

# **Warning Lights**

**Letting Feelings Do Their Good  
Work and Not Their Bad Work**

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# WHO I AM WRITING TO

How do we live in Christ? We let the true God lead us at all times and receive His generous forgiveness and other provisions for us in Christ whenever we do not. I do not lay this foundation in Jesus here, but use it as the starting point for this book.

In this paragraph I write to those who do not yet agree with this foundation. I want God's best for you also, but this book is not the best for you now. When you realize that you can never find a better way to live than to let Him lead you, then what I write can make sense to you ("better" means that our loving God always makes His way to be better for you and for others within eternity). The best that I can do for you in this book now is to help my brothers and sisters in Christ to be truly led by Him. This will help others to realize the totally unselfish love of God for each of us at all times in our lives, so that you can want His leading.

Our feelings are good gifts from God our Creator that serve us well at times and can get in the way of God's best for us at other times. I respect your time and God's leading for you to use it well, so that I do not write about every feeling. Instead, I include only those feelings for which I have found perspectives and insights that have helped me and some other people: you can see most of these emotions (= feelings) in the Table of Contents. What I write can apply to anyone and to other feelings like these, but I am writing only to those who want to be led by Him and have found that their feelings have sometimes hindered this.

I took "Dr." off my author-name for this book to avoid a false claim to be an authority. If I provide a helpful insight from our Creator, then you should listen to your Creator. You may regard the rest of this book as explanations and conclusions by a slow-learner who is still learning.

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I call the New American Standard Bible the NAS or NASB. I add boldface to specific words and phrases in Scriptures to add my emphasis for discussion.

Seventh edition, 2013.

## Chapter 1

# FEELINGS

Feelings or emotions can be compared to an instrument panel on the dashboard of a car. All are created by the designer to alert the driver to situations that might affect the condition or operation of the car. Some are gauges that let the driver monitor the speed, gas in the tank, engine temperature, or other issue where it might be helpful to know more than that a condition needs attention. Others light up when something related to it is out of order, such as an open door, low oil pressure, or the battery discharging. A light should cause the driver to investigate, evaluate, and take appropriate action for the real situation. It is never appropriate to use a hammer on the gauge or light, even if it is giving a false signal of a problem. The application of these obvious facts to feelings can be helpful.

In 2005 my wife and I were going from South Sudan into Uganda with two Sudanese friends and a driver. Under ordinary conditions, we would have a two-day trip and see more abandoned vehicles than moving ones before reaching a paved road or a town with electricity. Our driver had previously cracked the block of the car and it had been repaired, and this time he was driving it to Uganda for a new repair that needed to be done there.

At the beginning of the trip, the driver informed us that the temperature gauge meant nothing, and we would soon discover that it really did mean nothing to him. He repeatedly drove the car until it would stall from overheating. Then he immediately added water into

the radiator until it erupted like a volcano. When that died down, he added more water with less violent reactions. He was given authority for that car and would not listen to advice. Soon the hole in the radiator got larger. It got repaired by tea leaves that lasted most of the trip. Who knows what that was doing to the rest of the cooling system? The car stalled a final time before we reached Uganda.

By God's grace strangers gave my Sudanese sister, my wife, and me a ride to Uganda. On the next day my brother and driver plugged the radiator with superglue and also reached the town in Uganda. But here we notice the driver's foolish attitude toward the gauge.

Unfortunately, sometimes my approach toward my own emotions has been like the driver's. I am not alone. At age 68, I have seen many who have done like me. Being naturally slow in this area, I have been hungry for insights that others have grasped intuitively. I have found some real nuggets from our Designer in the Bible.

God created mankind wonderfully, even though our fall has added some defects and ways to corrupt His good provisions for us. Our approach in this book is to identify God's good purpose for selected emotions, which often can be signals for us. If we understand our Creator's design for good, then we can better evaluate the cause of a signal and take more appropriate actions to correct the problem. We can also recognize false signals and realize when the alarm system is not working as it should. Therefore let us consider God's way for us to live, and then we can see how our feelings fit in so well.

### *God's Good But Dangerous Gift of Emotions*

The Bible often refers to God's feelings of anger, wrath, love, compassion, delight, pleasure, satisfaction, hate, pain, grief, sorrow, and more. We are created in His image. We have these emotions or feelings, and they are not sin and are not an enemy to true spirituality. However, any of them can easily provoke a sin, and so they can be

dangerous to what is truly best for us – being led by God.

As explained in the introduction before the Table of Contents, I am writing only to those who want Jesus to be leading them at all times, but who have also found that there are problems in doing this well. Therefore in this section, I merely give reminders of basic truths, not try to teach them. In order to teach any of these truths to someone, I must lay a better foundation of God's totally unselfish love to us. I do this in *Knowing God* and some other free books at [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com) under James Tarter, but not here. Of course, you may prefer a better writer, and there are many on this life-giving topic.

I cannot do better than Jesus my Example, who let His Father lead Him at all times (John 5:19). Therefore if anything ever keeps me from letting God lead me, then I miss the mark (the meaning of "sin").

This gives me a simple way to live: let God lead me at all times. My own feelings and thoughts should not lead or rule me, or distract me from His leading. This is a big problem, because my feelings, thoughts, and perspectives often jump into leadership and reject any leading that is against them, so that I do not perfectly discern God's leading. We shall see why this is "natural" as we consider each specific feeling.

God leads each child with the perfect gentleness and direction that he or she needs. As with our own children, each situation is not isolated, but is a part of His child's long-term growth and development. With *agape* love (Chapter 12), God has my best interests in His heart, and His long-term perspective does include my short-term interests with the right priority. In contrast, I know little about my vast eternal future in Christ, have only guesses about my future on earth, and have a naturally egocentric perspective that sometimes keeps me from realizing what is good and right. With *agape*, God leads me to do the long-term best for myself as well as for others, but often "how a way is best" is not realized in this life. When I learn the whole truth, I shall realize that our faithful God did not leave me lacking because I chose

to obey Him in a situation.

My feelings can be strong enough to knock me into living in my “default mode”. Everyone’s default mode is the self-protecting, self-centered, and self-seeking “flesh” (Rom. 7). As soon as I realize that I have returned to my default mode, I need to turn to God to let Him start leading me again (Rom. 8). Oh, yes, He protects me and seeks what is good for me and my loved ones (considering all eternity, Rom. 8:28).

Any temptation not affecting my thoughts or feelings is very weak. Jesus was *“tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin”* (Heb. 4:15). At times He was pulled by strong feelings to not let God lead Him. No feeling becomes a sin until it causes me to not be led by God.

The bottom line for this discussion is that as I let God lead me at all times, I should let any disturbing feeling alert me and let God lead me in evaluating its cause and into good actions or inaction. (“Inaction” means I put the solution into His hands and not let it distract me from God’s leading). When I let a feeling do its God-given function of alerting me, the unhealthy drive drops. It is the ignored feeling that can unhealthily drive me (“scream louder”), and the long-stuffed feeling that comes out in ways that deceive me.

### *Our Order in This Book for Examining Emotions*

If we were to consider only the importance of a feeling to our life in Christ, then we would start with *agape* love. *Agape* is far more than a feeling, but should include feelings most of the time. If not, then we have a good indicator that something is wrong and needs repair. In fact, the greatest hindrance to the expression of *agape* in practice by most believers is that some feeling or feelings have gotten out of order and need to be handled well. Such feelings include fear, fearfulness, anger, pain, guilt, depression, hopelessness, grief, sorrow, and pride. We shall begin with anger, because God has a 2-verse capsule that shows His way to handle many dangerous feelings.



## Chapter 2

# ANGER

In the Bible God speaks far more often about His anger and wrath than His love. The clear lesson is that feeling angry is not a sin in itself. Many Scriptures and much personal experience show that anger often causes sins and hinders loving in the way that God often leads and commands us.

We consider anger first not because it creates greatest problems (fear might do this), but because God's directions for handling anger in Eph. 4:26-27 show the way to handle many other dangerous emotions:

***Be angry, and yet do not sin; and do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.*** (Eph. 4:26-27)

God has given anger as an emotion that is an especially strong motivator for action – to do something! The good thing to do is to turn to God, which often can be done in an instant. Then if I let the Holy Spirit lead me, I can do what is good and helpful (maybe only prayer helps), and release the situation and my anger to God in prayer.

But anger is dangerous because it rarely waits for the Holy Spirit: ***“But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and **slow to anger**; for the **anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God**”*** (James 1:19b-20). Both Ephesians and James warn against rash (too quick) sins that naturally come with anger. For example, God's anger never produced actions like mankind's rash actions that are not just and righteous, but normally His anger did lead to or imply His action.

What do we do when we get angry? Eph. 4:26-27 shows us: we are to go ahead and be angry – God’s solution for anger is not to try to suppress this feeling. But when angry, we do not let this God-given but dangerous emotion cause us to quickly sin or create long-term problems. Anger can do a good work if we let the Holy Spirit guide it: it can cause us to turn to God, so that we do what He wants and thereby put the whole problem into His almighty hands for His wise and loving solution. He can do all the good things that we cannot do, and with love He will take care of His trusting children before (and after) we can appreciate His solutions. In this way we can have righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit even when we are handling and releasing our anger. It has alerted us and we have responded well.

This is not a solution for a person who uses anger or irritation in order to control, manipulate, intimidate, or dominate others – to use this ungodly way to try to get others to do his desires. Such a person might have suppressed anger, but anger is not the primary root: it is an idolatrous demand to control, which often comes from a very deep and unseen fear. This idolatry requires repentance (without repentance, idolatry’s self-deceiving lie could take a person to hell). Spirit-inspired truth and actions can help him repent, but trying to help his deep anger will not succeed until he is willing to stop using it to control or manipulate people.

Often we must control anger to prevent rash sins, and believers might need to control or suppress anger until we can really turn it over to God. But we must turn it over to Him without delay (*“do not let the sun go down on your anger”*), because anger suppressed for a long time gives the devil great opportunity by letting unforgiveness and bitterness grow. After they have grown for some time, a person often stays angry but stops feeling angry – deceiving him. The anger often

reveals itself as irritability as small irritations cause inappropriately big reactions: “displaced anger”. We shall further discuss this soon.

God equips mankind to be able to carry anger and other stress for a while. But if anger continues too long, its stress ruins our spiritual, emotional, and physical health. Therefore God calls us to return to a lifestyle of forgiveness and peace soon after we get offended. We in Christ can do this because God has freely forgiven us, and even promises to bring all things together for good for those who love Him (Rom. 8:28, and this means that we will obey Him – John 14:15, 23). And because He has forgiven us, justice requires us to co-operate with His great desire to help others experience this forgiveness in practice. (How to forgive effectively is discussed further in Apx. 1).

Too many people live with problems produced from anger that is suppressed for too long. Few people know what we should do with anger well enough to do it. This is especially true for young children: which child (including yourself long ago) has not become very angry from some offenses or wounds (some truly bad, and some only thought to be bad)? Suppressed anger is a stuffed feeling (p. 8) with many self-deceiving symptoms, including an easily-provoked irritation, hostility, aggressive violence, bitterness, depression, sickness, etc. Such symptoms can have other causes, but long-suppressed anger is a very common cause or source or “root” of such problems.

For example, if one is easily irritated, then he shows a symptom of having a deep, long-suppressed anger or fear about something other than the irritants. This reality is illustrated by a person’s carrying a cup of coffee when his arm is bumped moderately: with little coffee inside, nothing comes out; but with a full cup, what is inside comes out in a situation that normally would not have created a mess. If a person will take care of the real source of anger or fear, then small offenses will

not irritate him so much, and he can love far more unselfishly and freely. Love covers a multitude of sins (1Peter 4:8), and God's love in us goes far beyond our natural capacity, so that little offenses do not disturb one's love and peace and joy in God.

When we do not need to handle our anger, we stay in peace by faith – trusting God to do good for us from His total eternal perspective (which covers everything that is truly needed now and later).

Mark 3:5 shows how our Example Jesus handled feeling angry, and this agrees with what we have seen: *“After looking around at them [the Pharisees] with **anger, grieved** at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored.”* Notice that Jesus had a righteous anger, being grieved at the great loss that the Pharisees' hardness of heart was causing for both themselves and the other people there.

Jesus' anger did lead to action, but His action was led by God and not by being ruled by His anger or getting back at them for rejecting Him. With unselfish *agape* love for them and others, Jesus provided the truth they needed, so that if they would ever open their hearts to this truth, then they could receive it. Jesus did nothing against them personally, but with God's power He exposed their hypocrisy and the hypocrisy of their toxic system that they were trying to protect.

What general principles have we seen in Eph. 4:26-27, the key Scripture that shows us how to handle anger? First, we fight the right battle: we do not fight against the feeling of anger, but we let it help us turn to God instead of letting this feeling cause the sins that it tends to cause. By turning to God through Jesus for His leading, we stop this feeling from getting stronger and taking over the leadership and ruling us – driving our actions and attitudes.

In Chapter 3 we shall see the same way to handle a feeling of fear.

## Chapter 3

# FEAR

Like anger (Chapter 2), fear is a feeling or emotion given by God for our good, but fear can be so strong that it can fight God's work for our good – even stronger and more deceptive than anger. God's gift of feeling fear helps us to handle potentially great dangers as a priority. A strong fear takes any perceived danger to be a top priority, so that it is natural to act on it, and with Him I can take appropriate actions.

As with anger, the best response is to turn to God in the heart immediately, so that I let Him lead me in the situation and keep me moving ahead in my eternal life. I can do this in an instant if a situation requires this, but other situations require a more prolonged turning to God. As with any disturbing feeling, I should let the fear alert me and then let God lead me into doing well. As in anger, sin or a demon can easily take a strong fear into responding so urgently that I do not turn to invisible God for a solution which might not protect me like I want.

