

What is God like 2 - Emotional

Reading: John 14:8-9 “...he who has seen Me (Jesus) has seen the Father....”

Introduction:

This is the second in the series of lessons on “What is God like”¹.

The question may be asked; “*Does God have any emotions or feelings?*” Some people may have the impression that God is aloof and “distant”; that he does not have any empathy with mankind, but is always ready to strike down those who incur His wrath. This impression may be the result of how God (or false gods) are sometimes portrayed in books, films and myths.

But is God just a stoic² being, having a “heart of stone”, devoid of any sort of emotion or feeling? Does He really remain aloof from mankind; indifferent to our needs and struggles?

In this series, we are looking at the qualities and characteristics of Jesus, and as we get to know Him (Jesus), we get to understand what God (the Father) is really like. This is because Jesus is the “...*express image..... of the invisible God...*” (**Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3**).

In this lesson, we will look at just four types of emotions displayed by Jesus to show that God is an emotional being.

LESSON

1) Emotions displayed by Jesus

When Jesus was here as a man, He displayed a range of emotions appropriate to the circumstances. In this lesson, we will consider four of those types of emotions recorded in the scriptures.

a) Compassion

“Compassion” is the understanding of, or empathy for, the suffering of others³. In other words, when a person sees someone else suffering and they do their best to understand their suffering and respond in a sympathetic manner towards them, then they are showing compassion.

There are many instances recorded in the gospels of Jesus showing compassions towards others – both to groups of people, and to individuals. In this part of the lesson, we will look at two different scenarios.

i. Matthew 15:29-37 – Fulfilling a physical need

At times, great multitudes of people followed Jesus (*e.g.* **Matthew 5:1; 14:13**). In **Matthew 15:32**, we read that a crowd had been following Jesus for three days, but eventually, their food ran out - there was nothing left to eat. No doubt, the hunger pangs would have started with many of them, particularly the children (verse **38**). But there were no shops close by to purchase food – they were in a place that is described in verse **33** as being a “*wilderness*”; a “*deserted place*” (**Luke 9:12**).

¹ The first lesson looked at the power of God over both the physical and the spiritual worlds.

² “*Stoic*” means One who is seemingly indifferent to, or unaffected by, joy, grief, pleasure, or pain. Ref: <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/stoic> as at 06.02.2013.

³ Ref: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compassion> as at 06.02.2013.

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Jesus knew that they were hungry and needed something to eat. In verse **32**, He said that He had “...*compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me for three days and have nothing to eat...*”. He was also concerned that if He sent them away to get food, some may faint on the way due to their hunger. And so His compassion and empathy turned to action...and we have the miracle of feeding the 4000 from seven loaves and a few fish.

ii. **Mark 6:34** - Fulfilling the spiritual need.

Jesus’ compassion was not limited to just people’s physical needs – He was also mindful of their spiritual needs. He understood the trials and temptations that people went through in their lives because He experienced the same things (**Hebrews 4:15**).

The Levites, Priests and Scribes had the responsibility to teach the people God’s Law, and to help them understand and obey it (**Leviticus 10:11; 2 Chronicles 17:7-9; Nehemiah 8:4-8; Matthew 23:1-3**). But in Jesus’ day, they were failing in their duty (**Matthew 23:13**). They focussed on the minute parts of the Law, but neglected the weightier things – justice, mercy and faith (**Matthew 23:23**). They failed to help people to be obedient to God (**Matthew 23:4, 15**). Neither did their lifestyles provide a pattern for righteousness – they would say one thing but do another (**Matthew 23:3**). Therefore, Jesus described them as being “...*blind guides...*” (**Matthew 23:16, 17, 19, 24**).

The result was that the people “...*were like sheep not having a shepherd...*” (**Mark 6:34**). They were lost, wandering, and had a need for godly, spiritual teaching. And “...*so He began to teach them many things...*”. He used parables⁴ to illustrate spiritual truths (**Matthew 13:1-52**). He also taught the “hard things”, like loving your enemies (**Matthew 5:44**) and making personal sacrificing to help others (**Matthew 19:21**). He did not teach them a “socially acceptable” gospel (**John 6:60-66**); rather, He taught them the truth, because it is only the truth that “...*makes you free...*” (**John 8:32**). He wanted the children of Israel to return to and be in harmony with their Father (**Luke 13:34**).

Point: Jesus showed compassion - He understood people’s needs, and followed that compassion through with practical help.

