

Anointed Affections
**An Examination of the Emotional Life of Christ and
its Implications through the Lens of the Psalms**
by **Cary Smith**

Introduction

“It belongs to the truth of our Lord’s humanity that he was subject to all sinless human emotions.”¹ So began B.B. Warfield in what remains one of the only scholarly treatments of the emotional life of Jesus Christ. Warfield then laid out his strategy for investigation: “We may thus, without serious danger of confusion, go simply to the Evangelical narrative [predominantly the Synoptic Gospels], and, passing in review the definite ascriptions of specific emotions to Jesus in its records, found on them a conception of his emotional life which may serve as a starting-point for a study of the aspect of our Lord’s human manifestation.”² This paper, in turn, aims to progress past Warfield’s “starting-point” by examining the emotional life of Christ as it is portrayed throughout the Psalmody.

We will begin by establishing a working definition of “affections.” We will then pursue brief discourses on why the Psalms have taken the central role for our study, and how our texts were chosen. A very limited survey of specific passages will follow, in which we will examine Christological emotions under the broad categories of lament and praise. Our study will conclude with a discussion of anthropological implications.

Toward A Definition of Affections

Affections are as difficult to define as they are to describe. If we are to pursue the present study, however, the reader must understand the conception of human affections that is adopted in this paper. At this point, Jonathan Edwards may be of help. In his watershed treatise concerning the place of human emotions in the life of every Christian, he used the following formula: “The affections are no other than the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul.”³ Edwards understood the human mind to possess two basic faculties – discernment and inclination. The former describes the logical capacities and categories of the mind. The latter encompasses all inner desires that drive the human will. For Edwards, these inclinations included “love, desire, hope, joy, gratitude, complacency...hatred, fear, anger and grief.”⁴

Edward’s perspective coalesces well with the lexical nuance of related terms that are used in this paper. The words inclination, emotion, affection and disposition all

derive from etymological ancestors that relate to motion. These words will be used interchangeably to refer to those things within our human make-up that move inside us to drive us in various directions as we respond to circumstances of life – those inner-workings that give us a certain bent or sway.

The reader may object along the way that certain categories to be named are not mere emotions. How often has one heard that love is not an emotion, but a commitment? To be sure, but true love always contains an emotional aspect to it; so will all categories that we examine. In addition, we will not only handle explicit *expressions of emotion* in the Psalms, but will discuss *emotional expressions* as well. The phrase, “Honey, I would give my life to protect you!” is not properly an expression of any particular emotion, but the phrase is pregnant with emotive significance nonetheless. Likewise, several of the Christological expressions examined in this paper, though not themselves discrete emotional categories, will be used to illustrate Christ’s emotional life.

Why the Psalms?

Our discussion centers on the Sacred Psalter for two primary reasons. First, the Psalms contain remarkable divine revelation concerning human emotions. Second, they provide significant Christological material.

Revelation of Human Emotions. “I have been accustomed to call this book,” said Calvin in reference to the Psalms, “An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul.”⁵ The Psalms reveal humanity in all of its diversity. The history of the Church testifies to the central role that the Psalms have played in the hearts of God’s people, largely because of the piercing reality portrayed as the authors divulge the inner-workings of their hearts. “In this Book, we have a mirror which reflects every aspect of true Christian experience.”⁶ With regard to depth and diversity, no section of Scripture surpasses the Psalms’ depiction of religious emotional life.

Revelation of Christ. Any cursory reading of the New Testament will confirm that the Psalms have much to say regarding the Lord Jesus. Payne commented that the abundance of messianic verses⁷ found in the Psalms provides “the greatest single block of predictive matter concerning the Savior to be found anywhere in the Old Testament.”⁸ If Christ be considered the subject of any substantial number of Psalms or portions thereof, then, in light of the last paragraph, they become to us a well of revelation concerning the nature of His emotional life.

For clarification, we should make explicit that messianic revelation such as we find in the Psalter never merely conveys truth regarding the Son of God as the eternal, Second Person of the Trinity, but also always reveals aspects of Christ in his humanity. The Christ of the Psalmody is the messianic Christ – the anointed mediator to come. And Christ portrayed as mediator is Christ portrayed as man (1 Tim. 2:5), for His human nature is essentially tied to His redemptive office. This bears significance in light of questions surrounding the doctrine of divine impassibility. We somewhat circumvent that debate because the Psalms point to the redemptive historical human experience of the divine Person of Christ. According to Warfield, interestingly, Augustine took impassibility so far as to say that even the Lord’s human emotions were a “show” of

sorts, but Calvin and the rest of the Reformed tradition have dissented here. And even though most Reformers have viewed the eternal nature of God as apathetic (in the proper sense), we need not take them on (at least not now), since we are concerned with revelation portraying the Son of God in His messianic (and therefore divine-human) role.

