

God Without Passions (2LCF 2.1c)

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[0:00] Now this evening as we continue to work through the doctrine of God we come to two words and those two words are without passions. So tonight we will consider God without passions and I think that some people do struggle with the doctrine of divine impassibility of God without passions and I think that they struggle with divine impassibility because they misunderstand what passions are or they either misunderstand God's most perfect and absolute nature.

And we as creatures as mankind as humans we have a tendency of thinking that God must be just like us except bigger and better than us but God is not man.

Now illustration I'd like to paint for you to demonstrate how we as creatures operate. I want you to pretend in your minds that this is happening to you. Let's say you wake up in the morning and you wake up and you realize you don't really feel very refreshed.

You feel kind of groggy and you feel kind of sad and disappointed about it. Then some knowledge comes to your mind and you remember that today is a day off and you have big exciting plans for today.

Let's say an adventure with the family. So now you're excited. You're happy. You've moved from being groggy and sad to being excited and happy. So you go to jump out of bed and you sit up and then your head just starts pounding and you realize you're sick.

[1:39] You're disappointed now. Now you're sad again and now you've changed and because of this circumstance that's come to your knowledge you've been moved again. And so you lay back down you fall back asleep and I guess the rest of this would be more for parents.

But then you wake up by your child coming through the doors and you're woken up and you're still groggy and you think oh now you're disappointed again. But then you look and you see it's your child and your child has decided to bring you breakfast in bed.

So now you're moved to affection for your child and you feel love for your child and you think this is good. So your state of being has changed yet again.

And as the child's bringing breakfast in bed to you, the child pauses for a moment and it turns out that you're not the only one that's sick. And the child sneezes and chartreuse colored facial fluid goes all over your breakfast.

And you went from being happy and excited to now kind of grossed out and disappointed. And within not even getting out of bed, there's been a roller coaster of emotions, a roller coaster of feelings and circumstances that change you.

[2:51] Changes that occur within you because we're human. We're mankind. We are creation. And these changes, the movements that occur are called passions.

God is without passions. Now I want to turn your attention to Acts and we'll read verses 1 to 15. Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews and so spoke that a great multitude, both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed.

But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren. Therefore, they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

But the multitude of the city was divided, part sided with the Jews and part with the apostles. And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews with their rulers to abuse and stone them, they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lyconia and to the surrounding region.

And they were preaching the gospel there. And in Lystra, a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked.

[4:17] This man heard Paul speaking. Paul observed him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, stand up straight on your feet. And he leapt and walked.

Now, when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lyconian language, the gods have come down to us in the likeness of men.

And Barnabas, they called Zeus and Paul Hermes because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes.

But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, tore their clothes and ran in among the multitudes, crying out and saying, Men, why are you doing these things?

We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them.

[5:25] Lord, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the Lord's day. We thank you for the means of grace. We pray that you would attend the preaching of the word, that be demonstrated by the spirit and the power, and that you would make your word effectual to the hearers.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, what I want to draw to your attention this evening is that there is an absolute absence of causation, mutation, distress, suffering, and change in God.

So we will look at creature-accommodating language, or what's called, if you want to impress your parents, memorize this word, anthropopathisms.

And we will also look from Acts 14 of God is not of like passions, and the doctrine of divine impassibility.

So first of all, creature-accommodating language. As we've been going through the doctrine of God and reading things that the Bible says about God, you might be having a hard time wrapping your mind around it, thinking, I just, I can't grasp it.

[6:34] I can't relate to it. And that's exactly the point. We can't relate to it because we're not God. So because we're not God and can't relate to God, God reveals himself to us in language that accommodates our creatureliness, worded in ways in which we can understand it.

And this is called anthropopathisms. Now, in the Bible, we get the general concept of the use of language metaphorically describing God.

Now, God, we know, is a spirit, but the Bible sometimes describes God as having body parts. So we get that. We understand that part, that that's metaphorical, that that's analogical.

We need to understand that the same thing applies to metaphorical descriptions of God having human passions, of God having human emotions.

So the metaphorical describing of God with body parts, such as his strong right arm, even though God's spirit, this is an anthro, according to the manner of men.

[7:44] Anthropomorphisms and passions or emotions are anthropopathisms. Now, in first, how do we know from scripture that this is occurring? Because it would seem otherwise that perhaps scripture is contradicting itself because it describes God, a description of God's essence in one way, but yet it describes God's interactions with people in another way.

