



Behold Your God, Part 13: The Impassibility and Affections of God





The Impassibility of God

- The Doctrine of Divine Impassibility
 - Not an attribute by itself
 - A subset of divine immutability



The Impassibility of God

- The Doctrine of Divine Impassibility
 - Does God suffer?
 - Does God have emotion?



Does God Suffer?

- Impassibility
 - unable to **suffer**, or not-suffering.
- “Passion”
 - to suffer.
 - original Latin root: passio meaning "suffering, enduring,"
- To Suffer
 - “to undergo, be subjected to, or endure pain, distress, injury, loss, or anything unpleasant.”



Does God Suffer?

- The Reformed Confessions: God is "without body, parts, or *passions*, immutable"
 - The London Baptist Confession of Faith (the Baptists)
 - The Westminster Confession of Faith (the Presbyterians)
 - the Savoy Declaration (the Congregationalists)
 - the 39 Articles (the Anglicans)



Does God Suffer?

- Why the big deal?
 - If God suffers, does this mean that something external to God forced him to change?
 - Is God reactionary?



Does God Suffer?

- If God suffers (i.e. experiences passion)
 - **1.** God is not **independent** because He relies on something outside of Himself for His emotional state.
 - **2.** God is not **omnipotent** because an external force is able to force Him to feel a specific emotion.
 - **3.** God is not **immutable** because He was forced to change his emotions based on an external occurrence



Does God Suffer?

- **John Frame:** “God in his transcendent nature cannot be harmed in any way, nor can he suffer loss to his being. In his eternal existence, ‘suffering loss’ could only mean losing some attribute, being defeated in his war with Satan, or otherwise failing to accomplish his eternal plan. Scripture assures us that none of these things will happen, and so they cannot happen. In this sense, God is impassible.”



Does God Suffer?

- Jurgen Moltmann: Why God suffers:
 - The Passion of the Christ
 - The Nature of Love
 - The Problem of Evil

Does God Suffer?

Responses to Moltmann

- The Passion of the Christ:
- Response: If Jesus, the God-man suffered, this does not mean God as God suffered
 - 4 reasons

Does God Suffer?

Responses to Moltmann

- The Passion of the Christ:
 1. The Rejection of the heresy of Theopaschitism
 - The belief that when Christ suffered on the cross, God suffered
 - Christological heresy: denied Jesus had **two** natures
 - Taught Jesus was only divine, not human

Does God Suffer?

Responses to Moltmann

- The Passion of the Christ:

2. The Rejection of the heresy of Patripassianism

- When Jesus suffered and died on the cross, the Father was suffered and died
- A Trinitarian heresy
- Believed that the Father and Son were the same person

Does God Suffer?

Responses to Moltmann

- The Passion of the Christ:
- 3.** The Importance of the Doctrine of the Communication of Properties
 - What can be said of the **God-man**, Jesus Christ, cannot be automatically assigned to either nature

Does God Suffer?

Responses to Moltmann

- the Communication of Properties
 - Christ was asleep, but God does not sleep
 - Christ was hungry, but God does not hunger
 - Christ died, but God does not die

Does God Suffer?

Responses to Moltmann

- The hymn *Amazing Love*
 - Wesley wrote: “Amazing love, how can it be, that thou my God shouldst die for me.”
 - To avoid confusion: “Amazing love, how can it be, that thou my Lord shouldst die for me.”

Does God Suffer?

Responses to Moltmann

- the Communication of Properties
 - When Jesus suffered, God did not suffer

Does God Suffer?

Responses to Moltmann

- The Passion of the Christ:

4. The Historic Testimony of the Church

- Council of Rome (382): “If anyone says that in the passion of the cross it is God himself who felt the pain and not the flesh and the soul which Christ, the Son of God, had taken to himself...he is mistaken.”

Does God Suffer?

Responses to Moltmann

- Love must be vulnerable
- Response: God's love in Scripture is:
 - strong (Psalm 18:1, 31:23, 116:1)
 - omnipotent (Romans 8:35-39)

Does God Suffer?

Responses to Moltmann

- The Problem of Evil: God does not have control but suffers with us
- Response: God is in control yet also has compassion on us
 - **Isaiah 63:9:** “In all their affliction He was afflicted”



Does God Have Emotion?



No Emotions

Yes Emotions

**Classical
Impassibility**
No Passions

Open Theism
Yes Passions



Does God Have Emotion?

- **Classical Impassibility**
 - Philo of Alexandria in 30-45 A.D.
 - Augustine
 - Anselm
 - Aquinas



Does God Have Emotion?

- Classical Impassibility Definition:
 - “God does not experience emotional changes either from within or effected by his relationship to creation. He is not changed from within or without; he remains unchanged and unchanging both prior and subsequent to creation.”



Does God Have Emotion?

- All Biblical statements of God's emotion are *anthropopathisms*:
 - **Figurative or metaphorical** expressions ascribing human emotions to God.



Does God Have Emotion?

- Like Anthropomorphisms:
 - hands (Exodus 15:17)
 - feet (1 Kings 5:3)
 - eyes (2 Chronicles 16:9)
 - ears (James 5:4)
- But God is a Spirit (John 4:24)
 - "a spirit does not have flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39)



Does God Have Emotion?