Lastly, the Psalms as windows into Christological affections are (to the knowledge of the present author) completely unexplored. This provides a challenge to research, but an increased motivation that the work may broaden current theological horizons in the area.

Which Psalms?

One does not pursue an exploration of Psalter Christology long before the question arises, “Which Psalms testify of Christ?” The ancient Fathers responded, “Which Psalms do not testify of Christ?” Augustine, in that tradition, referred to the Lord Jesus as *iste cantator psalmodum*, “He, the singer of the psalms.”⁹ The more contemporary conservative tradition has undergone its investigation, well, a little more conservatively. The question of Christ in the Psalms has been pursued largely within the framework of Messianism. The question for evangelicals becomes, then, “Which Psalms are messianic and which are not?” Unfortunately, few have similar messianic groupings (and often quite diverse hermeneutical guidelines for reaching their varying conclusions). The critical schools have, for the most part, critiqued messianic investigation, as seen in Gillingham, “I believe it is difficult to propose that any Messianic interpretation was intended, both in the earliest stages of the composition of individual psalms and in the later stages of the assembling of the Psalter as a whole.”¹⁰ The critics, then, ask, “Why is anybody looking for Christ [or any Messiah figure] in the Psalms?” Instead, the currently *en vogue* efforts of liberals attempt to delineate “royal psalms” and “sacral kingship in the Psalms.” Unfortunately, few have similar kingly groupings, from which we might glean some insight.

Our present attempt to select a pool of Christological references, on the other hand, began with a fundamental presupposition – that all the Scriptures (including the Psalms) testify of Christ in some sense. Jesus admonished the Pharisees, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify of Me.” (John 5:39) He explained, as well, on the road to Emmaus “the things concerning Himself in *all* the Scriptures.” (Luke 24:27, emphasis mine) And most specifically related to our current discussion, he told his disciples just prior to his ascension, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets *and the Psalms* must be fulfilled.” (Luke 24:44, emphasis mine) We agree with Riehm that, “The decree of God, fixed before the foundation of the world, that Christ should assume the central position of sole mediator...implied that all prophecies, proceeding from whatsoever different starting-points, should from the first point towards him, should converge towards him as rays of light to their focal point, and find in and through him their unified fulfillment.”¹¹

Though many parameters need to be established to correctly guide this presupposition in general exegesis, our study primarily drew from the following two interpretive principles, both of which bear special significance in the Psalter. First, we can interpret the office of king (and many ancient persons residing in that office) according to the same typological perspective that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews employs as he exegetes Pentateuchal texts concerning the ancient priesthood. (Heb. 7:1-16, 9:15-10:1, etc.). The royal office from which the term *meshiach* derived its technical use was established to reflect redemptive historical truths concerning the only true Anointed One and His work. And we should thus expect the royal line of David to reflect similar truths as it is considered in the Psalms. Thus we would consider all Psalms that deal with David's line as messianic *in some sense*, and potential sources for insight.

Second, we can explore the full messianic implications of passages that explicitly reflect on the eschatological (or otherwise "ideal") kingly Deliverer (especially those passages cited as such in the New Testament). Given limited space (and limited experience!), the results of this paper stemmed largely from this second principle. Along with Van Groningen, then, we view revelation in the Psalms as both historical and progressive ("organic" is often the preferred term), bearing a full meaning to the original audience that blossomed as its greater significance in history became unveiled.¹²

Examination of Scripture

Our examination of texts falls into two categories, according to which Westermann categorizes the entire Psalter – Praise and Lamentation.¹³ Westermann views praise as encompassing all positive responses to God's providence, and lamentation as indicative of all pleas concerning the difficulties of common evils. To say it simply, we will divide the emotional responses of Christ in the Psalms into negative and positive groups, respectively.¹⁴

1) Lament

As a result of entering a fallen created order, the Westminster Confession Faith testifies, Christ "endured most grievous torments immediately in His soul...." (WCF 8.4) The soul-struggles of the psalmists often foreshadow this reality.

