



(Mar 8:31-38)

These verses are some of the most important in all of Scripture. That because they make clear that our greatest enemy is not Satan and the world, or God and His laws. It is instead ourselves (or self). Learning then what that means, why it is so dangerous and how to conquer it, should be of first importance.

1. WHAT THESE VERSES (31-34) TEACH US ABOUT SELF = Living for self (or “setting you mind on the things of man”) means you are a person controlled by your feelings. Being controlled by feelings is a big problem for many people. Hence the reason Jesus expanded His words to Peter to include the rest of the “disciples” and the “crowd” (vv33-34 “seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter... And calling the crowd to him with his disciples he said to them” in contrast to v32 “And Peter took him aside...”). Modern advertising knows this to still be a problem today and exploits it on a regular basis. (e.g. 1) FOMO; Displaying “low stock” or “limited supplies” is a part of most/all marketing strategies, 2) Fb “likes”; Whenever someone likes a comment or post, “we give you a little dopamine hit.” – Fb founder, Sean Parker).

Jesus demands that we go to war with this part of our person no longer allowing ourselves to be controlled by it.¹

2. WHAT BEING CHARACTERIZED/CONTROLLED BY YOUR FEELINGS LOOKS LIKE (signs that this is you):

1) You are characterized by rash decisions, big talk/promises/commitments and no follow thru/perseverance/loyalty, 2) Truth and error, good and bad, right and wrong, are determined by how you feel, 3) What decides what you do or don’t do most days is pleasure, 4) You make it a point to avoid anything that would cause controversy, conflict and/or tension w/another person (Controversy/chaos is a big part of how God accomplishes his purposes [e.g. Act 13:17-30 = Israel’s chaotic/controversial history up to Christ including His death and resurrection], which means if you avoid rather than embrace the controversy/chaos God brings then you not only possess a very unbiblical worldview, but also are an incredibly rebellious person who is very much controlled by your feelings), 5) You choose what to do or not do based on its potential to cause pain and/or discomfort regardless of the benefit it may afford you, 6) You always seek the path of least resistance, 7) You fantasize about “checking out” of life or your responsibilities, 8) You fear the future or missing out, 9) You cry easily (A sign of addiction to negative emotions. Fear, sadness, feeling sorry for yourself are some of the strongest emotions – eliciting the same dopamine receptors as cocaine in the brain).

3. WHY WE MUST DIE TO SELF/BEING CONTROLLED BY OUR FEELINGS (33-38)

3.1. You are no better than Satan if you do not.

(v33 - “Get behind Me, Satan!”) = Why Jesus identifies Peter this way is because when he was controlled by his emotions (i.e. “setting his mind on... the things of man” rather than “the things of God”) this is who he was acting like.

The connection between being controlled by our feelings (“setting our mind on the things of man”) and Satan = Satan’s fall was due to the fact that he was controlled/deceived by his feelings (Evidence for this is found in Eze 28:17 w/2 and 5).

¹ Several texts view our spirit/soul as different from that physical portion of our person that embodies our emotions and feelings corrupted by sin (i.e. self). Equally supported is the fact that we are to be at war against this fleshly part of our person (Rom 8:18-26 w/2Co 5:1-10 = Paul’s groaning while in this life/earthly tent is related to the flesh’s emotional torments/temptations [or “sufferings” - Rom 8:18] – something he determines [through the Spirit’s help] to bring under control as necessary to passing the final test before God [again v2Co 5:9-10; See also 1Co 9:24-27]; Gal 5:16 “desires” = Feelings; Rom 7:5, 15-23, 8:12-13; Eph 2:3; 1Pe 2:11; 2Pe 2:18). That there are essentially “two persons” (or two parts to our one person) is a concept that has been believed throughout human history going back to ancient times – even among pagan philosophers (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle). Most importantly it is the view purported in Scripture.

