

## **First Baptist Church Powell, TN**

### **Sermon Topic: The Cross and Messed Up Emotions**

#### **1 Corinthians 1:18**

The phrase, “the message of the cross” refers to the whole Gospel. The word “foolishness” is the Greek word *moria* from which we get “moron.” To the lost (those who are perishing), the message of the cross, the Gospel, is moronic. The cross stands in contradiction to the world’s pride, the world’s wisdom, the world’s psychology, and the world’s counseling. The world says, “How can a man dying on a cross (the most shameful method of death reserved for the worst of criminals) 2,000 years ago save me apart from my own works, make me righteous, and give me victory over messed up emotions, life-long habit patterns, and addictions? That’s moronic.” The world says, “You have to work for salvation, and you need to have the help of professionals with a PhD to really see your life changed.” That is the world’s wisdom.

The reason that the world likes complex, elaborate means of change and a works salvation is that it appeals to the human ego. In stark contrast, “the message of the cross” calls for us to repent and savingly believe in a crucified, risen Savior who saves by grace, through faith, apart from our works! The “message of the cross” says that lasting victory over messed up emotions comes not from years of counseling by highly educated therapists, but through the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. That’s a blow to human pride.

Notice that the cross, to those who are being saved, is the power of God. It is the cross that makes crooked people straight, defiled people pure, drunken people sober, weak people strong, and addicted people free.

The focus of this message is experiencing the power of the cross in healing messed up emotions. When we begin to understand our emotions, we see that sometimes we must choose between what we feel and what is real – what is truth. Here is the problem we face: we live in a culture today that is almost totally emotion (feelings) based. People consider what they feel to be truth. Because in our culture we have been taught for a whole generation that there is no absolute truth, the way has been paved to accept the lie that truth is what each individual feels it is. Our culture believes that truth is individual because feelings are individual. I don’t know how many times I have heard people say something like this: “I really don’t care what anyone else says; in my heart I just *feel* that this is right.” Here’s another one, “I know what the Bible says but I just *feel* I need to go in another direction.” Because our culture has allowed emotions to determine reality, we are living in moral chaos and watching our foundations crumble all around us – foundations like marriage, authority structures, and morality. The cross is not just about what I feel; the cross is about objective truth. In this topical message, I want to try to help us see how the emotions operate and how they can sometimes be our ally but more often our enemy.

Let’s face the fact that all of us are somewhat “messed up” emotionally. We often say of a more stoic person that they are, *unemotional*. Technically, there is no such thing as an unemotional person. While we express our emotions differently, we are all emotional. The real problem occurs when our emotions enslave us. Much of what we call “mental illness” does not have a physical origin; it is often a person whose emotions have enslaved them. When your emotions enslave you, it can take years from your life and life from your years. One of the problems in our culture is that the church has pulled back, with an extreme inferiority complex, and left “emotional problems” to the secular counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists. The reason that is so tragic is that in the Scriptures, we have the answers and the unbelieving “professionals” do not.

Let's lay something out on the table and talk about it. True believers have emotional problems. At salvation, we become new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). We are united to Christ and possess the Holy Spirit, but God doesn't press the *delete* button on our old programming. That old programming is called the "flesh" in the Bible. The difference after we have experienced "the message of the cross" is that we now have the power to walk in victory over the flesh, over programmed emotions, messed up emotions, damaged emotions, and even *weird* emotions. A major part of our sanctification (spiritual growth) is learning to walk according to what God says is true of us and not what our emotions (and sometimes other people) say is true of us.

I remember the words to an old Don Francisco song we used to sing with our children:

Praise the Lord; Hallelu.  
I don't care what the devil's going to do  
The Word in faith is my sword and shield,  
and Jesus is Lord of the way I feel.

Is Jesus the Lord of the way you feel? Let's look at some counsel for messed up emotions. This is applicable to you, because we all have messed up emotions.

## I. The Purpose of Emotions

What is the purpose of emotions and how do they work? Our basic emotions are not a curse; they are a gift from God. The primary reason that we have emotions is because we were created in the image of God and God has emotions. Let me show you a few of God's emotions.

God expresses anger and a pure form of jealousy. *Nahum 1:2* says, "God is jealous, and the Lord avenges; the Lord avenges and is furious [an intensive form of anger]. The Lord will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves *wrath* for His enemies."

