Question 9: I was reading from Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology. I was reading about "The question of God's Impassibility". It's in ch 11 which is about the "incommunicable attributes" of God. Impassibility according to Grudem means that "if it's true" God wouldn't have passions, He's "impassible".

It was interesting because he mentions that the Westminster Confession says in ch 2 that God is: "...without body, parts, or passions...". The reference to that is Acts 14:15 which is about how Paul and Barnabus are dealing with idolatry at Lystra. Paul says: "...We are men of like passions with you..." This was in response to being referred to as being Greek gods, Zeus and Hermes... So the implication according to Grudem, which sounds right to me, is that because Paul is saying they're "men of like passions" -and not gods- that gods wouldn't have passions. Grudem then says that God does feel emotions and lists references to show that He does from Isaiah 54:8, Ps 78:40, and several more.

It does seem like a leap to say that God doesn't feel passions based on that verse from Acts... What do you think?

That is a great question and one that is often asked about the Confession.

I think the Westminster divines are right when they say that God does not have passions and I don't think (from the sounds of it) that Grudem quite understands this from the comments you have made about his view. The idea is that He does not have passions *like men* because God is unchangeable. Remember that He does not receive new information. It is very difficult for us to even think of such a state of being because we constantly get new information—someone does something and it makes us angry or something good happens and it makes us glad. But God already knew the end from the beginning. A death does not come to Him as a new thing—it was known to Him ten thousand years before it happened just as well as it is known to Him a half hour after it happened.

But having said that, God *does indeed* have that which corresponds to anger and joy and sadness in His divine being. In fact, He has the original of these things on a level that transcends our changing human passions that go up and down with changes of history. We have fluctuating emotions and passions, but He has these things in a permanent unchangeable way. What we have might be compared to a flash of light while what He has is a constant light. What we have is a true reflection of His anger or joy or sorrow, but it is only flashes and so ours are passions and emotions rather than unchanging, unshifting attributes.

We need to understand as well that God *responds* to us in history with acts that reveal His eternal attributes (that correspond to passions). For example, He rained fire and brimstone on Sodom, but it was not because He suddenly got angry. He was opposed to

what Sodom did 1000 years before they did it just as much as He was when He poured out fire and brimstone, but He revealed His wrath in history by that dreadful action. For us, anger is an emotion that gets stirred up, but for Him, it is a fixed opposition to wrong that He displays in time and history for our sake, as a revelation of Himself and His character.

As God's image, we reflect what is eternal in God by way of our emotional responses in time and history. For example, if I see a man abusing a woman, I get angry. That is a true reflection of God who is also opposed to a man who abuses a woman. But for me, the anger flares up and then I go to a wedding or something and am full of rejoicing the next day, not thinking about the abused woman I saw the day before. My joy is also a true reflection of God's joy, but His does not come and go.

This is tough to explain, so that is why I am going on and on trying to explain. I hope it makes some sense. I hope it causes you to come away and say, "Wow! God doesn't have passions like men. He has something that corresponds to passions, but something that is far greater, far more permanent, far more glorious and complete!"