

# THE IMMUTABILITY OF GOD

Jonny Matthew – BCLC – 12 January 2020

(PRAY!)

In the last few weeks we've looked at what God is like (the doctrine of God):

- SEEKING God
- LOVING God
- KINDNESS of God (Rachel S.)
- HOLINESS of God

Today I want to examine something of the **IMMUTABILITY** ('**unchangeableness**') of God.

**Illus:** 2009 & 2019 Decade before after shots on FaceBook!

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## **1. MEANING**

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**IMMUTABILITY** – from the Latin '*mutare*' – 'to change' (e.g. to mutate)

When we refer to God's '**immutability**' we mean his '**unchangeableness**'

(Slide 3)

Wayne Grudem puts it this way:

*'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.'* (Systematic Theology, p.163)

Tozer in Knowledge of the Holy says:

*'To say God is immutable is to say that he never differs from himself. The concept of a growing or developing God is not found in the scriptures. It seems to me impossible to think of God as varying from himself in any way.'* (KOTH, p.63)

(Slide 4)

Speaking of Jesus the writer to the Hebrews refers to Him as:

*'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.'* (Heb.13:8)

James says:

*Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.' (James 1:7)*

Malachi writes:

*'I the LORD do not change.' (Mal.3:6)*

It seems clear then the Bible presents God as being immutable – unchanging. In this respect – just like his holiness, his love and his kindness – he is absolutely and essentially 'other' (different) than we are.

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**(Slide 5)**

To unpick this further I want to look at two aspects of God's unchangeableness:

1. **God is immutable in his BEING** (who he IS, in HIMSELF)
  2. **God is immutable in his DOING** (plans & purposes: what he DOES, his WILL)
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**(Slide 6)**

## **2. GOD IS IMMUTABLE IN HIS BEING** (who He is)

David writes in Psalm 102:25-7

*'In the beginning you laid the foundations of the Earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.'*

Charles Hodge writes:

*As an infinite and absolute Being, self-existent and absolutely independent, God is exalted above all the causes of and even above the possibility of change...So God is absolutely immutable in his essence and attributes.' (Systematic Theology (Abr.), p.143)*

**(Slide 7)**

People are fickle and prone to change – more on this later – This means they cannot always be relied upon. God, however, is immutable in His being – i.e. His essence, His nature, His character, all remain the same. Hence His name:

*'I AM who I AM' (Exodus 3:14)*

*'Very truly I tell you,' Jesus answered, 'Before Abraham was born, I AM!' (John 8:58)*

Covenant College MTP 'Doctrine of God' says:

*'God cannot become anything other than what He is. He already is all that He ever will be, and He has always been so.'* (Sec.5, p.32)

God was, is presently and always will be who He is and how he's always been – I AM!

(Slide 8)

## **GOD IS IMMUTABLE BUT ACTIVE**

A common mistake, when studying this subject, is to confuse God's immutability with some kind of immobility or inactivity.

The fact that God's being and purpose do not change, does not mean that He is like a statue – inactive, immobile and devoid of interaction with His people.

The Bible clearly portrays God as being alive and actively working out His plans in the Earth:

*'I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfil my purpose. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that I will do.' (Isaiah 46:10-11)*

These verses portray God is being both **ETERNAL** (i.e. existing outside of time and its effects) and **IMMANENT** (i.e. actively present in the here and now).

God is not an **absentee creator** who spoke the world into being and then stood back to let an inevitable process take its course (watchmaker). God's plans and purposes are set and unchangeable – they are immutable – but He is constantly interacting with mankind in order to bring about those plans and purposes.

*'In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.' (Ephesians 1:11)*

So, God is immutable in his BEING, but He is also immutable in his plans/purposes!

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### **3. GOD IS IMMUTABLE IN HIS DOING** (his plans & purposes)

David writes in Psalm 33

*'The LORD foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.' (vs.10-11)*

Hebrews 6:17-18

*'Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confided it with an oath. God did this so that...we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.'*

**(Slide 10)**

God is not only unchanging in his nature, his being, but also in his plans and purposes for humanity and for the Earth.

What a joy and a comfort to know that God is in complete and unshakeable control of all that happens to us – nothing escapes his notice, nothing happens without his knowledge, nothing surprises Him or can threaten His plans.

Steve said last week:

*'Everything that comes into our lives is God-filtered.'*

God is truly sovereign – not only in his nature but also in the outworking of his purposes.

