

Title: Realizing the Grid is God-made

Text: Romans 8

Theme: Truth-based or Feeling-driven?

Series: **Living the Cross-Centered Life – pt.2**

Prop Stmt. A feeling based life is a practical denial of the authority of God's Word.

The purpose of our study is to see how the gospel is not just the means by which we become a follower of Christ, but the gospel is also the means by which we live as followers of Christ. The gospel of the kingdom, which is based on the cross, is the God truth-grid through which we are to filter all of life; every single drop. For most of us, that approach goes against the grain.

Read Romans 8

In some of the hospital rooms I have been in, there is a pain chart that asks the question, "How much pain are you in?" The answers range from 1-10, with smiley to frown faces accompanying the numbers. The chart brings up an interesting dilemma: How can a medical professional evaluate and measure pain? There is no real objective basis. One researcher noted that soldiers with rather catastrophic injuries sustained in war, seemed to be a lot more at ease than post-operative patients who had just come through a surgical procedure that paled in comparison to the ordeal the soldiers had endured. He had his theories as to why this was the case, but his point was, you cannot rely upon a patient to give you an objective evaluation of pain.

Feeling is one of the five senses. We rely upon our sense of smell, hearing, sight, taste and feel to give us information about our world. But, how many times have we said, "I can't believe my eyes!" or, "I can't believe my ears!" Illusionists amaze us by doing things that are logically impossible if we were to only believe the information from our eyes. Even our sense of taste is not always what we think it is. You might be surprised to know that recently (Jan. 29.2007), Consumer's Reports reported that McDonald's coffee beat Starbucks in a taste test. A friend of mine calls it Morebucks instead of Starbucks.

But the very notion of a taste test is itself problematic. The gauge is the preferred tastes of the participants. It is like trying to determine the perfect temperature for a car, home or church building. If two people do not agree on what is comfortable, forget about getting several hundred to agree.

If we cannot always trust our actual senses to give us perfectly reliable information, how can we trust our emotions, or that elusive sixth sense? Emotions, while often called feelings are not even part of the 5 senses, but we often vest our emotions with the absolute power to determine what is good or bad for us, what is right and wrong, or what is true or false or what is going to happen. I have a bad feeling about this. That is dangerous. Emotions are indicators, but they should never be viewed as the final authority. Our emotions are so vulnerable to changing circumstances, and we all know that, but it is such a dominant view of our world. Watch how many times a reporter

sticks a microphone in someone's face and asks, "How did that make you feel?" or "What did you feel like at that moment?" We elected a president because he could feel our pain. Politically and pragmatically, that was a very shrewd and effective statement to make because we place a ridiculous amount of emphasis upon how we feel and we think that good leaders have to be able to feel the same thing.

In some funeral homes, the directors like to speak at the end of the service, offering their own take on matters and in some cases completely gutting the gospel that I just preached. If they understand the gospel, that's one thing, but that is of ten not the case. My point is, I don't prepare bodies, so you please don't talk about souls. Anyway, one day, after one director hijacked the service at both the funeral home and the cemetery, I decided to find out a little more of why he was doing this. I found out that he had gone to a death and dying seminar for funeral directors, where they all had to get into a casket and lay there (I believe with the lid closed) and try to imagine what it would be like to die. Then, they had to write about this, believing that by going through this experience, they were able to more closely identify with the dead and emote a little deeper with the families left behind. If, you can make the people feel like you really connect with them at that level, then, they will give you good return business. Think of the logic of that! By lying inside of a casket, I imagine what it must be like to be dead. On the basis of my imagination, I presume to know the truth about dying, which now makes me an authority on the death process and gives me the experiential basis to be able to speak truth and give comfort to others. And yet, many people don't care if it is bogus or not, as long as it makes grieving people feel better. After all, isn't that the job of everyone? Just make people feel better? Why is it the church's job, or the pastor's job or the worship leader's job to make everyone feel better? Because we naturally allow our feelings to be the Supreme Court of reality.

A couple of weeks ago a man came here to church on a Sunday morning when the temperature was about 2 degrees. He goes back and forth between here and a more charismatic church, but on that morning, he said, it was not a convenient morning to be charismatic because it was just too cold. He didn't think he could get himself "into worship" that day. We know this point all too well. The sermon is great if it makes me cry or laugh. The worship is good or awesome if I get a great feeling out of it. And this part is what can be so comical. I am criticized at times for selecting way too many old songs, and criticized for selecting way too many new songs (sometimes in the same service). In fact, some of the old songs are actually newer than some of the new songs, they just happen to be new to the person. The music is too loud and too soft, the worship is too formal, and too relaxed. When I try to point out the lyrics that we sing, and the actual truths that are being communicated, I sometimes get blank stares. I want to leave church feeling invigorated, and singing songs that make me feel good, is what I need. Make me feel good about coming today. At a senior's luncheon a few years ago, we sang, the chorus, "Every day with Jesus, is sweeter than the day before." I asked everyone that day, "is that true?" They all said – "No, of course not." So, I asked, why do you sing it if it isn't true?" "Oh, we like to sing it. It makes us feel good."

