



Examine the contradicting ideas on whether the Christian God can suffer (20)

The traditional Christian view always held that the Christian God cannot suffer on the grounds of impassibility. Impassability means 'having no human feelings' and was often an attribute associated with God and Jesus. This means that God has to maintain an epistemic distance from his human creation, and therefore is not capable of suffering like humans do. The impassibility of God was applied to the Biblical narratives about Jesus' torture and crucifixion, as the traditional Christian view was that Jesus did not suffer pain at the hands of the Romans.

Another traditional Christian view is the idea that God is immutable. This means that God cannot change. The Old Testament God is often regarded as an immutable God on the grounds of his consistent mercy and compassion. This can be seen in Genesis 22 where Abraham is told to sacrifice his son Isaac. Although it at first seems in this story that God has changed from a compassionate being to a bully, it is later revealed that the command was purely a test and God remains compassionate after all. This can be used to argue that God doesn't change his emotions, so therefore cannot suffer.

Moreover, the traditional concepts of the nature of God such as transcendence and omnipotence suggest that he cannot suffer. God's transcendence means that he remains outside of space and time, and therefore cannot feel human emotions and cannot suffer. God's omnipotence also suggests that an all-powerful God would not allow himself to suffer at the hands of others, as he would then become subordinate to their will.

However, the life of Jesus and the doctrine of incarnation has led others to suggest that Jesus was capable of suffering during his time on earth. The doctrine of incarnation is the idea that Jesus was born fully God and fully human, which could make Jesus passible. This view argues that Jesus would be capable of feeling human emotions including pain, because his Godly character would ultimately allow him to rise from the dead. For example, there are Bible passages which refer to Jesus crying as well as passages such as Luke 7 which refer to him enjoying a drink and being a glutton. This would mean that God in the form of Jesus is able to suffer.

In a similar vein, 20th Century Christian scholar Jürgen Moltmann suggests that God not only can suffer, but indeed *must* suffer. In his works *The Crucified God*, Moltmann argues that God is a partisan God and chooses to be on the side of the oppressed and those who suffer. Based on his experiences of seeing destruction at the hands of the Nazis, Moltmann argued that the Christian God chooses to suffer in order to understand the pain that humans endure, and to offer hope of salvation. Moltmann uses Jesus proclamation on the cross of "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me" as evidence that Jesus must have suffered on the day of his crucifixion. For Moltmann, it is key that Jesus resurrected 3 days after his death, which demonstrates why Christians who suffer today should have hope.