

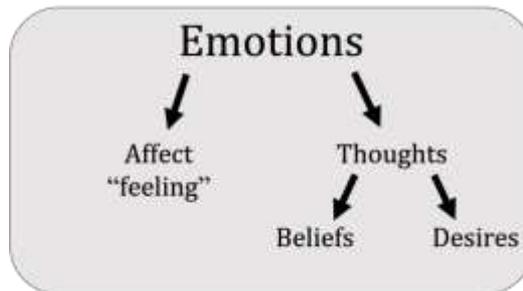
Feeling Our Way Towards God

Study Guide

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Lecture 2: Shame or Contrition?

Video 5: Emotions and Thoughts



Object of the Emotion: what the emotion is about

- in philosophy, this is called the “intentional object”
- emotions are generally about something
 - o anger is about the person I’m angry at
 - o sadness is about the misfortune that happened to me
 - o joy is about the good thing that happened
- the object of shame:
 - o THE SELF
- the object of contrition:
 - o WRONGFUL ACT
 - o GOD’S MERCY

Beliefs: things I hold to be true

- examples:
 - o My name is Eric.
 - o I’m an American.
 - o The sky is blue
 - o There is a God.
- Beliefs are **justified** if
 - o we have adequate evidence supporting them
 - o My belief that the sky is blue is justified because every time I look at the sky, I see blue. Everyone who sees colours says the sky is blue.
- Beliefs are **true** if
 - o the beliefs correspond to how the world really is
 - this is much higher bar than justification!
 - o My belief that my name is Eric is true, if my name is Eric. My belief that my name is John is false, if my name is in fact Eric.
- Beliefs are justified/unjustified, true/false
 - o this distinction is important because
 - we can’t always prove that our beliefs are true/false

- sometimes justification is the best we can do
 - examples:
 - fear of God
 - Can I prove that God is dangerous or not dangerous?
 - maybe not, but I can justify my belief by pointing to scripture, spiritual writers, the lives of holy women/men, my own experience...
 - Self-love
 - Can I prove that I am (un)lovable?
 - maybe, maybe not, but I can justify my belief in my own lovability by pointing to what people have told me, how I view myself, etc.
- Beliefs involved in **shame** (*note: I'm using the word "shame" in a particular way, the way that it is currently used in colloquial English*):
 - I'm unlovable, inadequate, stupid, weird, broken and unfixable, worthless, fat, ugly...
- Beliefs involved in **contrition**:
 - I've done something bad, I'm a sinner, God can forgive me...

Desires: what we hope to achieve

- examples:
 - I want to eat.
 - I want to FaceTime with so-and-so.
 - I want to be a better person.
- Desires are rational or fitting if
 - they can achieve their goal
 - My desire to FaceTime with David Copperfield is rational if
 - David Copperfield is a real, living person,
 - I have an iPhone,
 - David has an iPhone,
 - David and I are on speaking terms, etc.
 - So my desire to FaceTime with David Copperfield (Martin Luther King Jr, Mother Theresa...) is not rational.
- Desires involved with **shame**:
 - I want to hide myself or a significant part of myself.
- Desires involved with **contrition**:
 - I want to make amends, try harder in the future, be a better person, fix my relationship with so-and-so

Does this emotion make sense? It is helpful? Is this emotion a good emotion for me to have?

Emotions may be appropriate or inappropriate.

- An emotion is generally appropriate if
 - the beliefs that the emotion involves are justified/true and
 - the desires that the emotion involves are rational/fitting
- ex., **shame**:
 - Is my belief that I'm unlovable justified/true?
 - Does my desire to hide myself achieve the goal of lessening my misery or of helping me to heal?
- ex., **contrition**:

- Did I really do something wrong? How do I justify this belief? With scripture, societal norms, personal values...?
- Does my desire to make amends better the situation?
- **Context Matters!**
 - the appropriateness of many emotions depends on context

Caution!