3.2. It is impossible to follow Jesus if you do not.

(34) = Jesus juxtaposes coming after or following Him with denying or dying to self (i.e. taking up one's cross) – which again, refers to our feelings (or being controlled by them). As such, the point He is making is this: that it is impossible to follow Him - and at the same time, be controlled by your feelings. IOW: Jesus must have complete control of you or it won't work (your attempts at coming after/following Him will fail). Hence the reason "self" (or our feelings) are the greatest enemy (not God or His laws, not Satan or the world).

The reason (then) you are getting nowhere or there seems to be so much tension in trying to live the Christian life, or living the Christian life seems so hard = Because your feelings are still running the show. Until you take the control away from them and give it all to Jesus, it will continue to be that way. Following Jesus will be an impossible mission and your Christian life, temporary (Rom 7:24-8:8). Giving control of your life to Jesus is something that must happen everyday – or daily (Luk 9:23; Consider also Mat 6:10). This (then) is also what it means to live by faith: I am trusting Jesus with the control/decisions of my life (versus what my feelings are telling me).

Being controlled by feelings (rather than faith and following Christ) is the reason for the temporary status and failure of the seed thrown on the rocky and thorny soils in Jesus' parable of the soils (Mar 4:16-19 "they have no root" = In all three gospels this is the description applied to - and to be assumed, of the rocky and thorny soil alike. It refers to a person whose current faith/following of Jesus is not the basis [or "root"] of their behavior [they again have no such root]. As a result, when their feelings are ignited – through trials or temptation, they leave their Christianity behind).

3.3. Attempting to navigate life by your feelings will mean losing your soul.

(35) = This verse makes crystal clear that attempting to follow Jesus while at the same time being controlled by your feelings, will end in utter failure. That is what Jesus is referring to when He speaks of someone attempting to "save (their) life". He is talking about a person who continues to operate according to the old/existing way of doing things (i.e. running things by way of the emotions/feelings – the "old self", Eph 4:20-23). The result will be losing their life - or more literally, their soul (See Fn 1 – the word translated "life" can be translated "soul"). Jesus' warning is therefore in relation to more than just this life. It has eternal implications. Losing your soul means going to hell. And (as before), the only way around this is to (instead), "(lose) your life for (Christ's) sake and the gospel's". IOW: You must give complete control of your life to Jesus and His mission for you. Everyday (or again "daily") your life - and its every decision, needs to be consistent with what He wants you to do (irrespective of how you feel).

The reason Jesus demands that we remove all such control from our feelings and give it all to Him is not because He has some power trip. It is in every respect because He wants to save us. And the enemy (once more) that we need to be saved from –the one wrecking everything, is self (or our feelings).

Why we don't recognize that our feelings are deceiving us (thinking everything is okay when in reality, we are in grave danger) is similar to the plight suffered by flight pilots known as "spatial disorientation" : the physical senses (sight, sound, balance) of the pilot fail to discern the actual angle, altitude or speed of the plane. This often happens during night or bad weather. The pilot (based on such physical senses) believes they are flying at a safe angle, distance from the ground and speed, when in reality they are not. The only solution to such situations is to stop trusting one's physical senses and fly instead solely by the plane's instruments. Pilots failing to fly by their instruments have caused the death of many people – most recently the death of Kobe Bryant and his daughter. The helicopter pilot encountered fog, became visually disoriented and ran the helicopter into the side of a hill at 184 mph.

Anyone "flying by their feelings" are suffering from "spiritual disorientation": Like spatial disorientation, you are a person looking to the wrong things to determine what's up and what's down, what's right and what's wrong, what's safe and what's not. Your flesh/feelings (severely depraved or damaged by the corruption of sin) are sending you false signals. You think you are okay when in reality you are about to crash and burn (forever). And the only way to pull your life out of this spiritual tailspin is to completely turn off your emotions/feelings and listen instead to Jesus (or His Word) since He is the only One who truly knows what's going on and can navigate your way safely to heaven.²

² The spiritual plane crash that Jesus is attempting to save us from is depicted in the rest of Scripture as the corruption of our spirit/soul (i.e. the corruption of our physical bodies/feelings leaches into and corrupts our spirits/souls). Like Satan and the demons, allowing our physical bodies/feelings to control us will eventually mean the corruption of our eternal spirits/souls. Hence the reason

This is why in college, I (pastor) gave my entire life/the controls to Christ, because I knew if I tried to save my life (i.e. trust myself/my feelings), I would shipwreck/corrupt my soul. I knew I needed to give all decisions/all discernment to Him and never look back (30 years later = no regret).