Pathos of Zeal and Reproach. In college, I had lunch with a young man who told me that the Temple-clearing episode recorded in John 2 caused him to doubt the deity of Christ because Jesus displayed there such anger and violence. My fellow student did not understand that the Lord's indignation actually proved his divine righteousness all-the-more. As Warfield noted, "The moral sense is not a mere faculty of discrimination between the qualities which we call right and wrong.... It would be impossible, therefore, for a moral being to stand in the presence of perceived wrong indifferent and unmoved."¹⁵ Jesus was anything but "unmoved," and the testimony of the Psalms helps us to understand what moved him to his greatest recorded display of holy anger.

Psalm 69:7-10 reads:

⁷ ...for Your sake I have borne reproach; Dishonor has covered my face.

⁸ I have become estranged from my brothers And an alien to my mother's sons.

⁹ For zeal for Your house has consumed me, And the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.

¹⁰ When I wept in my soul with fasting, It became my reproach.

Christ understood Himself as the ultimate fulfillment of this Psalm (John 2:17) and publicly pronounced this association in the midst of His clearing the Temple. Zeal for the Lord (as represented by his zeal for the Temple) brought “reproach” (*cherpah*) upon the psalmist (and upon Christ of whom he was a type). The reproach that God receives from wicked men becomes the full possession of the righteous (and, in our case, the Righteous). In fact, it is zeal for righteousness that brings about the psalmist’s reproach, which became Christ’s reproach both in the Temple-clearing and throughout His life. None tainted by sin can comprehend the incongruity between One who “hates wickedness” without qualification (Psalm 45:7) existing in a world-order that wickedly hates the righteous. Not only did Christ suffer the agony of living among men who hated His Father, but by His own zeal for the Father provoked them to hate Him with the same fervor. (v. 9b) This psalm speaks both of Christ’s loathing toward those who revile God and of the fact that they revile Him who loves God.

Pathos of Compassion. “Psalm 72 has been considered the outstanding messianic royal psalm.”¹⁶ The psalm portrays the Regal Office-holder in ideal and eschatological terms, according to which we attribute the ultimate significance to Christ who is in all the Old Testament the Ideal King to come.

Verses 12-14 read:

¹² For he will deliver the needy when he cries for help, The afflicted also, and him who has no helper.

¹³ He will have compassion on the poor and needy, And the lives of the needy he will save.

¹⁴ He will rescue their life from oppression and violence, And their blood will be precious in his sight...

Though such a portrayal might seem to fit better with the positive affections, we have designated it here because it represents the messianic response to the suffering of the weak. It highlights the fact that the messianic emotions in the Psalms are often aroused by the disparity between the way things should be and the way that they are. The nature of messianic dispositions, here, runs contrary to the structures of fallen societies that not only produce, but then neglect the poor, afflicted, needy and oppressed. The One who will “crush the oppressor” (v. 4) is the same One who delivers, has compassion, saves and rescues, and to whom the very blood of the oppressed is precious – a fitting description for One who would eventually be anointed “to preach good news to the poor...to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed....” (Luke 4:18)

Before the concluding section of laments, we should comment that Christ may be properly viewed in some sense as the ideal Expresser of all the negative emotive language in the psalms, excepting one category – that of contrition. The Lord does not say with David, “Against You, You only have I sinned.” (Psalm 51:4) Does this somehow hinder His ability to relate to us at the emotional level, since sorrow for sin is at the heart of so much of our experience? Certainly not, for Christ is the ideal Expresser of a much deeper and darker disposition, to which we now turn.

Pathos of Dereliction. Certainly no one would deny that Jesus was acquainted with grief. Isaiah named him a “man of sorrows.” Psalm 22, however, gives us insight into the nature of his grief. The apex of despair in the life of the psalmist, in our own life, and in the life of our Lord is experienced in complete and utter abandonment.

Psalm 22 has been called the “Psalm of the Cross,” for it not only possesses parallel language and ideas found in the crucifixion account, but several portions are variously cited in the Gospel Narratives. We will consider the follow group of verses:

¹ My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning.

² O my God, I cry by day, but You do not answer; And by night, but I have no rest.

⁶ But I am a worm and not a man, A reproach of men and despised by the people.

⁷ All who see me sneer at me; They separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying,

¹⁴ I am poured out like water, And all my bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It is melted within me.

¹⁵ My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And my tongue cleaves to my jaws; And You lay me in the dust of death.

¹⁶ For dogs have surrounded me; A band of evildoers has encompassed me; They pierced my hands and my feet.

¹⁷ I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me;

¹⁸ They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots.