So how do we know that the description of the interactions is the metaphorical and not the descriptions of his essence as metaphorical? Well, in 1 Samuel 15, we see in verse 10-11 that it says, Now, the word of the Lord came to Samuel saying, I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king.

So here we might see, or here we see that what scripture says is that God regretted. And we think of what happens when we regret and how we change.

Now, how do we know if this is metaphorical language? Well, it goes on later in verse 29 to say, And also the strength of Israel will not lie or relent.

So at first it describes God's interaction with men as though he relents, but then it confirms later saying that God will not relent. God's essence will not relent.

[9:09] And it goes on to say, For he is not a man that he should relent. And the word that's used in 29 in Hebrew is the exact same word that's used in 10 and 11 in Hebrew.

It's not a different word. It's a different tense. So what it's telling us here is that God is not a man. Man relents.

And the description of God's interaction with men, it's described in the way in which man understands. So while it says that God regretted, it confirms by saying God will not relent.

He is not a man that he should relent. So what it's saying here in 1 Samuel is that the relenting is something that belongs to man, not to God, that God will not.

So what is this relenting? And as I mentioned that we're going to be looking at, it's about passions. Passions. So we need to understand what passions are.

[10:11] But first, we're talking about creature accommodating language. And I mentioned this big word, which you've memorized already, because you're going to impress your parents. Anthropopathy.

Now, anthropopathisms is the predication of human passions to God. We haven't defined passions yet. We've seen examples of it.

But whatever this passions is, we see that it's metaphorically predicated of God. So what's the intent? What's the intent of Scripture doing it?

The intent is not to imply that there is a change in God, because that's what it would imply, but rather a changed relationship between God and man.

And the change occurs in creation. The change occurs external to God. So we must understand that there is no mutation.

[11:08] Perhaps you've heard the word mutability of God. There is no mutation in God's essence, nor eternity, nor understanding, nor will.

Nothing about God changes. Benedict Pictet, who is a Reformation, post-Reformation theologian of 1600s and 1700s, he wrote this, This immutability of God, so immutability is with unchangeability, without change.

This immutability of God is the fulcrum of our faith and the foundation of our hope. Our faith and our hope, it rests on the fact that God does not change.

So is this something that's important for us? Absolutely. So creature accommodating language.

Next of all, to go back to Acts 14, that God is not of like passions.

Now let's read again verse 15 specifically. Actually, I'll explain what's going on here. What's going on is that they see what the apostles are doing, Paul and Barnabas are doing, and they think that they are gods.

[12:21] And what's their response? The response is not just saying that they're not gods. They get to an even deeper issue.

They do even more. Have you ever talked to somebody, and it's like every time you say something, they have to one-up what you're saying. You tell a story, and well, they've got a better story, or you did this thing, and they did it even better.

Well, what they're doing here is they're one-upping by getting to an even greater issue. In verse 15, it's saying, Men, why are you doing these things? We are men with the same nature as you.

Now this word nature, it's also interpreted in some Bibles as passions. So it would read, Why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same passions as you.

And we'll get to that later. And preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God. So what they're doing here is they're not just saying, We're not gods.

[13:20] We're not God. What they're saying is they're confirming that they're not gods because they have passions. They have like natures as man. And in so doing, they're defining the essence of the one true living God, which excludes their gods.

The Greek and Roman gods were full of passions. They had roller coasters of passions. And they're saying, Because your gods have passions, they're not true and living.

They're not the one true living God. They're not gods, which there is only the one true and living God. And that essence of God is not of like passions, not of like nature as man.

So this word passions in verse 15, or this word nature, in the New King James Version, in my copy it says here, of like nature, some translate it as passion.

B-day Greek lexicon, it explains this word as saying, To experience similarity in feelings or circumstances with the same nature. So they're saying, they experience same feelings and circumstances with the same nature as these men, which defines God, the one true living God, as not being of the same nature, of not experiencing the same feelings or circumstances.

[14:41] So what exactly are passions? We are not of like passions. Passions are causes. If you remember last, not last week, two weeks ago, of divine simplicity, in Romans 11, 36, of him and through him and to him are all things.

God is uncaused. Passions are causes, considering cause and effect. Passions are the causes, they're causes that bring about a new state of being.

