

THE “EMOTIONAL” LIFE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST (Part 4: The *splagchnidzomai* of the Lord-1)

After laying down some of the groundwork on the history of “emotions,” (I put *emotions* in quotation marks to signal to the reader that I do not accept the term as commonly conceived) namely, how the concept of “emotions” underwent a radical naturalistic and reductionistic shift from being viewed as active moral or immoral powers of the soul to mere passive and amoral physiological reactions, it is time to begin our study of the perfect, sinless “emotions” of Jesus Christ.

The scriptures explicitly depict Jesus, the Son of God, the God-man of the universe walking the same path of pain and death all humans walk, yet He is not broken by it. He is the representative human, the “new Adam,” displaying a vast range of “moods” of a perfect man of God. He, more than other, demonstrates the virtuous quality of rightly ordered “emotions.” Moreover, He is the epitome of how God can take the greatest evil and travesty of justice and turn it into the greatest blessing the world has ever known. It is no accident that one of His titles is “Man of Sorrows” or that the synoptic gospels have been described as the “Passions of Christ.” Although I am not sure what to make of it, it is a brute and undeniable fact that not once is it recorded in all of Scripture that He laughed or smiled.

As we go through the various “emotions,” it will be important to distinguish the ones that are primarily from His immaterial intellect—*from above*, from those which are primarily from His corporeal nature—*from below*. What makes this challenging is accomplishing this without falling into Cartesian dualism of the body-soul dichotomy. Christ was one hylomorphic person with one will that related to two powers: an intellective appetite—*from above*, and a corporeal appetite—*from below*.

The “emotion” that is most frequently attributed to Jesus Christ is “compassion” (*σπλαγχνίζομαι*). This is to be expected since his whole life was a mission of love, grace, and mercy and marked by deeds of beneficence as summed up in the memory of His followers with “doing good”: “*You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good (εὐεργετῶν), and healing all who were oppressed by the devil; for God was with Him,* Acts 10:38.

The word for compassion is *splagchnidzomai* (*σπλαγχνίζομαι*). There is no doubt that this word points to the inclusion of visceral or corporeal “feelings.” It is the basic word for entrails, inward parts (translated “bowels” in the KJV), and although unknown to the Greek classics, it is used of Jesus more than any other “emotion/feeling” Moreover, this physical feeling is viewed in the New Testament in a positive light, even in terms of spiritual virtue. Consider the following:

1. This “emotion,” which undeniably includes physical/corporeal feelings, is used more extensively than any other “emotion” of the Lord. Here are a few examples.
 - a. Matthew 20:34, And moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him.
 - b. Mark 1:41, And moved with compassion, He stretched out His hand, and touched him, and said to him, “I am willing; be cleansed.”

- c. Luke 7:13, And when the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, "Do not weep."
 - d. Matthew 9:36 And seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd.
 - e. Matthew 14:14 And when He went ashore, He saw a great multitude, and felt compassion for them, and healed their sick.
 - f. Matthew 15:32 And Jesus called His disciples to Him, and said, "I feel compassion for the multitude, because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not wish to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way."
 - g. It should be noted that this term is not found anywhere in John's gospel—a fact that should make all those who build doctrines and reality on word usage pause for a few minutes. In other words, just because Jesus is not said to have these "emotions" in John's gospel does not mean that He did not have them or that they were not expressed in other ways like John's recurrent use of "love."
2. This "emotion," which, again, includes physical and corporeal feelings, is also viewed as a spiritual virtue in the epistles.
- a. In 1 John 3:17 we are told that those who see fellow believers in need and respond by shutting down this corporeal "emotion" do not have the love of God in them:
 - 1 John 3:17, *But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his feelings/splagchnidzomai against him, how does the love of God abide in him?*
 - b. In 2 Cor. 6:11-12 *splagchnidzomai* is parallel to heart/*kardia*: *We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. 12 We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us.*
 - c. In 2 Cor. 7:13-15 *splagchnidzomai* is used of Titus deep love for the Corinthians and is parallel to his "spirit" (vs. 13).
 - d. Twice in Philemon (vss. 7, 20) Paul refers to the refreshing of this "emotion."
 - *Philemon 1:7, For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the splagchna of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.*

- *Philemon 1:20, Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my splagchna in Christ.*
- e. In Philippians 2:1 *splagchna* and mercy seem to sum up three preceding phrases (*encouragement in Christ, comfort in love, and fellowship of spirit*), connecting them to those other Christian spiritual virtues, which are essential to virtuous interaction in the Christian family.
 - f. In Philippians 1:8 we are told that the very *splagchna* of Christ was communicated to and through Paul to fellow believers: *For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection/splagchna of Christ Jesus.*

Clearly we have a huge problem! The Bible clearly classifies, at least at times, physical feelings (*splagchna*) in virtuous categories. What?! Surely, that cannot be!! Don't we know that the bodily feelings have nothing to do with virtue or love? How can feelings be virtuous? Aren't feelings simply amoral physiological states? A person cannot help, let alone be responsible for, how he feels, right? This just does not make sense! I respond to all of these declarations and questions with "You are right! It really does not make sense—*given a dualistic Cartesian framework of human nature!* If you are Humean emotionalist or Cartesian dualist you have absolutely no way of resolving what the Bible clearly teaches about Jesus and the nature of this spiritual virtue—no matter how much Greek you learn. All you can do is suppress it by ignoring it, all the while continue to spout atheistic and naturalistic comments like 'emotions are just amoral physiological states that have nothing to do with virtue or the spiritual life...I am not responsible for how I feel.' Wrong, we are all responsible in one way or another for how we feel about things. Our feelings can be virtuous or filled with vice.

Apart from philosophical realism and hylomorphism, what the Bible says about this "emotions" just does not make sense. I have been asked many times "Why as a Bible-believer do you study philosophy?" I have been tempted to quip, "I don't know. I don't see the relevance either. After all, philosophy is only concerned with things like Total Truth and God and what is right." As far as philosophical realism versus other perspectives in dealing with the Word of God, it is not the case that these other perspectives, even like Humean naturalism or Cartesian dualism, have absolutely nothing to offer. It is just that they make it impossible to get the Whole Truth. Only philosophical realism delivers a Total Truth perspective because of its metaphysical or wholeness perspective. Think of it this way: say there is a ball with a board balanced on it. The ball represents reality and the board represents perspectives according to Cratylus, Hume, Descartes, Kant, and all modern perspectives outside of Realism. Where the board touches the ball is the area of reality that these perspectives touch—just a part of reality. However, philosophical realism is like wrapping the ball with a cloth, it deals with all of reality for only it really deals with metaphysics as such.

In the next essay I will attempt bring together both the Lord feelings from His intellectual appetite, *from above*, and His feelings *from below*—His corporeal powers (*not to be conceived as passive amoral states*) in our study of His *com-passion*.

In the Sacred Romance,

Pastor Don