God expresses the emotion of compassion. *Psalms 103:13* (HCSB) says, "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him."

God expresses the emotion of delight. *Deuteronomy 10:15*: "The Lord delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as *it is* this day."

God experiences grief. *Psalms 78:40*: "How often they provoked Him in the wilderness, *and* grieved Him in the desert!"

God expresses the emotion of pity. *Isaiah 63:9* (ESV): "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old."

These are only a few examples of God's emotions being expressed. There are many more. To be created in the image of God is to be an emotional being. Emotions add quality to our life; they motivate us to action, and they make life way more interesting. It was the entrance of sin into the world and the resulting fall that brought about the negative side to our emotions. It was sin that disrupted the harmony between mind, emotions, and will. I think without a doubt we will have emotions in heaven, but there won't be the effects of sin and the emotions will work in perfect harmony with the mind and will. The purpose of our emotions is that they were given by God as a part of our being in the image of God and they were to motivate us to action and to add quality to our lives and to become another means to glorify God.

## II. The Problem with Emotions

Because we live in a fallen sin cursed world, our emotions often get us in big trouble. Because of the effects of sin, the thrust of Scripture is to our minds, not our emotions. Our transformation into spiritual maturity and Christ likeness is through the mind. Romans 12:2: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Our emotions want to rule our life. One woman said, "I never met a feeling that wouldn't be god if you let it" (Andre Seu).

Scottish theologian, Sinclair Ferguson summarizes the problem we have with emotions this way: "We think with our emotions." That thinking with our emotions is instead of thinking with our rational mind. On this side of Genesis 3, our emotions are not always our friends; sometimes they can be a powerful enemy, especially when they oppose the truth.

Let's see if we can understand a little better how the emotions work. Emotions are responders. We feel something primarily because we think something. You don't catch a feeling like you catch a virus. Our emotions have no intellect (in other words they are dumb). They respond to what the mind tells them. They get programmed. For example, a person may believe a lie about themselves for many years and then discovers the truth. His thinking changes, but it will take some time for the emotions to change. Consider a person who since they were a kid thought they were inadequate, inferior, and unacceptable to anyone else. The emotions respond to that and are programmed by those thoughts. That person may come to Christ and learn the truth that they, as a born again person, are totally adequate in Christ. Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." From reading the Word, they learn that they are an adopted child of God in Christ. Romans 8:15: "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'" This person reads in Ephesians 1:6: "to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved." They may fully accept the truth of these verses, but their emotions will be slow to come along because they have been programmed. This person faces daily decisions of whether to live by truth or emotions.

Remember, our emotions can't tell the difference between truth and error, or between past present and future. For example, I did a really horrible thing to my Mother when I was about thirteen or fourteen years old (it's amazing that she still loved me after that). My brother and I were on a hike in the mountains with a bunch of other guys. We came upon a huge mountain rattlesnake on the trail that someone had killed. It was huge. We got a paper bag, put the snake in it, and took it home with us. When we got home we said, "Mom, we have something for you in the bag." She opened it up expecting some mountain plant, or wild fruit, and there was a huge rattlesnake staring her in the face. What happened next was not a pretty sight. She completely failed to see the humor in the situation. I think she almost literally died from the emotion of fear.

Let's look at truth and emotion in this sad incident. Was my Mother in any physical danger from a dead snake? I was, but she wasn't. However, when her eyes relayed a message to her brain that there was a snake in the bag and the brain processed the image and sent it to the mind, the mind said snakes are dangerous. Their bite can kill, or at best cause severe physical pain. Her emotions responded and there was a real emotion packed scene that took place. Do you get the picture?

Emotions are responders. They have no ability to determine what truth is and what error is. That is the function of the mind. In counseling, I have seen someone bring up an incident from the past and be overcome with emotion just as if it was happening right then. The emotions can't tell time. They cannot discern between past, present, and future. By setting our minds on an incident in the past, our emotions respond in the present. That's how worry works. When we set

our mind on possible scenarios in the future our emotions respond with fear and worry in the present. For example, we feel a lump or bump, and soon our mind determines that it is terminal cancer, our future is filled with suffering, we are going to die without adequate insurance, our family is going to suffer, and our spouse will marry someone else and tell them how superior they are to their first spouse. Then the emotions respond with fear, worry, depression and gloom! When we keep setting our minds on a past wrong done to us, the emotions respond with bitterness, and even hatred, even though the person who wronged us may be dead. Those emotions of bitterness control our lives, because we are thinking with our emotions.

