

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

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# With All Your Mind—Emotions

*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Galatians 5:22-23a*

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1 - In considering the five components of the human person outlined by Jesus in Mark 12:29-31, we now seek further understanding of the mind.

2 - We are viewing the mind as being composed of thoughts and emotions. In this chapter we explore human emotions. They too must be re-formed.

3 - God has emotions. The Scriptures describe characteristics of God which are accompanied by emotions.

- God is love. (1 John 4:8)
- God knows joy. (Nehemiah 8:10)
- God creates peace. (Hebrews 13:20)
- God exercises patience. (Romans 2:4)
- God is kind. (Psalm 145:17)
- God is good. (Psalm 107:1)
- God is faithful. (Psalm 31:5)
- God is gentle. (2 Samuel 22:36)
- God can be pleased. (1 Kings 3:10)
- God can be grieved. (Genesis 6:6)
- God can become angry. (2 Samuel 6:7)
- God can lay down his anger. (Amos 7:1-3)
- God is forgiving. (Psalm 86:5)
- God initiates reconciliation with his enemies. (Romans 5:10-11)
- God shows mercy. (Psalm 103:4)

4 - Human beings are created in God's image. We too have emotions. God designed us for expressing our emotions in ways that are healthy, beautiful, delightful.

5 - The fruit which characterizes the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23a) gives insight into God's emotions. The Spirit forms these in people who allow him to do so.

6 - The components of this one fruit (singular) are best viewed as characteristics of one who is walking with God. They are accompanied by emotions.

7 - Take love for example. Love is more than a feeling. It is a condition, a quality of relationship that one person chooses toward another. Feelings accompany it.

8 - Some of our emotions may not be in the condition God intended for them. Sin damages. Wounded emotions can be very strong and frightfully uncontrollable.

9 - In our current cultural environment in the western world, emotions are considered to be valid simply because they exist.

10 - If I feel it, I have the right to express it. How dare you even suggest that I don't have the right to express what I am feeling!

11 - This idea is rooted in a belief system that sees humans as autonomous. There are no absolutes except what man, beginning from himself, arbitrarily selects.

12 - It lacks any acknowledgement of lurking dangers. Acting autonomously can feel good in the moment, but can result in painful damage to me and others.

13 - Contrast this with the belief system Jesus taught: Man is created by God to be like him. Some choices result in life functioning well; some choices lead to harm.

14 - Not everything I desire is good for me. To successfully navigate life, I must learn how to order my desires under the wisdom, governance and goodness of God.

15 - The engine of my car is designed—created—for oil. If I keep the oil topped up, the engine will function well. If I allow the oil to drain out, I will ruin the engine.

16 - It is my car. I can do with it whatever I want! True enough. But if I choose to treat it in ways for which it was not designed, I will damage it.

17 - So it is with my emotions. God is the manufacturer of my person. If I choose to act in ways contrary to how I was designed, I will damage myself—and others.

18 - How can we seek deeper insight into our emotions? In Matthew 5:21-48 Jesus teaches about seven behaviors to avoid. Each negatively impacts emotional health.

19 - **Anger.** My anger is aroused when my will is crossed. I feel a strong desire to hit back. But I can learn that I am not under compulsion to give in to every feeling.

20 - Jesus placed anger in the category with murder and contempt. (Matthew 5:21-22) All three are behaviors of violence toward others.

21 - Anger negatively marks all who experience it—perpetrator, victim, bystander. It is not pleasant to be around someone venting anger.

22 - There are better strategies for achieving my desired ends than anger. Whatever I try to achieve by anger can be better accomplished without it.

23 - We were not created for anger. It is death-producing rather than life-giving. The ways of Jesus are different.

24 - So what do I do with my anger? Stuff it? No! It will only erupt in an unguarded moment. God's way is not to suppress harmful emotions—but to transform them.

25 - **Contempt.** We treat another person with contempt when we speak about him, or to him, or relate to him, in ways that dishonor, despise or dehumanize him.

26 - Contempt typically begins with speech. We call others “fools” or “idiots” or something worse. We work to find words that will inflict the greatest hurt.

27 - Hateful speech gives permission for hateful acts. Here are the roots of racism, slavery, misogyny, ethnic cleansing and hatred of those who are the “others”.

28 - Contemptuous speech can become “normal” in political life. Living with Jesus, we become the kind of people who can discuss differing political views respectfully.

29 - When we speak of a political opponent with contempt, one thing can be said with certainty —we did not learn to talk that way by being with Jesus.

