



attributes of *God*

WEEK 6 — GOD IS UNCHANGING



AUGUSTINE:

“You, my God, are supreme, utmost in goodness, mightiest and all powerful, most merciful and most just.... You are unchangeable and yet you change all things. You are never new, never old, and yet all things have new life from you. You’re ever active, yet always at rest. You gather all things to yourself, through you suffer no need. You support, you fill, and you protect all things. You create them, nourish them, and bring them to perfection. You seek to make them your own, though you lack for nothing. You love your creatures, but with a gentle love. You treasure them, but without apprehension. You can be angry and yet serene. Your works are varied, but your purpose is one and the same.... You are my God, my life, my holy delight, but is this enough to say of you? Can any man say enough when he speaks of you? Yet woe betide those who are silent about you! For even those who are most gifted with speech cannot find words to describe you.”

HERMAN BAVINCK:

“The Bible very positively denies any change in God’s being. There is change round about him; there is change in the relations of men to God; but there is no change in God. God’s majesty and the glorious character of the Christian confession is apparent in this, that God, though immutable in himself, is able to create mutable beings; that he, though eternal in himself, is immanent in time; that he, though transcending all spatial relations, is present in every point of space; that he, though he is absolute essence, is able to give a distinct existence to transient beings. Completely absent from God’s eternity is every moment of time; from his immensity, every point of space; from his being, every element of becoming.”

God Is Unchanging

This attribute is related to God's eternity.

This attribute is related to God's independence.

GOD'S "UNCHANGEABLENESS" DEFINED

A. W. Tozer – *"Always, always, always God acts like God."*

Herman Bavinck – *"He does not change with respect to his being, nor with respect to his knowing or willing; he ever remains himself. Every change is foreign to God. He transcends every change in time, for he is eternal; in space, for he is omnipresent; in essence, for he is pure being."*

A. W. Pink – *"God is perpetually the same; subject to no change in his being, attributes, or determination. Therefore God is compared to a rock (Deut. 32:4, etc.) which remains immovable, when the entire ocean surrounding it is continually in a fluctuating state... Because God has no beginning and no ending, he can know no change."*



Wayne Grudem – *"God is unchanging in his being, perfections, purposes, and promises, yet God does act and feel emotions, and he acts and feels differently in response to different situations."*

OTHER TERMS USED FOR IT:

Immutability

Constantness

Faithfulness

THIS TRUTH IS REVEALED, NOT REASONED...

NUMBERS 23:19-20 – *"God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it? Behold, I received a command to bless: he has blessed, and I cannot revoke it."*

1 SAMUEL 15:29 – *"And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret."*

MALACHI 3:6 – *"For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed."*

PSALM 102:25-28 – *"Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end."*

HEBERWS 13:8 – *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."*

JAMES 1:17 – *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."*

God is unchanging *ONLY* in the way Scripture affirms

1. In His Being

Exodus 3:14 – “God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

Herman Bavinck – “Whatever changes ceases to be what it was. But real being pertains to him who does not change. That which really is remains.... God is not subject to change as every change would indicate a decrease in his being.”

2. In His Character (Attributes)

Westminster Shorter Catechism - “God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.”

A. W. Pink – “His power is unabated, his wisdom undiminished, his holiness unsullied... His veracity is immutable... His love is eternal... His mercy ceases not.”

3. In His Purposes (Will)

Psalms 33:11 – “The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.”

Isaiah 43:13 – “Also henceforth I am he; there is none who can deliver from my hand; I work, and who can turn it back?”

Isaiah 46:9-10 – “Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose’”

4. In His Promises and Covenant Faithfulness

Micah 7:19-20 – “He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old.”

Psalms 89:34-37 – “I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips. Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David. His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me. Like the moon it shall be established forever, a faithful witness in the skies.”

Hebrews 6:13-20 – “For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, ‘Surely I will bless you and multiply you.’ And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”

BUT WAIT! If God is unchanging...

1. Does God feel differently in different situations?

God is not indifferent to our changing situation.

God feels and responds differently to our changing situations.

We see Him having different responses in Scripture:

JOY - Zephaniah 3:17 – “The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.”

GRIEF - Psalm 78:40 – “How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness and grieved him in the desert!”

DELIGHT - Isaiah 62:4 – “...for the LORD delights in you...”

ANGER - Exodus 32:10 – “Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you.”

Herman Bavinck – “Because of his majesty divine, God is able to condescend to the level of the creature. Though transcendent, he is able to be immanent in every creature; while preserving himself, he is able to give himself; and likewise also, though absolutely maintaining his immutability, he is able to sustain an infinite number of relations to his creatures.”

2. Does God change his mind?

Some passages speak of God “relenting” and being “sorry”

Genesis 6:6 --- “And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.”

1 Samuel 15:35 --- “... And the LORD regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel”

Jonah 3:4-10 --- “Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" And the people of Nineveh believed God. ... When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.”

- (1) Our translations of relent and sorry come from the same Hebrew word: *nacham***
Nacham word indicates a feeling had toward a situation.

It reflects God's feeling to the current changing situation He is observing.

- (2) Relenting of promised judgment is tied to conditional prophecies**

Remember from our previous study of "How to Understand the Bible:"

Judgment prophecies are conditional, even if not directly stated.

Jeremiah 18:5-10 --- "Then the word of the LORD came to me: "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done? declares the LORD. Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it. And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it."

This Doctrine is Essential For Our Faith

1. It is the basis of our ability to trust God.

Wayne Grudem – "If God is not unchanging, then the whole basis of our faith begins to fall apart and our understanding of the universe begins to unravel. This is because our faith and hope and knowledge all ultimately depend on a person who is infinitely worthy of trust – because he is absolutely and eternally unchanging in his being, perfections, purposes, and promises."

2. It means we can trust all of His promises.

John Dick (1800s pastor and theologian in Scotland) - "The Divine immutability, like the cloud which interposed between the Israelites and the Egyptian army, has a dark as well as a light side. It insures the execution of His threatenings, as well as the performance of His promises; and destroys the hope which the guilty fondly cherish, that He will be all lenity to His frail and erring creatures, and that they will be much more lightly dealt with than the declarations of His own Word would lead us to expect. We oppose to these deceitful and presumptuous speculations the solemn truth, that God is unchanging in veracity and purpose, in faithfulness and justice."

Rosemary Jensen (from Bible Study Fellowship) – "Lord, I confess that at times I don't want you to be immutable. I want you to change your laws so that I can do what I want without being guilty of sin. I'm foolish enough to think that if I wait long enough you might change something. Please forgive me for not thanking you enough that you do not change and for the security that your immutability gives to me and to the world."

3. It leads us to worship His greatness.

John Wesley – "And all things, as they change, proclaim the Lord eternally the same."

A. W. Pink – "The realization of this ought to make us lie down under a sense of our own nothingness in the presence of him 'in whom we live, and move, and have our being' (Acts 17:28)."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does God's immutability give us hope? How does it give us a holy sense of fear?
2. How does God's immutability help us fight sin in our lives?
3. How does God's immutability encourage us in our praying?
4. Some people believe that when a person dies, they may get a "second chance" to believe in Jesus. How does God's immutability help us correct that wrong thinking?
5. How should God's immutability encourage us in evangelism, sharing Jesus with those who do not believe?
6. How does God's immutability impact how we view and respond to changing moral values in our society and in the world?
7. What songs do you know that describe this aspect of God's nature?