- We don't always know if an emotion is appropriate because
 - we can't always justify beliefs
 - we're not always in a position to know if our desires are rational
 - often, some of the beliefs and desires that an emotion involves are okay and others are not—so informed judgment may be the best we can do
- Knowing whether an emotion is appropriate or not may not be enough to change or get rid of the emotion
 - beliefs and desires can be deeply rooted

Speaking Practically...

Questions to Consider

- 1) Think back to emotions you have experienced recently. Do you recognize the beliefs and desires that your emotions involve? Can you list them?
- 2) Are you able to discern whether the beliefs and desires these emotions involve are justified/rational?
- 3) Are you able to discern when your emotions are appropriate to a given situation?
- 4) Have you noticed that some emotional responses are helpful and others are not? How do you account for this?

Video 6: Shame

Why are we talking about shame?

- We are living in a shame culture.
 - online shaming
 - shaming of political and religious leaders
 - shaming of certain groups because of their ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation...
- Many individuals today experience deep personal shame.
 - depression, suicide, and addiction rates are very high
 - we live in a perfectionistic culture
 - perfect looks
 - perfect job
 - perfect school
 - perfect relationships
 - perfect social-media profiles
 - many psychologists have called the levels of shame in our society a mental-health epidemic
- But how often do we hear shame preached about or talked about in religious education or other church-related contexts?
- Doesn't the Gospel have something to tell us about shame?

Something to keep in mind...

- I'm using a particular definition of shame: **shame is self-directed hatred, disgust, loathing, rejection**
 - o this is how the word "shame" is most often used today in English
- There are other uses of this word
 - o St. Ignatius of Loyola uses the word to mean something like unworthiness
 - o Pope Francis uses the word to mean heartfelt contrition
 - o These uses are entirely legitimate, but these uses are a bit different from the colloquial meaning of "shame" in today's English-speaking culture in the UK and in the States.
- The definition of emotions as well as their corresponding beliefs and desires vary from culture to culture and even from individual to individual. So before jumping to conclusions about what a person means by shame, anger, fear, love, etc., we have to understand the beliefs and desires that that person associates with a particular emotion.

Let's start at the beginning...**Adam and Eve**



Elizabeth Fyfe
Adam and Eve Hiding

I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.
(Gen 3:10)

What does shame involve?

- **Object of Shame**
 - o oneself or a significant part of oneself
 - appearance
 - race
 - gender identity
 - sexual orientation
 - physical or mental abilities

- ...
- Common **Beliefs** Associated with **Shame**
 - I'm worthless.
 - I'm unlovable.
 - I'm broken and unfixable.
 - I'm a nuisance.
 - I'm a bad person.
 - I'm disgusting.
 - I'm weird.
 - I'm unacceptable.
 - I'm inadequate.
- Common **Desire** Associated with **Shame**
 - I want **to hide** myself or a significant part of myself
 - Hiding can take many forms
 - avoiding social interactions
 - alcohol and drugs
 - suicide
 - creating a façade, a perfect self
 - smiling when I'm miserable
 - spending more than I can afford on clothing, grooming, and self-presentation generally
 - pretending like my life is in order when it's actually a mess
 - ignoring significant problems in my life
 - *people will accept me as long as I don't show them my brokenness, vulnerability, weakness...*
 - achievement
 - academic, sports, career success...
 - *if everyone sees what an amazing worker (athlete, business person, musician, Christian...) I am, they won't see the rot underneath.*
- Is **Shame** ever **Appropriate**?
 - Beliefs: Are people really worthless (unlovable, inadequate, broken and unfixable)?
 - Desires: Does hiding help to escape the bad feelings and to heal the shame?
 - Caution!
 - The beliefs and desires that shame involves tend to be deeply rooted. They can be difficult to get rid of.
 - It's very difficult to convince someone who feels deep shame (or ourselves) that they are entirely lovable, worthwhile, adequate.

How Do We Get Past Shame?

- Psychologists tend to agree that getting past shame requires that we allow ourselves to be seen.
- **Being Seen by God**
 - Here is a prayer from the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola that I have found personally helpful:

“A step or two before the place where I have to contemplate or meditate, I will put myself standing for the space of an Our Father, my intellect raised on high, considering how God our Lord is looking at me, etc.; and will make an act of reverence or humility.”

