

**The 1689 Confession of Faith; Chapter 2 – “Of God and the Holy Trinity”,  
Message # 6 – “God’s Immutability and Impassibility”, Presented in  
the Adult Sunday School Class by Pastor Paul Rendall  
on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2016.**

**Job 23: 13 and 14** – “But He is unique, and who can make Him change?” “And whatever His soul desires, that He does.” “For He performs what is appointed for me, and many such things are with Him.”

**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.

Having looked together at the truth that God is a most pure spirit, invisible and without a body or parts in His Being, we now want to turn our attention to the subjects of Divine Immutability and Divine Impassibility. I believe that we should study them together for they are very intimately related theologically speaking. Our God is a God who does not change, and He therefore is a God without passions. He certainly does not have sinful passions; having fits of anger or sadness; neither is He subject to sorrow or pain. But it is also true that He does not at all have any feelings, emotions, or affections which involve change, or which are subject to change. If we will remember that God is a pure being in regard to His immutability (His Unchangeableness), we shall then begin to understand the reasons why He is Impassible. God is pure being with no becoming. He already always was everything that He is now, and He is now everything that He shall be in the future.

**A standard definition of God’s Impassibility** is that it is “that Divine attribute whereby God is said not to experience inner emotional changes of state, whether enacted freely from within or effected by his relationship to, and His interaction with, human beings and the created order.” (Confessing the Impassible God, P. 441)

**A standard definition of God’s Simplicity** –“ Having an uncompounded or non-composite nature which, referring to God, asserts that He is absolutely free of composition physically, rationally, or logically.” “Because of divine simplicity, we assert that all that is in God is God.” (Taken from Confessing the Impassible God, P. 443)

The controversy in our own day, in our own Reformed Baptist circles, has been whether our God has affections or feelings in any way like a man; such as are attributed to Him in the Bible: grief, pity, anger, and love, and other affections related to these. And the conclusion that we must come to, from our study of the Bible, is that God does have affections, but they are not like a man's because they do not involve any internal change in His Being, or have succession in time, or develop in Him. They are fixed virtues and perfections which are always present in Him; which, when they are providentially exercised in relation to His creation, and in relation to men and their actions, it is perceived by us who are finite creatures, that He has changed. But He has not, and never will change in His essence and Being. I am saying that it is often because we do not begin our study with God's Divine simplicity and His immutability that we cannot at first accept the idea of God's impassibility. The truth of the matter is that God does have feelings and affections but they are not essentially like a man's. God is one in His Being; He does not have parts to Him. He is simple in this regard. And since God is unchangeable in His Being, He cannot possibly have feelings that change, or ebb and flow, like a man's feeling do. Let us examine these things in relation to particular verses which should convince us that our God is without passions.

### **1. Let us begin, where we should, with God's Immutability.**

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

**John Gill comments on this verse** – “For I am the Lord,... Or Jehovah; a name peculiar to the most High, and so a proof of the deity of Christ, who here speaks; and is expressive of His being; of His self-existence; of His purity and simplicity; of his immensity and infinity; and of his eternity and sovereignty: **I change not**; being the same today, yesterday, and forever; he changed not in his divine nature and personality by becoming man; he took that into union with him he had not before, but remained the same he ever was; nor did He change in His threatenings of destruction to the Jews, which came upon them according to His word; nor in His promises of His Spirit, and presence, and protection to His people; nor will He ever change in His love and affections to them; nor in the efficacy of His blood, sacrifice, and righteousness; wherefore, as this is introduced to assure the truth and certainty of what is said before, concerning His being a swift witness against the wicked, so also for the comfort of the saints, as follows. The Targum is, "for I the Lord have not changed my covenant." **Therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed**; such who were Israelites indeed, true believers in Christ; these were not consumed when the wicked Jews were, but were directed to leave the city before its destruction, and go to another place, as they did, whereby they were preserved; and so it was, that not one Christian perished in it; and so it is owing to the unchangeable love, grace, and power of Christ, that none of his perish internally or eternally, but have everlasting life.”

**John Owen** in his Works, Vol. 2, Pages 30 and 31 says this on Malachi 3: 6 – “The love of God in itself The love of God is the eternal purpose and act of his will. This is no more changeable than God himself: if it were, no flesh could be saved; but its changes not, and we are not consumed. What then? Loves he his people in their sinning? Yes; his people, — not their sinning. Alters he not his love towards them? Not the purpose of his will, but the dispensations of his grace. He rebukes them, he chastens them, he hides his face from them, he smites them, he fills them with a sense of [his] indignation; but woe, woe would it be to us, should he change in his love, or take away his kindness from us! Those very things which seem to be demonstrations of the change of his affections towards his, do as clearly proceed from love as those which seem to be the most genuine issues thereof. “But will not this encourage to sin?” He never tasted of the love of God that can seriously make this objection. The doctrine of grace may be turned into wantonness; the principle cannot.”

**James 1: 17, 18** – “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of Lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” “Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures.”

**Psalms 102: 23-28** – “He weakened my strength in the way; He shortened my days. I said, ‘O my God, Do not take me away in the midst of my days; Your years are throughout all generations.’ “Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands.” “They will perish, but You will endure; Yes, they will all grow old like a garment; Like a cloak You will change them, And they will be changed.” “But You are the same, And Your years will have no end.” “The children of Your servants will continue, And their descendants will be established before You.”

**Stephen Charnock says:** “Immutability is a glory belonging to all the attributes of God.” “It is not a single perfection of the Divine nature, nor is it limited to particular objects thus and thus disposed.” “Mercy and justice have their distinct objects and distinct acts; mercy is conversant about a penitent, justice conversant about an obstinate sinner.” “In our notion and conception of the Divine perfections, His perfections are different: the wisdom of God is not His power, nor His power His holiness, but immutability is the center where they all unite.”

## **2. God is pure actuality and He is a Being who is not affected in His essence by anything that men might do, so that He changes.**

Nothing compels or provokes God to do anything which He has not purposed to do. His purposes are unchangeable and cannot be thwarted. And thus, the display of His affections are directly related to His eternal purposes, and the demonstration of His perfection of justice and what would most glorify His own righteousness, as well as His goodness, mercy, and love.

**Isaiah 40: 21-26** – “Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. He brings the princes to nothing; He makes the judges of the earth useless. Scarcely shall they be planted, Scarcely shall they be sown, Scarcely shall their stock take root in the earth, When He will also blow on them, And they will wither, And the whirlwind will take them away like stubble. "To whom then will you liken Me, Or to whom shall I be equal?" says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, And see who has created these things, Who brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name, By the greatness of His might And the strength of His power; Not one is missing.