There are two extremes. The one that we have been speaking about is when we make feelings the final authority. The flip side to that is to say feelings don't matter at all! Feelings do matter. God made us with feelings. Feelings are part of our design by our Creator. So, I am not advocating a robotic, machine-like approach to life.

It is somewhat tragic that for many, their only exposure to Jonathan Edwards, is an American Literature class in high school, where they read his sermon, "Sinners in the hands of an angry God." The sermon, by the way, is well done, but Jonathan Edwards was not a mean, bitter, angry, screaming lunatic who delighted in scaring the daylights out of people. He was in reality a very delightful, warm and gracious man. His magnus opus, is clearly his work on Religious Affections, in which he wrote, **"That religion which God requires, and will accept does not consist in weak, dull, and lifeless wishes, raising us but a little above a state of indifference."**¹ Romans 12.11 says, "Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord." The next verse says, "Rejoice in hope!" How is that for emotion? He goes on to point out that fear, hope, love, hatred, desire, joy, sorrow, gratitude, compassion and zeal are all affections (or emotions) that are presented in the Scriptures as being part of the life of a believer with God.

Think of this: In John 11, Jesus is informed that his friend Lazarus is sick. Jesus delays in going to see him and meanwhile, Lazarus dies. At that moment, the disciples do not know it, but Jesus does and informs them that he is going there to wake him up. Christ clearly knows what has happened and what is going to happen and how all of this will be a powerful statement of His deity, power and hope for his followers beyond the grave. The scene is all set. The mourners are there, Mary and Martha are still traumatized by the loss of their brother, and here comes our hero – Jesus. What does he do? Mary tells him, that if he had been there sooner, Lazarus would not have died. Based on the ministry of Christ – that is a logical conclusion for Mary to have. So, what does Christ do? He says, "Mary, relax. Quit getting so stressed out, because I could have gotten here earlier and healed Lazarus with your average, run-of-the-mill, garden-variety healing that I have performed for so many of others, but I have something special in store for you guys – what till you see this! This is going to blow you away! He does not do that at all – does He? In fact, He weeps! He weeps! He knows that in a moment, He is going raise this guy from the dead and yet He weeps! Please do not miss this! The deity of Christ did not hinder him from fully experience our humanity, complete with emotions.

Emotions are important, however, I am simply pointing out the serious danger of making our feelings the final word. Brothers and sisters, here is the heart of the problem: When I trust my feelings instead of God's Word, I am placing myself over God. On Sunday mornings, there is a reason why I ask you to stand for the reading of the Word, and it is not because I want to give you one final stretch before you settle in for a long sermon. I want you to know that we all stand under the authority of the Word. If we focus on the truth, our feelings and what Jonathan Edwards calls affections, will follow. But, if we do not challenge the authority of our feelings and if we allow them to determine truth and error, then we can expect our lives to be a roller coaster existence.

¹ Jonathan Edwards, Religious Affections, p. 27

When considering these foundational matters of God, Sin, revelation, Christ, and the gospel, the question that you need to consistently ask yourself is NOT – What do I feel about this? **The question is – Do I believe it?** There are days in which I do not feel saved! That does not mean that I am not saved.

We have some neighbors who are wintering in the south and we are watching their home. Last week, the battery providing back-up power for their sump pump went bad (so I thought). I replaced the battery. Then I found out that the actual pump was not working. The circuit breaker had tripped, which meant that the recharger was not recharging the battery and the battery had given out trying to keep the water level down. So, I replaced the sump pump and everything was fine – so I thought. Thursday morning, I checked on everything and discovered there were leaks in the pvc connections, which had not been there before and these leaks allowed water and the silt on the bottom of the sump pump to get sprayed all over that section of the basement. I found that out the hard way, looking into the well when it went off and got it right in the face! This is so frustrating for me, because it is so typical. I try to fix things, I really do. And there are moments when I am actually tempted to believe it when Home Depot says, “You can fix it, we can help!” It is the same sort of faith that we have at the beginning of the 4th quarter of a Lions game, maybe, maybe this time, they will hang on – only to be mocked. Thursday night, I reconnected the pipes, turned on the pump, only to find out that the water level was not going down. Is it frozen? This is my neighbor’s house. I’m feeling a little panicky now. This is not good! This is when self-pity likes to come in. Hey, I am doing this out of the kindness of my heart. I don’t need this problem right now. And I don’t know what is going on, and I don’t want to call him and get him all concerned. I just want to fix it and clean up the mess. I have images of my neighbor’s basement floating in about 3 feet of water, and we are going on vacation ourselves on Monday – you know the feeling. And maybe God wanted me to have a really fresh illustration for this message, but I am thinking, God – there has to be an easier way than this.