-Spiritual Exercises

- In other words, just imagine God or Jesus looking at you and approving, finding you adequate and acceptable, rejoicing to be with you.
- This prayer can be done for “the space of an Our Father,” for 5 minutes, 15 minutes, or a whole hour.
- This poem was recommended to me by one of the Living Theology participants and might be helpful for praying about God looking at us.

Let Your God Love You

Edwina Gateley

Be silent.	God loves you
Be still.	With an enormous love,
Alone.	And only wants
Empty	To look upon you
Before your God.	With that love.
Say nothing.	Quiet.
Ask nothing.	Still.
Be silent.	Be.
Be still.	
Let your God look upon you.	Let your God—
That is all.	Love you.
God knows.	
God understands.	

- **Being Seen by Others**

- intimate friends
- close family members
- therapists
- mentors/spiritual directors

Speaking Practically...

Questions to Consider

- 1) Do you ever hide yourself or significant parts of yourself in prayer? If so, which parts of yourself do you try to hide from God?
- 2) Are you able to imagine God/Jesus looking at you and seeing you as worthwhile, acceptable, adequate?
- 3) What beliefs might you hold about yourself that might make it difficult for you to imagine yourself in God’s presence? Do you think God thinks about you in these ways?

Here are a couple of books on shame that I particularly enjoyed. They're very engaging and by mental health professionals who take faith seriously. I personally found these books insightful and inspiring.

Bradshaw, John. 2005. *Healing the Shame that Binds You*. Healthy Communications, Inc.

Thompson, Curt. 2015. *The Soul of Shame: Retelling the Stories We Believe about Ourselves*. InterVarsity Press.

Video 7: Contrition

Psalm 50/51

I like to think of this Psalm as a template for contrition.

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.

INTENTIONAL OBJECT

- my unworthiness
- my wrongdoing
- God's steadfast love and mercy

For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgment.

BELIEFS

- I'm a sinner.
- I've done wrong.
- God has the power to judge and condemn.
- This sentence would be just.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

DESIRES

- I want God to forgive me.
- I want God to forget my sins.
- I want God to restore our relationship.
- I want to be joyful.
- I want God to hide God's face from my sins

Mixed Emotions

- 2 or more emotions experienced together
- each emotion has its own intentional object
- usually one emotion attracts (positive valence) and the other repels (negative valence)
- nostalgia is the classic example
 - o nostalgia is actually two emotions

- grief
 - intentional object: a significant loss
 - valence: negative/aversive
- gratitude
 - intentional object: cherished memories
 - valence: positive/attractive

Contrition as a Mixed Emotion

EMOTION	INTENTIONAL OBJECT	VALENCE	BELIEFS	DESIRES
Hope	God's Love/Mercy	positive/ attractive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - God is Merciful - God is loving - God knows my sins - God is just - etc. 	I want God to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - forgive me - hide God's face from my sins - cleanse me - save me - restore our relationship
Remorse	Wrongful Act	negative/ aversive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What I did was wrong - I've done evil - I'm a sinner 	I want to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ask for forgiveness - make amends - restore our relationship

Final Reflection

- Contrition pushes us away from wrongdoing and into God's merciful embrace.
- Shame by contrast is only a negative emotion. It encourages us to reject something, oftentimes ourselves.
- We can think creatively about our emotions. We can allow Scripture, spiritual writings, and the example of admirable people teach us about which emotions are most helpful and how we can foster them.

Speaking Practically...

Questions to Consider

- 1) Am I able to appreciate the difference between shame and contrition? Can you name times in your life when you've felt these emotions?
- 2) Have you experienced your own wrongdoing as an occasion to jump into God's loving embrace?
- 3) Can you remember times in your life when your own failures or wrongdoing led to greater growth in your life of faith?

Some Traditional Reflections on Contrition

- “O truly necessary sin of Adam, destroyed completely by the death of Christ. O happy fault that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer.” (Easter Proclamation)
- The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)