30 - **Sexual lust.** God created us so that a man and a woman could share a one-of-a-kind unique intimacy, and could express this physically. (see Chapter 19)

31 - God further designed us so that the physical, sexual expression of this one-of-a-kind intimacy would result in beautiful, honoring emotions for both persons.

32 - Bodily intimacy (sexual activity) apart from intimacy of persons (unique, shared commitment), violates the intent of the Creator and those who engage in it.

33 - Sexual activity that is only physical can indeed generate strong emotions. But it is without integrity. It cheapens and damages persons who engage in it.

34 - The emotions it generates are short-lived and ultimately unsatisfying. They can transition quickly into contempt, even hatred. (2 Samuel 13:14-15)

35 - What is superficial cannot meet needs that are deep. Sexual behavior outside of authentic, committed, mutual intimacy of persons wounds the soul.

36 - **Divorce.** We must think and speak of divorce with tenderness and compassion. Some among us have experienced it, and the wounds it leaves behind.

37 - A fundamental violation in divorce is personal abandonment. The deepest of all human relationships is being severed. People are leaving each other.

38 - Those considering divorce do well to call “time-out” and seek help. Divorce is never a good option. Sadly, at times, it can be the better of two unfortunate choices.

39 - The circle of those affected goes well beyond the two whose marriage is ending. Divorce reveals how broadly we are inter-related—children, family, friends.

40 - Damaged emotions involved in divorce may take years to heal. But Jesus is a specialist in healing! Personal crises of all kinds beckon us to go deeper with God.

41 - **Oaths.** What was wrong with swearing oaths as practiced in Jesus' day? There were two issues, arrogant presumption and verbal manipulation. (Matthew 5:33-37)

42 - In our 21st century world we daily encounter the idea that we can control our life circumstances. "If you can imagine it, you can do it." Really?

43 - Jesus: "And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black." Claiming to control what is beyond my control is living in unreality.

44 - I am not self-determined, self-sufficient or all-powerful. I control neither the external nor internal circumstances of my life; only God does. (James 4:13-15)

45 - The next issue is verbal manipulation. The motivation for swearing oaths was to add weight to what was being said—to override the judgment of the hearers.

46 - God doesn't manipulate or override. He speaks directly, truthfully, respectfully, and allows us to reach our own conclusions. "Yes" means "yes"; "no" means "no".

47 - Of course we must make commitments—life does not work without them. We do so with humility, owning our limitations, acknowledging our need for God's help.

48 - Marriage vows are a prime example. Hanna and I ended our marriage vows with "May the Lord help me." We know we need God's help to keep our promises.

49 - Also legitimate is testifying under oath in a judicial process. This establishes a legal basis for what is said. It's purpose is to protect against verbal manipulation.

50 - **Retaliation.** When we respond to an offense, real or imagined, by wanting to retaliate, we assume a role God has not given us—the role of judge.

51 - To try to justify myself—to right every wrong—is unworkable. It leaves me frustrated. It wounds me further. The way of Jesus: I leave pay-back to my Father.

52 - Only God has a fully accurate view of the wrong. What really happened? Who is to blame? Only God can judge with the proper balance of truth and mercy.

53 - **Love of enemies.** How can I possibly love my enemies? Not by greater "will-power". I must become a new kind of person—the kind of person who forgives.

54 - How do I become the kind of person who forgives? (See Chapter 20) The answer: I become the kind of person Jesus is.

55 - Initial steps to becoming the kind of person who forgives:

- Forgiveness never denies or minimizes the wrong.
- Forgiveness faces the truth without deciding judgment.
- Forgiveness leaves it to God to judge the "bad guys" and assign punishment.

- Forgiveness results in the healing and freeing of the one feeling wronged.

56 - How do I pursue the re-formation of my emotions? Let's look again at the fruit of the Holy Spirit and its components. (Galatians 5:22-23a)

57 - These components are best seen as conditions accompanied by emotions. I pursue the condition, for example love. In time the emotions follow.

58 - The most direct ways I have to regulate my emotions are choices as to where I will place my thoughts. I practice the Presence. I locate my thoughts in Scripture.

59 - What do I do with painful emotions? Jesus' way is not to block them out or suppress them. Any relief this may yield will be short lived.

60 - God's way is to heal painful emotions. Practicing his Presence, I bring my pain to Jesus on the cross. In my imaginative mind I "see" him dying there for me.

61 - I ask him to take my pain and administer his healing. He died for my sin; he also died for my pain. (Isaiah 53:5) I rely on him; I trust him. (see Chapter 7)

62 - I focus on learning how to love. Jesus said this was most important. (John 15:9, 12-13) Here all qualities of Christlikeness converge. (Colossians 3:12-15)