

Human Emotions



God has created human persons with emotions, feelings, and affections, which are important for their lives and their relationships with God.

Emotions are an essential part of human life that, though broken by [sin](#), are redeemed and restored by [Christ](#). Human beings experience emotions passively. We *suffer* negative emotions, and even in positive emotions, we are to some degree subject to our circumstances. In this way, emotions reveal the dependency and finitude of human life. (This is also the reason that the emotions, or passions, have been traditionally denied of God, in the doctrine of [God's impassibility](#).)

Many emotions are associated with the suffering of humankind that points towards [death](#). Sorrow can be deep, even for those who obey God. Fear, ultimately of death, controls much of human life. Shame and guilt follow [the fall](#), as human beings are shown to be not "like God" but naked like the animals. It is by way of the emotions that humans experience the misery that is the consequence of sin.

The emotions do not only reveal finitude and misery but also sin. Human [anger](#) does not produce the [righteousness](#) of God but rather [evil](#) ([Jas 1:20](#)). Hatred is tantamount to [murder](#) because it is the origin of

murder ([Matt 5:21–26](#)). The danger of jealousy is evident from the first sibling rivalry, between [Cain](#) and [Abel](#). While emotions are natural to human beings, they are not for that reason sinless.

In light of the sinfulness of the emotions, believers are encouraged to act with self-control and to counteract sinful emotions. [Christians](#) are encouraged not to “let the sun go down” on their anger ([Eph 4:26](#)). We are encouraged not to fear ([Luke 12:32](#)). We are commanded not to be anxious ([Matt 6:24–34](#)). Pride is forbidden ([Jas 4:6](#)). We are to take an active role with respect to our emotions. The [Ten Commandments](#) forbid many actions, but the last of them forbids a sinful passion, or emotion: covetousness. Covetousness and jealousy are anything but innocent feelings.

In the same way, [Jesus Christ](#) himself exemplified a proper emotional life. Jesus’ ministry was shaped by *compassion* ([Matt 15:32](#)). In the face of evil, Jesus was deeply *moved* and *troubled* ([John 11:33](#)). With the religious leaders, Jesus was *angered* and *grieved* ([Mark 3:5](#)). At the death of his friend, Jesus *wept* ([John 11:35](#)). Looking ahead to his suffering, Jesus felt great *distress* ([Luke 12:50](#)). According to the prophet, he “carried our *griefs* and [bore] our *sorrows*” ([Isa 53:4](#)) But through his suffering, Jesus *loved* his own, even to the end. All this he did for the *joy* set before him ([Heb 12:2](#)).

Likewise, the emotional life that Scripture commends for the believer is not solely one of self-control nor of emotional denial. Christians are supposed to experience *peace* in relation to God as well as *joy*, *hope*, and *gratitude*. Rejoicing is even commanded ([Phil 4:4](#)). Christian [fellowship](#) is characterized by participation in the emotions of others, rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep ([Rom 12:15](#)). [Faith](#) itself is characterized by feelings of confidence and assurance, rooted in trust in God—and is therefore an antidote to anxiety (theologian [John Frame](#) calls faith “cognitive rest,” pulling together the cognitive and affective elements of human personality). In hope, the Christian looks forward to a day when every tear will be wiped away and all mourning, pain, and fear of death will be removed. When faith gives way to sight and hope to eternal joy, the emotions will not be eradicated; instead, they will enable the resurrected saints to experience the weight and pleasure of the [glory](#) of God.

Passages

KEY VERSES

[Ex 20:17](#) (Do not covet = prohibiting an emotion.); [Is 53:4](#); [Mt 15:32](#); [Mk 3:5](#); [Jn 11:33–38](#); [Ga 5:22–24](#); [Php 4:4](#); [Php 4:6](#); [Jas 1:20](#)

Recommended Resources

[Summa Theologiae, I–II, Qq. 22–48 \(Aquinas\).](#)

“The Emotional Life of Our Lord” (Warfield).

[Spiritual Depression \(Lloyd-Jones\).](#)

Spiritual Emotions: A Psychology of Christian Virtue (Roberts).

[Desiring God \(Piper\).](#)

[The Doctrine of the Christian Life \(Frame\), 361–382.](#)

Mark Ward et al., eds., *Lexham Survey of Theology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018).

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[The Religious Affections \(Edwards\).](#)

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See Also

- [Emotion](#)

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