

**The 1689 Confession of Faith; Chapter 2 – “Of God and the Holy Trinity”,
Message # 7 – “Anthropomorphism and Anthropopathism”, Presented in
the Adult Sunday School Class by Pastor Paul Rendall
on September 18th, 2016.**

Chapter 2 – Of God and the Holy Trinity, Paragraph 1 -

The Lord our God is but (a)one only living and true God; whose (b)subsistence is in and of Himself, (c)infinite in being and perfection; whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but Himself; (d)a most pure spirit, (e) invisible, without body, parts, or passions, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; who is (f)immutable, (g)immense, (h)eternal, incomprehensible, (i)almighty, every way infinite, (k)most holy, most wise, most free, most absolute; (l)working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, (m)for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; (n)the rewarder of them that diligently seek him, and withal most just (o)and terrible in his judgments, (p)hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the (q)guilty.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism states in Question 4 – “What is God?” “God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.”

Question 5 states: Are there more Gods than one ?

Answer: There is but One only, the living and true God.

We have begun our study of the Impassibility of God by speaking about His unchangeability; what theologians call His immutability. In order to rightly understand the doctrine of God we must realize that in His essential Being God never changes in regard to what He thinks and feels, and in regard to His decrees; His purposes and plans which have been formed from all of eternity. And in order to come to a greater and more Biblical understanding of Divine Immutability and Divine Impassibility, it will be important for us to add a few descriptive definitions to our understanding and our vocabulary. Two of these words which we will need to add are Anthropomorphism and Anthropopathism.

Anthropomorphism is figurative language which predicates human form to God. (Confessing the Impassible God, P. 440)

Anthropopathism is figurative language which predicates human feelings, affections, and passions to God.

1st – Let’s look first at some anthropomorphic language which is used in the Bible.

Isaiah 59: 1 and 2 – “Behold, the Lord hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear.” “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.”

There are at least 3 anthropomorphisms here in these two verses – hand, ear, and face. As regards the deity, which has no form, which has no bodily parts, it is evident that these words which are descriptive of a man’s bodily parts or features, are not found in Him. We could also

consider the words, “shortened”, “heavy”, and “hear” which because our God is without limits, do not properly apply to Him. He is perfect in discernment, all powerful and not able to have an ear that is heavy. But these things are written so that we might understand better the truth that God is infinite in His Being.

Psalm 18: 4-15 – “The pangs of death surrounded me, And the floods of ungodliness made me afraid. The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me; The snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the LORD, And cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, And my cry came before Him, even to His ears. Then the earth shook and trembled; The foundations of the hills also quaked and were shaken, Because He was angry. Smoke went up from His nostrils, And devouring fire from His mouth; Coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also, and came down With darkness under His feet. And He rode upon a cherub, and flew; He flew upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness His secret place; His canopy around Him was dark waters And thick clouds of the skies. From the brightness before Him, His thick clouds passed with hailstones and coals of fire. The LORD thundered from heaven, And the Most High uttered His voice, Hailstones and coals of fire. He sent out His arrows and scattered the foe, Lightnings in abundance, and He vanquished them. Then the channels of the sea were seen, The foundations of the world were uncovered At Your rebuke, O LORD, At the blast of the breath of Your nostrils.

