

THE “EMOTIONAL” LIFE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST (Part 9: Basic nature of love and emotion)

The problem with the modern term “emotion” is not only in its amoral, physicalistic, Darwinian, and reductionistic implications (cf., David Hume, William James). It also vexes because of its ambiguity. The gamut on views of emotions run from being nothing but amoral, raw, physical, animal-like feelings to the view that “emotions” are experiential movements (“motions”) or acts of the soul as it perceives and is drawn to the good (love, joy) and moves away from evil (fear or hate).

In spite of all of my haranguing regarding using the term “emotion,” I am going to relent and use the term in the sense of experiential motions of the soul that may or may not resonate in the body. So, my working definition of emotion is “an experiential movement in a human being.” This is a fair definition given that the term “emotion” has in it the idea of movement and experience. This movement/motion can be in the immaterial intellect/will or in the physical, bodily passions or both. In both cases, there is movement to a perceived good or away from a perceived bad. In this sense, we can see that love is most assuredly related to emotions or movement toward a perceived good, whether the perceived good is immaterial like God and justice or material as per ice-cream. The perception of the good is in the intellect and constitutes the formal cause. The movement is in the will and constitutes the efficient cause. Think of the will as an appetite of the intellect. The intellect knows the object and the will seeks the object as a good (love) or moves away from the object that is perceived as bad (fear, hate).

We can see the difference between mental emotions (AKA affections) and physical emotions (AKA passions) in 1 Peter 1:6-8.

1 Peter 1:6 In this you **greatly rejoice**, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been **distressed** by various trials, 7 that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 8 and though you have not seen Him, **you love Him**, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you **greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory**,

Note that love for Jesus Christ brings such emotions as inexpressible *immaterial* joy (verse 8) that can exist at the same time as the experience of *physical* sorrows (verse 6). As these believers were persecuted, they experienced physical pain and sorrow while simultaneously experiencing inexpressible joy.

To grasp the two levels of love, intellectual love and sensed love, is to be able to untangle some of the confusion regarding the various objects of love. As humans we have immaterial intellects with immaterial objects of love; and we have material senses with their physical objects of love. Because the believers above possessed a regenerated immaterial intellect, they had the capacity to love the immaterial object Jesus Christ. However, these believers also possessed a corporeal body, which also has natural loves for physical things. The sorrow they experienced was related to, at least in part, privation of the goods that their physical beings loved—like food, clothes, and shelter. In other words, loving God is related to the immaterial intellect. Loving something like physical comfort or

ice-cream is more related to the corporeal nature. The intellect is the formal cause as it perceives the object. The will is the efficient cause in that it reaches out or is inclined toward the object that is perceived by the intellect.

Note the two levels of love in the Lord Jesus Christ: His immaterial intellect loved immaterial God the Father and the Plan of God, yet His sensed nature loved food as evidenced by the fact that He was tempted regarding which He loved the most: God or food—in the desert for forty days (Matt. 4:1-10). The temptation was not about being doubled minded. Rather, it was on two levels and it was to demonstrate which level He loved the most, either God and the Word of God or the natural love and the pleasure of eating for satisfaction of physical appetite. Moreover, although He had two levels and objects of love, one for the Word of God and one for food, they both fall into the basic category of love. There is a difference in kind and degree, but both are still loves (note how love for God and love the world are both considered loves in Matt. 6:19-24 and 1 John 2:15). His love for God was a different kind of love than His love for food, even though they are both loves, just on different levels and with different objects. Love for God translates into loving obedience while love for the bread translates to its consumption. Love is always the will's attraction to the good, but the kind of love that exists is always related to the object of that love. So, love is not always thinking the best of the object, like with the bread. It depends upon what the object is. I may love both a steak and a new car, but the kind of goods they are will determine how the love manifests itself. I will want to eat the steak, but as far as the car I do not want a scratch on it. However, they are both inanimate things.

On the two levels of love among humans, let's consider an example. Say a young lady, a teenager, comes home from school filled with euphoria as evidenced by her incurable radiant smile. She is exhilarated! She says she now knows what love really is. She has found the boy of her dreams. My question is "does she really love him?" The answer is yes and no. It depends on what love kind of love you have in mind. Her attraction to him would point to her loving him on at least on a sense level. The fact that she thinks about him all of the time and perhaps writes his name on all of her notebooks gives evidence that she definitely views him as a good—*she is very attracted to him*. This love has reverberated throughout her corporeal being as evidenced by the fact that she simply cannot stop smiling.