- But Anthropomorphisms still point to a reality in God
 - **2 Chronicles 16:9** that "the eyes if The Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth"
 - God sees everything



Does God Have Emotion?

- But Anthropomorphisms still point to a reality in God
 - **James 5:4** “the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth”
 - God hears everything



Does God Have Emotion?

- If God's emotions are metaphors, what are they a metaphor for?
 - i.e. God's anger



Does God Have Emotion?

- Likewise Anthropopathisms must also point to a reality in God
 - **Zephaniah 3:17:** “The Lord your God is in your midst, A victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will **rejoice** over you with shouts of joy.”



Does God Have Emotion?

- **Psalm 78:40:** “How often they rebelled against Him in the wilderness and grieved Him in the desert.”
- **Exodus 32:10:** “Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them.”
- **Psalm 103:13:** “Just as a father has compassion on *his* children, So the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him.”



Does God Have Emotion?

No Emotions

Yes Emotions

**Classical
Impassibility**
No Passions

**Sovereign
Emotion**

Open Theism
Yes Passions



Does God Have Emotion?

- **Definition of Sovereign Emotion** is:
 - God does not experience emotional changes effected by his relationship to creation but God does experience emotional change from within. God cannot suffer and is incapable of being acted upon by an external force but His emotions are internally ordained.



Does God Have Emotion?

- **God's Emotions are not like human emotions**
 - They are not sinful emotions.
 - They do not have physical manifestations



Does God Have Emotion?

- **God's Emotions are **affections**, not passions**
 - **Jonathan Edwards:** “The *affections* and *passions* are frequently spoken of as the same; and yet, in the more common use of speech, there is in some respect a difference. *Affection* is a word that, in its ordinary signification, seems to be something more extensive than *passion*, being used for all vigorous lively actings of the will or inclination; but *passion* for those that are more sudden, and whose effects on the animal spirits are more violent, and the mind more overpowered, and less in its own command.”



Does God Have Emotion?

Affections	Passions
Emotions	Emotions
Internal source	External source
Active	Passive
Voluntary Under Control	Reactionary Reflexive



Does God Have Emotion?

- **Packer says,** The conception of God [as impassible] represents no single biblical term, but was introduced into Christian theology in the second century. What was it supposed to mean? The historical answer is: Not impassivity, unconcern, and impersonal detachment in the face of the creation. Not inability or unwillingness to empathize with human pain and grief, either. It means simply that God's experiences do not come upon him as ours come upon us. His are foreknown, willed, and chosen by himself, and are not involuntary surprises forced on him from outside, apart from his own decision, in the way that ours regularly are...In so far as God enters into suffering and grief, it is by his own deliberate decision; he is never his creatures' hapless victim...Let us be clear: A totally impassive God would be a horror, and not the God of Calvary at all.”



Does God Have Emotion?

- Sovereign Emotion:
 - God does not have passions
 - God does have affections
 - sovereignly ordained, eternally decreed changes in emotion



Does God Have Emotion?

- **Frame says:** “Does such responsiveness imply passivity in God? To say so would be highly misleading. God responds only to what he has himself ordained. He has chosen to create a world that will often grieve him. So ultimately he is active, rather than passive.”



Does God Have Emotion?

No Emotions

Yes Emotions

**Classical
Impassibility**

No Passions
No Affections

**Sovereign
Emotion**

No Passions
Yes Affections

Open Theism

Yes Passions
+/- Affections



Does God Have Emotion?

- Classical Impassibility Definition:
 - “God does not experience emotional changes either from within (**affections**) or effected by his relationship to creation (**passions**). He is not changed from within (**affections**) or without (**passions**)”



Does God Have Emotion?

No Emotions

Yes Emotions

**Classical
Impassibility**

No Passions
No Affections

**Sovereign
Emotion**

No Passions
Yes Affections

Open Theism

Yes Passions
+/- Affections



Does God Have Emotion?

- **God's Affections are Consistent with His Character**
 - **Wayne Grudem** says: "God is unchanging in his being, perfections, purposes, promises, yet God does act and feel emotions, and he acts and feels differently in response to different situations."



Does God Have Emotion?

- In order for God to maintain His immutable character, He must feel differently in light of different situations



Practical Application

- We worship a God who does not lose control over Himself or anything else
 - **Ephesians 1:11 God** ‘works all things after the counsel of His will.’
 - God decrees all events and decrees His emotional response to those events



Practical Application

- We know a God who can sympathize with us in the God-Man Jesus Christ
 - **Hebrews 4:15 says:** “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are, yet* without sin.”



Practical Application

- We have a God that is not stoic to the events in our lives



Practical Application

Spurgeon: “I believe in a God who can feel. As to Baal and the gods of the heathen, they may be passionless and without emotion, or without anything that is akin to feeling. Not so do I find Jehovah to be described. How did His anger kindle when He gave His people over to the sword and was angry with His inheritance! And how transporting is His love to the daughter of Zion when He rejoices over her with joy! He has a pity, yes, and a sorrow, too, according to this Book. I dismiss, therefore, the theology of the schoolmen—I am quite satisfied with the Divinity that I find in these Scriptures! Believe it then, dear Friends, with all your hearts, that God has kindly feelings towards them that fear Him, such as a father has towards his children!”