A person initially responds with feeling fear of anything that he perceives as a big danger, whether or not it is real. I divide perceived dangers into three kinds: definite, possible, and unreal dangers. Each kind has its own type of good response unless God leads into a different response. I illustrate by a simple example: I am near the door to my house when I see (1) a hungry tiger across my large yard, or (2) a poisonous snake known for its aggressive nature across my large yard, or (3) moving shadows of a tree that create an alarming illusion.

A good response is normally (unless God leads differently) to get away from the first danger, to handle the second danger well and keep it monitored until then, and to realize that the third is really no danger, so that I can ignore it or handle it at the right time with a lower priority.

Again, feeling fear is not a sin, even like feeling angry is not a sin: Eph. 4:26 tells us, *“Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.”* As with anger, I do not fight my feeling of fear; I must not let fear override my priority of letting God lead me; and I must not “stuff” my feeling of fear for too long. If I do, then it will come out in many other ways as fear turns into sins like fearfulness (being too timid or driven by unreal dangers to take control), panic, or worry. We shall consider these specific outgrowths of feeling fear in Chapter 4.

This distinction between the feeling of fear and sinful fear makes good sense. The very meaning of “courageous” confirms this. A person is not courageous unless he first perceives a danger and then chooses to do good regardless of the personal consequences. If I do a right thing but do not realize the danger (realizing it would have caused an initial feeling of fear), then my action was good – but not courageous!

This distinction is important in practice because it helps us to focus on the real issue. Instead of trying to keep from feeling fear – a good emotion for potential dangers – I check that I am letting God and not my feelings lead me. With His leading I can also handle the source of the fear well with the right priority and timing. But ignoring this feeling causes it to shout louder and drive harder, and stuffing it for a long time causes it to find tricky ways to express itself (self-deceptive).

A key Scripture for handling fear is Psalm 56:3: *“When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You”* [God]. God’s ways for us to handle fear and to prevent and/or remove sinful outgrowths of strong fears are huge practical issues and are considered further in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4

# PANIC, WORRY, FEARFULNESS

In Chapter 3 I stated that feeling fear is not a sin. A strong fear can easily turn into a sin of fear if it keeps us from letting God lead us. One sin is panic: a sudden fear that freezes a person and his ability to think sensibly, and might even delay him from turning to God for His leading through the situation. Another sin is anxiety or worry, which rejects God's peace by not trusting Him with the future or outcome of the situation. A third kind of sin is a fearfulness that often manifests in opposite ways: either being too timid or driven by unreal dangers to be in control. Either way works against a person letting God lead him in other situations. Here we briefly consider how each sin fits into the pattern we have seen for feelings, and with this foundation we further discuss God's solution to get us out and keep us out of sins from fear.

Panic is a good natural reaction to some dangers until realizing a better solution (a predator notices a person easier if he moves, etc.), but is an awful response in situations that need a different action immediately. The best response to panic is to turn one's heart to God as soon as he realizes that he is in a panic mode. Father God can provide direction before clear thinking returns, and by trusting Him the person can receive the peace that helps him to think sensibly, which is

taking him out of the panic mode. A prolonged panic (a lasting partially paralyzing fear) is never God's solution, which changes a situation, helps change it, makes the best of it, or reveals that the danger is not like it was first perceived (maybe not even a real danger).

People often learn to "compartmentalize" a prolonged strong fear. Instead of staying totally overwhelmed, a person learns to keep most of the fear out of areas of his life. This can allow success for some goals, but is no substitute for the full healing that Jesus provides by receiving the perfect love from God that casts out fear (1John 4:18-19, p. 20). Without Jesus' healing the heart, great efforts to keep fear – a stuffed feeling (p. 8) – out of areas of a person's life will not fully succeed and will show up in jolting situations as anger, a desperate or brittle need to control, etc.

As indicated, worry or anxiety rejects God's peace by not trusting Him with the future or an outcome of a situation. Worry is fearful of being unfit for an upcoming situation (this is also fearful), or fearful of future outcomes or lack of provisions. Phil. 4:6-7 tells us to "*be anxious for nothing*", but ask God about it (p. 54). Notice how trusting Him (Psalm 56:3, p. 14) relieves most sources of worry. We are not able to control the outcome of some situations, but Rom. 8:28 promises that it will be good (within eternity) if we do our part: "*And we know that God causes all things to work together for **good** to those who **love God**, to those who are called according to His purpose.*"

We also cannot control the future enough to make sure that we get the things that we need to live on earth, but we can seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness, and Matt. 6:33-34 shows that this is enough for God's promise of what we need:

<sup>33</sup>*But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things [food, drink, and clothing are mentioned in v. 31] will be added to you.* <sup>34</sup>*So do **not worry about tomorrow**, for tomorrow will take*



*care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” (Matt. 6)*

An underlying fearfulness can manifest as timidity, cowardliness, shyness, or self-depreciation, or the opposite: a need to control that causes strong drives to dominate, succeed, or be aggressive (“the best defense is a good offense”). For example, when a person becomes fearful, he (she) might quickly become very aggressive, even like a cornered wild animal with no escape. In such situations, fear is the dominant factor even while he might not feel fear: a strongly-driven, aggressive panic shuts out a consideration of future issues (this often looks like being fearless), and adrenalin in the “fight or flight” response helps to remove a feeling of fear. Many highly fearful people do not sense their fear nor easily recognize it if it is pointed out.

### *Our Self-Protective Heart – Fearful by Nature*

The fearfulness of our hearts is a huge practical issue. From the use of “heart” throughout the Bible, Harris’s *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* and Vine’s *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* conclude that the heart is the whole inner person – the spirit, soul, mind (consciousness), will (the chooser), emotions, personality – everything beyond the visible body that makes a person who he/she is. Some experiences can get into the heart and become a part of it.

Therefore a person’s heart contains many beliefs, some of which may contradict each other. A part of his heart may fully agree with God while another part agrees with a demon that contradicts God. For example, a part of his heart may strongly believe that God loves him while another part feels totally unloved from rejection by parents.

God has made our hearts stable, so that the heart has effective ways to protect itself. This is good but can easily get corrupted. The heart often chooses to avoid perceived dangers without the mind ever

thinking sensibly about the reality and nature of the perceived issues. The protection of our hearts by fear and fearfulness is so deceptive and poorly understood that we need to consider this further.

Everyone has had a great terror, embarrassment, etc. We learn how to put it out of our minds (the consciousness), or else it goes into everything that we do. This handles many situations well, but can become the top problem if it continues long after the emergency.

For example, a victim may unconsciously shut out reminders of a severe abuse – sometimes the whole memory is blocked out of his/her mind. If the heart has chosen to avoid this issue, then the conscious mind “never” (rarely) considers it. This may help to get past the trauma and partially recover, but is no substitute for a spiritual and emotional healing that Jesus provides for all who will let Him in to heal.

The wounded heart is still affecting choices. Inappropriate fears, intimidation, condemning guilt, unbelief, etc., may ruin the victim’s life before a healing, but he or she may want to hide the abuse from oneself and everyone else. The victim wants Jesus and His healing, but he/she also wants to keep everything away from this area. If the heart agrees with demons for darkness, then they get a legal way to stay with him/her, to get a cover and a foothold for their work that can extend far beyond anything related to the abuse.

In this example we can see how the heart often protects itself from what it perceives to be a danger without our ever becoming aware of the choice. The abuse victim might feel dirty, embarrassed, ashamed, guilty, unworthy, fearful, intimidated, or have other attitudes about himself. He might be unable to trust God or good people, and tends to pull back from them. Indeed, distorted attitudes about himself go into his life-decisions with no thought of this basic source of his attitudes. We often remember a faulty conclusion from an awful experience while

not thinking about the experience.

More generally, unhealed wounds in the heart can cause it to fear God (an unhealthy desire to avoid Him) or some people or situations when there is no danger. The heart often avoids these unreal but perceived dangers before we think about them, and normally perceives anything that would change the heart as a big danger.

Fearfulness is often subconscious, and a fearful person might not realize that he is fearful. Human development helps fearfulness to be universal: all of us are born completely helpless, which is followed by being surrounded by older people who do almost anything better than we can. Most of us find a better balance later, but during highly formative years, our subconscious learns lessons that might stay deep within our hearts and surface later in well-disguised forms.

The good balance to the early human development of fearfulness is the sound judgment of Rom. 12:3. This receives truth from God about oneself and does not try to answer thoughts of inadequacy with pride or arrogance (Chapter 11). Indeed, people typically use strengths to compare ourselves with each other. Instead, our Creator gave all of us various capacities and opportunities to develop strengths, and we do not measure His love by His free (unearned) gifts to us (as Luke 16:25 shows). This truth can help us receive the attitude of Paul in Phil. 4:13: *“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”* “All things” means everything that I should be doing in Christ, but does not include things that I should not do (jump to the moon, etc.).

### *Handling Fear and Stopping Its Sinful Outgrowths*

In Chapters 3-4 we have seen God’s good purpose for the gift of feeling fear, and have seen common ways that this good gift can get corrupted so that we sin (by missing His leading of us). God created mankind in His image, so that we have many of His emotions, even as

the Bible shows. However, before God the Word became the human Jesus (John 1), God could not feel fear, fearful, worry, or panic like we feel them, because He knows that nothing is dangerous to Him. Some things really are dangerous to us people, and God has given us the gift of feeling fear to alert us to a potential danger and to put it as a priority – with a strong fear taking it naturally to be at the top of priorities.

In order to be *“tempted in all ways as we are, yet without sin”* (Heb. 4:15), Jesus felt strong fear, but it never caused Him to sin – to miss the mark of doing as His Father did (John 5:19). The Bible does not tell us when Jesus felt fear, but probably it was a part of His strong desire in Gethsemane for an alternative to the cross.

What do we do with fear and its sinful outgrowths? First, we fight the right battle. Trying to suppress an unwanted feeling of fear is like using a hammer on a warning light (Chapter 1). This easily helps one to deny or suppress a vital truth. Moreover, if his unhealthy ways to handle fear do not work, the fear often becomes a panic that paralyzes or gets dogmatic or aggressive as he gets very angry at the one who violates his way to protect himself. Finally, we can realize that the most destructive fear – a long-lasting panic, which paralyzes effective action for a long time – often lacks a feeling of fear.

If I never feel fear with real dangers, then I must repair a smashed warning light. If I feel fear, I should evaluate the source of perceived danger with God and let Him lead me into handling it well with the right priority. Prolonged ignoring or stuffing fear sets up self-deception.

1John 4:18-19 says: “...**perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because He first loved us.**” As our hearts really learn God’s love in Jesus, then we can do Psalm 56:3: “*When I am **afraid**, I will **put my trust in You***” [Almighty and carefully loving God].

## Chapter 5

# GUILT AND SHAME

God is the God of truth, and since our beginning mankind has often hidden the truth about feeling guilt and shame. We deceive ourselves in this way, which has led to spiritual death (separation from our life-giving God) and interfered with our receiving life in Christ since the beginning of mankind. Our ancestors Adam and Eve enjoyed a close fellowship with God until Gen. 3:1-6, when the crafty serpent (Satan) deceived them into disobeying God's command to them. V. 7-13 show their fatal responses to Him after they sinned:

*Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. Then the **Lord God called to the man**, and said to him, "**Where are you?**" He said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid myself." And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? **Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?**" The man said, "The **woman** whom **You gave** to be with me, **she gave me** from the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "**What is this you have done?**" And the woman said, "**The serpent deceived me, and I ate.**" (Gen. 3:7-13)*

God knew all the answers of the questions He asked, but He gave Adam and Eve opportunities to speak their own parts in the issue. They kept speaking truths to God but always avoided the truth that they needed to confess. When Adam was hiding from God in shame, God merely asked, "*Where are you?*" Adam's sin was causing his

actions and clearly was heavy on his heart, but he was not willing to confess. He wanted to hide his sin because he refused to trust God's love or mercy for his fear, guilt, and shame. Then God explicitly asked Adam about his sin, and he again spoke truths to God in order to avoid the key truth. Adam blamed both the woman and God for the sin: he did not confess his guilt in his "I ate". He missed his opportunity to confess, and lost his close fellowship with God on earth.

Then Eve missed her opportunity to confess. She accurately blamed the serpent, but avoided her guilt. By refusing to confess, she also lost her close fellowship with God. Then God kept them from eating from the tree of life and thereby living forever (Gen. 3:22-24). This tree of life is the cross of Christ from the foundation of the world.

Gen. 3 illustrates that Satan's real goal for mankind from our start was to separate us from God for further destruction. Jesus' goal was the exact opposite: to justly reconcile us with God (2Cor. 5:18-21). Rom. 3 shows that every person is guilty and needs to be saved, and 1John 2:2 shows how we can be justly reconciled: Jesus, our Creator along with our Father and the Holy Spirit, is the innocent Propitiation (atoning sacrifice) for the sins of mankind – His creation – so that God can love everyone freely and justly. But only believers in Jesus receive His sacrifice for our eternal salvation, and few believers make full use of His sacrifice for our close, loving fellowship with God while on earth.

1John 1:9 (3 verses earlier) shows how we justly remove our guilt and shame: *"If we **confess** our sins, He is faithful and righteous to **forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**"* The Greek word for "confess" means "speak the same thing". I speak the same as God would speak about my part in the real issue. In order to speak this truth, I must come to realize the real issue as He sees it. Therefore confession to God includes repentance, because I have

changed my mind (repented) and heart-attitude about this whole issue, and have embraced the truth.

