

# THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

## The Immutability of God

### Lesson #12

Many theologians prefer to study the Immutability of God by contrasting God's immutability with man's mutability. But we will focus the bulk of our time studying God's immutability rather than man's mutability, except for the paragraph below from the most eloquent of preachers, Thomas Watson, who said:

"Mutableness denotes weakness, and is not in God who is "the same, yesterday, and to-day, and forever." Heb. 13:8. Men are fickle and mutable, like Reuben, "unstable as water." Gen. 49:4. They are changeable in their principles. If their faces altered as fast as their opinions, we would not know them. Changeable in their resolutions; as the wind that blows in the east, presently turns about to the west. They resolve to be virtuous, but quickly repent of their resolutions. Their minds are like a sick man's pulse, which alters every half hour. An apostle compares them to waves of the sea, and wandering stars. Jude 13. They are not pillars in God's temple, but reeds. Others are changeable in their friendship. They quickly love and quickly hate. Sometimes they will put you in their bosom, then excommunicate you out of their favor. They change as the chameleon, into several colors, but God is immutable."<sup>1</sup>

#### I. DEFINITION OF GOD'S IMMUTABILITY

A. The immutability of God is also referred to as the constancy of God, the unchangeableness of God, and the permanence of God.

B. Thomas Watson defines God's immutability as,  
  
"That perfection of God by which He is devoid of all change, not only in His Being, but also in His perfections, and in His purposes and promises."<sup>2</sup>

"By nature we tend toward nothingness, since we came from nothing. Nothing stays our annihilation but the will and sustaining power of God. None can sustain himself a single moment. We are entirely dependent on the Creator for every breath we draw. We gladly own with the Psalmist, Thou "holdest our soul in life" (Psa. 66:9). 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)."  
A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, pg. 39.

C. A. W. Pink notes,

"God is perpetually the same: subject to no change in His being, attributes, or determinations. Therefore God is compared to a *rock* (Deut. 32:4, etc.) which

<sup>1</sup>Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, pg. 67.

<sup>2</sup>Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pg. 58.

remains immovable, when the entire ocean surrounding it is continually in a fluctuating state; even so, though all creatures are subject to change, God is immutable.<sup>3</sup>

## II. THOUGHTS TO PONDER ABOUT GOD'S IMMUTABILITY

A. Millard Erickson causes us to think when he writes,

“Divine constancy involves several aspects. There is first no quantitative change. God cannot increase in anything because He is already perfection. Nor can He decrease, for if He were to, He would cease to be God. There also is no qualitative change. The nature of God does not undergo modification. Therefore God does not change His mind, plans, or actions, for these rest upon His nature, which remains unchanged no matter what occurs.<sup>4</sup> He is free from all ascension or diminution and from all growth or decay in His Being or perfections.”<sup>5</sup>

B. Thomas Watson rightly says,

“Expect to meet with changes in everything but God.”<sup>6</sup>

## III. SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT FOR GOD'S IMMUTABILITY

A. As we look up Scriptures that speak about God's immutability, it would be wise to keep the words of A. W. Pink in mind,

“It might be noted that some theologians point out that there are three primary areas where God does not change i.e., 1) His essence, 2) His attributes, and 3) His counsel.”<sup>7</sup>

B. Psa. 102:26-27 -- “Even they will perish, but You endure; And all of them will wear out like a garment; Like clothing You will change them and they will be changed. 27 “But You are the same, And Your years will not come to an end.” (quoted in Heb. 1:11-12)

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3 A.W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, pg. 37.

4 Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, pg. 278.

5 Ibid. pg. 58.

6 Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, pg. 68

7 A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, pgs. 37-38.

- C. Psa. 33:11 – “The counsel of the Lord stands forever, The plans of His heart from generation to generation.”
- D. Numb. 23:19 -- “God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?”
- E. 1 Sam. 15:29 -- “Also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind.”
- F. Mal. 3:6 -- “For I, the Lord, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.”
- G. Rom. 1:22-23 – “Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.”
- H. Rom. 11:29 – “. . .for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”
- I. Heb. 6:17-18 – “In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, 18 so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.”
- J. James 1:17 – “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.”

#### IV. **AN APPARENT PARADOX CONCERNING GOD’S IMMUTABILITY**

Some Scriptures considered by themselves seem to teach that God does in fact change and isn’t immutable.

- A. Gen. 6:6 – “The Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.”
- B. Ex. 32:10-14 -- “Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation.” 11 Then

Moses entreated the LORD his God, and said, “O LORD, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? 12 “Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, ‘With evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth’? Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about doing harm to Your people. 13 “Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.’ ” 14 So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people.”

- C. Jonah 3:10 – “When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.”

## V. SOLUTION TO THE APPARENT PARADOX OF GOD’S IMMUTABILITY

- A. Louis Berkhof rightly points out that the apparent changes of God found in scripture are misunderstandings which arise from equating the immutability of God with immobility i.e., the theory which says there is no movement in God. This of course is false. The Bible describes God as a living, moving Being. There is always change in His creation and changes in His relationships with men, but never His Being, attributes, purpose, motives, or promises. When God seems to change in His relation to men it is not God who is changing but men. God merely appears to change as men change in relationship to Him.<sup>8</sup>
- B. Erickson recommends that we keep in mind these three principles in mind when dealing with texts that seem to show changes in God.
  - 1. Some of them [passages which seem to show God changing] are to be understood as anthropomorphisms [God being described in human like attributes] and anthropopathisms [God being described with human like emotions]. They are simply descriptions of God's actions and feelings in human terms and from human perspective.
  - 2. What may seem to be changes in mind may actually be new stages in the working out of God's plan.