So in that illustration, where I had you imagine that you woke up and you were constantly being brought to a new state of being through the circumstances or through people that had an impact on you.

Passions are the movement, not the attribute. They're the movement in creatures from one state to another. And passions indicate passivity.

Passive and active, something that is active when the subject is doing the action, it's active. When the subject has the action being done to them, it's passive.

[15 : 49] So passions indicate passivity. That is being altered by an action exerted by an exterior agent. And as humans, this is what we experience.

This is what we know. Not so with God. So with change, something about change is you can only change into something that you're not already. You change from one thing, change into another thing.

And that change occurs according to a power that causes movement. A power that causes, a cause, or causes, produce a state of being.

So for something to change into something, it's not what that is prior to the change. And such a movement in God would suggest imperfection.

If God is perfect and there's a change that occurs, then either he was imperfect and changed to being perfect, or he was perfect and the change has made him imperfect.

[16 : 51] So such a movement in God suggests imperfection and it is an absence, it suggests an absence of what is his very essence. If you remember two weeks ago from Divine Simplicity, God Without Parts, God's attributes, such as his love, his power, his wisdom, they're not external things that he possesses, but it is his very essence.

All that is in God is God. So such a movement would suggest then that there is an absence of that in his essence. Now the Greek and Roman gods in Acts 14 here, the Greek and Roman gods were consumed with passions and therefore these Greek and Roman gods were of the same nature as man, which means that they're not divine essence.

And unlike, this is unlike the one true living God who is without passions. So next, the doctrine of divine impassibility.

And in the confession, those two words, without passions, it's speaking about impassibility. And the doctrine of divine impassibility and the confession's use of it, it's not something, it's not something new.

It's not that in the 1600s a new doctrine was created, but it's in continuity. The doctrine of divine impassibility is in continuity with historic orthodoxy. The patristics, the medieval era, the reformation, post-reformation era, including when the confessions were written.

[18 : 29] Now, passions are caused by the impact of an object on the subject that changes it. So I want to read how the confession articulates the essence of God and draw out from it the doctrine of divine impassibility, how it is articulated.

Because when the confessions are written, they articulated things very specifically. So if you have your confessions with you, turn to chapter 2, paragraph 1.

And this is how they have articulated doctrine of God, the one true and living God. The Lord our God is but one only living and true God, whose subsistence is in and of himself, infinite in being and perfection, whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but himself, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, who only has immortality, dwelling in the light, which no man can approach unto, who is immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, every way infinite, and listen to this, most holy, most wise, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of his own, immutable, and most righteous will, for his own glory, most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, the rewarder of them that diligently seek him, and withal, most just and terrible in his judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.

Now did you notice the use of the word most, about how God is most? And I think when people struggle with their understanding of the doctrine of divine impassibility, why they struggle with it is because they have a misunderstanding of passions.

They think, well, something that I love very much, I'm very passionate about it. So to not have passions, to not be passionate about it, would be devoid of that love.

[20 : 55] But that's not what impassibility is. Because God, all that is in God is God, and his attributes we also call his perfections, the fullness, the completeness of those attributes.

And when God is most loving, it means, if most loving is up here on a scale, and somebody thinks, because I'm passionate, then my love is brought up high.

So if we say, God's not passionate, he's not brought up high in love. But what impassibility is saying is that God is perfect, his perfection of love, he is most loving, so any change, any passion, would be an absence of love, would be reduced from it.

So it's not that God, impassibility doesn't mean that God is not loving, it means he is most loving, and cannot be changed from that, or become unloving. Impassibility indicates the absence of passions in God, the absence of suffering in God, that there is no mutation in God's being, no change in God.

God's attributes, his perfections, if you remember from, without parts, divine simplicity, his perfections are the same as his essence.

[22 : 17] And God's perfections don't need to become perfect, as I already mentioned. God's perfections don't become corrupt from perfection. So if this is perfection, God doesn't need to become perfect, and God isn't corrupted from being perfect.

God is most perfect in his essence. Because God does not depend on anything to be God, he does not depend on humans to be most holy, most wise, most righteous, most just, most loving.

Rather, God is. So because God does not depend on anything for his essence, God does not depend on humans to make him most loving, or to make him most wise, or to make him most blessed.

