fellowship with God in His glorious presence.
 1. Christ suffered abandonment on the cross. He felt despair, but He took it to God and expressed hope, trusting God to restore Him to fellowship.