

~Our Passionate God~

When we speak about God's passion, what do we mean? When I talk about His passion, I mean His love, His emotion, His anger, His longing to save, His ardor, His grief, and His hate.

Since all of these emotions are attributed to Him in the Bible, why is there even a question about His passion? Why is there even a quality called impassibility attributed to Him? The Bible does not support the speculation that God is impassible. On the contrary, God's word establishes the fact that God has emotions. Our emotions are like His. However, when we show ours, the negative ones are usually expressed in a context of sin.

First we must understand what the word impassible means. The dictionary states a person is impassible who: 1. cannot feel pain; incapable of suffering. 2. cannot be injured; invulnerable. 3. cannot be moved or aroused emotionally; unfeeling.

If God is passionate, who invented the idea that He is impassible? We are not absolutely sure, but Augustine (354-430), who became the Bishop of Hippo, embraced Plato's idea that God never changes in anything. This concept was popular in the schools of philosophy of Augustine's time. Plato explained it this way in, "A dialogue between Socrates and Adeimantus," in the **Republic**.

"Is it not true that **to be altered and moved by something else** happens least to things that are in the best condition . . . that the healthiest and strongest is least altered. . . And is it not the soul that is bravest and most intelligent that would be least disturbed and altered by any external affection . . . **that those which are well made and in good condition are least liable to be changed by time and other influences.**"

Adeimantus: "That is so."

Socrates: "It is universally true then, that that which is in the best state by nature or art or both admits least alteration by something else."

Adeimantus: "So it seems."

Socrates: "But surely everything that belongs to God is in every way in the best possible state. . . . Then does he (God) change himself for the better and to something fairer, or for the worse and to something uglier than himself? It must necessarily, said he, **be for the worse if he is changed . . . the gods themselves are incapable of change. . . . Then God is altogether simple and true in deed and word, and neither changes himself nor deceives others.**"^[1]

In this dialogue, Plato popularized the idea of the immutability of God. A little over 800 years later Augustine adopted this idea from the writings of Plato and the Neo-Platonists.

^[1]Plato, *Republic I*, Loeb Classical Library, II, pp. 191-197.

After the revival of Augustinianism during the reformation, this idea of the immutability of God permeated our whole society. How did this happen? I'd like to illustrate this by telling a story that I read some time ago.

One of the Czars of Russia, while walking in his park, came upon a sentry standing guard over a little patch of weeds. He asked the guard, "What are you doing here?"

"I don't know. All I know is the Captain of the Guard ordered me to stand guard over this spot."

The Czar sent for the Captain of the Guard. "What is this man guarding?"

"All I know, Sir, is that the regulations call for a sentry to be posted here."

The Czar ordered an investigation, but no one in the Russian government could discover why that spot needed guarding. Then they opened the archives, and the mystery was solved. The records showed that 100 years before, Catherine the Great had planted a rose bush on that plot of ground and ordered a sentry posted there to keep people from trampling it. Eventually the rose bush died. For 100 years, men stood guard over that spot where a rose bush had grown and didn't know why they were guarding it.

Many Christians are guarding religious ideas with a fervor, but haven't checked the archives (the Bible) to really see why they are guarding them. We are going to check the archives.

To begin, I want to do a credibility check on this idea of impassibility. If He were impassible, would God show wrath? Does God respond to man's sinful acts in anger? We will see that the answer is, yes, He does respond! Since it is true that God responds in anger, should the idea of impassibility be attributed to Him?

The answer to this question is, no, because that would contradict the definitions of immutability and impassibility. I will quote just a few of the many verses that show God's response in wrath.

Ex 22:22-24 You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. 23 If you afflict them in any way, and they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry; 24 and My wrath will become hot, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.

Ex 32:9-12 And the Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! 10 Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation." 11 Then Moses pleaded with the Lord his God, and said: "Lord, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? 12 Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, 'He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and repent from this harm to Your people.'"

Deut 9:7, 8 - Remember! Do not forget how you provoked the Lord your God to wrath in the wilderness.

From the day that you departed from the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the Lord. 8 Also in Horeb you provoked the Lord to wrath, so that the Lord was angry enough with you to have destroyed you.

Deut 29:23 The whole land is brimstone, salt, and burning; it is not sown, nor does it bear, nor does any grass grow there, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, which the Lord overthrew in His anger and His wrath.

We find that members of the body of Christ are also disciplined by God when they do not discern the body of Christ when partaking of the Lord's Supper, in 1 Cor. 11:27-32.

"Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to

himself, not discerning the Lord's body. 30 For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. 31 For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world."

Then, what is God like? Let's look at the Archives again. Since the Reformation, the church has dwelt on ideas which give an unbiblical view of God. When we read about God in His word, we see pictures of Him to which our emotions relate, not just our intellect. But these pictures of God's goodness and compassion have been neglected

Biblical statements about God appeal to me theologically, but metaphors which show me God impact my soul. I want to love my God. If I am to love Him, I must know Him better. Therefore, let's look at some metaphors in the Bible which show God in a more balanced way.

God suffers when we suffer. This is, indeed, comforting to the person who is suffering.

1. God was afflicted in Israel's affliction.

Isa 63:7-9 "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. 8 For He said, "Surely they are My people, children who will not lie." So He became their Savior. 9 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."

2. God agonizes over Israel.

Hos 11:8 "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zeboiim? My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred."

3. He asks, how long, what, and why?

Ex 16:28 And the LORD said to Moses, "How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws?"

Num 14:11 Then the LORD said to Moses: "How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them?"

Num 14:26-27 And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 27 "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who complain against Me? I have heard the complaints which the children of Israel make against Me."

4) Just like a parent, He asks, "What Have I done?"

Mic 6:3 O My people, what have I done to you? And how have I wearied you?
And why?