How can one possibly elaborate on such a description of the life and soul of a man who lacks the saving, acting presence of God? In contrast, the Gospel crucifixion accounts seem like a skeleton requiring the flesh and blood of this psalm to engage us in a “Passion narrative” seen from the inside-out. The language is astonishing, and yet what human psalmist (despite whatever circumstances he either experienced or contemplated) could obtain but a glimpse of what actually took place when the ultimate Referent “became sin for us”? (1 Cor. 5:21) May no one belittle the Savior by claiming that He cannot understand their pain. The significant truth is not that Christ remains existentially unaware of the sorrows stemming from our constant contrition; but rather that we remain unaware of the sorrows that stemmed from His complete dereliction.

1) Praise

Pathos of Anticipation. And despite the oppressive weight of anxious abandonment, still Psalm 22 exudes steadfast hope dispersed throughout its pitiful pleas. It therefore serves as our hinge between reflections on lament and praise. Consider the following:

⁴ In You our fathers trusted; They trusted and You delivered them.

⁵ To You they cried out and were delivered; In You they trusted and were not disappointed.

²³ But You, O LORD, be not far off; O You my help, hasten to my assistance.

²⁴ For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; Nor has He hidden His face from him; But when he cried to Him for help, He heard.

We cannot speculate as to how this type of hope manifested itself throughout Christ's sufferings, but it does not seem too presumptuous to assert that similar sentiments sustained him when desperation would have broken any other human will. This psalm portrays the perseverance of godly, unyielding hope in the midst of greatest crisis. But the Psalms portray the messiah as possessing another category of hope as well.

Peter quotes Psalm 16:8-10 in his Pentecost sermon:

⁸ I have set the LORD continually before me; Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

⁹ Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will dwell securely.

¹⁰ For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.

Peter attributes these words to Christ, and in so doing, reveals to us the foundation of the stability displayed in Psalm 22 – an *a priori*, messianic hope that He would not see the deterioration of His body. And not only did this general trust support him, but also a very specific resolve as evidenced in Psalm 40:8, “I delight to do Your will, O my God,” which the author of Hebrews interprets as a messianic intention (in some sense at least) to replace Levitical sacrifice with his own body (Hebrews 10:5-7). The Psalms reveal therefore a Christ who both anticipated His own everlasting life (Psalm 16:10), and at the same time delighted to obey the Father's will to His own earthly demise (Psalm 40:8). Just as messianic righteousness in Psalm 69 led to derision in the world (discussed above), so this same righteous volition led to the voluntary sacrifice of His own life. These related passages testify to the passion and firm resolve that Christ manifested to perform God's will in hope that though it might cost dearly, it would not cost indefinitely. “We must bear in mind that our Lord did not come into the world to be broken by the power of sin and death, but to break it.”¹⁷

Pathos of Joy. Psalm 16, which we already established as being applied to Christ by Peter, leads us into the messianic expression of joy, particularly joy in God, and most specifically in God's abiding presence (fascinating contrast with the messianic dereliction in Psalm 22). The psalmist cries that the Lord is "before him," "even at his right hand." He confesses that this brings gladness and joy and then the psalm climaxes with the exuberant affirmation, "In Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever!" Psalm 21 shares the same sentiment:

Verses 1-2:

¹ O LORD, in Your strength the king will be glad, And in Your salvation how greatly he will rejoice!

² You have given him his heart's desire, And You have not withheld the request of his lips.

Few of us are familiar with a Savior that smiles. Psalms like these should reform our common (and detrimental) misconceptions.

Implications

"That religion which God requires and will accept," wrote Edwards, "does not consist in weak, dull and lifeless wouldlings, raising us but a little above a state of indifference...."¹⁸ We do well with Edwards to examine the state of our "religious affections." "When we compare our own emotional lives to [Christ's], we become aware of our need for a transformation of our emotions so that we can be fully human, as he is."¹⁹ But do we have support to make significant Christologically-based applications from the Psalms?

The apostle Paul does us a tremendous favor as we seek to understand ourselves amid the messianic affections of the Psalms. He challenges the Roman Christians to edify one another by reminding them that "even Christ did not please Himself, but as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on me.'" (Rom. 15:3, Psalm 69:9) As is often the case for Paul, Christ becomes a tangible picture of God's law for the believer, so that righteousness is found in imitating His character. Taking our lead from Paul, we may assume that the emotions of Christ call for imitation as well. Not only this, but Paul even provides his *Christological* example of righteousness from the Psalter! How much more confidently, then, may we seek to complete a proper perception of the Lord (including His emotive faculties) by examining the Psalms ourselves. And not only this, but Paul adds to his admonition a general hermeneutical principle to support the poetic quotation, "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." (v. 4) We do not have time to unpack all that lies therein, but suffice it that apostolic authority encourages our Christological investigation into the Old Testament hymnbook.

