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## SESSION 2 | DIVINE IMPASSIBILITY

# Delighting in Our Unchangeable God

**Definition:** God cannot experience emotional changes, either by his own divine will, or in response to his creation.

### I. IMPASSIBILITY AND US

#### A. What are passions?

“You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of underdone potato. There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!” Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 24-25

“You’re not you when you’re hungry.”

#### B. Scriptural Support<sup>1</sup>

“Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, being of **like passions** (*homoioopathēs* ὁμοιοπαθής) with you.” Acts 14:8-14

“Elijah was a man with **passions like ours** (*homoioopathēs* ὁμοιοπαθής).” James 5:17

“A **desire** fulfilled is sweet to the soul.” Proverbs 13:19

“We all once lived in the **passions of our flesh**, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind....be renewed in the spirit of your minds” Ephesians 2:3; 4:23

“If anyone **aspires** to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.” 1 Timothy 3:1

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<sup>1</sup> For further study, see also Proverbs 10:24, 11:23, 21:26; Luke 22:15; Romans 13:14; Galatians 5:24; Philippians 1:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:17; 1 Timothy 6:9; James 1:14; 1 John 2:16-17

## II. IMPASSIBILITY OF GOD

### A. Scriptural Support<sup>2</sup>

“The Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should **have regret**.” 1 Samuel 15:29

“I AM WHO I AM.” Exodus 3:14

“I the Lord **do not change**; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.” Malachi 3:6

“God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should **change his mind**.” Numbers 23:19

“God **is** love.” 1 John 4:8

### B. Theological Arguments

**Aseity:** God self-existing. Everything necessary for God to be God comes from himself and not from his creatures. THEREFORE....

**Simplicity:** Everything that is in God is necessary for God to be God. God’s essence cannot be divided into categories of essential and non-essentials properties. THEREFORE...

**Eternity:** God exists outside of time. He doesn’t have unfolding experiences over time like we do. THEREFORE...

### C. But doesn’t God regret his decisions sometimes?

“The word of the Lord came to Samuel: ‘**I regret** that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments.’ “ 1 Samuel 15:11

Compare to:

“The Glory of Israel will not lie or **have regret**, for he is not a man, that he should **have regret**.” 1 Samuel 15:29

“Even though we speak of God changing His mind, of His becoming angry, for example, after being kind to certain people, it is, in reality, these people, not God, who change. They find God changed because *they* have undergone a change” Augustine, *The City of God*, 22.2

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<sup>2</sup> For further study, see also Deuteronomy 32:39; Psalm 33:11, 102:25-27, 110:4; Isaiah 43:13; Jeremiah 4:28; Ezekiel 24:14; James 1:17.

“God’s unchanging holiness requires him to treat the wicked differently from the righteous. When the righteous become wicked, his treatment of them must change. The sun is not fickle or partial because it melts the wax but hardens the clay,—the change is not in the sun but in the objects it shines upon.” Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* 258.

**D. But what about Jesus?**

“[The Word] took up man into Himself, the invisible becoming visible, the incomprehensible being made comprehensible, the impassible becoming capable of passions, and the Word was made man, thus summing up all things in Himself.” Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*. 3.16

“[God the Son] assumed flesh capable of passions.” Clement, *Patchwork*, 7.2.

“Jesus **wept**.” John 11:35

“And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and **his sweat became like great drops of blood** falling down to the ground.” Luke 22:44

The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, “Take these things away; do not make my Father’s house a house of trade.” His disciples remembered that it was written, “**Zeal for your house will consume me.**” John 2:13-17

“And Jesus said to them, “I have **earnestly desired** to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” Luke 22:15

AND YET.....

Jesus Christ is **the same** yesterday and today and forever. Hebrews 13:8

### III. IMPASSIBILITY AND REAL LIFE

- A. We can have great confidence in God’s unchanging love.
- B. We can be confident that God will not be swayed in executing justice against wickedness on the final day.
- C. We can feel love and thankfulness for Jesus to an even greater degree.