

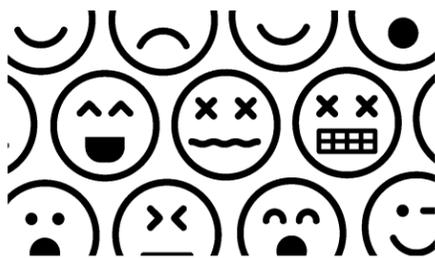
No matter what the indwelling thoughts, desires, and emotions may be, they are most certainly manifested in our outward behavior. To illustrate this principle, when we have sinfully angry thoughts, desires, and feelings in our hearts, our words, actions, and body language will also display sinful anger. We may scowl, pout, or slam a door. We may give others the silent treatment or walk in a belligerent manner. Sinful anger in the heart produces angry outward behavior. Likewise, if we have joyful thoughts, desires, and feelings in our hearts, our countenance will display this godly joy. Our faces will be bright, our words and actions will be kind to others, and the way we walk may even be lighter; joy in the heart produces joyful outward behavior.

Since Scripture teaches that we live from our hearts, which include thoughts, desires, and feelings, it is correct to conclude that we live from our feelings. (Again, we do not live from feelings *alone*, but we do live from them.) Sometimes conservative Evangelicals don't fully understand Scripture's teaching that we live from our hearts and they say things like, "Don't live from your feelings." It is actually not accurate to tell others to not live from their feelings, because we *do* live from them!

Now, to be fair, I think most of us understand that when someone says, "Don't live from your feelings" what is really being said is to not live from *sinful* feelings like anger, selfishness, or fear. We understand this as an exhortation toward righteousness. And indeed, we should be living from *godly* and righteous feelings, such as compassion, kindness, and peace.

This is one of those situations in which mere semantics can unintentionally portray feelings as bad. It is likely that people do not intend to communicate feelings as bad, but imprecise speech can represent them as such. Perhaps we Evangelicals could communicate this advice more precisely so that a negative view of feelings can be avoided.

In the next edition of The COG we will examine Principle 2: *Feelings are not Inherently Wrong.*



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: The Community of Grace Biblical Counseling Ministry and the editor of the monthly newsletter welcome letters from the readers. Letters may be edited if the editorial team deems it necessary to do so to fit the space allowed or due to unbiblical communication practices. We encourage the reader to write with edification in mind. Letters must be signed. Names can be withheld upon request. If you have a question about counseling that you would like to ask for future publications feel free to submit those questions to Pastor Blake Shaw.



Food for Thought BY PASTOR BLAKE SHAW

John was really just an ordinary man, a hard-working man who provided for his family and faithfully brought them to church services at the small community church. He grew up in the area, being born into a family that had a great reputation with people from miles around. John's reputation grew as he became one of the most trusted and respected members of the community. So, one can understand the shock, the dismay, yes, even the anger that shot through the community when word spread that he had abandoned his wife and kids to start a "new" life in a different community with a different woman. Any discussion with John was brief, ending with a cavalier response because of his "I-don't-care" attitude. Best friends tried to persuade him to return. Church leaders and fellow church members did the same. Even people in the community who had no religious ties shook their head in dismay at his conduct.

More heartbreaking was that he spurned the appeal of his teenage daughters and son. The man was hardened and in such a state that he just hurled accusations at others. He played the blame game and used Scripture, such as Matthew 7:1-2, trying to squelch the calls for his repentance and return. "Judge not," he would often say to those who challenged him. He rejected his family, his friends, his church, his community, and worse, he rejected his Savior. A common response from those who knew him best was, "What happened? We had no idea he was struggling. How did we miss the sign of a struggle?" His wife exclaimed at one point, "This stunned me beyond words. Sure, we had our moments of conflicts but, those conflicts always seemed to be resolved. There were times when it seemed like he pulled away, and there was an odd distance between us. But it wasn't too extreme so I wrote it off as just his tiredness or distractions from work. This whole thing seemed to come from nowhere.

Reader, let me ask you: What is your reaction to John's story? It is not uncommon to hear such an account. Do you think John's actions came from nowhere? How could the warning signs be missed by those who knew him best? Why did it not bother him that with one decision, all of the trust and respect he had from others was destroyed?

An understanding of what happened in this man's life begins by understanding the word "sin." Yeah, the simple, biblical word, "sin." This simple three-letter word is not popular in our world. Sadly, it's not a popular subject in the church. Understand that within a span of fifty years, the church's perspective on sin has completely changed. Following the world's system, the church at large has embraced the concept that the human condition and corresponding problems can be relegated to what the field of psychiatry calls syndromes and disorders. Take a peek in the psychiatrist's bible (the DSM-V) and you will quickly learn that virtually every sin can be dismissed as a disorder.

