

THE “EMOTIONAL” LIFE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST (Part 3: The Deficiency of Physicalism)

In the last two essays, I provided a thumbnail sketch of the history of the term “emotions.” Originally I planned on moving into the life of Christ with this essay, but after reflection I decided that it would be better to lay a bit more groundwork on the metaphysics of emotions in light of modern physicalism. In short, “emotions” is not a biblical term nor one that can withstand the scrutiny of four basic laws of reality, that is, realism’s undeniable four laws of reality (identity, non-contradiction, excluded middle, and sufficient reason)—all of which I will demonstrate after examining the data of Scripture and reality as such. As I noted in the previous two essays, the term “emotions” is a relatively modern term created by a reductionistic, physicalistic, positivistic view of reality as per David Hume, whose views were so physicalistic that he did not even believe he had an enduring self; he believed he “was” only a stream of consciousness. On a physicalistic view of man, he is right: there are absolutely no grounds for anything enduring in man’s physical makeup, all is in flux on a physical level.

The physicalist, the positivist, accepts nothing that is not physical (However, has he not noticed that that belief is not physical?). No man can live like this and no man has—all who have tried always end up buried under a host of absurd metaphysics. To reduce human experience to the physical-only will never work. Consider, for example, the experience of music from its two aspects: the experiential/immaterial and the physical. Physically speaking, music is nothing but temporally extended and divided sequenced mixture of air vibrations of various frequencies and amplitudes or, alternatively, mixture of atmospheric compression of wave trains of varying wavelengths and amplitudes. A physicalist/physicist can give an exact acoustical account of a piece of music, delineating its mathematical substructure in precise terms. Such a physicalist account, while useful, *is not the same* as understanding a piece of music as a musician understands it. Musicians hear and speak of melodies, harmonies and counterpoint, rhythms, themes, and their development, musical structure, dynamics, evocation, and musical meanings, phrases, cadences, dissonances, and resolution of dissonances, and much more. It is only incidentally and occasionally that they hear and speak of frequencies and amplitudes and wavelengths. Similarly, a purely physicalistic and neurological explanation of “emotions”, no matter how advanced and accurate, cannot substitute for, or compete with, an account given in terms of a person’s concern, beliefs, thoughts, perceptions, personal history, present situation, and other facts. In sum, the affections, sentiments, and passions—aka modern “emotions”—cannot be understood by or accounted for by their physiological mechanisms that are reductive and only viewed in terms of passive states/feelings produced by the body.

In the Bible and according to a full account of reality (Realism), the “emotions”—that is the affections, sentiments, and passions—are active powers of the immaterial soul. They have cognitive and virtuous value and every single one of them can be traced back to man’s non-negotiable desire for the good. This is in contrast to the physicalistic (cf., Hume, Brown, Chalmers) view that sees them as involuntary, non-cognitive states that are to be contrasted with intellectual judgments and thoughts. In fact, according to a physical view of reality, they are all reducible to physical feelings that were worked up from bodily sensations. This is not surprising especially in light of the fact that physicalists do not believe in a human will as an active power

of the soul. These non-realists actually believe that the human will really is not a power or faculty of the soul: it is but a mere feeling. No surprise since one cannot see, hear, touch, weigh, or measure an immaterial will.

The bottom line regarding the problem of “emotions” is that they have been reduced to an all-encompassing amoral category of a physicalistic order. This has encouraged all kinds of aberrant thinking and behavior regarding human nature first by non-Christians and then by Christians. To be sure, it is dangerous to move into an across-the-board approval of “emotions.” Some of the worst acts human violence, cruelty, ignorance, and fanaticism are the results of the action of emotions such as lust and anger. Moreover, some of the worst human misery is characterized by the emotions of anxiety and despair. Yet, on the other hand, without our “emotions” we would lack virtues such as sympathy and compassion.

In short, it is necessary to distinguish between good emotions and bad emotions; virtuous ones and vicious ones; constructive ones and destructive ones. This is far different than the physicalistic and amoral category of emotions as developed by unbelievers and used today even by Bible-believers, unbeknownst to them. Ignorance always brings a very high price—the highest price of all is the loss of Truth, the Whole Truth, the Total Truth, and resultant distortion of God’s Word. In the next essay, we will begin with a study of the “emotions,” as active powers of the Sinless Man’s *soul*.

Hebrews 2:14 Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also *partook of the same*,

Matthew 26:38 Then He said to them, "*My soul* is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me.

Mark 1:41 And *moved with compassion*, He stretched out His hand, and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed."

In the Sacred Romance,

Pastor Don