

Digging Deep: Exploring the Joy of Systematic Theology

Class 10: The Doctrine of God, part 6

The Attributes of God

"... this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

John 17. 3

I. Introduction

Two important terms/concepts ...

1. **Impassability** – God cannot suffer & is incapable of being acted upon by an external force.
2. **Communication of idioms** (*or communication of properties or sharing of attributes*)
 - What can be said about either nature of Christ can be said about the person of Christ;
 - But what can be said about the person of Christ cannot necessarily be said about either nature
 - And what can be said about one nature cannot necessarily be said about the other.

What Christ did, He did as a single Person, the union of two natures. Therefore what you can say about either nature you can say about the Person. But what you can say about the Person you cannot automatically say about the two natures.

JI Packer, Knowing God

Four arguments in favor of the passibility of God ...

1. If God truly is love, then He must enter into the pain of His creatures. Anything less would be cruel;
2. Throughout the Scriptures we see God exercising the full range of passions & emotions;
3. Our only hope & comfort in suffering is knowing, not only that God is in control of it, but that He is with us in it as well;
4. If Jesus is the invisible God made visible, then in His suffering He showed the true suffering nature of God Himself.

One Biblical, full-of-good-news conclusion

While Jesus Christ clearly suffered, God the Father did not. In other words, God remained impassible even though the Impassible suffered in Christ.

II. Examining a key passage: Hebrews 2. 5-18

⁵ *For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking.* ⁶ *It has been testified somewhere,*

“What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him?

⁷ ***You made him for a little while lower than the angels;** you have crowned him with glory and honor,⁸ putting everything in subjection under his feet.”*

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. ⁹ *But we see **him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus,** crowned with glory and honor **because** of the suffering of death, **so that** by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*

¹⁰ ***For** it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, **should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.*** ¹¹ *For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, ¹² saying,*

“I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.”

¹³ *And again,*

“I will put my trust in him.”

And again,

“Behold, I and the children God has given me.”

¹⁴ *Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, **he himself likewise partook of the same things,** that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels that he helps, but **he helps the offspring of Abraham.** ¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, **so that** he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ **For** because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*

*For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, **to perfect** the originator of their salvation through sufferings.*

Heb. 2.10, NASB

*For it became him, for whom are all these things, and by whom are all these things, seeing that he brought many children unto glory, that he should **consecrate** the Prince of their salvation through afflictions.*

Heb. 2.10, Geneva Bible

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him ...
Hebrews 5. 7-9

III. Why the Doctrine of the Impassibility of God is Such Good News

1. We have an unchanging God who is not in the same mess we are in.
2. This unchanging God – who is “outside” of our mess – is nevertheless intimately involved in our mess.
3. God does not love in order to relieve the suffering He feels on account of our suffering; God chooses to love because He is love.
4. Our comfort in the midst of suffering is not that the Father suffered with the Son, nor that God continues to suffer with us. Our deep consolation is that, moved by love & mercy, God the Son, in perfect cooperation with the God the Father and God the Spirit, laid aside His immunity to pain so that He might suffer for us, as one of us.
5. Only an impassible God who suffered as a man can truly sympathize with us. We do not need a God who as God is distracted & overcome with pain. We need a God who knows what its like to be one of us.
6. What we need in our suffering is not commiseration, but rescue. We need someone to do more than feel our pain. We need someone to triumph over it by conquering all that causes pain: sin, death, and the devil. That someone is Jesus!

Jesus sufferings tell us nothing about the eternal suffering heart of God and everything about the completion of the plan of salvation ... as Christians we look not in the sky to a passible God for comfort, but back in history to a suffering servant. God is not distant, aloof, or insensitive to our suffering. He loved us enough to send His Son to be like one of us, and He loves us enough to come near to us in the person of Jesus Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith.

Kevin DeYoung,
 Divine Impassibility and the Passion of Christ in the Book of Hebrews