2. Let’s look at some Anthropopathisms in the Scripture.

Isaiah 63: 7-16 – “I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the LORD And the praises of the LORD, According to all that the LORD has bestowed on us, And the great goodness toward the house of Israel, Which He has bestowed on them according to His mercies, According to the multitude of His lovingkindnesses. For He said, "Surely they are My people, Children who will not lie." So He became their Savior. In all their affliction He was afflicted, And the Angel of His Presence saved them; In His love and in His pity He redeemed them; And He bore them and carried them All the days of old. But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; So He turned Himself against them as an enemy, And He fought against them. Then he remembered the days of old, Moses and his people, saying: "Where is He who brought them up out of the sea With the shepherd of His flock? Where is He who put His Holy Spirit within them, Who led them by the right hand of Moses, With His glorious arm, Dividing the water before them To make for Himself an everlasting name, Who led them through the deep, As a horse in the wilderness, That they might not stumble?" As a beast goes down into the valley, And the Spirit of the LORD causes him to rest, So You lead Your people, To make Yourself a glorious name. Look down from heaven, And see from Your habitation, holy and glorious. Where are Your zeal and Your strength, The yearning of Your heart and Your mercies toward me? Are they restrained? Doubtless You are our Father, Though Abraham was ignorant of us, And Israel does not acknowledge us. You, O LORD, are our Father; Our Redeemer from Everlasting is Your name.”

All that is mentioned here, of how God dealt with Israel of old, is meant to be an encouragement to the elect Jews and Gentiles in all generations, to behold the great affections of the Lord in relation to His people’s obedience and disobedience. The way that these “afflictions” of God are described, are in anthropopathic language; language that is proper to men, but not proper to God who is Unchangeable and Impassible.

Listen to John Gill on verse 9 – “In all their affliction he was afflicted,.... That is, God, who said the above words; not properly speaking; for to be afflicted is not consistent with his nature and

perfections, being a spirit, and impassible; nor with his infinite and complete happiness; but this is said after the manner of men, and is expressive of the sympathy of God with his afflicted people, and his tender care of them, and concern for them under affliction, as one friend may have for another: afflictions belong to the people of God; they come to them, not by chance, but according to the will of God; and are not in wrath, but in love; they are many and various; there is an "all" of them, yet not one too many, and in every one of them God is afflicted, or sympathizes with them: as he looked upon the affliction of the people of Israel, in Egypt, at the Red sea, and in the wilderness, and had compassion upon them, and saved them, so he visits all his people when afflicted, and pities them, and speaks comfortably to them; knows and owns their souls in adversity; makes known himself to them; grants them his gracious presence; puts underneath them his everlasting arms; makes their bed in their affliction, and supplies their wants; and this sympathy arises from their union to him, from his relation to them as a Father, and from his great love to them.

Listen to Benjamin Keach in his book – *Preaching from the types and metaphors of the Bible* (P. 49):

“There are certain human affections, which according to their descriptions in a proper way of speaking are not in God, but are used by way of similitude to signify something divine and on that account are ascribed to God.” “Sadness and grief of mind is attributed to God, by which His displeasure, and the withdrawings of His grace and favor are signified. (Isaiah 63: 10) “But they rebelled and vexed His Spirit: therefore He was turned to be their enemy, and He fought against them.” “That is they have perpetrated such wickedness against their proper consciences, that the Holy Spirit has forsaken them, and justly withdrawn His grace.”

Also John Calvin on Isaiah 63: 9 – “In all their affliction He was afflicted. He enlarges on the goodness of God toward His people, and shews that He was kind to the fathers, so long as they permitted themselves to be governed by Him, and was so careful about them that he himself bore their distresses and afflictions. By speaking in this manner, He declares the incomparable love which God bears toward his people. In order to move us more powerfully and draw us to himself, the Lord accommodates Himself to the manner of men, by attributing to Himself all the affection, love, and (συμπαθεία) compassion which a father can have. And yet in human affairs it is impossible to conceive of any sort of kindness or benevolence which He does not immeasurably surpass.”

“I acknowledge that לֹ (lo) with א (aleph) literally signifies not; and therefore I do not altogether reject a different interpretation, that the people in their afflictions were not afflicted, because God always applied some remedy to alleviate their sorrows. But since א, (aleph,) in many passages, is manifestly changed into ו, (vau,) learned commentators justly, in my opinion, view it as equivalent to the pronoun לו, (lo,) to him. In this sense the Prophet testifies that God, in order to alleviate the distresses and afflictions of His people, Himself bore their burdens; not that He can in any way endure anguish, but, by a very customary figure of speech, he assumes and applies to himself human passions.”