However, saying the right words without really changing the mind (repenting) is not confession. Consider 1Sam. 15. King Saul said many times that he had sinned, and in v. 24 he voluntarily spoke the key truth: *“Then Saul said to Samuel, ‘I have sinned; I have indeed transgressed the command of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and listened to their voice.’”* This was so true and the real issue: as the leader of God’s people, Saul’s heart and ear should have been turned predominantly to God for His guidance.

But this was not a confession: Saul’s heart did not agree with God or his own words about his sin, so that his heart kept it. It manifested immediately. Samuel rejected Saul’s good words of confession, and Saul did not try to repair his relationship with God, even when he asked Samuel to worship the Lord with him: *“Then he said, ‘I have sinned; but please honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and go back with me, that I may worship the Lord your God’”* (v. 30). Saul quickly turned from the problem in his relationship with God to his real issue and concern: getting honor from the people. He was still fearing the people that he should have been leading with God’s guidance, and this kept him from being able to be God’s king over His people.

1Sam. 15 illustrates how God rejects right words when a speaker’s heart also rejects those words – his heart has not repented and wants to keep the sin, and it is kept! The mind and attitude are not changed, and there is no forgiveness or cleansing that comes with confession.

With a right heart-attitude, my good confession might be done in a moment. If my heart is not ready to fully agree with God about the real issue, then I need to work with God on the problems in my heart. God

is not looking for a legalistic or long confession, but avoiding the real issue can prevent a real “confession” and growth in the truth.

We are like our ancestors Adam and Eve: it is natural for any of us to fail to honestly confess our full guilt and receive His mercy in Jesus by faith for all of our guilt. Since we are so likely to fail, why does our loving God require us to confess honestly? In a brief answer, because lasting health is built on truth instead of efforts to avoid or deny it.

How do we avoid their error? Consider this illustration. I am tired and frustrated because my plans to do a job did not work. A frustrated co-worker makes a heated comment to me, and I fire back with anger. I really want to shut him up now and keep him from treating me like that in the future, and at this moment deeply hurting him is OK.

What do I confess to God? “I wanted to hurt him without regard for what You wanted.” My heart agrees with God to humble myself before my co-worker and admit: “My comment came from my mess, not an honest assessment of you.” I receive God’s costly sacrifice for my sin, so that by faith I am freely forgiven without earning this myself – I am justly restored to the righteousness of Jesus after my selfish sin.

If I try to reduce the guilt of my sin (blaming, excuses, etc.), then I lose my confession and the restoration of my close fellowship with God. An excellent Bible teacher, Charles Simpson, said: “God is great at taking us from where we are to where we should be, but He refuses to take us from where we pretend to be to where we should be.”

### *Our Conscience, Conviction, and Condemnation*

God has given Adam, Eve, and us descendants a conscience (Rom. 2:15), which is a great gift for us. It naturally discerns between right and wrong and makes us feel guilty if we do wrong. A seared conscience (1Tim. 4:2) is a smashed warning light. Of course, our adversary – the literal meaning of the name “Satan” – can twist God’s



great gift to us into being destructive. Our lying adversary has tricked us to feel guilty about false sins (which really are not sins) and by false accusations (another major name of Satan is “the devil”, which means “the accuser”), and by turning true guilt into condemnation and shame. Condemnation or shame separates and destroys instead of reconciling and restoring us to God. God does not like to condemn and is not a faultfinding critic (but many parents help children to think that He is).

As we see the difference between conviction and condemnation, we can see this great gift of God and how it is often corrupted. God’s Holy Spirit convicts me of any sin that I did. This includes anything that I should have done and did not. Conviction seeks for my agreement with God about the real issues and also motivates me to do what He wants me to do to clean the mess created by my sin, and to receive His provisions to make my heart less vulnerable to sinning like that later. Then I can confess with the repenting and receiving of God’s forgiveness and righteousness by the blood of Jesus, so that I am justly separated from this sin and quickly restored to abiding in Christ.

To keep us from our life in Christ, demons from the devil try to twist conviction into condemnation. Condemnation seals the sin onto the believer, attacking him personally by telling him that God rejects him because he is unfaithful, unworthy of good, is not getting better, and will never get better. This hinders him from turning to and hearing rightly from God, who wants to build and edify him – not destroy him!

What is the truth? Everyone is guilty and worthy of condemnation. But there is more truth. Believers are justly saved from condemnation by our Savior: *“There is therefore now **no condemnation** for those who are **in Christ Jesus**”* (Rom. 8:1).

After we become believers, we need to receive the Holy Spirit’s conviction so that we repent from real sins (change the mind and attitude about them); but we also need to reject condemnation, which

takes us away from Jesus and from our restoration to God in Him. Now notice the false guilt as our hearts sometimes falsely condemn us:

*<sup>19</sup>We shall know by this [our obedience to love in deed and truth in v. 18] that we are of the truth, and shall **assure our heart before Him**, <sup>20</sup>in whatever **our heart condemns us**; for **God is greater than our heart**, and knows all things. (1John 3:19-20)*

Notice how we handle false guilt. I realize the truth in Christ Jesus and confirm that it applies to me in my situation (v. 18-19). Then I hold fast to the truth and assure my heart as long as a part of it believes a lie: I answer lying beliefs with the truth as long as my impure heart has wrong ideas. Once again, we do not ignore the feeling, but face it and address its concern appropriately with truth. Our conscience should merely help us discern the real leading of God, who is truth and love.

While answering, I should also ask God to reveal and heal (clean) all that makes the lie seem to be truth to a part of my heart, such as repeated condemnation from a parent, unhealed wounds from painful rejection, or a condemning theology or teaching that reinforces milder experiences of condemnation or feeling ashamed, unworthy, or inferior. This is a part of cleansing us from all unrighteousness in 1John 1:9 (p. 22). A lie which stays strong for too long reveals a long-ignored warning light and a wound that needs God's "inner healing".

God's perfect provision for us in Christ to clean our hearts in an issue may be quick or take nearly a lifetime: how long depends on our co-operation with Him (we can often improve this) and on what is best for our eternal good (we often cannot "help" this). No matter how long, we reject condemnation and fully receive God's conviction.

Finally, true guilt that is avoided, denied, or suppressed is at least as self-deceptive as long-suppressed fear or anger. All work alike to deceive those who do not handle the feeling truthfully with God.

## Chapter 6

# PHYSICAL PAIN

Pain can be so intense that I often do not think of it as an emotion. But it clearly is a feeling and fits well into the pattern that we have seen for other feelings. Indeed, pain is universal and can illustrate features of other feelings even as the warning lights on a car have illustrated.

In the 1980s Dr. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey (*Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, Zondervan) introduced me to God's good purpose for pain, which I had always considered to be a negative feeling. They wrote that not feeling pain was the cause of the horrible secondary damage in modern leprosy: their patients' lack of feeling pain caused their bodies to get badly burnt or harmed in other ways. With only about a quarter century of incubation, I have realized that God has purposes for good in many emotions that are usually considered as negative, sinful, or dangerous to true spirituality.

I no longer have that book to help me, but I now see God's good purpose for pain to be a warning signal that the body is getting damaged in some way. In our fallen world, there also are sources of pain that do not serve this good purpose (for example, the firing of sensory nerves for an amputated arm). Focusing on a pain tends to increase it, and a distraction can often help reduce a pain (a fine thing if it does not ignore a warning of damage that should be prevented). In any case, removing the source of pain is near the top of natural priorities. Therefore the feeling of intense pain, fearing it, and the

threat of it can provide strong competition to our desire to be led by God, so that those who resist the Gospel often use pain in any of these ways to cause us to sin (to miss the mark of letting God lead us).

The threat of pain in doing God's will is one of Satan's chief weapons to provoke disobedience to God's leading. This can be a major part of counting the cost of following Jesus (Luke 14:27-28).

God does not call us to want pain, to like it, or to take pride in our ability to work well through pain. God does call us to not let pain or the threat of pain to keep us from doing all that He calls us to do. We can have this courage (p. 14) by knowing in my heart God's wisdom, power, and love for me and for those I love. Then I can freely trust Him to work things for "eternal good", which combines now and forever with His wise priorities. He is for our bodies (1Cor. 6:13b): He created, knows, and understands our natural desire to avoid pain, and shows that He suffers as His children suffer (Matt. 25:35-45). Jesus endured the excruciatingly painful cross for the lasting joy set before Him (Heb. 12:2, Luke 9:51). From all of this, God regards pain as a negative that can be more than redeemed by positive lasting results in the person.

I cannot tell those in excruciating pain what to do about it, but I can tell how I have handled the threat of intense pain. I have not lived in fear of possible future situations, but trusted that God will get me through what I need to experience. I do not claim the strength in myself to endure through unlimited pain, but instead I know the wonderful love of God and trust that His provision will eventually prove to be far better than the worst temporary situation that my Father actually lets happen to me. Therefore I live in peace without worry, and in the few times I have needed to "count the cost" that God could be leading me into a situation with great pain, I have considered pain to be a small negative compared to the positive of being with Him and in His future for me.

## Chapter 7

# DEPRESSION

There are many different sources of feeling depressed. Here we see how vital it is to treat the primary source of a person's depression.

Depression is a signal that something within us is not working well and needs help. It usually features a loss of interest and energy for action. Depression can come from situational, biological, emotional, or spiritual sources. When any source starts a strong depression, the decreased output of desired activity can trigger other sources to add extra depression, making it deeper, more overwhelming, and harder to get out of the depression. Therefore if a primary source of depression is not helped, then it is capable of bringing back the whole package when the treatment is lifted, so that a lasting solution must get to the primary source. Treating a secondary source must help getting to the primary source in order to be part of a real solution.

Let us briefly consider these four kinds of sources.

God has created our bodies to need adequate rest, but a person's situation might not fit his need for rest. God gives him some flexibility to go beyond his natural limits for special situations – to carry a heavy load longer than is good for him (Matt. 11:28, p. 31-32). But eventually this will deplete his physical and emotional and spiritual resources, hinder their restoration, and cause him significant damage. Therefore God has created the body to have an involuntary depression or shut-

down if we go beyond getting tired into a damaging exhaustion or burn out. A great effort might put off this shut-down until finishing a major task, and great efforts short of a depressive shut-down can help enlarge a capacity to work in future situations, but this depression is a warning of damage and is a natural resistance to personal harm.

Typically the greater the overload and the deeper into depletion and personal harm, the longer the time needed for recovery. With this perspective, we easily see that treating any other source of depression as a substitute for providing real rest sets up greater harm to the person during the treatment and a deeper depression after it.

The source of physical depression can be situational or biological: a body can shut down to prevent further harm, but also from a body malfunction. One often-diagnosed malfunction is “brain chemistry”, which is accurate in some people and a harmful diagnosis in others. It is a convenient diagnosis for many who do not want to deal with the real source, because a misdiagnosis is not testable (schizophrenia was used like this 50 to 100 years ago when it had no biological test). Any medicine should treat the specific biological source of depression or set up the treatment of the primary source, or else the medicine is likely to cause harm while it “attacks the warning light”.

An emotional depression can come from sources like a relational loss, grief or sorrow or no hope (Chapter 9), loneliness, self-pity or a victim mindset, or feelings of rejection, inferiority, or shame. Any of these sources can produce the heavy load of Matt. 11:28 and easily set up other sources of depression to add to the already heavy load. As we shall see (Chapters 7-13), God provides an abiding joy and peace that can lift our feelings, but we should not try to stuff them.

A spiritual source of depression can come from specific kinds of sin, guilt (Chapter 5), or be largely demonic as they take advantage of

opportunities from sin and guilt. Judging critically to condemn or put down someone, unforgiveness, legalism, or any sin with a refusal to confess can set up a spiritual darkness that lets demons work against a person and create very heavy loads. If this is the primary source of depression, God's solution is to turn to Jesus with confession (1John 1:9 and its discussion in Chapter 5). Deliverance could help get the repentance (truly changing one's mind and attitude about the sin) that is a part of a real confession.

If a reader is depressed, I highly recommend that he read and fully consider Apx. 1, which provides powerful insights for removing these spiritual sources of depression. One or more of them often become a major contributor to the depression that started with a different primary source, and often are the unrecognized primary source of depression when another source has been diagnosed. I say honestly that very many depressed believers greatly need to realize some of the insights in Apx. 1 in order to escape the subtle traps that are caused by common wrong ideas about these sins.

How does depression work effectively against our being led by God? It makes doing His will or any other good thing harder than it should be. Any demonic work will especially resist what God wants or a real cure. Depression often causes a sense of being tied down when the person knows that nothing tangible is holding him. This only helps the depression to continue and increase.

In Matt. 11:28-30 Jesus shows both short- and long-term solutions for the weariness of depression – no matter how weary or heavy laden:

***<sup>28</sup>Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.***

***<sup>30</sup>For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.***

If I realize that I am weary and heavy-laden, then Jesus invites me to come to Him. Clearly I had carried a load or loads that are not from Him, because His yoke is easy and His burden is light (v. 30). Jesus our Creator knows and understands my condition and situation, and He promises to give us rest, not a condemning lecture or scolding. This is His short-term solution for whenever I need it, every time that I get worn out by carrying a heavy load for too long.

For His long-term solution, His wise and healing counsel to us is that we take His yoke upon us and learn of Him (v. 29). Clearly we have added hard ways and unnecessary baggage to His easy yoke and light burden. We need to draw near to Him and learn His nature and His true ways to replace our preconceived ideas about them. He created the enormous sun as a tiny part of His creation, but He is so gentle and humble in our hearts that we would go right past Him if we do not seek Him intentionally. If we do learn His nature and ways and walk in them, then we shall find the rest and joy that strengthens us to do all that we should be doing, and we shall be His children who manifest His true nature to the world (Rom. 8:12-22).

