



“College Life Class”

The Attributes of God: Impassibility & Infinity

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God's Impassibility

- Impassibility affirms that God is without changing passions, but it does not deny that He has different feelings.
- “Impassibility” is that God is not passible or subject to passion (*im* = not and *passible* = having passion). God cannot undergo passion or suffering; nothing in the created universe can make God feel pain or inflict misery on Him.
- This does not mean that God has no feelings, but simply that His feelings are not the results of actions imposed on Him by others. His feelings flow from His eternal and unchangeable nature.
- Classical theists do not believe that God is a divine “Mr. Spock”, the emotionless Vulcan in *Star Trek*. God **does express** such emotions as anger, jealousy, hatred, love, kindness, patience, grief, and sorrow.

God's Impassibility

- Neither does impassable mean immobile: God can and does act.
- Acts 17:25 “He is not served by human hands, *as if he needed anything*, because He Himself gives all men life and breath and *everything else*”.
- Acts. 17:28 “In Him we live and move and have our being.”
- “Does God change His mind due to an emotional response on His part to the actions of an outside agent?” We know that God expresses emotions, but can He do so without compromising His immutability?
- Classical theists say yes; neotheists disagree.

The biblical basis for God's impassibility

The biblical basis for impassibility is found in many verses on God's self-sufficiency (aseity) and immutability.

That God cannot be changed by external causes is based in part on His self-sufficiency.

Deut. 10:14

¹⁴“Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it.”

Psalm 50: 10-12

¹⁰“For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. ¹¹I know every bird of the mountains, and everything that moves in the field is Mine. ¹²If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world is Mine, and all it contains.”

The biblical basis for God's impassibility (cont.)

Isaiah 40:13-14, 28

¹³Who has directed the spirit of the LORD, or as His counselor has informed Him?

¹⁴With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding?

²⁸Do you not know? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable.

Rom. 11: 34-36

³⁴For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? ³⁵Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? ³⁶For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

The biblical basis for God's impassibility (cont.)

Not only is God so totally self-sufficient that He is unaffected by anything or anyone else, but He is also completely unchanging in His being, will, and purposes.

God cannot undergo changing feelings; how He feels is determined by His own unchangeable being. (Num. 23:19; Heb. 6:18)

God cannot change. Any outward expression of emotion does not mean that God might change what He has decided that He will do.

God expresses emotion in perfect concert with His immutability (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29; Mal. 3:6).

If God cannot change, then He must be impassible. Everyone who suffers undergoes change. Therefore, an immutable God is an impassible God.



Objections to God's impassibility

Objection one -- based on Christ's Atonement

It is claimed that impassibility is the most dubious of the divine attributes, because it suggests that God does not experience sorrow, sadness, or pain.

Impassibility appears to deny that God is touched by the feelings of our infirmity's, despite what the Bible says about His love and His sorrow.

How can God be loving and yet not be pained by evil?

How can God be impassible when God the Son experienced suffering and death?

Objections to God's impassibility (cont.)

Response to Objection one

In the “hypostatic union” of two natures in one Person there is neither a separation of the natures (as in Nestorianism) nor confusion of the natures (as in monophysitism). Objection one confuses the natures. Jesus had two distinct natures, one divine and the other human. He suffered in and through the latter, not the former. He who suffered was the God-man, yet He did not suffer as God, but as man.

This objection is similar to the 3rd-century heresy called *patripassianism* (lit: “Father-suffering”), which asserts that the Father suffered on the cross when Jesus did.

This view fails to recognize that the divine **nature** did not undergo suffering; only one **person** (Christ), who also shares the divine nature with the Father and the Holy Spirit, suffered on the cross--and that in His human nature. God did not suffer on the cross; only the second person of the Godhead suffered. To claim otherwise is to confuse the two natures of Christ and to fall into heresy.

Objections to God's impassibility (cont.)

Objection two--based on the Personhood of God

The commonly accepted definition of a person is one who has intellect, emotions (feelings), and will. All three members of the Trinity are persons, and as persons must be able to undergo emotions (including suffering). Thus, acknowledging personhood and God is a tacit agreement that God--all three persons--can suffer.

Response to objection two

1. God does have feelings
2. God does not change
3. Therefore, God cannot undergo changing feelings. That is, God is impassible.

This does not mean that God has no feelings: He has ***unchanging*** feelings. He always feels good about our being good, and He always feels bad about our being bad.

Objections to God's impassibility (cont.)

Response to objection two (cont.)


God does not change when we repent: He always feels the same about the same.

When we change, God does not change. We simply move under another unchangeable attribute of God.