But does she love him in a full and complete sense of loving another human soul? I doubt it. Loving humans is much more complicated than loving ice-cream and pizza because to really love someone one must go beyond the sense level and reach into the immaterial soul of the beloved. As a teenager it is very unlikely that she has a developed understanding of his soul and desire for *his* good. In love for and among human beings two interrelated desires must exist: a desire to be close to the object of love (which she definitely has) and a desire for the good of the beloved (this is much more difficult). So, she would have to want to be around him all of the time and also want his good even if that good translated to something that was not particularly good or enjoyable for her. As far as the latter, for example, if she really loved him and realized that she was getting him in trouble (not his good) when she was around him, then she would not be around him for his own good. She really thinks more of him than herself. Moreover, she would not want to do anything that was not his good—that would include doing things that he might want, but that would not be his good before God.

Let's reverse the situation and talk about "her" teenage boyfriend who is captivated by her beauty and charm. Does he love her? Yes and no. Since he is attracted to her, he does love her on a sense level. That is undeniable. But does he love her on a soul level? To love her on an immaterial soul level would require the same two interrelated desires: a desire to be with her as much as possible and a desire for her good even if that particular good was not his good. For example, what

if he told her he loved her and he wanted to have sex with her even though he knew that would not be her good?—for she had made it clear to him that she wanted to remain a virgin until marriage. So, in that scenario does he love her? Yes and no. He does love her on a sense level as a good (body, beauty, sex), but he does not love her on a soul level because to love her on that level always translates to desiring what is best for her—*not him!* In other words, he loves her body but not her soul. In true human love, one always seeks the good for the object of love. This is not only true among human beings, it is also true of God loving us and us loving God. No man can really love God unless he really seeks God's good, namely His glorification, the fulfillment of His plan for His sake only.

It is important to remember that love can be good (John 3:16) and love can be bad (John 3:19). Ontologically speaking, both the good love and bad love are loves. It is just that one is virtuous and one is a vice—one can love God and one can love sin. The issue is the kind of love and the object of that love as far as its appropriateness. We find this reality of love in all languages and cultures from the beginning of time. Same term of love is used in the Old Testament and New Testament for loving soup, wives, darkness, evil, and God. Moreover, all men love some “good,” for all men are drawn to a perceived good, which is what love is all about. It is the object of the love that makes all of the difference. My love for fellow believers, a steak, a new car, or God has the same basic ontology as far as love is concerned. However, how I treasure these objects of love will vary according to what they are. Again, my treasuring a steak is going to be far different from treasuring other objects. I treat a steak that I love differently than I treat a new car that I love. One I will protect, the other I will destroy.

Now that we have considered a few preliminary concepts on the basic structure of love and emotions, let us turn our attention on Jesus Christ and His love and “emotions.” Jesus Christ was the embodiment of greatest love that ever existed on this planet. He truly loved man's soul more than any other person who ever lived. It was His love that moved (e.g., “[e]motioned”) Him with compassion for the needy and by the self-sacrifice of His own life on the Cross: John 15:13, “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.” To give up one's life for someone else is to think of the other's good, not one's own, while at the same time it was Christ's good to die for man so man could be united with God. If we see emotions as a movement of the soul, then it does make sense to speak of an emotion of love, a movement of love. It was Christ's movement/emotion of love in this sense that is repeatedly depicted throughout the synoptic gospels. His emotional movement was aroused at the sight of individual distress—a few examples:

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

Matthew 20:34 And moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him.

Mark 6:34 And when He went ashore, He saw a great multitude, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things

In each case there was an internal movement of love to compassion (very powerful word for physical feelings), which then moved Him to external acts of beneficence. Guess who was insensitive to human suffering? The Pharisees! Moreover, the very sight of the insensitivity on the part of the Jews, i.e., their lack of compassion for human suffering moved in Jesus the emotion (movement) of

anger (Mark 3:5). The spectacle of their hardness produced in Him the deepest dissatisfaction, which moved [e-motioned] into anger. Anger always has a pain at its root, and is a reaction/movement of the soul against what gives it discomfort. The hardness of the Jew's heart, vividly realized, moved Jesus to anger. In other words, Jesus had feelings of discomfort at the sight of man's inhumanity to man and this translated into anger against them for their uncaring attitudes. Yes, Jesus was angry at injustice. Just as love is not always a virtue, anger is not always a sin. It all depends upon the formal cause (intellect) and the efficient cause (will).

In Christ,

Pastor Don