Indeed, Neh. 8:10 tells us that *“the joy of the Lord is our strength”*. This great truth was given when God’s people were letting His words of truth into their hearts: they grieved with anguish as they realized both their sinfulness and that their ancestors’ sins caused their great losses – the conviction of Chapter 5 and the grief of Chapter 9. When any of us opens his heart to the true God, our Father does not crush him, but instead equips him to move ahead in His strength.

We shall see more about God’s work with our grief in Chapter 9 and His joy as our strength in Chapter 13.



## Chapter 8

# DISAPPOINTMENT AND ITS ANSWER

Our faithful God has often promised: “*he who believes in Him* [Christ our Cornerstone] *will not be disappointed* [or, *ashamed*]” (Rom. 9:33, 10:11, 1Peter 2:6, Isa. 28:16). This is the disappointment or shame from having a false hope and expectation. But every Christian has surely experienced great disappointment in an issue that was or is extremely important to him or her. Let us first see why each of us is likely to create a false hope or wrong expectation, and then see that God repeatedly promises a provision so wonderful that we shall regard it as far exceeding all such “temporary” disappointments.

The book of Hosea ends with, “*For the **ways of the Lord are right, and the righteous will walk in them, but transgressors will stumble in them***” (Hos. 14:9b). The problem is not in God’s righteous ways for us to live, but in what we can add that convert them into stumbling blocks – corrupting something healthy and taking the life out of it. Our sin-filled world provides many corrupters, and each person’s immaturity adds limited and egocentric perspectives and preconceived ideas to God’s clearly stated truths. This easily leads to a false hope and wrong expectation in especially some highly emotional issues.

Everyone begins immature, with his heart not fully understanding God’s ways and with perspectives limited by not knowing the future

and by being egocentric. Our wise and loving Father shows His full understanding of our temporary disappointments by being the Author of the proverb: *“Hope deferred makes the heart sick”* (Prov. 13:12).

God’s promise to not disappoint us combines with this proverb to hint that His plans far exceed our feelings of disappointment caused by a wrong expectation and false hope. Consider these descriptions:

*Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think... (Eph. 3:20)*

*Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him (1Cor. 2:9)*

*For momentary, light affliction [beatings, stoning, persecution, etc.] is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison (2Cor. 4:17).*

Within eternity each believer in Jesus will surely realize that He has far exceeded our best expectations on earth. I have taken hold of this true hope from our Almighty God who has greatly exalted truth and faithfulness: this shows that He has these qualities, because a creator can exalt any qualities that he wants. This hope greatly reduces feeling disappointed by non-eternal losses. I have found that this hope in God and from God has held me up while I rest (not trying to prop up things), and has kept me from real despair (a condition of no hope). Consider these Scriptures about our hope and perseverance from God:

*For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. (Rom. 8:24-25)*

*For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus. (Rom. 15:4-5)*

*Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Rom. 15:13)*

## Chapter 9

# GRIEF, SORROW, AND SADNESS

Grief and sorrow are painful emotions or feelings caused by losing something precious. Sadness feels like sorrow, but is less related to a loss than to no hope for a solution. Seeing something important that needs to be fixed and having no hope that it will be fixed causes a person to feel sad. A sure hope (Chapter 8) lifts sadness.

Christian psychology normally emphasizes that recovery from losing something precious (like a loved one) is a process that should not be rushed. Normally treatment for grief is advised only if a person gets stuck and cannot move on with his life after a good amount of time to fully process the loss. This agrees with the whole approach to feelings in this book: consistently we let them alert us to a condition or situation, so that we can let the Lord lead us into the good action for that time. Doing this normally helps the feeling stay healthy and not drive us harder, because it has fulfilled its God-given purpose and has had the source of the feeling appropriately evaluated.

Therefore I have little to add about grief in this chapter, except to give a true balance available for believers in 1Thes. 4:13: “...*you will not grieve as those who have no hope.*” We should not rush getting

over the pain of a great loss or minimize it because “a mature Christian like me should not be grieving so badly” (notice the pride). However, we also do not need to hold onto grief and should not try to fulfill some pattern of grief (like “it takes a year”), because we have the great hope that God provides to us in Christ. He promises to more than redeem all such losses (as in Rom. 8:28) and really does provide a great future for each of us as we continue in our love for Him. For example, I did not fulfill a conventional grief after my 10-year old daughter died over 20 years ago (but I have missed her), because God assured me of good for her and not because I tried to hold back expressing grief.

God fully feels our grief, even as Jesus felt Martha’s and Mary’s grief in John 11. Jesus also probably experienced the death of His dear father Joseph at a hard or painful time for Jesus. As indicated from Matt. 25:35-45 in Chapter 6 on pain, Jesus also continues to suffer with the suffering of His people, including their times of loss.

Barry Byrne in his and his wife’s workshop, *Love After Marriage*, helped me to appreciate how Jesus’ beatitude in Matt. 5:4 especially applies to those in grief: “*Blessed are those who **mourn**, for they shall be **comforted**.*” The Greek word for “mourn” means a sorrow or grief normally with lamenting or mourning as an outward expression. The key insight comes from the Greek word for “comfort”, which literally means “to call to one’s side”. Especially when we are mourning over a loss, Jesus invites us to come to Him with our honest grief. Anyone who comes will also be given God’s comfort, which is another major meaning of this word as it is used in the New Testament.

As we saw at the end of Chapter 7, God gently tells His grieving people that “*the joy of the Lord is our strength*” (Neh. 8:10). Jesus is highly accessible to us if we turn to Him in a time of grief, sorrow, or sadness, no matter how we might feel at that time.

It might help some readers to realize how much grief Almighty God the Word – Jesus – took on to save us, relate to us, and be tempted as we are but without sin. Jesus fully knows our grief and sorrow: notice how much He personally lost when He came to mankind as Jesus in order to save us justly and be the perfect Example for us (John 1:1-18). The eternal Word, the Creator of everything and therefore able to provide anything that He wanted for Himself, took off His almighty strength to become a helpless baby, totally unable to provide anything that He wanted for Himself. Even as Jesus grew into a man who was able to provide more for Himself by His own strength, He kept His non-self-seeking attitude throughout His life on earth and did only what His Father was doing (John 5:19, Matt. 4:2-4). He surely felt great losses.

Isa. 53 provides the most thorough description of Jesus' long-term feelings in the Bible, but the Hebrew words for grief and sorrow in Isa. 53 are only loosely related to common English meanings. This grief is usually a sickness or wound with a resulting weakness, and sorrow emphasizes feeling pain and anguish that often goes beyond physical pain. Consider how v. 3-11 add to our understanding of Jesus' feelings (I do not discuss these verses beyond boldfacing certain words):

<sup>3</sup>He was **despised** and **forsaken** of men, a **man of sorrows** and **acquainted with grief**; and like one from whom men hide their face He was **despised**, and we did **not esteem** Him. <sup>4</sup>Surely **our griefs He Himself bore**, and **our sorrows He carried**; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and **afflicted**. <sup>5</sup>But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was **crushed** for our iniquities; the chastening **for our well-being fell upon Him**, and by His scourging we are healed. <sup>6</sup>All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the **iniquity of us all to fall on Him**. <sup>7</sup>He was **oppressed** and He was **afflicted**, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth. <sup>8</sup>By **oppression** and **judgment** He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off

*out of the land of the living **for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due?*** <sup>9</sup>*His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death, because He had done **no violence, nor was there any deceit** in His mouth.* <sup>10</sup>*But the Lord was pleased to **crush Him, putting Him to grief**; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the **good pleasure of the Lord** will prosper in His hand.* <sup>11</sup>*As **a result of the anguish of His soul**, He will see it and **be satisfied**; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will **justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities.*** (Isa. 53:3-11)

## Chapter 10

# FEELING REJECTED AND FEARING THAT

God provided some of His deepest and most powerful work in my heart through my painful rejection by my previous wife. I made my contributions to our problems, but the specifics are irrelevant to God's good work and to our discussion here. This rejection tore at my total identity, but this was absolutely necessary for me to open up to God's loving work in Christ Jesus. I had some usual rejection experiences in my childhood, but as an adult I had learned how to avoid rejection and most situations that set up being rejected. And if I felt like I was about to be rejected, then I could get out first...oh, did I cause someone to feel rejected as I left? I was too focused on getting out to notice.

Decades later, I have found that in many cases I have surprisingly little to do with being rejected. As illustrated in the last sentence of the previous paragraph, many rejecters are so wrapped up in their own issues that my imperfections are more often excuses that fit into what is driving them. Trying to "walk on eggshells" does not help. Yes, I can help people to reject me if I act without God's wisdom or leading. But Jesus followed His Father perfectly, and John 1:11 tells us: *"He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him."*

When I was experiencing my strong rejection, this verse helped me to see that this really was a normal Christian experience instead of a strange thing for us. In my case, I needed the humbling of my pride and the stripping of my identity in order to let God do what I needed for my eternal welfare and to find my identity in Christ. For my healing, I needed to keep my heart open to this painful rejection, because it was the way for me to see the truth about myself and God. This let me get a healthy hunger for Him and for His better nature over my own. No person could have manipulated me into this condition: I would have bolted out of my painful situation if I had detected any hint of that.

The emotional pain of feeling rejected can be so strong that it is a common way to threaten, intimidate, manipulate, or control a person (Chapter 6). Rejection and fearing it are common sources of emotional depression (Chapter 7). A fear of rejection is a major source of broken relationships, grief (Chapter 9), loneliness or isolation, man-pleasing (John 5:44), and fearfulness or worry (Chapter 4).

As we saw, there was no healthy way for me to escape the pain of my rejection, because it was providing exactly what I needed. The pain rightly signaled that I was getting crushed or damaged, but God also healed and restored me to a “much-better-than-before” condition. As usual, pain was not His top priority, but being led by Him eventually provided many kinds of healing and, in my case, relieved the pain.

Psalm 139 shows that each one of us is fearfully and wonderfully made, and He knows each one of us perfectly and is ready to redeem any of us into a uniquely wonderful creation in Christ Jesus. Therefore a fear of rejection is much weaker in me now. How can I let one who knows me so poorly (even my spouse or myself) totally identify who I am? As stated, most rejecters are really too focused on themselves to look at others honestly. I like to be liked, but I am free with this feeling.



## Chapter 11

# FEELING PROUD

How can I write a book about feelings without including insights into pride or arrogance? I was near the top in that when God's grace in Jesus removed almost all of my pride and left me with only an above average amount to handle with Him. We have continued to remove my pride, but it still is dangerous to me.

Pride is an attitude with a feeling like many God-given feelings that come with being approved or valued, or doing good or right. In the Bible, pride is a corruption of those God-given desires: a sinful attitude with a drive to exalt oneself over others and the feeling that comes with finding a way. The drive in pride is terribly self-deceptive and rejects the “*sound judgment*” of Rom. 12:3.

James 4:6b and 1Peter 5:5b both say the same: “**God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.**” What does this mighty truth mean? Many other Scriptures and my life show that God was for me – not against me – even when I was much prouder than I am now. I now see how this Scripture has worked out in my life: in order for my Father to provide eternal good for me, He must oppose my doing some good and great things until I stop being proud, which would use a God-given grace for success as a way to exalt myself over others. When I stop this lie by truly humbling myself, He is free to give me the grace to do these things, because they will not ruin His child.

1Cor. 4:7 asks a question to bring us back to the truth: “*What do*

*you have that you did not receive?"* Before I did anything that could be used to justify my gifts, God – our Creator – gave me the capacity to develop in the way that I have developed, and this includes giving me all that was needed (perseverance, opportunities, etc.) to develop the desirable features. Pride is a lie. In practice, this pride often extends to my family, my team, my location, my nation, my race, etc.

I was too proud to see my pride as a sin. It was also easy to justify my pride: it served good purposes at crucial times in my past, helping me to avoid some shameful sins. Likewise, pride surely helped every disciple to choose to continue with Jesus at some tough times, but it was also a source of the disciples' many disputes about who was the greatest. A time came when their pride had to be replaced by realizing the truth that God's loving grace kept them with Jesus. God broke their pride as they were scattered during Jesus' crucifixion, so that He could bless them later by working more freely in them and through them.

Feeling unworthy, inferior, or rejected often mixes with pride to produce arrogance: an exalted opinion of oneself that causes rebellion or a disregard of God and His word – a highly toxic spiritual poison. A person's strong negative feelings combine with realizing that he has some special skills and abilities, so that he exalts their importance. This produces a self-centered world and causes strong self-deception, because his emotions cling tightly to his distorted world-view. A healed heart – not put-downs from other people – stops arrogance, a corrupting answer to feelings of inferiority and no worth that handles unwanted opinions but lacks the sound judgment of Rom. 12:3.

In Chapters 2-11 we have considered some especially common corruptors to the expression of *agape* love. It is the key feature of our life in Christ and seeks for the good of another totally unselfishly. Now let us consider this feature with its feeling.

## Chapter 12

# AGAPE LOVE

Now that we have considered feelings that interfere so much with *agape* (the Greek word for God's love), we are prepared to consider this most important feeling in our life in Christ. What? Have we not heard that *agape* is more than a feeling? Yes, and I also say that. As we shall see, *agape* is far more than a feeling, but should include the feeling most of the time. If not, then this is an indicator that something is out of order and needs repair.