A lesson for us: We are to be perfect like our Father is perfect (**Matthew 5:48**). Therefore, we need to show practical compassion towards others.

b) **Anger/wrath**

Anger is a response to something that greatly displeases us – something that “riles us up”. While we are warned that “...*the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God ...*” (**James 1:20**), there is a place for righteous anger⁵.

⁴ A parable was when Jesus used a common, well known, every-day event to illustrate a spiritual lesson.

⁵ **Matthew 5:22** (in some versions says, “*angry with his brother without a cause*”), **Ephesians 4:26-27** and **James 1:19** give place for anger, but these verses also stipulate some conditions and warnings - sometimes man’s anger results in unrighteous thoughts / actions.

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There are not many instances recorded in the gospels of Jesus being angry⁶, but below is one such case.

In **Mark 3:1-6**, Jesus had entered a synagogue, and there was a man there who had a withered hand. It was the Sabbath, and some of those present (which included Pharisees – vs.6, also **Luke 6:7**) watched Him to see if He would heal the man. Jesus knew their thoughts (**Luke 6:8**), and was angry at them, “...*being grieved by the hardness of their hearts...*” (**Mark 3:5**).

The Pharisees, along with the scribes and priests, should have been teaching the people the ways of God. However, as we saw earlier in this lesson, their focus seemed to be solely on the letter of the law. In fact, they even came up with their own rules and regulations and considered them as doctrine as well (**Matthew 15:8-9**). **Mark 7:8** tells us that they were “...*laying aside the commandments of God...*”⁷ by holding to their traditions.

Now while it was important for the Law to be taught and obeyed, there were other things to be considered as well – justice, mercy and faith (**Matthew 23:23**). But the Pharisees either would not, or could not, see these things, and as a result, they had no mercy or compassion for those in need⁸.

Point: Hardness of heart towards those in genuine need is one of the things that makes God angry- consider **Deuteronomy 15:7-11**.

c) Sorrow/grief

There were things that happened during Jesus’ life here that caused him sorrow and grief. We saw in the previous section how He was grieved by the hardness of heart of the Pharisees (**Mark 3:5**). But that was not the only time when Jesus experienced sorrow and grief.

- i. When He heard of the death of John the Baptist, He went off to a deserted place by Himself (**Matthew 14:3-13**). John was a righteous man (**Luke 7:28**). His coming was ordained by God, and he prepared the way for Jesus (**Luke 1:13-17**). But he was imprisoned for speaking the truth, and then executed so that king Herod could save face after making a rash promise to his daughter. John’s death obviously had an effect on Jesus, and He went off to be alone for a while.
- ii. When He saw the children of Israel reject the ways of God, it caused him grief. We saw earlier how they were like sheep without a shepherd (**Mark 6:34**). He showed them the way to eternal life (**John 6:68; 14:6**), but most people only seemed to be interested in the signs He performed (**John 6:2**). Eventually, many turned away from following Him (**John 6:66**), and this caused Him sorrow. Like a parent grieving over a wayward child, Jesus lamented over His people (**Luke 13:34**).
- iii. When He was about to be arrested, knowing the full horror that awaited Him, His soul was “...*exceedingly sorrowful...*” (**Mark 14:34**). So much so that the sweat was dripping off Him like “...*great drops of*

⁶ In **Mark 10:14**, Jesus was “greatly displeased” when the disciples rebuked those who brought children to Jesus.

⁷ For example, by not showing mercy to others (as in this scenario), they were breaking God’s commandment to “...*love your neighbour as yourself...*” **Leviticus 19:18b**.

⁸ Consider the cases found in **Matthew 23:14; Mark 7:9-13**.

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blood...” (Luke 22:44). And it was not just the physical agony that He was about to go through; He was also going to be burdened with the sins of us all (Isaiah 53:6), (temporarily) forsaken by the Father (Matthew 27:46).

Point: When the innocent suffered; when people rejected the ways of God, it caused Him sorrow. And He also experienced the grief of physical pain.

d) Joy / being pleased

I haven’t found any examples in the scriptures of Jesus openly laughing, but that doesn’t mean that He didn’t experience joy. “Joy” is described as a state of cheerfulness, delight, gladness, and one of the things that brought joy to Jesus was when the Father’s Will was done on earth.

