



SACB Position Paper Concerning the Divine Impassibility of God

The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 asserts that God is “without body, parts, or passions” (2LCF 2.1). As an association of churches, we affirm that the position taught by the Confession is the traditional and classical doctrine of divine impassibility, which is defined as:

“[That divine attribute whereby] God does not experience emotional changes either from within or effected by his relationship to creation. He is not changed from within or without; he remains unchanged and unchanging both prior and subsequent to creation.”¹

We further affirm that only the classical doctrine of divine impassibility is compatible with the doctrine of God as revealed in Scripture and as articulated in The Baptist Confession of Faith. Therefore, full subscription to our Confession requires adherence to classical impassibility without any reservations of conscience.

Our God is the great unchangeable “I AM” (Exodus 3:14) who does not experience inner turmoil or pain, for nothing can disrupt His infinite happiness, whether coming from without or enacted from within. Nor does God repent or change His mind, for as the Prophet Samuel said “...he is not a man, that he should repent” (1 Samuel 15:29b, KJV). Indeed, it is precisely because God does not have passions or affections like a man that Israel was not consumed for their sinful rebellion against Him, for He says through the Prophet Malachi, “I am the Lord, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob” (Malachi 3:6). Therefore, Scriptures that speak of God changing His mind (1 Samuel 15:11), experiencing inner turmoil (Genesis 6:6), or acquiring knowledge He previously did not have (Genesis 18:20-21; 22:11-12), must be interpreted as anthropomorphic or anthropopathic language. By using such expressions God is accommodating Himself to our capacity by speaking in analogical language, revealing His immutable attributes as if He were a passionate and mutable creature. We affirm that the Second Person of the Godhead took on human passions in His incarnation, but that these passions exist exclusively in His human nature, not in His Divine essence (Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:14-16). We also affirm that, just as the Bible uses anthropomorphic and anthropopathic language without qualification, even so it is right and proper to use such unqualified language in the preaching and teaching of the Word.

We reject all forms of Open Theism and Process Theology as heretical departures from the historic and orthodox Christian faith. We also reject the erroneous and dangerous teachings

of Qualified Impassibility, whether in the form of positing a duality in God between His transcendence and His imminence; or by asserting that God does indeed have passions which are perfectly governed by Him according to His own sovereign decree. These teachings are exegetically unsound and deny the doctrines of divine simplicity and impassibility affirmed by our Confession of Faith, and therefore are outside the boundaries of full subscription. The confessional position is not that God has passions outside of His essence which He perfectly governs, but that God has no passions that need to be governed. All that is in God (always and in all circumstances) is God. God is all that God is all the time. He says what He says and He does what He does because He is who He is.

For a further articulation and defense of our position we recommend the following sources:

1. Samuel Renihan, *God Without Passions: A Primer*; (Palmdale, CA: RBAP, 2015).
2. Samuel Renihan, *God Without Passions: A Reader*; (Palmdale, CA: RBAP, 2015).
3. Ronald S. Baines, Richard C. Barcellos, James P. Butler, Stefan T. Lindblad, James M. Renihan, eds., *Confessing the Impassible God: The Biblical, Classical, & Confessional Doctrine of Divine Impassibility*; (Palmdale, CA: RBAP, 2015).
4. Peter Sanlon, *Simply God: Recovering the Classical Trinity*; (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2014)