

HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD? WEEK 21 – IMPASSABILITY

<p>** Communicable – We share with God</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Love 2. Jealousy 3. Graciousness 4. Just 5. Wrath 6. Merciful 7. Goodness 8. Faithfulness 9. Wisdom 	<p>**Incommunicable – Unique to God</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Omniscience 11. Incomprehensibility 12. Glory 13. Majesty 14. Sovereignty 15. Omnipresence (& Immanence) 16. Holiness 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. Righteousness 18. Omnipotence 19. Immutability 20. Impassibility
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Introduction

What Does This Attribute Mean?

Impassible – incapable of suffering from external causes; exempt from harm or pain; not to be moved to passion, sympathy, or any sign of emotion

- *The word “Impassioned” = the opposite meaning moved to a strong emotion*
- *But, IMPASSIBLE is to be incapable of being impassioned.*

Impassibility – the inability to suffer or be moved to passion, sympathy, any strong emotion

Human emotions

Dr. Bob Gonzales (Dean of RBS) has written on this topic:

...older classic theists (including Reformed writers) do not always provide a compelling positive model of divine affections. Their stress is usually on what God’s emotions are not, that is, on the ways in which God’s emotions are unlike human emotions. As a result, they frequently deny that God “properly,” i.e., strictly, feels such emotions as grief or anger or compassion. Such ascriptions, they argue, are “figures of speech.” Yet, when these theists endeavor to interpret the “metaphor” for us, they often turn around and use emotive or affective language. For example, God can’t be angry at sin (since anger is a human emotion), but such human anger ascribed to God signifies that he abhors sin. Such seeming “double talk” is a form of equivocation. It’s not that these writers are trying to mislead. But their formulation of God’s emotional life is, at times, ambiguous and confusing. (Robert Gonzales, *Some Reformed Reflection on God’s Emotional Life*, p1)

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Biblical Definition:

Lam. 3:22 The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; **23** they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

.....**31** For the Lord will not cast off forever, **32** but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; **33** for he does not afflict from his heart or grieve the children of men.

Psa. 103:6 The LORD works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. **7** He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. **8** The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. **9** He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. **10** He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. **11** For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; **12** as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. **13** As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. **14** For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

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Anthropomorphic Language

Gen. 3:8 And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

Psa. 111:7 The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy;

Deut. 11:12 a land that the LORD your God cares for. The eyes of the LORD your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.

Gen. 6:6 And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.

Jl Packer

God is impassible. This means that-no one can inflict suffering, pain, or any sort of distress on him. Insofar as God enters into an experience of suffering, it is by empathy for his creatures and according to his own deliberate decision. He is never his creature's victim. This impassibility has not been taken by the Christian mainstream to mean that God is a stranger to joy and delight. Rather, it has been construed as an assertion of the permanence of God's joy, which no pain clouds.

"This 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. ... Let us be clear: A totally impassive God

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would be a horror, and not the God of Calvary at all. He might belong in Islam; he has no place in Christianity. If, therefore, we can learn to think of the chosenness of God's grief and pain as the essence of his impassibility, so-called, we will do well." (J.I. Packer, "What Do You Mean When You Say God?" *Christianity Today* (Sept 1986): 31 (27-31)).

Does Scripture Teach That God Exhibits This Attribute?

Job 42:1 Then Job answered the LORD and said: **2** "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

Is. 55:8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. **9** For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. **10** "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, **11** so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

2Tim. 2:12 if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; **13** if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.

James 1:16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. **17** Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

How Does This Attribute Affect the Christian?

1 – God's Impassability & Salvation

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2 – God’s Impassability & Evil

3 – God’s Impassability & Image Bearing

4 – God’s Impassability & Our Relationship