We looked first at Christ's emotional struggle as a reproach, and (especially in light of Paul's comments above) we should expect the same emotional challenges. Added to this is the assurance that we will somehow share in Christ's sufferings, even

filling up that which is lacking (1 Pet. 4:13, Col. 1:24). Suffering always involves a significant emotional component. We both look to His example of bearing reproach, and take refuge in His empathy. We seek as well to maintain the same zeal for righteousness though it often be to our own detriment in human terms. Many churches need the fire of righteous indignation to refine their stagnant waters. Next, we examined the messianic response to the wicked realities of the fallen world order. Our hearts must follow His in compassion specifically, but must also seek a universal antithesis against the inclinations of the unbelieving world to oppress the weak of every sort. Finally, our eyes fell upon the dereliction of Christ, which assures us that the depth of human sorrow is known fully to the Lord.

The emotional struggles of Christ, however, provide much more than examples to follow and assurance of his understanding. We agree with Allen's comment, "[The Psalms] speak of Y'shua's entire life; but *[they] are particularly the libretto of his passion and his triumph over death.*"²⁰ (emphasis his) When Jesus Himself taught from the Old Testament, He spoke primarily of His suffering and resurrection, that is, He drew out the chief redemptive historical themes – "Thus it is written [in the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms] that the Christ would suffer and rise again...." (Luke 24:46) We do not study Christ in abstraction but only in light of His eschatological work, on which all the Scriptures focus. We see Him suffer in the Psalms chiefly as Savior (and we see Him rejoice in the Psalms chiefly as triumphant Victor). This paradigm leads us to focus our application of the Savior's laments on the redemptive historical reality that "for our sake he became poor that we through his poverty might become rich." (2 Cor. 8:9) Reproach and sorrow of unthinkable measure were borne by him, that we might live in everlasting affection and joy. We approach our emotional struggles during this already/not yet period in that light, so that what should break us, merely increases our longing and hope.

We looked as well at the positive aspects of Christological emotions in the Psalms. We saw the anticipation of Christ that surrounded and pervaded His redemptive work, and that calls the Church to perseverance and eager expectation of final deliverance. And to joy, at last, we turned, seeing that Christ relished in the presence of God and, more specifically, rejoiced in the salvation that God's presence brought (and that brought God's presence). As above, these realities for us are redemptive historically conditioned, so that we follow them in light of the fact that "salvation [through and toward God's presence in which is our hope and joy] is nearer now than when we first believed" (Rom. 13:11) in one sense and is utterly complete in another. (Rom. 10:10)

We began our study with Warfield's quote that Jesus "was subject to all sinless human emotions," but in closing, we must note that He not only was, but is and ever will be subject to human emotions. The Lord lives in perpetual humanity to physically reign on the throne of David over God's people forever. Concerning the Book of Psalms, one has noted, "It was the religious hymn book of the nation, in which they mingled their hearts and voices in the expression of religious emotions common to them all."²¹ But in glory, we will not merely mingle our hearts and voices with each other to express the affections of our religion, but with Him as well who is now common with us. He will

eternally rejoice, probably singing the Psalms, which will continue to express the fullness of His anointed affections.

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Endnotes:

¹ B.B. Warfield, *The Person of Christ*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: P & R Publishing, 1950), 93.

² *Ibid.*, 96.

³ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 96.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries* Vol. 1, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 37.

⁶ Murdoch Campbell, *From Grace to Glory* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1970), 5.

⁷ We will deal with the question of determining the nature of messianic references in the following section.

⁸ J.B. Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 257.

⁹ Ronald B. Allen, *Lord of Song* (Portland: Multnomah, 1978), 11.

¹⁰ S.E. Gillingham, "The Messiah in the Psalms" in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. John Day (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 209.

¹¹ Edward Riehm, *Messianic Prophecy* trans. Lewis A. Muirhead (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1891), 297.

¹² Gerard Van Groningen, *Messianic Revelation in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 63.

¹³ See introduction of Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* trans. Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1946).

¹⁴ We should note here that the affections described below are but a speck in the cavern of those yet to be mined.

¹⁵ Warfield, 107.

¹⁶ Van Groningen, 379.

¹⁷ Warfield, 123.

¹⁸ Edwards, 99.

¹⁹ G. W. Hansen, "The Emotions of Jesus," *Christianity Today*, 41:2 February 1997, 43.

²⁰ Allen, 38.

²¹ Edward Mack, *The Christ of the Old Testament* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1926), 78.