God doesn't ever lack any of his perfections, nor will he change. God is free from all mutation of being. The immutability of God indicates the eternal and perpetual identity of the divine essence with all of its perfections.

So before we conclude, just a quick closer look at passions to rightly understand what passions are. Passions are affected states of being.

[23 : 39] To be affected by something. To be affected into a new state of being. Passions are to suffer. Passions are to submit.

Passions are to undergo or to experience. Let's put it another way, passions are to be a recipient. To be on the receiving end. Passions are to be the patient.

Passions means being the one who undergoes operative change on account of an agency. An agency which is a cause. Something has caused you to undergo undergo this change.

And according to Aquinas, to put it much more simply, passions are the effect of the agent on the patient. So that illustration about in the morning where you wake up, you're groggy, you're excited, you're sick, you're disappointed and all these roller coasters of emotions and passions.

passions. What's going on here is we are being affected by people or circumstances as agents on us as the patient, the recipient of these effects.

[24 : 53] Passions, so when we think about God and how improper it would be to say that God undergoes passions, passions are finite, passions are mutable and passions are caused and that's not the case with God.

God is infinite, God is immutable and God is uncaused. Remember Romans 11, 36 from him and through him and to him are all things to him be the glory forever.

Amen. So a couple concluding uses that we can make of God without passions is this indicates why the incarnation was necessary.

Now mankind because the fall mankind was sinful and born in sin and does actually sin but to be in a right relationship with God, God who is holy and righteous and just and does not change, for man to be in a right relationship with God requires perfect obedience which mankind cannot do.

Mankind cannot produce this perfect righteousness. So something, there's a problem there that needs to be fixed. furthermore, mankind has sinned and the penalty, the ransom price needs to be paid.

[26 : 11] So how is this to be done? Man can't do it and God, according to his essence, cannot suffer and God cannot die. So that is why the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God and the fullness of time came into the world, came into time, assumed our nature, took to himself a body and as a man perfectly obeyed, having the meriting eternal life with a perfect righteousness, suffered and died as a substitute, as a man, according to his human nature, to satisfy the justice of

God, but yet being of divine essence, of infinite value, his propitiation of infinite value.

And that's when we consider why is the incarnation necessary, the passion of Christ. I'm not talking about the movie, don't watch it. If you need, if you want to know why not to watch it, listen to Albert Martin's sermon on the passion movie, to watch or not to watch.

When I say the passion of Christ, it's again, that receiving the suffering of Christ, the coming of Christ in the world to save sinners requires the suffering which requires human nature, which is why we have the divine nature united to the human nature in the one person of Jesus Christ as the mediator between a holy God and sinful mankind.

And the only way to be right before God is to be in Christ, to receive Christ, to rest on Christ, to rest on Christ's righteousness, to rest on Christ's accomplishments, and all that is Christ and all that belongs to Christ and all the promises in the gospel of life.

The second concluding use is somebody at some point in time said, wise men say only fools rush in, but I can't help falling in love with you.

[28:08] So I guess it was more than just one person at one point in time because you've all probably heard it before. And this gets to the point of what passions are. Despite the counsel of wise men, something happens to this person that they can't control.

They can't help it happening. And what happens is they're falling into, there's a change that's occurring. They are the patients that are being impacted by an agent that's causing this movement. And they can't control it. And it's contrary to the counsel of wise men. And they're undergoing change on the account of that agent, of the person which is causing them to fall in love for this move to happen.

Before falling in love was not there. Change of a state of being has occurred and they can't help it happening. Because he or she is human.

Not so with God. Something doesn't happen to God that he can't help. God is not caused and God does not fall into a new state of being.

[29:18] God does not change. God does not become more of his essence at any time and God does not become less of his essence at any time. In other words, because God doesn't fall in love, God will not fall out of love.

God will not cease to love you because he never began. When I say that, part of you might go, he never began to love me. But there is no beginning with God.

God doesn't undergo succession of change. It's not that God didn't and then something happened and caused God and then God did. God never began.

God never fell in love. God's love has no cause. Rather, God is love. God's very essence is love. He is the fountainhead and the source of all love.

And all that is in God is God. God is the perfection of love without beginning, without end, without corruption, and without change. And for every Christian, this is good news.

[30:26] Because as Malachi 3, 6 says, for I am the Lord, I do not change. Therefore, you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob. Let's pray. Let's pray.