You see, if a culture can do-away with sin and then re-label it as a disorder then the concepts of salvation, faith, depravity, guilt, repentance, and other biblical doctrines, actually become meaningless. If you smash the standard of right and wrong and guilt, then you render the concept of the conscience meaningless as well. Or, to put it another way,

"Obliterate the human conscience, and you will raise an amoral and unredeemable generation" (*The Vanishing Conscience*, by John MacArthur, page 11). It is serious business to avoid, re-define, re-label, and ultimately get rid of the biblical understanding of sin.

Back a few years ago I was reading the book *Whatever Became of Sin* by Dr. Karl Menninger. Menninger wrote,

In all of the laments and reproaches made by our seers and prophets, one misses any mention of 'sin,' a word which used to be a veritable watchword of prophets. It was a word once in everyone's mind, but now rarely if ever heard. Does that mean that no sin is involved in our troubles—sin with an 'I' in the middle? Is no one any longer guilty of anything? Guilty perhaps of a sin that could be repented and repaired or atoned for? Is it only that someone may be stupid or sick or criminal—or asleep? Wrong things are being done, we know; tares are being sown in the wheat field at night. But is no one responsible, no one answerable for these acts? Anxiety and depression we all acknowledge, and even vague guilt feelings; but has no one committed any sins? Where, indeed, did sin go? What became of it? (*Whatever Became of Sin*, by Dr. Karl Menninger, page 13)

How you view sin determines how you understand John's situation and other situations that are similar. The world has no "doctrine" of sin by which to truly understand John's actions. So the world must come up with other reasons. To the world's system, John merely acted upon his basic instinctual drives as a man. Remember, that perspective flows out of an evolutionary worldview. Freud would say that John is finally tossing aside the restraining effects of the superego and living more as a whole person as he follows the instinctual urges of the id. Others might be inclined to exclaim that John has needs that are not being met at home. John himself may point the finger at his wife and exclaim, "I have sexual needs and you aren't meeting them, so, of course, I'm going elsewhere." Others still, influenced by Freudian thought, would try to understand what may have happened to John in the formative years of his life (birth to 5 years). They might ask: "Who abused John or neglected him? Were his mom and dad detached from him? Was there a lack of comfort and love in the home leading to low self-esteem, thus leading to adultery?"

Instead of these unbiblical stances to John's situation, how about we simply go with the Creator's diagnosis? Sure, there could be influences in John's life that impacted him, but John's problems can't be blamed on his wife, his parents, his church, his community, or any other external influence. At the core, John's problem is his heart. Jesus makes it clear in Matthew 15:19 and Mark 7:21-23 that John's adultery comes from the heart. James, the half-brother of Jesus, tells us that John's problems are solely an issue of strong passionate desires—aka, lusts (James 4:1-5). In fact, James tells us that John has simply been "carried away by his own lust" (see James 1:12-15). Lust, in John's heart, has conceived and it is bringing forth sin-horrendous sin. John wants what he wants.

Food for Thought [Continued from cover page]

To understand John we must understand sin. Sin is an insidious spiritual disease that has wreaked havoc upon our lives. Every fiber of our being has been affected by sin. Our intellect, emotion, and our will, have all been twisted and mangled by sin. Likewise, our desires, our motivations, and our worship are tainted by this horrific thing we call sin. The Bible describes humans this way,

- ◆ This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing happens to all. Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live... (Ecclesiastes 9:3).
- ◆ The heart is deceitful and desperate sick (or wicked), who can know it (Jeremiah 17:9).
- ◆ There is none righteous, not even one...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:12, 23).
- ◆ ...no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness... (Ephesians 4:17-19).

We shouldn't really be surprised when John does what he does. Saddened? Yes. Surprised? No. Not if we understand sin.

But there's one lingering question that we have to address: "How can John, having studied and taught God's Word, having been a spiritual stalwart within the community, suddenly make such a decision that runs totally contrary to everything he said he believed for so many years? Could it be a hardened

conscience? Most certainly it could be. Could it be that John has merely played the religious game to appease others or because there have been perks that come with being a respected leader? Definitely. Such things happen often.