In Luke 10:1-16, Jesus sent out “the seventy” into all the towns and cities to “...heal the sick, and to say to them “The kingdom of God has come near to you”...” (vs.9). As well as the healing and driving out demons, they were to introduce people to the coming kingdom⁹, just as the disciples had done when they were sent out some time earlier (Luke 9:1-6). When they returned, the seventy were filled with joy at having seen demons being subject to the name of Jesus (vs.17). But the success of their venture also brought joy to Jesus. In verse 21 we read, “In that hour, Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit...”. What the seventy had done and achieved was something special and amazing – they had carried out the Will of God and succeeded. They were not “wise and learned men”, but “babes”¹⁰, but they had demonstrated God’s wisdom and power over the wisdom and power of men (1 Corinthians 1:25-29) – they had succeeded in doing things that the Pharisees and Scribes had not been able to do.

Point: Like John in 3 John 3, it brought joy to Jesus when people lived and walked in truth. Jesus had joy in doing the Father’s Will, and He wanted others to have that same sort of joy (John 15:9-11; 17:13).

A lesson for us: There can be many things that make us happy here on earth. But true (spiritual) joy comes by being right with God. The “seventy” were excited about what they had been able to do on their mission, but Jesus said to them;

“Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in Heaven” (Luke 10:20)¹¹.

2) Emotions displayed by God (the Father)

There were many occasions when God showed His emotions throughout the Old Testament;

⁹ Verse 16 implies that teaching and preaching were just as much a part of this mission as the healing and driving out demons.

¹⁰ As far as we can tell, and the term “babes” (vs.21). would bear this out, the seventy were not men who had a background in religious learning like the Pharisees and Scribes.

¹¹ Consider also Revelation 20:11-15.

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- a) When His people were oppressed, even though it was usually because of their own unfaithfulness (to Him), He showed mercy and compassion towards them.
- He told them beforehand that, if they went astray but then repented, He would show them compassion and deliver them - **Deuteronomy 30:1-3**.
 - when they did go astray and set themselves on a path that would cause them to incur the wrath of God, He sent prophets to warn them, because He didn't want them to have to face punishment they deserved - **2 Chronicles 36:15**.
 - when they repented, He turned away His anger and showed compassion by forgiving them - **Psalms 78:38**

God does not want people to suffer – physically or spiritually, even though the suffering may be the result of our own actions. He sees us struggle with our sins, but He does not want anybody to face condemnation at Judgement¹² (**Ezekiel 18:23; 33:11; 2 Peter 3:9**). Therefore, God made it possible for us to have our sins forgiven (**Romans 5:8-9; Ephesians 1:7**), and He shows mercy and compassion towards those who seek Him (**Psalms 112:4**).

- b) There were times when He was grieved and angry with people;
- In the days of Noah, sin was so rampant in the earth that the Lord was “...*sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart...*” – **Genesis 6:6**.
 - during the wilderness wanderings the Hebrews complained and rebelled against God. As a result, God was angry with them, and some were killed as punishment – **Numbers 11:1; 25:1-9; Deuteronomy 9:8, 20; Psalms 95:10-11**.
 - they were also warned that if they went after other gods, they would incur His anger - **Deuteronomy 4:25; 6:14-15**.
 - God was angry with the northern kingdom of Israel because it had rejected Him, so he let the Assyrians take its people away into captivity – **2 Kings 17:18**.
- c) But we also read of God being pleased, and having joy;
- when God asked Solomon what he would like, and Solomon answered, “...*give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people...*”, this “...*pleased the Lord...*” because he didn't ask for selfish things like riches – **1 Kings 3:5-13**.
 - King David tells us that God is “...*pleased with the sacrifices of the righteous...*” – **Psalms 51:19**.
 - there is joy in Heaven (where God dwells) when a sinner repents – **Luke 15:10**.
 - Jesus did those things that “...*please Him...*” - **John 8:29**. And God confirmed that He was pleased with Jesus - **Matthew 3:17; 17:5**

¹² Yet justice has to be served, because He is a just God (**Revelation 15:3**).

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Conclusion and Application:

So what does this mean for us?

Our God is an emotional being. He can be pleased (**Hebrews 13:16**), and He can be grieved (**Ephesians 4:30**). He can show exceedingly abundant mercy and compassion (**Ephesians 2:4-8**) to those who turn to Him, but He can also show forth His wrath towards those who reject Him (**Hebrews 10:26-31; 12:29**). Biblical history provides the evidence for this.

Therefore, our lives should be guided by a desire to be “...*fully pleasing Him...*” (**Colossians 1:10**). For when we do so, we receive His mercy, His compassion, His forgiveness (**1 John 1:7**). Let me finish by quoting from **Hebrews 12:28**;

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.”