3.4. Attempting not to miss out will mean missing out (for eternity).

(36) = To not miss out on what your feelings desire in the world (to “gain” even “the whole world” in this respect) will mean *eternally missing out* since the trade-off will be the loss of your soul in hell. And to Jesus that is not trading up (but down, way down!). Hence why He says what he does in (v37) = IOW: what (in the world) is worth losing your soul for all eternity? (Answer: nothing!)

Here (then) is the grand irony of letting feelings run the show. People do it because of the (feeling) or “fear of missing out” (FOMO). Yet if we follow those feelings/fear, that is the very thing we will do! We will miss out in the biggest way possible. We will miss out on heaven and the new creation.

According to Paul, nothing that we give up in this world (or miss out on) compares to what will be gained in heaven and the new creation (2Co 4:17-18).

What (then) Jesus is not saying: Jesus is not saying that by gaining the whole world – or living for the world you won’t be happy. As discussed in Practicum, there are plenty of people in the world (even in false religions) who are extremely happy. Hence the reason it is foolish to say they are all faking it - or Christianity is the only thing that will make you happy in this world. NEWSFLASH: there are just as many happy people in the world as there are in the church - and likewise, just as many unhappy people in the church as there are people in the world (Act 14:16-17 = Happiness is the result of realizing/possessing whatever you deem to be important/worthy/valuable – e.g. scoring a touchdown, having a family, eating bugs; your feelings will calibrate to whatever you believe is important/worthy/valuable. Hence the reason people can be happy doing whatever or believing whatever. Happiness is just what happens when you get/achieve what you believe to be important/worthy/valuable –that’s it. Hence the reason for unhappy Christians – they are failing to achieve what they believe to be most valuable).

Additionally, Jesus is not saying that you won’t miss out if you live for Him. Living for Jesus will cause you to miss out on certain things in this life (that’s a fact). Which means the issue is not about happiness - or whether or not there are things to be missed, but rather which path will lead to regret (that’s the issue). And in that respect, the path that puts self (or our feelings) to death and follows Jesus is the only one that avoids that. Every other path leads to regret – eternal regret.

3.5. If you don’t trust Jesus, He won’t trust you.

(38) = The final reason Jesus gives for why you need to die to your feelings as that which controls your life (i.e. that which determines what you do/what you pursue) and (instead) trust Him to call the shots in your life, is because if you don’t (and that’s what you are doing by not giving up on your feelings – you are choosing not to trust Him with your life), then He won’t trust you (on the day of His return). That’s what He is getting at when He says He will be “ashamed” of you - just as you were of Him. The cause (or reason) behind being ashamed of someone is lack of trust. When you don’t fully trust someone, you won’t stand up for them –or suffer for them. You will instead “be ashamed”. Which means Jesus will do the same to you.

Though this is the last verse, it is the place where it all starts. You won’t give up on your feelings (i.e. die to them as that which controls you) unless you first make the decision to trust (and that is exactly what it is – a decision or choice – nothing more/nothing less).

So the closing question is this, are you going to trust Jesus with your life (and get to heaven and the new creation) – or are you going to remain enslaved to your feelings (to self) and spend all eternity regretting it?

The choice is yours. Your future is totally up to you. What is it going to be? Go to war with God (the One Who is trying to save you from what is killing you)—or go to war with self (your feelings) the true enemy and thing that will kill you and send you to hell?

Again, the choice is in your power to make. Make the choice to go to war with self/with your feelings and to listen only to Christ. That is the only way to get to heaven. That is the only way to live a life you won’t regret.

“He is no fool who loses what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose” – Jim Elliott

God cannot allow such spirits to enter heaven or the new creation. To do so would mean a repeat of this corrupted world (Gal 6:8; 2Pe 1:4, 2:19; In re: to the demons – Mat 10:1; Act 8:7).