Now, understand, John's step into full-blown adultery was not a huge step. One pastor friend of mine once said, "When a man falls into adultery, he didn't fall far." The reason is because for quite some time, he has been making conscience-silencing decisions in his heart. He's been thinking, desiring, worshipping, and imagining—all in his heart. So, in all reality, stepping into adultery was one small step. His conscience was slowly hardened over many years. The beautiful gift called "the conscience" was told to "shut up!" so many times that it had little, if any, restraining voice in John's life. Those around John were stunned and perplexed by what happened in John's life because they can only see the outward conduct. Only God knows the heart and He is well aware of all of the small steps that John took on his way to adultery.

You and I are really not that much different than John. Sure, we may not be destroying our marriage by leaving our spouse for another person, but at the core of our being we all have a sin problem. We all stand in desperate need of a Savior. You sin. I sin. Every day. Often throughout the day. The reality of sin means that we need a Savior. It means things are not right. But what of the conscience? Let me ask: Are you telling your conscience to shut up when it tells you to not do or say something? Are you making slow, subtle decisions that are like tiny steps into the abyss of sin? Do those around you know the real you, or would they respond like John's family and friends if you did what John did? Understand sin. Understand your own propensity to run contrary to Christ and His Word. Live in humility and be careful how you handle the conscience.

Q&A with Guest Writer: Julie Gossack

Question:

Sometimes conservative Evangelicals avoid the topic of feelings and emotions and even go so far as to portray them as a bad thing. Could you address the issue of feelings and what role they play in our lives?

Answer: (Part 2 of 6)

In the last edition of The COG we defined the terms: feelings, emotions, and affections. Starting in this edition, we will examine the first of four biblical principles of feelings: 1) feelings are a component of the heart from which we live, 2) feelings are not inherently wrong, 3) feelings can be sanctified, and 4) feelings must be directed by God's Word. Let's begin with Principle 1.

Principle 1: Feelings are a component of the heart from which we live.

We need to begin our discussion with the place from which feelings come—the human heart. Scripture teaches that feelings are a component of the heart.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew transliteration of the word "heart" is lev ("labe") and refers to the totality of man's inner or immaterial nature.¹ Lev is the inner man which includes: 1) thinking (beliefs, contemplations, judgments, views, understanding, perceptions); 2) desires (volition, intentions, motivations); and 3) feelings (emotions and affections).² The term "heart" is representative of the inner person and does not refer to or include the physical body.

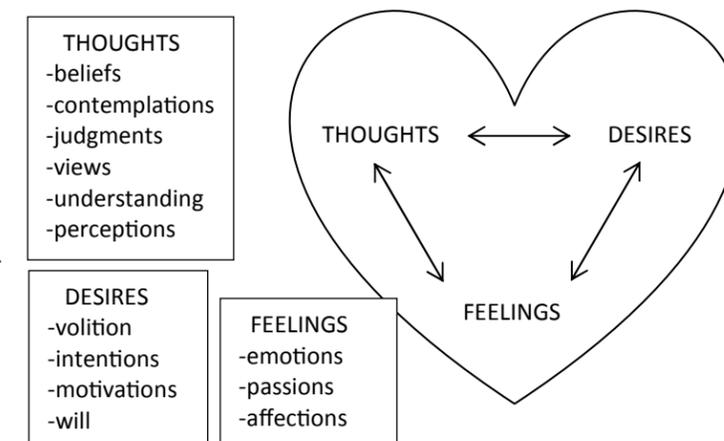
In the New Testament, the Greek transliteration of the word "heart" communicates the same meaning as lev from the Hebrew language. The Greek word for "heart" is kardia ("kar-dee'-ah"), and it refers to thoughts, reasoning, understanding, will, and judgment.³ It is the "affective center of our being"⁴ and is the seat of desires, feelings, affections, and passions.⁵ Again, this word does not refer to or include the physical body. Scripture refers to the physical body as the outer man (II Corinthians 4:16). The heart is part of the inner man.

Generally speaking, the heart contains thoughts, desires, and feelings. Thoughts, desires, and feelings are not synonymous with each other, but are distinct components of the heart. Thoughts are the intellectual reasoning part of the heart where we contemplate, perceive, and make judgments. Desires are the volitional component of the heart that ignite choice, and feelings are that part of the heart where passion and emotion stir and inspire. Each component of the heart acts and responds interdependently with one another. That is, our thoughts instruct our desires and feelings; our desires direct both our thoughts and feelings; and our feelings enlighten our thoughts and desires.