In this chapter we first see how *agape* love is a command to be totally unselfish instead of self-seeking, and is quite different from common misconceptions of love. We also see how God's commands that seem to be His self-seeking are really not-at-all that way, and shall consider how the feelings fit into the command to *agape*.

## *Agape (= Love): What It Is and What It Is Not*

More than any other Scripture, 1Cor. 13:4-7 tells what love is and is not. Indeed, realizing its opposite helps our understanding of the real meaning of love, so that we can better live in Christ. Consider the 16 qualities of *agape* love in v. 4-8a:

***Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.***

All of the qualities together provide a picture that conflicts with common ideas about “love”. *Agape* love goes far beyond mere good attitudes or actions toward another: I can have or do them while bragging arrogantly, rejoicing in unrighteousness, being self-seeking, easily provoked, etc. Hate, a feeling of intense dislike and hostility against another, is not the opposite of this love. I can hate patiently and without jealousy or bragging or being arrogant, etc.

What is the opposite of *agape*? Every quality, 16 out of 16, specifically opposes and corrects a self-seeking heart-attitude and value system. Consider how each quality of *agape* love corrects a problem caused by self-seeking, which pulls me:

- \* to be impatient with others as I look for what I want
- \* to be jealous and be too concerned for myself to be simply kind
- \* to brag often and be arrogant
- \* to act unbecomingly when I am resisted or overlooked
- \* to seek its own (specifying the central issue)
- \* to be easily provoked and be very sensitive to a wrong suffered
- \* to rejoice in anything that I want, whether or not it is the truth
- \* to poorly bear, believe, hope, or endure things from others
- \* to fail often to provide well for others as I seek first for myself

God’s greatest commands are to love Him and our neighbor (Matt. 22:36-40), and He often commands us to love one another (1Thes. 4:9, 1Peter 1:22, 4:8-10, 1John 3:11, 3:23, 4:7, 4:11, 2John 1:5). We see that love is a command, and we respond to any command by choosing to obey it fully, or else to disobey or ignore it partly or fully.

Therefore I choose to love or not. My choice to love depends totally on what is in me and how I am relating to my commander – God! I do not base my choice to love on a good feature or merit of the one I am to love, but my choice to *agape* is given like grace: *agape* is a free gift and cannot be earned. If I am seeking foremost for myself,

then I lack interest in providing good for you unless that helps me. Love chooses to reject the self-seeking in my heart in order to seek for the good of another. *Agape* corrects self-seeking and also ministers to any indifference or hatred I have.

Self-seeking creates problems in relating to others. Unless people consistently *agape* love others, how can heaven stay a great place to live? But if I keep loving by His Spirit, then I relate well to others, seek their good, and might help all of us get prepared for our eternal futures. Indeed, love is a key to fulfilling God's purpose for our lives on earth and all eternity, and love fulfills the Law (Rom. 13:8-10).

What does *agape* love look like? There is no simple answer to fit all situations. Therefore our loving Father sent Jesus to show us love by a perfect Example instead of telling us a complicated answer.

### *God's Totally Unselfish Love*

God is love – totally unselfish – but He commands many things that our self-centered nature would naturally misunderstand to be selfish and self-seeking. God calls us to love Him above all, to worship only Him, and to give Him glory and praise. But God is love! In a world full of sin and false appearances, doing these things works for the good of many, including those who do them. Let us consider how God gave all of these commands to help people.

Consider God's foremost command: to love Him with all that we are (Matt. 22:36-40, Mark 12:28-30). How does loving God above all help people? It causes love to abound to people: loving God causes us to obey His commandments (John 14:15, 23), and He commands us to *agape* love others unselfishly (p. 44). This gives extra goodness and blessings to those who receive this love. God loves them fully, better than the lover does, and this means that He seeks for their best.

My love relationship with God equips me to unselfishly love others more consistently and effectively: *"We love, because He first loved us"* (1John 4:19). If I receive His great love for me when I do not deserve it, then I will be able to love Him more and will be better equipped to freely love other undeserving people.

God also provides for anyone who loves others because he loves God. As a part of His complete wisdom, God knows how He created each of us and how to best satisfy and fulfill us for all eternity. Loving God helps one to go beyond a natural desire to seek things for himself and takes him out of self-directed motives that fail to deeply satisfy himself (p. 53). Indeed, self-seeking never stays satisfied, but is driven to look for better ways to meet its lustful appetite (p. 49). God makes our greatest fulfillment to come by loving others with His great love and wisdom, which go far beyond our limited love and wisdom. Truly *"it is more blessed to give than to receive"* (Acts 20:35).

To worship only God is to stay dedicated to Him. In our fallen world there are many alternatives to worshipping the true God. Our Father is the real source of all life and goodness, and relating to Him provides vital ingredients for our eternal life. Worshipping only Him helps our hearts to want to hear and receive all that He provides.

God also loves other people. Being dedicated to His nature and character, we also want to love wonderfully. And He gladly leads His willing children into loving well, which greatly pleases our unselfish God. Therefore worshipping God helps others by our better love for them and also by their getting to see our true worship. Both ways help them to regard Him favorably and with respect, which helps them also to turn to Him and receive all they need for their eternal good.

The redirection of favorable attention and honor from oneself to God in true worship is unselfish love both to God and to people who

seek Him better. The worshipper gets to grow in love and also to turn away from the pride that eventually corrupts righteousness. Both of these benefits are vitally needed for our blessed eternity with God and with other loving people.

“To give God the glory” gives Him credit or recognition for a good action or result. (More generally, Biblical “glory” is the manifestation of internal qualities). For many reasons most people like to be honored, and so they naturally tend to see God’s calls to worship only Him and to give Him glory and praise from their own self-seeking perspective.

Again, this self-seeking perspective misleads us. God is the wise Creator of everything, and He gave mankind a little wisdom to use with our little knowledge. Opinions of people who know and understand so little do not disturb God’s ideas. If no one approved of one of God’s qualities, He (who knows all truth) would not be shaken by our combined ignorance. If He wants our recognition, He can merely open our eyes to see Him – the Creator of everything, so that the whole earth is like a tiny speck of dust in what He has made.

God calls His people to love and worship Him and give Him glory and praise for a different goal. As we have been seeing, God is love, and doing any of this helps people. It helps God only in that He is love, so that He deeply cares that people get what they need – and our greatest needs are eternal.

How does giving God praise and glory help people? We naturally focus on the visible manifestations, the things that work. God reveals His nature and character in a far more gentle way, which helps us adopt His less spectacular qualities for ourselves. To do this, He made Himself invisible to us and made it necessary for us to relate to Him to receive all that we need for our eternal good. Therefore with love our Father teaches us to look for the invisible source of the visible results,

to go beyond the things that naturally impress us.

Our loving Father calls us to be His children and to grow into His likeness – His character or nature. Then people will often regard us as the source of blessings. If we give God the glory when providing for others, then we help them know God's love and relate directly to Him, the invisible source of goodness and eternal life. If we keep the glory, then people might join us but miss the truth and real life.

Jesus again is the perfect Example for us. He delivered people, healed, and performed other miracles, so that the visible source of these mighty blessings became the center of attention. Especially the Gospel of John shows that this visible source directed the disciples' attention to His invisible Father, and later they would teach the people, because the disciples and the people needed to connect with and relate to invisible God. As we can see from Luke 7:31-35, the key issue is to receive God's invisible Spirit, whether He comes from one visible source or another (in v. 31-35, John or the man Jesus).

Giving God glory also helps the glorifier to grow in good ways for all eternity. As with worshipping God, giving Him glory and praise helps the glorifier to grow in love and to turn away from corrupting pride. Again, this blesses him, which pleases God.

We have considered commands from God that seem to be very self-seeking, but are really full of love both for those who obey and for people who receive the loving actions. Each of the 10 commandments and many other commands from God can be understood from this perspective of God's unselfish love. Everything that God calls us to do comes from His love for people. Yes, God is love: fully seeking the good of others!



*Love As Both a Command and a Feeling*

As a command from God, love tells me to put aside my selfish and self-seeking drives and desires in order to seek what is truly best for the person I am to love. He gets this best if I let God lead me to do His will, who has that person's best interests in His heart along with all knowledge, wisdom, and resources. This is precisely the place that we should be after handling any feeling as we should: letting God lead us.

God's leading is normally gentle, because gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit and therefore a part of God's nature. If not, the Creator of the earth, sun, and more would crush His tiny children. A compulsive drive (sometimes thought to be His leading) is like the feelings that take over leadership and is rarely from the true God, who works to get His children to want and choose His good nature increasingly in their lives. Therefore we should see a long-term increase in our agape actions coming with our totally unselfish agape feelings and desire for the other person's good. Of course, it is likely that situations, stresses, feelings, and good humbling would provide temporary set-backs within this long-term increase (seeing that I am not as good as I should be is a "good humbling" that confronts pride with truth).

The total distinction between God's gentle leading into *agape* love and the more driven or compulsive feelings for selfish desires is revealed in the difference of *agape* love and lust (p. 46). *Agape* love desires what is truly good for the other person – his "eternal health" – and lust is a pushy demand for one's own desire. I heard a Bible teacher, Jim Blessing, teach in the 1970s: "Lust can't wait to get, but love can always wait to give." I have found this to help discernment of whether a leading is from God or from another source (me or a demon, or in another person's claim to be led by God).

*Speaking the Truth in Love*

The book of 1John shows a foundation of both truth and love for the eternal life in Christ with its lasting healthy fellowship. Eph. 4:15 says this combination more concisely while describing the building up of the Body of Christ in v. 11-16: “<sup>15</sup>...*speaking the truth in love*...” I add that parts of a body naturally seek its welfare, which includes what is good for the other parts of the body (Eph. 5:28-29). As we have seen, this is *agape*. Now let us consider how we should combine it with truth.

If I believe that I should tell a person a deeply correcting “truth”, then I should also listen to Jesus’ advice and warning in Matt. 7:1-5: take the log out of my own eye, so that I can see clearly to take the speck out of my brother’s eye. Therefore I first confirm that my word is not being driven by my own feelings and needs, so that I will let God lead me into what He wants for His body. This is *agape*: seeking what is good for the other in God’s way and with His wisdom and leading.

Brotherly kindness removes condescension, which sets up good *agape* (2Peter 1:7, which is explained briefly on p. 80 and more fully in the reference there). I should specifically avoid a critical attitude that wants to correct my brother or sister without God’s leading or in the way that He wants. I should also avoid the opposite extreme of too little correction from especially being fearful, which often comes from a fear of rejection or other issue within myself that I should handle.

If I do realize that the person needs this truth, then I should ask God to lead me to fulfill each issue: what He wants me to do about the need, how He wants me to do each thing, and when to do it.

Therefore I need to let God lead me to give truth to others with His wisdom. I need an opposite approach to receiving truth: I receive it no matter how poorly it is given (I am not the judge of its delivery to me).

## Chapter 13

# JOY AND PEACE

In Chapters 12-15 we are considering some feelings that people normally would want to feel if there are no overriding factors. We see how they should work and their corruptors and counterfeits.

The fruit of the Spirit in Gal. 5:22-23 is caused by His presence abiding in us through any situation, and this produces good feelings in us as well as good actions in our lives. I comment only on the first three fruits: love (Chapter 12), joy, and peace.

Joy is the feeling aroused by anticipating good. Believers can have joy in any situation by trusting God's love, wisdom, and power to produce good in our lives. Joy and happiness can often feel alike, but joy abides and happiness depends on external events or "happenings" ("hap" originally implied by chance or luck and still suggests external situations). Therefore feelings of happiness disappear or change wildly to or from sadness or grief as the circumstances change from desired to awful, encouraging to discouraging, or the reverse. Joy can stay strong through such changes, because God's Spirit stays with us and continues with His unselfish love and purposes for our eternal good.

Jesus told His disciples, *"Peace I leave with you; **My peace** I give to you; **not as the world gives** do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful"* (John 14:27). The world gives a peace like happiness: by external situations, such as removing all strong threats, war, or other sources of trouble. The world can even give peace by removing inner feelings like some fears, troubles, or

discomfort. By not knowing real peace, people can also confuse it with feelings of being relaxed, pleased, glad, satisfied from accomplishing a good thing, or rested from a time of stress. All of these feelings can be considered as clues to what Jesus' real peace feels like, but also as counterfeits of the real peace that Jesus gives to His disciples.

As Jesus said in v. 27, the world's peace is different from what Jesus gives, which is a fruit of the Spirit, the Helper (Gal. 5:22, John 14:26). Jesus gives a peace that, like joy, can stay with us through trouble, intimidation, threats, and persecution (John 15:18-21, 16:1-4).

The world's peace and joy get weak in discouraging situations, but God's Spirit abiding within us believers gives us true hope with His joy and peace when we need them the most. They can feel like the best of the world's peace and joy, but are also with us at the right times. And with God's peace we evaluate sources of fear and handle them well, not try to remove feelings of fear in order to get peace.

When God's people received His conviction of their failure to keep His Law in Neh. 8, they wept. As we saw in Chapters 7-9, their leaders told them this truth: "...***Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength***" (v.10). "***A joyful heart is like medicine***" (Prov. 17:22a). Consider how this all fits into Rom. 14:17: "***for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.***" If a believer loses his righteousness, then he will soon lose his peace. If he loses his peace, then he will soon lose his joy. The reverse order is also true, but slower. God's Spirit is the key to uphold all three within us, which come out in our lives.

Gal. 5:22-23 lists 9 fruits of the Spirit in a contrast to the deeds of the flesh in v. 19-21. Remember (p. 8) how a strong feeling can knock us back into a default mode, which is our flesh. We need to choose with purpose to let God's Spirit start leading us again, or else we can find that we are missing His fruit in our lives.