My goal is to help you see how the emotions work so that you can see how the truth of the cross relates to our emotions and how the emotions many times can keep us from genuinely experiencing the truth of who we are in Christ.

### **III. The Provision for Emotions**

Here is the bottom line. If we are going to genuinely experience the cross, we must live based on the truth of who we are in Christ and on the truth of what the cross has accomplished instead of programmed emotions. We must continually *set our minds* on the truth of Scripture about the cross and what happened there. Over time our emotions may begin to agree with the truth, but even if they do not, we will still be making decisions and living life based on truth and not the old programming of our emotions. Let me ask you to stop and do a personal examination. Are you living day by day based on what your emotions tell you is truth, or are you making decisions, confessing what is true based on the objective never changing truth of God's word? In other words, are you living based on the truth of God's Word or based on the false message of messed up emotions? At this point I want to give you three very practical ways to deal with messed up emotions in your daily life.

#### **A. Reckon on the Cross**

The Greek word that is sometimes translated "reckon" is used nineteen times in the book of Romans. Sometimes it is translated "consider" or "count" in different translations. By the fact that this word is used nineteen times, you see how important it is. To "reckon" means to count or consider something as true because God said it is true whether we feel like it is true or not. Romans 6:11: "Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord." That verse is referring back to Romans 6:6 (HCSB): "For we know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that sin's dominion over the body may be abolished, so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin." You may say, "Well I certainly don't feel dead to sin." Are you going to live by feelings or truth? Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones once said something profound and yet so simple. Let this quote sink in to your mind. He said, "...most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself" [C. J. Mahaney, *The Cross Centered Life*, page 45]

If I could paraphrase that in the context of what we are talking about, "Most of our failure to experience the abundant life, that was procured for us on the cross, is because we listen to our emotions instead of speaking to ourselves and reckoning on the truth of Scripture." I am convinced that the longer our mind is set on the truth, and we are reckoning on the truth, the more our emotions and affections are going to be in agreement with the truth. However, because most of us have been programmed by lies, that may take quite some time. That's why teaching these truths of the cross to young people and children are such a priority. They don't have as much wrong programming to overcome.

Allow me to give you a good way to start your day and then remind yourself of this truth throughout the day:

Lord, I begin this day reckoning on the fact that the old me in Adam is crucified with Christ. He was the only one the power of sin had dominion and authority over and because he is crucified with Christ, I am free from slavery to sin and an emotion controlled life. I now choose to obey Romans 6:12-14: "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace." Lord I say no to self and take up my cross and in your strength I choose to follow You. Throughout the day as I am tempted to sin, I reckon on the truths of the cross. As I am overcome with false guilt over sin that is already under the blood of Jesus, I reckon on my forgiveness through the blood of Jesus. 1 John 1:7b : "...and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."

The abundant life is a cross centered life; it starts with Biblical thinking and reckoning and choosing based on truth instead of feelings.

### **B. Meditate on the Cross**

Memorize verses relating to what happened at the cross and mentally *chew* on them for a while. Memorize verses like:

Romans 6:6-7 (HCSB): "For we know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that sin's dominion over the body may be abolished, so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin, since a person who has died is freed from sin's claims."

Romans 6:11: "Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord." [Sub addiction, critical spirit, pride, anger, lying, materialism, trashy thought life, etc.]

Meditate on the cross. Listen to songs on the cross and meditate on them. For example: *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross, Hallelujah What a Savior*, ("Lifted up was He to die; it is finished was His cry. Now in heaven exalted high, hallelujah, what a Savior!"). We are to reckon on the cross and meditate on the cross.

### **C. Share the Cross**

The more you share the glorious truths with others of the cross, and what happened there, the fresher it stays in your life, and the more these truths are reinforced in your life. Share not only the truth about how to be saved, but how to enter in to the freedom we have over the bondage of sin and our emotions. We share not only with the lost, but with defeated, struggling Christians who have been to the cross for the forgiveness of sins but have not experienced the fullness of the cross in giving us victory over sin and self. Do you know what the Bible calls that? The Bible calls that "making disciples."

### **Conclusion**

Truly, the message of the cross is liberating. It is in believing, and applying continually, the message of the cross that we see the power of God blasting out a life controlled by messed up emotions.