Because of this interconnectedness, it cannot be said that one component always acts first or is predominant over the others. Thoughts, desires, and emotions each equally

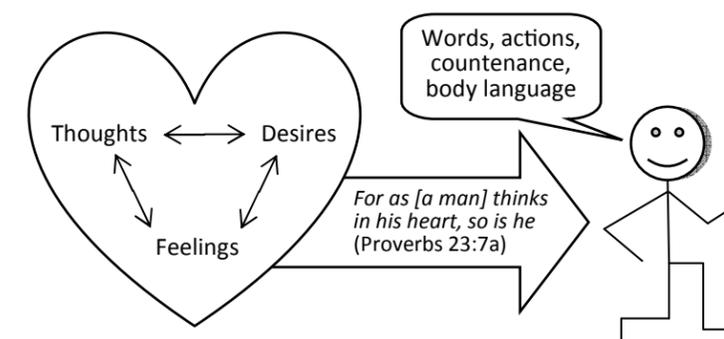
comprise the human heart, working in tandem with one another. The interaction between the thoughts, desires, and feelings takes place rapidly in the heart each moment of our lives and makes up who we are. Figure 1 depicts both the interactions between thoughts, desires, and feelings as well as synonyms for each of these terms.

Figure 1: The Components of the Heart



The heart is the control center of our being and everything we do is a reflection of the thoughts, desires, and feelings that dwell within. All our words, actions, body language, and countenance come from our heart. (See Figure 2.) The fact that we live from our hearts is clearly taught in Scripture. King Solomon taught this truth in the book of Proverbs: As in water face reveals face, so a man's heart reveals the man (Proverbs 27:19) and, For as [a man] thinks in his heart, so is he (Proverbs 23:7a).

Figure 2: Man Lives from the Heart



Jesus also taught this fact on several occasions as He interacted with both the religious leaders and His own disciples: *For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things* (Matthew 12:34b-35).⁶

The Counseling Zone: A View from the Counselor's Chair 25 Ways to Pursue Joy in Christ, by Stephen Altrogge

(Stephen serves as a pastor at Sovereign Grace Church of Indiana, PA, where his main duties include leading worship, preaching, and working with youth. He also has written a number of worship songs that have been included on Sovereign Grace Music albums. Stephen is the author of the book Game Day For the Glory of God: A Guide For Athletes, Fans, and Wannabes, published by Crossway Books in September 2008, and The Greener Grass Conspiracy: Finding Contentment on Your Side of the Fence, published by Crossway Books in April 2011. When not shining his dad's shoes, you can find Stephen drinking coffee or playing video games.)

God promises his children joy, and many times he fills us with it without our asking. But at other times, especially when we go through trials, we must fight for it. Much of the battle lies in fighting to believe God's word.

For some the battle for joy is much harder than others. Some must deal with their own tendencies to being downcast. Depression and hard, long, sad afflictions can make Jesus' joy seem beyond reach. Yet God's word says it's his intent to give us his joy both in this life and especially in the next. So here are some ways to pursue joy in Christ:

1. Praise God for the cross: for his mercy and grace in saving you.
2. Thank him for all his spiritual benefits: forgiveness, adoption, the Word, spiritual gifts, the church.
3. Ask Jesus to fill you with his own joy (JN 15:11).
4. Thank him for his steadfast love that never ceases.
5. Thank God for your temporal blessings: for your spouse or for the blessings of being single, kids, health, sight, food, strength, home, computer and coffee.
6. Praise God for his attributes: his greatness, sovereignty, goodness, love, wisdom and power.

7. Praise Jesus for being a compassionate high priest who intercedes for you.
8. Thank him for all the specific good he is producing in you through trials: patience, perseverance, and faith.
9. Thank God for his past faithfulness.
10. Give to the kingdom.
11. Give to the poor.
12. Serve others (PHP 1:25).
13. Don't dwell on whether you are joyful or not. Try to forget yourself.
14. Thank the Lord that he is making you like Christ.
15. Seek God's presence in prayer (PS 16.11; PS 43.4).
16. Read the Word – it produces joy (PS 119.111; JE 15:16).
17. Thank God that he will never turn away from doing good to you (JE 32:40).
18. Ask others to pray for God to fill you with joy.
19. Ask the Holy Spirit to produce the fruit of joy in you.
20. Confess your sins to God and ask him to restore the joy of your salvation (PS 51:12).
21. Memorize God's promises to give you joy and ask him to fulfill them (JN 16:24; RO 14:17; 15:13; PS 4:7; 30:5; 68:3; 97:11; 126:6).
22. Consider others who have it much worse than you.
23. Pray for others who are suffering.
24. Contemplate the joys of heaven and the world to come.
25. Read John Piper's book, *When I Don't Desire God: How to Fight for Joy*

1 Baker, Warren, ed., The Complete Word Study Old Testament, (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1994) 2328.

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