## Chapter 14

# FEELING GOOD

Enjoying or taking pleasure in a thing and feeling cheerful, glad, merry, pleased, satisfied, and content can be regarded as related variants of joy or happiness (Chapter 13). Many Scriptures show that God has this feeling and wants His children to have it in healthy ways. I contrast some of these related feelings from *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (1943), continue to discuss joy and peace and their variants that began in the brief Chapter 13, and discuss other pleasant feelings.

## *Related but Distinct Good Feelings*

- \* To be content is to come to the point where one is not disturbed by desire, even though not every wish is gratified; to satisfy is to gratify one's desires fully. If I am anxious (Chapter 4), then I am not content.
- \* Pleasure is the general term for gratification, which is being pleased or satisfied.
- \* Delight implies a high degree of pleasure or lively satisfaction.
- \* Gladness suggests especially a joy or happiness that shows itself, often quietly, in one's face or conduct.
- \* Joy is like delight, but deeper-rooted, and is more demonstrative or radiant than gladness.
- \* Enjoyment is a milder term than joy, and denotes the satisfaction that is felt in something.
- \* The expression of joy can be overridden for a time by feelings like grief or worry. The deep, abiding expectation of good from God is always present so that we can be joyful, which gives the sustaining strength that enables us to keep on doing what is good.

*Learning the Secret to Being Content*

<sup>6</sup>**Be anxious for nothing**, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let **your requests** be known to God. <sup>7</sup>And the **peace of God**, which surpasses all comprehension, will **guard** your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus....<sup>11</sup>...I have **learned to be content** in whatever circumstances I am. <sup>12</sup>I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance **I have learned the secret** of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. <sup>13</sup>I can do all things **through Him who strengthens me**. (Phil. 4:6-13)

Paul had learned the secret of being content with much or little, and disclosed the key to the secret in v. 6-7 and 13. Being anxious is not contentment (p. 53), and God's peace guarded Paul's heart from being anxious. But many believers in Jesus have related to Him and asked with thanksgiving without being content in their situations. They have not found His strength for contentment and therefore have not learned the whole secret. Who knows how much of it I have learned? I do know that the insights I have learned from the Bible have helped me to be content when I have not liked my circumstances.

The key insight is that God loves me even when not doing what I ask. In order to open myself to God's love so that my heart learns it, I needed to realize that I know very little – especially about my eternal future that has already begun. This humbling (from thinking I know more than I really do) has opened me up to learn more from God, and I have learned God's great love for me especially in situations that once seemed only to be bad. I have already seen that He who numbers the hairs on my head has my interests in His heart, so that I have learned His love in many ways and can trust Him about the things that do not yet make sense to me. He has a plan to more-than-redeem anything that is not good by itself, so that I trust my Father to limit my situations

to those that He can make to be good for me. My heart-realization of this truth in Rom. 8:28 has helped me to be content in any situation.

In the long-term process of opening my heart to God so that I can learn His love more fully, I open my heart to Him by faith, and find that He really is gentle and loving and trustworthy. Then according to my choices and/or situations, I can choose to open myself more to Him only little by little, or choose to throw open and keep open the door of my heart to Him. I have done the latter with great blessing, but even now my door can spring back to be less open, so that I re-open it.

I do not know if anything else is in the secret of being content. But the key in this section – knowing God’s love in situations that I do not like or want – has greatly helped me to be content in them.

### *Envy, a Good Feeling Becoming an Idol, Lust, and Less*

Knowing that my Father carefully provides good for me helps me to understand how envy is so sinful (missing the mark). If I see that a person’s provision looks better or more desirable than mine (no sin yet), then I can talk about this with God. He told King David that he could have done this instead of sinning with Bathsheba: “...***I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these!***” (1Sam. 12:8). Envy slanders God as holding back good from me, so that I do not openly ask Him for a desire, or do not receive His “no” or “not now” if He judges that my request is not good now. Or I could go further into sin by acting on my envy, so that I steal. Then I harm others and directly or indirectly set up further harm for myself.

I shall define “idol” for those who know well the love of God (those who do not yet know it simply cannot understand what this means until their hearts learn His love in Jesus). An “idol” is anything that one’s

heart treasures above God, so that he puts fulfilling or satisfying that thing as a top priority – specifically above letting God lead him.

In Chapter 13 we saw that happiness is a counterfeit to the God-given feeling of abiding joy, and circumstantial peace is a counterfeit to His real peace. Believers in the U.S. and some other nations can see how many people have made an idol of entertainment (to provide an escape, happiness, cheer, etc.), a sport or a goal (with the satisfaction, pride, or excitement of winning or achieving), a source of pleasure or comfort, or a way to rest or relax. A counterfeit's good feeling is not a sin, but becomes a sin by becoming an idol: the top priority of a person's heart, which has gone above his eternal life with God. This idolatry gives a demon all that it needs to take away real life from him.

Col. 3:5 tells us, “...**greed**, which amounts to **idolatry**.” The Greek word for greed or covetousness means wanting more – as we saw with King David in this section. If a person's desire for more of his thing is not taken to God, then it easily turns into idolatry. This pressing, idolatrous desire for more of what is otherwise an OK thing is the lust described on p. 46 and is not contentment (by its definition on p. 53). In the U.S., advertising breeds this greed.

Prov.30:8-9 illustrates how greed is spiritually deadly:

*...Give me **neither poverty nor riches**; feed me with the food that is **my portion**, that I might not be full and deny You and say, “Who is the Lord?” Or that I might not be in want and steal, and profane the name of my God.*

(How to remove an idol from my heart is discussed from Eph. 4:22-24 on p. 39-43 of *Destroying Spiritual Strongholds*. You can see or download for free its PDF file at [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com) under James Tarter).

A good feeling can work against a person's welfare when being less than an idol. A counterfeit like “happiness by entertainment” can



be a non-sinful way to escape a negative emotion like sadness or depression: a person is getting cheered up and might get distracted from his negative emotion enough to do uplifting work. A problem arises if the counterfeit takes away a hunger for God (p. 78-79) with His full provision that fulfills and satisfies more in the huge eternal future – and often is far better on earth!

### *God's Provision of the Sabbath for Our Rest and Refreshing*

God created us to need suitable rest and relaxation. Remember from Matt. 11:28-30 (p. 31-32) that Jesus promises to give rest to all who come to Him when tired – very refreshing! We need sleep each day. God also built provisions for various intervals of Sabbath rest into His Law for Israel. He commanded His people to rest and to let others rest one day each week, a few extra “holidays” in each year (some are longer than a day), one year every seven years (as in a sabbatical), and a Jubilee year every 50 years (which is often once in a lifetime).

Each kind of rest interval actually provides opportunities for its own kind of reflection, processing, healing, and refreshing. All of this can help each person to evaluate his purpose and direction in life. One kind of interval is not a good substitute for any other kind of interval.

Jesus confirms that the Sabbath is for us in Mark 2:27, where He says: *“The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.”* Some teachers have claimed that the Sabbath on the wrong day of the week condemns a person to hell. But consider Col. 2:16-17: *“Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a **Sabbath day** – things which are a mere **shadow** of what is to come; but the **substance belongs to Christ.**”* God's Sabbath is for our rest in Christ – not for condemning people.

Heb. 4:9-10 shows that believers in Jesus have another kind of

Sabbath rest: a rest from our own works. V. 10-11 tell us to “*be diligent to enter that rest*” for us. A legalistic Sabbath is a dead work (Heb. 9:14) of trying to be right with God and is no rest. His rest is not “legalistic” (Apx. 1), and we do not work to justify ourselves.

Instead, we receive Jesus’ justification by faith, so that in fellowship with Him we let His Spirit lead us into all that we should do. Isa. 58:13-14 (in “the fasting chapter”) shows that on the Sabbath we turn from our own pleasures, ways, and desires. If we do this while truly seeking God to lead us, then He will surely lead, and our work is not our own.

### *Why People Sometimes Do Not Want to Feel Good*

A person might not want to feel good or have a good feeling that people normally want. There can be many reasons, but a major reason is that the person has a very strong emotion that he really needs to process. Examples include fear, anger, depression, hopelessness, guilt, grief, disappointment, rejection, and pride (Chapters 2-11). Often the person does not know how to process the feeling, but that problem should not keep us from appreciating his need to process. In the above examples, trying to cheer him up is no substitute for processing a very strong feeling (cheering up might or might not be a good first step toward processing it).

We can see people not wanting a good feeling in everyday life, but we can also see it in the Bible. In John 5:6 Jesus asked the sick man: “*Do you wish to get well?*” Getting well normally feels better, and we can be sure that this was a relevant issue even though he did not answer Jesus’ question.

Neh. 2:1-3 shows how any of our hearts can reject feeling good. Nehemiah was overwhelmed with a God-given feeling that he could not hide or override with any positive feeling:

*<sup>1</sup>...I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. <sup>2</sup>So the king said to me, "Why is your face sad though you are not sick? This is nothing but **sadness of heart**." Then I was very much afraid. <sup>3</sup>I said to the king, "Let the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire?"*

Likewise, any of us can ask, "How can I be happy when ... [the concern of my heart] is in such bad shape?" And trying to override an unwanted feeling with a positive feeling cannot work well, because the true feeling stays inside and comes out in more disguised ways.

### *Feelings of Worth, Belonging, Fulfillment, Vindication, and More*

Feelings of being condemned, rejected, lonely or isolated or not belonging, and having no worth, value, or purpose, are all related emotions and feel bad. Our loving God has given these awful feelings so that we can appreciate the opposites, which are called names like feeling vindicated or justified, feeling valued, being fulfilled, and having true friends and family and worth and purpose and direction.

Our relationship and fellowship with God in Christ provides all of the positive feelings, but not to the extent of taking away a hunger for healthy relationships within the Body of Christ and with those who should be a part of this Body (this excludes no one). Our need to develop a healthy hunger or appetite at times is discussed on p. 78-79. Sadly, too many have been hurt by a convincing negative experience and are still not healed, so that the positive truth and feelings seem to be impossible, an illusion, or unavailable to these people. Jesus made such hopeless feelings to be a lie.

### *Excitement and Adventure*

God has given excitement and a desire for adventure as good

feelings. They help us to fulfill His first command to mankind in spite of great challenges: “...*fill the earth, and subdue it...*” (Gen. 1:28). Moving into unoccupied ground is an adventure, and any adventure will have times of intimidating challenges that need to be met in order to move ahead.

The Bible has many challenging situations involving overcoming, winning vs. losing, conquering, achieving, and succeeding. These produce feelings of excitement (among other feelings) and show clearly that this is a desire of mankind. I add that God provides for the fulfillment of such feelings in Christ without this coming at the cost of putting others down – even as there is “clean humor” that has better and more creative ways of being funny than by putting down or ridiculing other people.

It is good that some Bible teachers have emphasized that desires for excitement and adventure are gifts from our Creator. Here I add only two comments. As with any good gift, it can be used well, but it can also be made into an idol or corrupted.

The second comment is to highlight a difference in the main ways that men and women tend to want to find their excitement and adventure. With many exceptions, men tend to look outward (outside himself and the home) to find adventures that fulfill his desire for excitement, and women tend to look to more intimacy in relationships to find fulfilling adventures. Both main ways are needed to fulfill God’s purposes, and a person’s rigid refusal to move into a main way reveals that he or she has another issue at work.

Being thankful or grateful is another good feeling. It is so essential to our life and growth in Christ that this needs its own chapter.

## Chapter 15

# FEELING THANKFUL OR GRATEFUL

Thankfulness or gratitude is an attitude with a good feeling that should be felt in receiving *agape* love and in true friendship. But many people never feel simply grateful because they always attach self-seeking motives to the giver: they never feel purely loved, valued, and appreciated. For many reasons, these people get robbed of feeling purely thankful for a truly free gift of *agape* love from God or a person.

Pride is one robber. Some are robbed by assuming that a gift puts them in an “I owe you one” position – in debt! Some project their own self-seeking motives onto others. Some have self-worth so low that they cannot believe anyone would give them anything for free. Wounds from swindlers, manipulators, or other self-seekers drive many to conclude that no gift is free. This lie is reinforced in many nations by advertising that offer people free gifts but usually attach traps or hidden “strings”. Instead of feeling purely thankful for a purely generous action, these people also get strong bad feelings with it.

The opposite extreme of presuming that “I owe because no gift to me is free” is an attitude of entitlement: I am entitled to the gift, so that I regard it as my right instead of a real gift. Then I do not owe anyone when I get it, but I also cannot be thankful for it. A person with this

attitude is robbed of feeling thankful for a loving action and – as we see below – is kept from growing in love.

The entitlement or “right to it” attitude is a recent development (within the past few centuries with the development of welfare systems and, in the U.S., the Declaration of Independence in our foundation). People in ancient cultures had a much stronger sense of needing to earn what they receive, but they still could remove thankfulness. The boasting of works in Rom. 3:24-4:4 and Eph. 2:8-9 is a “no gift” attitude that removes thankfulness and is incompatible with our life in Christ:

*<sup>2</sup>For if Abraham was justified by **works**, he has something to **boast** about, but not before God....<sup>4</sup>Now to the one who **works**, **his wage** is **not** credited as **a favor**, but as **what is due**. (Rom 4:2-4)*

*<sup>8</sup>For by **grace** you have been saved through **faith**; and that **not of yourselves**, it is the **gift of God**; <sup>9</sup>**not** as a result of **works**, so that **no one may boast**. (Eph. 2:8-9)*

God makes our salvation in Jesus to be His free gift by His grace and not at all by our works. We must receive His totally free *agape* love as a pure gift instead of our earning it, because we need to be thankful in order to relate well with others long-term and to grow in love: “We love, because He first loved us” (1John 4:19). *Agape* is not received as *agape* unless we feel simple thankfulness. Never feeling thankful for free *agape* reveals a major problem for which we need to ask and receive God’s healing.