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<sup>8</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pg. 59.

3. Some apparent changes of God's mind are changes of orientation resulting from man's move into a different relationship with God. God did not change when Adam sinned; rather, man moved into God's disfavor.<sup>9</sup>

C. Thomas Watson speaking to this issue said:

“Repentance is attributed to God figuratively. . . There may be a change in God's work, but not in his will. He may will a change, but not change his will. 'God may change his sentence, but not his decree.' A king may cause sentence to be passed upon a malefactor whom he intends to save; so God threatened destruction to Nineveh, but the people of Nineveh repenting, God spared them. Jonah iii 10. Here God changed his sentence, but not his decree; it was what had lain in the womb of his purpose from eternity.”<sup>10</sup>

## VI. A LOGICAL ARGUMENT FOR GOD'S IMMUTABILITY

A. W. Tozer reason,

“For a moral being to change it would be necessary that the change be in one of three directions. He must go from better to worse or from worse to better; or granted that the moral quality remained stable, he must change within himself, as from immature to mature or from one order of being to another. It should be clear that God can move in none of these directions. His perfections forever rule out any such possibility.”<sup>11</sup>

<p>“All that God is He has always been, and all that He has been and is He will ever be.” A. W. Tozer, <i>Knowledge of the Holy</i>, pg. 50.</p>
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## VII. ERRORS CONCERNING GOD'S IMMUTABILITY

- A. Error -- Some assert that God's attributes never change but His will and knowledge change.
- B. Error -- Some assert that God's decisions are dependent on the actions of men.

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<sup>9</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology*, pg. 279.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, pg. 69.

<sup>11</sup> A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, pg. 49.

- C. Error -- Some assert that slowly evolved into God.<sup>12</sup>
- D. God is immobile, static, and inactive.

### VIII. APPLICATION OF GOD'S IMMUTABILITY

- A. God will keep His promises.
- B. God is faithful.
- C. God is dependable.
- D. God's attitudes, affections, and motives never change.
- E. Thomas Watson notes,

"In all our efforts to find God, to please Him, to commune with Him, we should remember that all change must be on our part. "I am the Lord, I change not."  
A. W. Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, pg. 54.

"If once God's electing love rises upon the soul, it never sets. "The mountains shall be removed but my loving kindness shall not depart from thee, neither the covenant of my peace be removed." Isa.54:10. God's love stands faster than the mountains. His love to Christ is unchangeable; and He will no more cease loving believers than he will cease loving Christ."<sup>13</sup>

"Oh trust in the immortal God!  
Like Noah's dove, we have no footing for our souls, till we get into the ark of God's unchangeableness."  
Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, pg. 69.

- F. Knowing that God is immutable helps when we study the Bible. J. I. Packer, in his work *Knowing God* discusses the difficulty many people trying to apply the content of the Bible to their lives. His insight are amazing and the solution to the problem rests on the immutability of God. Packer says:

"Most Bible-readers have known this feeling. Not all know how to counter it. Some Christians seem to resign themselves to following afar off, believing the Bible record, indeed, but neither seeking nor expecting for themselves such intimacy and direct dealing with God as the men of the Bible knew. Such an attitude, all too common today, is in effect a confession of failure to see a way through this problem.

But how can this sense of the remoteness from us of the biblical experience of God be overcome? Many things might be said, but the crucial point is surely this.

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<sup>12</sup> This concept is often referred to as "Process Theology." This false theory states that all reality is in a constant state of change therefore God, if He is real, must be changing too. Yet, the very premise of this belief requires even the idea "Process Theology" to change and therefore cease to exist. And hence there is no absolute truth, no scientific law, and no criteria to judge anything for everything is in a state of flux. It is basically evolution and relativism stirred together.

<sup>13</sup> Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, pg. 68.

The sense of remoteness is an illusion which springs from seeking the link between our situation and that of the various Bible characters in the wrong place. It is true that in terms of space, time, and culture, they, and the historical epoch to which they belonged, are a very long way away from us. But the link between them and us is not found at that level. The link is God Himself. For the God with whom they had to do is the same God with whom we have to do. We could sharpen the point by saying, exactly the same God; for God does not change in the least particular. Thus it appears that the truth on which we must dwell in order to dispel this feeling that there is an unbridgeable gulf between the position of men in the Bible times and our own, is the truth of God's immutability."<sup>14</sup>

*Fountain of being! Source of Good!  
Immutable Thou dost remain!  
Nor can the shadow of a change  
Obscure the glories of Thy reign.  
Earth may with all her powers dissolve,  
If such the great Creator will;  
But Thou forever art the same,  
I AM is Thy Memorial Still.*

From Walkers Collection

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<sup>14</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, pg. 68.