We are all tempted to allow subjective emotions and changing circumstances to determine our attitude and view of ourselves. When we do, we get things out of whack. Emotions matter, they are just not the final authority. Circumstances are the settings in which our lives are lived. Of course they matter. But circumstances themselves are not the basis upon which we live. Even more personal matters of our own health and relational concerns affect us deeply, but are not in and of themselves the final judge on what is right and wrong, or true or false for us. God’s Word is. The question is not, how do I feel? Or how do I feel about my life right now, but do I believe it? Doctors need to know how you are feeling. Their job is to treat your body and help address its problems. But, this body is wasting away. I expect to have problems with this body. I expect things to break down since we live in a sin-cursed world.

Since the gospel as it is revealed really is the foundation for our lives. And the question we need to ask ourselves is – “Do I believe it?” The next step is to identify, what are the truths that I need to believe?

Truth #1 – God, in order to show the glory of Himself, loves me with an everlasting love.

How do I know that I am loved by God, when my body is so full of the poison of chemotherapy fighting against the enemy of cancer in the battlefield of my body, and I can't get warm, and my hair is coming out in clumps, and I am relentlessly nauseous? How do I know that I am loved by God, when I am sitting in a dank Roman prison, abandoned by friends and hearing reports that people I brought to Christ have turned on me? How do I know that I am loved by God, when the people I am trying to be Christ to, mock me and seek to crush my spirit with their bitter words?

CJ makes a very good point at the beginning of the 3rd chapter. He talks about the impact that the movie, the Passion of Christ had on people. People were moved emotionally. People left the theaters in silence, or were moved to tears. But, the profound sense of shock and repulsion at the level of brutality of a crucifixion is not the heart of the gospel. Images move us and affect us. But the gospel is more than that. The gospel is content. It is objective truth about the God of the Universe who died for his own creation. Why? Why? Why did He die?

Romans 3.21-26

There are many benefits of the death of Christ. But the benefits of the cross should not be confused with the very purpose of it. This text makes it clear that Christ died so that God could be both just (fair) and the justifier (gracious). In the coming weeks, we will address the just and fair part. Tonight, I want you to set your mind on the truth, that Christ died on the cross in order to set forth before the universe, that God loves you (!). No stronger statement could ever be made. (Romans 5.8) He, who had nothing to gain, gave up everything for us who had nothing to give. It is inherent to the very character of God Himself to be a God of love. God is love. God is committed to setting his own character on display so that it is seen and so in seeing it, people find more and more reasons to worship Him, and trust Him and obey Him.

Behind the cross was the decision of the Father, to treat His Son as you and I deserved to be treated. God made a trade. God made an exchange. He traded the life of His Son, for your life, and took His death in place of yours. He would have been just in taking your death as the consequence of your sin. He could send the entire world to hell and be perfectly just and not compromise His character in any way. He provided a perfect environment, with clear instructions on what to do and not do, and our human race blew it! We chose to rebel against God's Infinite Word which was a reflection of God's infinitely holy and righteous standard and because God's Infinite Word was broken, God's infinite punishment had to be levied. But finite persons cannot satisfy an infinite debt. So, the infinite God Himself, died in order to satisfy the infinite debt, so that God would not in any way compromise His own justice. And with his justice satisfied, God is free to make it eternally clear, that He is not just a God of justice, He is also a God of Love and Grace and Mercy. God demonstrates his own love for us in this: He keeps me from getting the flu? He makes my neighbor's sump pump work? He keeps anything

bad from happening to my kids? NO, NO, NO, God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us!

Jesus, Loves Me, this I know! For the Bible tells me so!

“The cross is the heart of the gospel; it makes the gospel good news. Christ died for us; He has stood in our place before God’s judgment seat; He has borne our sins. God has done something on the cross which we could never do for ourselves. But God does something to us as well as for us through the cross. He persuades us that He loves us.”²

In this book you get a little insight into the life and personality of CJ Mahaney. Cathi and I met him and Bob Kaughlin several years ago in Atlanta. I was attending a conference on theology and Mark Dever, grabbed me and said, I want you to meet a pastor who believes in the doctrines of grace and believes in the gift of tongues and then he grabbed CJ and said, I want you to meet a pastor who believes in the doctrines of grace and thinks you are wrong about the tongues thing. “Ok, Bob, show him that he is wrong.”

I had never heard of him before, but instantly we were kindred spirits, no doubt. That night, Oct. 22, after the evening session, we talked for a long, long time, so long, that by the time Cathi and I walked to the restaurant that I had picked out to have our wedding anniversary dinner – it had closed. But that is another story.

CJ is intense. He could easily allow emotions to rule the day, but he knows as we should that there is something that is more important – the gospel.

² Sinclair Ferguson, *Grow in Grace*, Nav Press, 1984, p. 75-76.