A balancing truth: God also gives gifts that are not free. Parents who help their children to grow up to be responsible people realize that a different kind of gift is sometimes needed: one with “conditions” that I handle it well (good stewardship). God provides both kinds of gifts to His children so that we grow and develop well. But as illustrated by our salvation in Christ, He does give us free gifts of *agape* (no traps) because each of us needs opportunities to be purely thankful.

## Chapter 16

# FEELINGS IN SEX

Lies and illusions about feelings during sex are strong and prevail in the U.S. culture. Simple considerations expose common perversions of God's truth about His creation. Let us consider the feelings in sexual satisfaction and fulfillment, so that we can live freely in the truth and enjoy the best in our lives instead of ruining our lives on earth and maybe for eternity.

God's design allows billions of couples to be sexually fulfilled if other things are right. The "world" creates a few views that oppose this truth in different ways. One view is to isolate sexual fulfillment from the relationship, so that real fulfillment comes in an orgasm or some other feature of sexual activity (conquest, appeasing lust, etc.). Almost any partner will do, as with some animals. Another view is an illusion that special physical features and the best performers are needed for the most sexual fulfillment. This implies that only a few fit people get the very best in sexual satisfaction and fulfillment. A third view regards the partner as a trophy, so that sex is primarily to build one's own esteem.

God's nature and design expose the truth and the lies. A closer examination reveals both.

First, realize that God created each person to be truly unique. All in Christ Jesus will be transformed and conformed into His image, but each one of us will provide a unique expression of it. He creates the

Body of Christ as a body, a unit made with different parts working together instead of identical parts. God illustrates this key difference for us: He had His temple to be made of stones that were uniquely shaped and fitted together away from the temple site (1Kings 6:7); but man's counterfeit was the Tower of Babel, which was made of identical bricks and held together with mortar (Gen. 11:3). In the counterfeit, the bricks had no unique identity and needed a glue to be permanently held together – as in the first lying world-view of sex.

For the truth, God creates each of us so that each can have a uniquely perfect relationship and intimate fellowship with Him. He also designed the husband-wife relationship to illustrate our relationship with Him (Eph. 5:22-33): He can make each relationship uniquely perfect. In the Bible God clearly commands sexual activity to be only between the husband and his wife, and to be a tangible seal of their relationship and fellowship. God did not create sex so that only the fittest get the best satisfaction and fulfillment – the second lying world-view of sex – but He makes this available at special times to many humble people who fit into His purposes for marriage. The third lying view of sex is totally egocentric and gives the partner no *agape* love.

As I explain now, I am convinced that I have had the best of sexual feelings, satisfaction, and fulfillment, and countless others have also had the best. Not every time is the best, but I really do not see a way for the best times to be better, and we shall see reasons for this. Performance is a factor for getting the best, but is not a major one: factors that set up or injure good attitudes and feelings (for example, being valued) are far more important – and often need to be greatly improved in a marriage and even more outside of it.

At its best, sexual activity can provide both people feelings like sexual arousal, excitement, power, pleasure, gratification, satisfaction,



rest, worth, value, *agape* love, joy, peace, kindness, and gentleness. Only in marriage does God add His fruit (the last 5), and He gives a better and more lasting quality than people normally can. Being free from true guilt and shame can take all but the first 5 feelings to a clearly higher level in marriage. Those 5 can go higher for those who let God develop values built on unselfish *agape* instead of the driven, self-seeking lusts of the flesh. The third view of sex will frustrate the partner and thereby keep both of them from full continued satisfaction. The creative ways that come as I let God lead me in expressing *agape* to my wife in sexual activity often give wonderful immediate feedback, because our loving Creator knows both of us perfectly.

In this paragraph I write to the unmarried. As a believer, I lived 25 adult years without a “sexual outlet” available. During that time God fulfilled many of the above feelings, and also led me into an unselfish *agape* that has brought a lasting fulfillment after marrying the one God gave me. Going after sexual activity instead of my life with God would have provided a horrific setback to these tremendous blessings for me. The point is that our Creator makes the best fulfillment available to each of us as we truly let Him lead us, whether or not this includes marriage.

In our intimate relationship with God, He perfectly knows each of us, and each of us gets to know Him in a unique way, and only some of that can be shared. As indicated, the husband-wife relationship is to model our relationship with Him. For example, much of the husband-wife relationship can and should be made known to outsiders, especially with the *agape* love to help them grow in good ways. However, the intimacy with the spouse in the sexual relationship is not shareable with another: no one else needs that, because God delights in teaching and helping each of His children to do things well.

I believe that God gave a relationship between INTIMate and INTIMidation in English (they do come from different root words). Consider that true intimacy with another person can be an exciting adventure into the unknown (this might surprise many men and few women). But as with any adventure, at times there will be intimidating challenges to moving ahead in the intimacy with the spouse (p. 59-60). These challenges are likely to come from fears and unhealed wounds in your spouse and/or in you.

A huge problem is that a person's own suppressed fears are very likely to deceive him (Chapters 3-4), so that he tends to blame a key problem on his spouse. For the most part, the model set by Hollywood is to find another spouse. Our faithful God's way is faithfulness as led by His Spirit. God is ready to provide fantastic help and lasting growth to the spouse who makes himself/herself vulnerable to God and to his or her spouse in the challenges that arise when married.

I believe that best-selling Christian books have been written about adventure and excitement in marriage, but I have not read any and therefore am not able to recommend them (at least a few of them are probably great). The goal of this chapter is to provide meaningful true insights and perspectives about feelings in sex that too many believers have not grasped in their hearts (which fits precisely into the goal of this book). My comment about excitement and adventure in men and in women at the end of Chapter 14 and two paragraphs ago might be addressed in other books. However, I have not heard or seen anything that exposes the world's lies like this specific truth of God's design for sex: God has indeed reserved the long-term best for His children who have let God lead them into His work within one's heart and for each other in their marriage relationships. Only in the husband-wife relationship can sex glorify God (discussed on p. 47).

## Chapter 17

# BEING LED BY GOD

Gal. 5:16-17 shows the opposition of the Spirit and the flesh:

*But I say, **walk by the Spirit, and you will not** carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.*

V. 16 does not say, “Resist the flesh, and you will not walk by it.” Instead, we set our hearts and minds on God’s Spirit so that we can be led by Him, and the flesh does not fit in. Rom. 8:5-14 explains this choice of one over the other:

*<sup>5</sup>For those who are according to the flesh **set their minds on the things of the flesh**, but those who are according to **the Spirit**, the **things of the Spirit**. <sup>6</sup>For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, <sup>7</sup>because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, <sup>8</sup>and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. <sup>9</sup>However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you....<sup>12</sup>So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh – <sup>13</sup>for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if **by the Spirit** you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. <sup>14</sup>For all who are **being led by the Spirit of God**, these are sons of God.*

This book has been written for all who realize our need to let Jesus lead us at all times. We have seen how various kinds of strong feelings can knock any of us back into his/her default mode, which is

the flesh.

Specifically, we have seen how God has given us feelings that naturally make issues a priority, which can help us live or live better. We considered this for fear and its outgrowths, anger, guilt, shame, depression, hopelessness, sadness, disappointment, grief, rejection, and pride. All of these feelings can be strong enough to knock us back to the self-seeking flesh instead of continuing to be led by our God of *agape*. He seeks especially the long-term good for both each of us and everyone who is with us. We also saw how good, desirable, and delightful feelings like pleasure, joy, rest, and peace can be made into an idol in our hearts or keep us from getting hungry for God's leading, so that they also can work against being led by His Spirit at all times.

If a feeling has disturbed me, then I do not fight it even if it seems to be against God's leading of me. Instead, I turn to God in my heart and let Jesus lead me in all that I should be doing. He will not lead me continually to ignore my feelings: I do not stuff them long-term, or else what is inside will eventually come out in ways that I can accept. This means that the stuffed feeling has deceived me (for example, anger coming out as an irritation about something else). God could lead me into actions with His wisdom for the situation, or He could lead me to address the disturbing feeling and its sources with Him and to receive His solution for that.

The wonderful truth is that Almighty God has the long-term interest of each of us in His heart. He also considers our short-term needs and interests with His wise priorities, so that we children can learn and appreciate His Fatherly wisdom as we let Him lead us. As Eph. 2:10 tells us clearly, He has prepared wonderful works for us to walk in by His grace in Christ Jesus.

## Appendix 1

# SINS THAT CAUSE DEPRESSION

In Chapter 7 we discussed four primary sources of depression and indicated sins that are often a source of spiritual depression: judging, unforgiveness, legalism, and unconfessed sin. Believers often cannot escape these entrapping sins because wrong ideas about them can seem right, are often taught to believers, and can be an impossible load, which can easily be a major unrecognized source of depression. God's right ideas make perfect sense, and we can do them.

Here we examine judging and unforgiveness so that people trapped in depression by these sins can remove them. I also briefly address legalism and unconfessed sins, and give references to a more thorough (free) treatment of legalism and unconfessed sin for those who want or need more than these sections to get out of those traps.

Jesus tells us a totally just principle about judging in Matt. 7:1-2:

*Do not judge so that you will not be judged. <sup>2</sup>For **in the way you judge, you will be judged**; and by **your standard** of measure, it will be measured to you.*

Because of evil men and deceivers (Matt. 22:18, 2Thes. 3:2, 2Tim. 3:13), we must often judge, and God gives many examples in

the Bible that show how such judging is necessary and good. What does v. 1 mean? V. 2 answers: if I create a way or standard to judge (put down or condemn) someone, then I also create it for myself. Judging can tie me up when I could have been free. Jesus made a very painful sacrifice to be able justly to love us freely with grace and without condemnation (Rom. 8:1-2), but judging can ruin this. His warning shows His desire for His children to “give Him permission” to be generous to others as He makes righteous judgments. He shows this clearly in Matt. 20:15: *“Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye **envious** because **I am generous**?”*

If God were merely just to us, we would not qualify for the great eternity that He provides for us with Him and with other loving people. God is totally just or justly generous in Jesus to each person over his entire eternal existence, which allows temporary injustices before all is made right. Mankind misunderstands God’s justice by trying to create justice at each moment of time or without knowing relevant facts. We all need His generous mercy and need to let Him give it to others.

Unforgiveness and legalism are major ways to judge wrongly.

### *Freely Forgiving by Understanding Forgiveness*

My forgiving releases to God the position that I have taken as the just judge of the offender. He is the just and loving Judge who knows the offense and every other relevant fact and feature of the offender. If I forgive him, I ask God: “Do not hold back blessing him because he hurt me (or my loved one).” If I refuse to let God be generous to the offender for reasons that I do not know or might not understand or approve, then I put myself under an unnecessarily strict just judgment that will condemn me. In judging him I considered only one or relatively few issues with the offender, concluded that I know all that I should know and refused to consider anything else about him, and I judged

that he does not deserve mercy. Guess what! I get my own offenses judged in that way (Matt. 7:2 on p. 69).

We can see much about the meaning of forgiving or not in an example of one of the hardest cases to receive God's grace to forgive: my child whom I dearly love is badly hurt by an offender, maybe death or damage that cannot be restored on earth (without a miracle). God tells me to forgive him: to let God judge him, and with Jesus He can be generous while being just and righteous, even as He has been for me.

What are some wrong ideas about the meaning of forgiveness? Forgiving him does not keep me from forcefully stopping an offense and does not make my child (if alive) vulnerable again. Forgiving him does not stop me from telling the truth in court, which God delegated as an authority for the earth and could be a part of His justice or His protection of other people who could be innocent victims. Forgiving him does not keep me from calling on God to work fully in any situation or to judge him justly – if I also let God be generous to him (but if I call on God with a “Get him, Lord” attitude, then I have already judged him and am opposing God's judgment if it is far more generous than mine).

True forgiveness does not mean never feeling anger or pain again. I might feel angry with him now or in a sudden surge a year later. But whenever I feel angry about this, I turn to God and release the offender and situation to Him, so that I let Him lead me into whatever I should do (review Chapter 2). When I release him to God, I shall not stay feeling angry and shall not get bitter.

True forgiveness does not erase events from my memory, so that forgiving does not mean forgetting the offense (but repeatedly raising it to the offender is a sin, whether from unforgiveness or to manipulate). Forgiveness is a command, which means that I choose to obey or not. I cannot choose to forget an offense: any attempt to forget it reminds

me of it. As we have seen repeatedly, I should not shut out or stuff my feelings about it for a long time, because this will show up in other ways and will eventually deceive me. But by trusting our loving God to judge well, I can forgive: choose to release the offender to God for his justice and mercy until the warning lights go out, so that I can move on freely with peace and handle future feelings if they arise.

A sign of true forgiveness is freedom to use or not use the situation totally according to what is good for a hearer, and not with my drive to hide or use the situation. My freedom to use or not use it indicates my healing and moving on, and my use is a part of His redemption of what seemed to be a bad situation, as Paul did in 2Cor. 1:4. Forgetting it would have lost this blessed part of God's redemption.

Jesus' parable in Matt. 18:23-35 vividly shows us what we have discussed. A slave owed an impossibly large debt to a king, who represents God. He wished to settle accounts with his slaves, and this slave was brought before him. Because the slave had no means to repay this huge debt, his lord commanded that the slave and all his family and possessions be sold and repayment made. The slave fell down, begged for patience, and promised to repay. His lord felt compassion and released him and his debt – forgave him and it.