Charles Hodge writes:

*'This sovereignty of God is the ground of peace and confidence for all his people. They rejoice that the Lord God omnipotent reigneth, and that neither necessity, nor chance, nor the folly of man, nor the malice of Satan controls the sequence of events and all their issues. Infinite wisdom, love and power belong to Him, our great God and Saviour, into whose hands all power in heaven and on Earth has been committed.'*  
(Systematic Theology (Abr.), p.164)

So:

1. **God is immutable in his BEING** (who he IS, in HIMSELF)
2. **God is immutable in his DOING** (plans & purposes: what he DOES, his WILL)

What difference does this make to us? How does it help us in our everyday lives to know that God is unchanging?

**(Slide 11)**

**4. IMPLICATIONS OF GOD'S IMMUTABILITY**

1. See the **glory of God** in his immutability

2. See the **vanity of mankind** in their changeableness
3. Take **comfort from being a child** of the unchangeable One

## 1) THE GLORY OF GOD IN HIS IMMUTABILITY

### (Slide 12)

Daniel 4:34-35

*'His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the Earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: 'What have you done?''*

Romans 11:33-36

*'Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor? Who has ever given to God that God should repay him? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen.'*

### (Slide 13)

Barnes writes (Notes on the New Testament)

*'God is not like the sun. With him there is no variableness, not even the appearance of turning. He is always the same, at all seasons of the year and in all ages; there is no change in his character, his mode of being...what he was millions of ages before the worlds were made, he is now; what he is now, he will be countless millions of ages hence.'*

(Notes on the New Testament, Vol.10, p.28)

This knowledge – of our unchanging magnificent God – drives us to:

- Worship
- Prayer
- Obedience

### (Slide 14)

## 2) THE VANITY OF MAN IN HIS CHANGEABLENESS

One of the greatest benefits of understanding something of God's immutability, is the light it sheds on our own fickleness and changeability.

- We are constantly at the beck & call of our emotions - God is unchangeable
- We are full of self-doubt & questioning - God is utterly stable in Himself
- We are wavering & labile (up & down) - God is certain of himself & his plans
- We worry about the future – God has set it in place from eternity

- We fret about what might happen – God has ALREADY filtered everything that *will* happen to us! (Steve Greening quote again!)
- We make resolutions & change almost daily – God is concrete, set & inimitably sure; he’s immutable in his nature & plans – all of them, always & forever!

The root of most, if not all, human problems is the human mind – we think wrongly

We need to have in mind an eternally loving & unchangeable father who loves us!

Proverbs 3:5-6

*<sup>5</sup>Trust in **the Lord** with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;  
<sup>6</sup>in all your ways submit to him,  
and he will make your paths straight.'*

The eyes, mind and perception with which we view the world, our lives and everything in it are flawed by our changeableness and limitations – GOD IS NOT...

So, let's... (Hebrews 12:3)

*'consider him (Jesus) who suffered such opposition from sinful men  
So that you will not grow weary and lose heart'*

(Slide 15)

### 3) TAKE COMFORT FROM BEING A CHILD OF THE UNCHANGEABLE ONE!

James 1:17

*'Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He (this eternal, loving, unchanging father of ours!) chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.'*

God brought about your conception & birth as part of His unchanging purpose

1 Tim.2:19

*'Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: 'The Lord **knows** those who are His.'*

(Slide 16)

'KNOWS' – ginosko (γινωσκω) -

**Thayer** – p.117: *'to know one, his/her person, character, mind & plans.'*

**Vine** – p.638:

*'In the sense of complete and absolute understanding on God's part...  
What is known is of value or importance to the one who knows and  
hence the establishment of relationship.'*

i.e. God knows EVERYTHING there is to know about you! AND LOVES YOU ANYWAY!

And that relationship is permanent – UNCHANGEABLE!

Old song:

*'The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases  
His mercies never come to an end  
They are new every morning, new every morning  
Great is thy faithfulness, Oh Lord  
Great is thy faithfulness'*

People change in their affections, passions, loves and commitments. God NEVER CHANGES! He loves you now AND ALWAYS HAS LOVED YOU! There is nothing you can do to change that BECAUSE GOD DOES NOT CHANGE!

**(Slide 17)**

The hymn writer (Thomas Obadiah Chisholm) said it beautifully when he wrote:

*'Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father,  
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;  
Thou changest **not**, Thy compassions, they fail not  
As Thou hast been Thou **forever** wilt be.'*

**(PRAY – then sing the song?)**