Isa 50:1-2 Thus says the LORD: "Where is the certificate of your mother's divorce whom I have put away? Or which of My creditors is it to whom I have sold you? For your iniquities you have sold yourselves, and for your transgressions your mother has been put away. 2 Why, when I came, was there no man? Why, when I called, was there none to answer? Is My hand shortened at all that it cannot

redeem? Or have I no power to deliver? Indeed with My rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness; Their fish stink because there is no water and die of thirst.

5) He was grieved, just like a parent of a rebellious teenager.

Psa 78:40-41 “How often they provoked Him in the wilderness, And grieved Him in the desert! 41 Yes, again and again they tempted God and limited the Holy One of Israel.”

We can grieve Him even though we are sealed.

Eph 4:30 “and do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

6) He loves and grieves like a husband.

Hos 1:2; 2:5, 13; 3:1 The LORD said to Hosea: “Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry And children of harlotry, For the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the LORD.” 2:5 “For their mother has played the harlot; She who conceived them has behaved shamefully. For she said, ‘I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink.’ 2:13 She decked herself with her earrings and jewelry, and went after her lovers; But Me she forgot,” says the LORD. 3:1 “Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the LORD for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans.”

7) He loves and grieves like a parent.

Hos 11:1-4 “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son. 2 As they **the prophets** called them, so they went from them; They sacrificed to the Baals, and burned incense to carved images. 3 I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms; But they did not know that I healed them. 4 I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love, and I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped and fed them.”

8) He’s like a parent at his wit’s end who says, “What more could I do?”

Isa 5:1-7 “Now let me sing to my Well-beloved. A song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard: My Well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. 2 He dug it up and cleared out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, and also made a winepress in it; So He expected it to bring forth good grapes, But it brought forth wild grapes. 3 And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge, please, between Me and My vineyard. 4 What more could have been done to My vineyard That I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes?”

That’s the God I love. He’s our passionate God. He suffers when we suffer. He sent His Son to suffer and die for us. I love Him because He first loved me. God is not impassible.

What about those theologians who say God cannot be affected by anything outside of Himself. They’re not stupid. In fact, most of them are brilliant. It is my opinion that they defend doctrines which are based on faulty foundations, and they have not examined the foundations to see if they are faulty. I want to look, again, at that brilliant man whose writings have affected us for about 1,500 years--Augustine. He wrote the following statement in “On the Morals of the Catholic Church”:

We do not worship a **God who repents**, or is envious, or needy, . . . These and such like are the silly notions . . . the fancies of old women or of children . . . **those by whom these passages are literally understood**. . . And should any one suppose that anything in God's substance or nature can suffer change or conversion, he will be held guilty of wild profanity.^{2[2]}

Since John Calvin was greatly influenced by Augustine, he wrote in his **Institutes**:

“We say, then, that Scripture clearly proves this much, that God by his eternal and immutable counsel determined once for all those whom it was his pleasure one day to admit to salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, it was his pleasure to doom to destruction.^{3[3]}”

Augustine also wrote, in **The City of God**,

“Indeed, to say that He is affected at all, is an abuse of language, since it implies that there comes to be something in His nature which was not there before. For he who is affected is acted upon, and **whatever is acted upon is changeable**. . . But in God the former purpose is not altered and obliterated by the subsequent and different purpose, but by one and the same eternal and unchangeable will He effected regarding the things He created^{4[4]} The anger of God is not a disturbing emotion of His mind, but a judgment by which punishment is inflicted upon sin. His thought and reconsideration also are the unchangeable reason which changes things; for **He does not, like man, repent of anything He has done, because in all matters His decision is as inflexible as His prescience is certain.**^{5[5]}”

But, that's not the God Who reveals Himself to us in the Bible. He loves us so much, and **is affected** by our lack of love. He really becomes jealous when we go after others gods.

Ex 20:3-6 “You shall have no other gods before Me. 4 You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; 5 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”

What are our gods? Wouldn't they be anything we put ahead of our God? As our own father, God is jealous of the many things that distract us. It's so easy to let things take up our time so we forget about Him. That's why He yearns jealously.

Jam 4:5, 6 “Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, the Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”? 6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

Eph 5:5 “For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man (one who is greedy), who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

Col 3:5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”

^{2[2]} Oats, Whitney J. “On the Morals of the Catholic Church,” *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, p. 327.

My emphasis.

^{3[3]} Calvin, *Institutes*, AGES Software.

^{4[4]} Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, pp. 399-400. My emphasis.

^{5[5]} *Ibid.*, p. 515. My emphasis.

There are many references to God's jealousy. Here are a few: Deut 32:21; 1 Ki 14:22; Psa 78:58; Psa 79:5.

Even one of God's names is Jealous. Ex 34:14. "You shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God."

We have shown that God is grieved in many ways. That grief causes God to respond in various ways. I only want to look at a few here.

Gen 6:5, 6 "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 And the Lord repented that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart."

Psa 78:40, 41 "How often they provoked Him in the wilderness, and grieved Him in the desert! 41 Yes, again and again they tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel."

Eph 4:30 "do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."

Therefore, in contrast to what many theologians say, we affect our Father. Our wonderful Father really cares: 1 Pe 5:7, "casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you."

I know that this article will be controversial, as it goes against much of what is taught, but if we are to follow the Scriptures, we must speak as God does in the Bible, regardless of how it confounds or upsets us. God is God and He needs no defense on our part. He has written what He has written and it is enough for us to glorify Him by the very words He gave us and try to understand them in context. God is no less

God because He repents of some things any more than He is no less God when He condescends to dialogue with us. If He put the word 'repent' in the Bible regarding something He did, He did it for a reason. It is not for us to change the meaning of Scripture just because it contradicts a preconception that we might have of Him.

Praise Him, all you people!