Then the slave went out and found a fellow slave who owed him 100 denarii, which was 100 days wages for a laborer. This is a large debt between people and hard to repay, but the lord had freely forgiven the slave of over 100 thousand years of labor at those wages. (I might think that my labor for that long is not a just penalty for my sins, but this great labor is not enough to buy the great eternal future that God gives me for free in Christ). The first slave seized, choked, and demanded the other slave to repay. He begged for patience and promised to repay, just as the first slave did to his lord. But this



forgiven slave was unwilling to have mercy like his lord had for him, and threw the debtor into prison until he paid back what he owed.

Fellow slaves saw this injustice and reported it to the lord, who brought the unforgiving slave before him again and told him:

*“You wicked slave, I forgave you of all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, **in the same way that I had mercy on you?**” And his lord, moved with anger, **handed him over to the torturers** until he should repay all that was owed him. <sup>35</sup>My heavenly Father will also **do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.** (v. 32b-35).*

Notice that God justly calls us to give only what He first freely gave us. Who are these torturers? One kind of torturer can be demons: they delight in torturing people if they get an opportunity. Depression is a torturer, with or without a demon. And God makes v. 35 a promise.

Then how do we forgive those who delight in hurting us badly, so that surely they deserve a severe punishment? The account of Joseph in Gen. 37-50 gives a wonderful insight. Briefly, with great hatred Joseph’s jealous brothers sold him into slavery. As a result, he was either a slave or in a dungeon from age 17 to age 30. God eventually released him and made him a mighty ruler, and his brothers feared his revenge after their father died. Joseph revealed how he was able to forgive their hatred and costly evil deed: *“Do not be afraid, for **am I in God’s place?** As for you, you meant evil against me, but **God meant it for good** in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.”* (Gen. 50:19b-20)

If I trust God to work all things together for good as I continue to fit in His plans, then I can release my judgment of a malicious offender to God for His just judgment, and be content with His generous treatment of me (p. 53-55, Matt. 20:15 on p. 70).

To conclude, I forgive by releasing the offender to our just God, so

that I do not ask God to make him pay a just penalty for offenses. If I realize God's generosity to me and that His knowledge and wisdom for His sure justice are far better than mine, then I will gladly forgive.

### *Depression from a Legalistic Attitude*

As another application of "judging" on p. 69-70, if I use the letter of the Law to judge a person for guilt without mercy, then I cause myself to be judged in the same way with the standard of the letter of the whole Law. James 2:10-13 makes this clear, explaining that failing at any point makes me guilty of the whole law (v. 10), and adding: "*For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment*" (v. 13). If I judge others without mercy, then I have a good reason to be depressed, and I need to fix what is wrong in my heart. One major source of legalistic judging is not understanding the true nature of God and His non-critical love for us. Another major source is not understanding in my heart that God has set us in Christ Jesus free from the letter of the Law.

Jesus' life and death on earth reveals the true nature of God and His non-critical love, but to receive this truth we also need to open up our hearts to Him. The discussion on p. 25-26 can help one see that God is not a condemner or faultfinding critic; p. 45-48 show how God's love totally seeks our good; and p. 54-55 briefly explain how we can use His faithful love to increasingly open up our hearts to Him.

***"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus **has set you free from the law of sin and of death**"*** (Rom. 8:2). 2Cor. 3:6-9 shows that the law of sin and of death is the letter of the Law. Scriptures about this freedom are examined in Chapter 8 of *Our Foundation in Christ Jesus* (its PDF file is free under James Tarter at [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com)). Here we see why our hearts naturally tend to be legalistic, so that we shall want to stop being legalistic (Jesus will free all who continue in His word).

Webster's Dictionary (1943) defines legalism as a strict conforming to a law or code of deeds and observances as a means of justification. At the core of legalism is a mindset about what it takes to be right with God, which usually reduces this to manageable rules and formulas. Often part of the Law or the whole Law of Moses is used for the code, and Galatians was written to warn believers of this deadly trap. A more treacherous trap perverts a provision in God's salvation by Jesus into a way to justify myself – such as perverting “my faith” or “faith in our doctrine” or “my denomination” into being a way to justify myself when I condemn others who do “what I do” or “what I hide in my heart”.

Rom. 2:1-3 identifies the self-condemnation in legalistic judging:

*Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you **judge another**, you **condemn yourself**; for you who judge practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?*

I can rightly judge others, but eventually I find myself doing some things that I have condemned in others. This sets up legalistic judging. What can justify me when I have condemned some other people who have sinned like me? Pride and fear push me to justify myself by exalting parts of the Law or other good things that I do well. In Gal. 5, some people had taught the Galatian believers to use circumcision as God's way to be right with Him, but this kept all who did from receiving any benefit in Christ. Read v. 2-4 to see their awesome loss.

I must face the truth that some of my deeds condemn me as unfit for God's eternal Kingdom. Do I reject my pride and accept this scary truth and God's pure gift of righteousness for unfit me? Or does my heart create or accept a lie to help me feel approved? Do you have this

issue? You can find God's opinion about you and this issue in Rom. 3.

If I embrace a lie, then it will serve a strong emotional need of avoiding feeling condemned, and I will try hard to defend it as God's truth. But that lie is not His truth, and so my defense of the accepted religious practices is characteristically fearful: brittle or rigid and with threats or intimidation against those who would question the validity of the "code" that I use to justify or approve myself.

But the lie does not justify me, and my insides are not working well and need help – depression! Legalism is a depressive trap and many get caught in it. If you have been caught, then you can embrace the truth that *"the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus **has set you free from the law of sin and of death**"* (Rom. 8:2, p. 74). God is not a faultfinder who looks for a way to condemn anyone. Instead, God paid a huge price to reconcile us to Him justly and to relate to us freely.

### *Depression from Unconfessed Sin*

Psalm 32:3-5 describes David's life after his sin until he confessed it:

***When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"; and You forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah.***

This describes a depression: his energy for action was gone. The rest of Psalm 32 shows David's blessing by God's forgiveness. Our blessing by God's forgiveness with our honest confession is promised in 1John 1:9 and discussed in Chapter 5. God has real freedom for you in Christ if you do not hide or deny the truth that you need to confess.

## Appendix 2

# OTHER FEELINGS

This is not an encyclopedia on feelings, but I have included only those feelings for which I believe that I have some perspectives or insights that could help many people. In this appendix we consider 5 relevant insights that did not fit into the chapters.

### *Physical Hunger and Appetite*

About 55 years ago my eighth grade Health teacher made a profound distinction to my class: appetite is a desire for food while hunger is a physiological need for food. Healthy people do not get hungry several times a day: this feeling of “hunger” is an appetite. His comment has proven valid whenever I have tested it, and not understanding it is a big problem in a culture that often confuses wants with needs. Of course, this distinction extends to a hunger and appetite for some things other than food.

### *Priority of Feelings with a Severe Lack of Food, Water, and Air*

Severe nausea and cramping in diarrhea are awful feelings that alert us to problems in our digestive system, and might help us remove the upsetting “poison”. A few years ago I saw a painful demonstration that God created natural priorities in the urgency of response to correct sources of strong undesired feelings. My nephew was fully alert with severe nausea when he stopped breathing and could not get his

muscles to act. Unable to live without air for more than a few minutes, his desperate efforts for air soon jumped to a far higher priority than taking care of his nausea as he effectively ignored the un-ignorable (he eventually did start breathing). This helped me to notice how my feelings and priorities changed in far milder situations when I tried to swim underwater for too long.

Later I realized that a natural response to a severe lack of food, water, and air is arranged in a pattern of priorities. Healthy humans can live without food for weeks, without water for days, and without air for minutes. An urgent seeking of food in true hunger will naturally drop to a lower priority by feeling the desire for water in a life-threatening dehydration. Likewise, the body “shouts by its feelings” a need for air with a demand or natural priority that can exceed an extreme thirst.

In this book we have seen that God’s pattern of priority of feelings in His creation of us extends to many other feelings.

### *Spiritual Hunger and Spiritual Appetite As Healthy Feelings*

God knows how vital it is for His children to want to be His children, who are to manifest His real nature to the world. In order to want to do this, I need to be able to see relevant features of His nature and my own, and to know in my heart that His nature is much better than mine when the two are different. But that is not enough. It also must be hard enough to adopt His nature in reality so that I develop a healthy spiritual appetite and hunger. This is having a “*hunger and thirst for righteousness*” (Matt. 5:6) and is being “*poor in spirit*” (Matt. 5:3). God will satisfy those with this hunger (v. 6), but difficulties in satisfying it help our hearts to learn God’s grace for our salvation in Eph. 2:8-9.

My pastor (Jeff Ell) accurately compares the “picky” attitude of a child who has not been allowed to develop a physical appetite, to adult

attitudes if spiritual food is available too easily (so that one never gets spiritually hungry). Some people ask why it is hard to hear God. Let us see why our wise, loving Father often speaks softly to His children.

God gives His Ten Commandments so clearly that disobedience is defiance. If He spoke only in this way, then we might better handle some specific immediate issues, but His children would not be able to greatly want to hear Him. Moreover, His words would be noticed most when they are against what the child wants – when not welcome! This creates a negative attitude toward His words, very much like a child who was never allowed to develop a good appetite.

Therefore God gives us some other words so softly that we need to draw near to Him to hear what He says. Illustrating this truth, Jesus did not tell the spiritual meaning of His parables to everyone, but only to His disciples who stayed near Him (Mark 4:9-11). And He speaks to each of us with the right difficulty, so that we can develop a healthy appetite and hunger to hear Him – but not a starvation (some teach that His children no longer hear Him, a flagrant lie that violates John 10:27). Knowing His love, I want to draw near to Him and hear Him more, not get away from what I have already heard from Him.

### *Feelings in the Entrapment of Drug Addiction or Other Addiction*

Certain chemicals in some addictive substances create an urgent demand to get relief from feelings they cause. One who is addicted has often been overpowered by such a strong feeling when it kept him from satisfying other strong desires. This can be a way that he/she learns to surrender helplessly to this feeling for the temporary relief or pleasure that the substance provides.

This insight provides a perspective – not a comprehensive one – that can help the addicted one realize a major source of issues like a

fear of failure and hopelessness. In turn, realizing such issues can help him/her to leave the addiction by facing them with God.

A more comprehensive perspective includes other feelings plus the significant physiological, emotional, and spiritual (demonic) work in an addiction. Some of the discussion of depression in Chapter 7 and Apx. 1 can also apply here.

### *Removing Condescension When Giving Agape Love*

A condescending attitude in giving *agape* to a person can cause him to miss the needed good feeling of being loved and valued. For this reason, 2Peter 1:7 tells us to supply brotherly kindness in order to supply *agape* love more effectively (p. 50). I shall explain briefly.

The 7 qualities that we are to supply in our faith in v. 5-7 are listed so that each builds on what the previous ones have done. Brotherly kindness is an empathy and fondness for the other person that removes condescension and gives it no room. Brotherly kindness likes the me-you connections (common ground) and respects personal differences without condescension. This sets up *agape* by helping the other person to receive its good actions without a strong distracting feeling that makes it unnecessarily hard to receive even a good gift.

(A fuller explanation is in *Fulfilling Our Part in God's Promises*: you can see it for free at [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com) under James Tarter).

### *Still Other Feelings*

Some feelings are not exactly like a feeling discussed in the book, but have the same kind of source and action. I mentioned an example of addiction and depression in this appendix. A second example is a connection between being agitated or disturbed and the worry or anxiety that we examined in Chapter 4. I expect that most extensions from our discussions would be valid, but take care to extend with God.



## About the Author (Jim Tarter)

I met God in 1972 when I was 27, a Ph.D. physicist and an agnostic. He quickly started showing me that Jesus authentically represents God, and that the Bible is His word. I had started reading the Bible thinking that it is full of contradictions, but I got surprised. The Bible's contents provided much evidence to show that the Lord had inspired and then protected these contents to say precisely what He wanted them to say.

Having missed God so completely in my life and in the world, I read the Bible with a deep hunger to learn more about this One who knew my thoughts and who numbers the hairs on each person's head. I also joined a church in Pittsburgh, PA. The pastor was Joseph Garlington, who provided a rich spiritual foundation. This congregation had many other believers who had met Jesus and sought to put His word into practice. When I moved to Roanoke, VA, in 1978, I actively participated in another congregation that was "alive in Jesus". Such experiences helped me to learn more about God and His ways, and have provided many perspectives about His calling for the Church in the Bible, what we have done in reality, and what we need to do to fulfill His word concerning us.

I am an elder at Grace Covenant Church in Roanoke and taught in public schools in 1976-2009. I wrote two books in the 1990s: *God's Word to the United States* (especially from Obadiah) and *Why, God?* (from the book of Job). Updates of both books plus 15 other books about the Bible are available at Lulu (see below).

In summers my wife Nita and I have taken extensive trips to South Sudan, the Congo, and elsewhere. Her heart for Jesus and sensitivity to His leadings have blessed me mightily.

Years after I first met God through Jesus, He started opening up whole books and certain sections of the Bible, which provide concepts and perspectives that the vast majority of the Church has not yet realized. This book about feelings as warning lights began with many of the insights and perspectives given in my other books.

At the time I write this, *WARNING LIGHTS* is available at [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com). Type "James Tarter" in their "search" space at the top. This printed book costs \$6.03 plus \$3.99 S&H (with an extra \$1.25 S&H for each extra copy). You can download a free PDF file of the whole book or view all of it in a free Preview under its title. Apple and Nook books are also available. You also have these options with my other books at Lulu.