

# **Anthropopathisms: human emotions ascribed to God**

## **Definition:**

1. An anthropopathism ascribes to God a human characteristic which God does not actually possess, but is used to reveal and explain God's policy toward mankind in terms of human frame of reference by the use of language of accommodation.

2. Accommodation means that human modus operandi is ascribed to God, such as human affection or human sins, so that man can understand divine policy and attitude in terms of his own frame of reference.

3. Unless this doctrine is understood, the believer is going to assume that God has emotion and consequently this believer will be in a state of confusion regarding divine essence. Let's examine a couple of passages just to get warmed-up. In Psalm 106:45b we are told that God relented [in other words changed His mind], but God is immutable and cannot change His thinking and 1 Samuel 15:29 confirms this, "The glory of Israel [God the Son] will not lie or change His thinking; for He is not a man that He should change His thinking." In Psalm 110:4 it says, "The Lord [God the Father] has made a solemn promise and will not change His mind. You [Jesus Christ] are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."

4. In order to explain divine policy in terms of human frame of reference, human characteristics are ascribed to God to explain His policy to human beings. An anthropopathism is a human characteristic such as: love when used as an anthropopathism, hate, wrath, change of mind, scorn, compassion, longsuffering, remembering. Hence, an anthropopathism ascribes a human characteristic to God which God does not possess.

5. The purpose of the anthropopathism is to explain to us in a way so that we can more easily understand God's attitude, policy, or modus operandi toward a person or persons. In this way, mankind can understand and adapt to God's divine policy.

## **Classification:**

### **1. Sinless anthropopathisms:**

**a. Love.** 2 Corinthians 9:7b, “For God loves a gracious giver [cheerful giver based on grace orientation].” Romans 9:13, “Just as it stands written, ‘I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau [a parallel structure: as hatred is an anthropopathism so is love in this verse].’”

The anthropopathism of love is an expression of divine approval, and acceptance. This is not the same as the divine attribute of love. Love explains God's approval of Jacob's decision to become a believer and hate explains God's disapprobation of Esau's rejection of Christ as his savior. Hebrews 12:17, “For you know that even afterwards, when he [Esau] desired to inherit the *eternal* blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for a change of thinking [toward Christ] though he sought for it with tears [no one is saved by weeping].” When the scar tissue of the soul equals the garbage in the subconscious, you have reached the point of no return regarding believing in Christ for salvation. Therefore, all you can turn to is your emotions.

**b. Compassion,** Psalm 103:13, “Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the Lord has compassion on those who fear [respect] Him.” Psalm 119:77, “May Your compassion come to me [forgive me in grace] that I may live, For Your law is my delight.

**c. Longsuffering and Patience,** Numbers 14:18, “The Lord is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations.”

### **2. Sinful anthropopathisms:**

**a. Hatred:** Psalm 5:5, “The boastful shall not stand before your eyes [anthropomorphism]; You hate [anthropopathism] all who do iniquity;” God cannot sin. Therefore, He does not hate. This only explains divine policy namely why God is doing what He is doing. Since man understands hatred as disapproval, he can easily understand divine disapproval expressed by hatred.

**b. Anger and wrath:** Numbers 22:21-22, “And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab. (22) And God's anger was kindled [the righteousness of God demands punishment and His justice executed] because he went; and the angel of Jehovah placed himself in the way for an adversary against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him.”

John 3:36, “He who believes on the Son has everlasting life, and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God [the righteousness of God demands eternal punishment for anyone who rejects faith alone in Christ alone and the justice of God will execute that demand] abides upon him.”

**c. Scorn:** Psalms 2:1-6, “Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? (2) The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One. (3) "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." (4) The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs [God never loses control] at them. (5) Then he rebukes them in his anger [from His righteousness] and terrifies them in his wrath [great judgment from justice of God], saying, (6) "But as for me, I [God] have installed my King [David] on Zion, my holy mountain." To scorn means to ridicule someone. It is unkind and thoughtless, a sinful function. Scorn involves mental attitude sins. Again, these passages use human frame of reference to explain divine policy.

**d. Vengeance:** Deuteronomy 32:25, “Vengeance [is merely the justice of God executing the demands of His righteousness] is mine

says the Lord for the Lord will vindicate his people and will have compassion on his servants.”

Psalm 94:1-3, “O Lord, the God who avenges [again the function of God’s perfect integrity], O God who avenges, shine forth. (2) Rise up, O Judge of the earth; pay back to the proud what they deserve. 3 How long will the wicked, O Lord, how long will the wicked be jubilant?” We are to leave our court case in the hands of the Supreme Court of Heaven. Vengeance is language of accommodation to express God's policy of perfect justice.

**e. Repentance:** Genesis 6:6, “The Lord himself changed his mind [anthropopathism: God is immutable, and so never changes his thinking] that He had made [after a pattern: the soul is made after a pattern] man on the earth, and He was grieved [anthropopathism: God is always perfectly happy] in His right lobe [an anthropomorphism: God is a spirit and does not have human anatomy].” These anthropopathisms and anthropomorphism are used to indicate that God was about to judge the ante-diluvian civilization.

**f. Jealousy:** Exodus 20:4-5, “You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; (5) you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous [what the righteousness of God demands, the justice of God executes] God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,” Jealousy and bitterness go together and are vicious sins. It is blasphemous to assign jealousy to God.

## **God’s Integrity is immutable and so He has no emotion.**

1. God is holy. This means that God has integrity. Holiness is the integrity of God, both His righteousness and His justice.

2. The integrity or holiness of God is not attained by God or some sort of divine achievement. God has integrity but it was not attained, it wasn't developed.
3. The integrity of God is eternal, absolute, infinite. It has always been a part of His perfect essence.
4. The integrity of God is not the mere absence of evil; it is the sum total of His perfection.
5. Therefore the integrity or the holiness of God is neither maintained nor attained, it is God's immutable, eternal self.
6. The being of God cannot be better or worse for God is eternal, immutable, unalterable, an absolute being who is eternally consistent.

## **Conclusion:**

The complexity of a doctrine such as anthropopathisms is not going to be understood unless other doctrines are understood first. Understanding the doctrine of Divine Essence must precede a consideration of the doctrine of anthropopathisms. When both are mastered mixed with a little common sense, it is not so difficult.

Written by Claude M. Klein (Max)  
Pastor of Grace Bible Church of Corpus Christi, TX  
Contact: [curlymaxk@hotmail.com](mailto:curlymaxk@hotmail.com)

Based on the scholarly work of R.B. Thieme Jr.

I recommend downloading 'THIEME'S BIBLE DOCTRINE DICTIONARY' from this website: [rbthieme.org](http://rbthieme.org)