Like other relations to His creatures, God is **not reactive**, but **proactive** in His feelings.

God has feelings, but these feelings are unchangeable.

There are two different senses in which God has feelings. He feels in the sense of **perception**, but not in the sense of **passion**. He has **sensitivity**, but no **sentimentality**. In summary, He has unchanging feelings, not changing feelings.



Objections to God's impassibility (cont.)

Objection three--based on alleged origin in Greek philosophy

Greek philosophy, not the Bible, is the bases for classical theism's view of impassibility

Response to objection three

God's impassibility is derived from sound understanding of the biblical and theological data apart from any thought borrowed from Greek theology.

No Greeks had an infinite personal God, to say nothing of a triune God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.



God's Infinity

Infinite = “not-finite”

God is literally limitless in His Being: He is without boundaries, a Being beyond the limits of the created universe. It is only because of the finite nature of our concepts that this positive attribute must be expressed in negative terms.

God is not an infinite such as found in mathematics, where there are an infinite number of points between A and B; this is an abstract infinite, not a concrete one, as God is.

God is infinite in a metaphysical way, not any mathematical way; He is an actual infinite being, not an abstract one.

God is not an infinite series of real things; He is not an endless series of moments.

God is actually Infinite Being and cannot be added to in any way.

Biblical basis for God's Infinity

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” Gen. 1:1

“Will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you” 1 Kings 8: 27

“Great is our Lord and mighty in power; His understanding has no limit.” Ps. 147:5

“Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens--what can you do? They are deeper than the depths of the grave--what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea.” Job 11:7-9

“ ‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ Declares the LORD. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts’ ” Isa. 55:8-9

“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out!” Rom. 11: 33

“He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.” Col. 1:17



The Infinity of God

Let's distinguish various aspects of God's Infinity:

- His absolute perfection; improvement and deterioration are both equally impossible. He is a limitless Being.
- It should **not** be understood in a quantitative, but in a qualitative sense.
- It qualifies all the communicable attributes of God.
- The Infinity of God is that perfection of God by which He is free from all limitations.
- It does not involve His identity with the sum-total of existing things, nor does it exclude the co-existence of derived and finite things, to which He bears relation.
- Infinite **power** is not an absolute quantum, but an exhaustless potency of power.
- Infinite **holiness** is not a boundless quantum of holiness, but a holiness which is, qualitatively free from all limitation or defect.

The Infinity of God (cont.)

Let's distinguish various aspects of God's Infinity: (cont.)

- Infinite holiness is not a boundless quantum of holiness, but a holiness which is, qualitatively free from all limitation or defect.
- The same may be said of infinite **knowledge** and **wisdom**, and of infinite **love** and **righteousness**.
- **Eternity** in the strict sense of the word is ascribed to that which transcends all temporal limitations. The whole of His existence in one indivisible present.
- His **immensity** is the Infinity of God with reference to space, by which He transcends all spatial limitations, and yet is present in every point of space with His whole being.
 - “Immensity” points to the fact that God transcends all space and is not subject to its limitations, while “**omnipresence**” denotes that He nevertheless fills every part of space with His entire Being. The former emphasizes the transcendence, and the latter, the immanence of God.

Objections to God's Infinity

Objection one -- based on the impossibility of another being

It is argued by monists that if God is infinite, there could be nothing else, for it is impossible to have more than an infinite.

There **are** beings other than God--for example, me. My existence is undeniable, since I cannot deny it without existing first to make the denial.

If there is an infinite Being, then there is no room for another being. In short, infinite means All, and it is impossible to have more than All.

Response to objection one

Finite creatures are not **more** than God; they are simply **other** than God. When an infinite Being creates other beings, there is not **more being**; there are only **more who have being**.

In the same way when a teacher teaches a class, there is not more knowledge, there are only more who have it. All finite beings share being only because God gave it to them: "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

Objections to God's Infinity (cont.)

Objection two--based on an Infinite as a class of one

The monist Parmenides (c. 485 B.C.) argued that it is impossible to have two or more beings, since they have nothing by which they could differ.

If there *were* two beings, they would have to differ by either being or nonbeing. But they cannot differ by nothing, since to differ by nothing is not to differ at all.

Response to objection two

This argument assumes that all beings are the same; that is, it assumes a *univocal* concept of being versus an *analogical* one.

If there are different kinds of being (e.g., infinite and finite) that are analogous but not identical, then there can be more than one being: one can be infinite and the other(s) finite; one can be Pure Actuality and the other(s) a composition of actuality and potentiality; one can *be* Being and the other(s) *have* being.



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