

ATTRIBUTE OF IMMUTABILITY

Exodus 3:14; Psalm 102:25-27; Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 1:12; 6:16-20; 13:8; James 1:17

God's attributes of immutability (or unchangeableness) and eternity are linked together. Both teach us of being always the same, never any change in Being. As we will see in this study God is immutable without the possibility of any change, or He would not be God. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is **no variableness, neither shadow of turning**" (James 1:27). Immutability is a perfection, and it is a glory belonging to all the attributes of God. God is fixed in His being, and immutability belongs to God alone, no creature has it.

A. "I AM THAT I AM (JEHOVAH).

"And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you" (Exodus 3:14).

This title signifies God's unchangeable Being from eternity to eternity. I AM, or the same that I AM. I AM that I AM, i.e. the same before and since creation, before the entrance of sin, and since its entrance, before Israel went into Egypt, and while they remain there. Jehovah, I AM, eternity and immutability, was given to support the Israelites faith in expectation of deliverance from Egypt, to assure them that God had not retracted His purpose and His promises made to Abraham of giving Canaan to his posterity. This name, according to the grammatical order, is a mark of God's immutability. It never has anything added to it, nor anything taken from it, it has no plural number, no affixes to it, which is a custom peculiar to eastern languages, and it never changes its letters as other words do.

I AM tells us that what God is He received from no other, but what I AM in myself, I depend on no other in my essence, knowledge, purpose, and therefore there is no changing power over Him. That only is true being which hath not only eternal existence, but immutability; it is not a true being that never remains in a true state. If God were changeable, He could not be the most perfect Being, and possess in Himself infinite and essential goodness. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

Immutability is proper to God and incommunicable to any creature. **It is the perfection of God alone.** It is one of the excellencies of the Creator which distinguishes Him from all His creatures. The essence of God with all the perfections of His being and nature are without any variation from eternity to eternity. This asserts His eternity and His immutability. I AM describes immutability to God and excludes everything else from partaking in that perfection. God is ever the same, subject to no change in His being, attributes, or determination. He could not be the same if He could be changed into anything other than what He is. He is ever the same in essence, nature, purpose, and will. God is compared to a Rock (Deut. 32:4), which remains immovable when all else fluctuates. All creatures are subject to change, God is not, because He had no beginning and has no ending, He can know no change.

B. God changes not.

"For I am the LORD, **I change not**; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Malachi 3:6). "Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: But **thou art the same**, and thy years shall have no end" (Psalm 102:25-27; also quoted in Hebrews 1:12). "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8).

There was never a time when God was not, and there will never be a time when God shall cease to be. All that He is today, He has ever been, and will ever be. Whatever God was in eternity, He never has differed from Himself. He does not become something, nor does He lose something. God is uninfluenced by the flight of time. There is no wrinkle upon the brow of eternity, and His power cannot diminish, nor His glory fade. In God there is no variableness, therefore we rest in Him without fear or doubt, and face tomorrow without anxiety.

Change and chance are busy in our little world of nature and men. To grasp the immutability of God we must discipline our minds to sort out the thoughts with which we think of created things, and rise to lay hold of whatever we may comprehend of God. For a moral being to change there are three ways. (1) From better to worse. (2) From worse to worse. (3) From worse to better. If the moral quality remain the stable, the man must change within himself. For instance, from immature to mature, or from one order of being to another, i.e. from a child, to a teen, to an adult.

But God cannot move in any of these directions because His perfections forever rule out any such possibility. God is perfectly holy (Isaiah 57:15), and as He is perfectly holy, never the less holy, nor can He ever become more holy, therefore He cannot change. God is eternal and immortal, and can never become mortal. God cannot change for the worse for any deterioration within the unspeakable holy nature of God is impossible. It is even abhorrent to even think of this because then we are no longer thinking of God, but someone else, and someone less than God.

The being of God is other and different from all other beings, and He is different from His creatures. God is self-existent, self-sufficient, and eternal. By virtue of these attributes, God is God, and not some other being. Someone who can suffer any slightest degree of change is neither self-existent, self-sufficient, nor eternal. God is self-existent, not composed or created. No foreign element has entered the original eternal God, nothing can enter His being from without, and nothing in Him can be altered. God has no parts for whatever is composed of parts is not altogether one and is capable of dissolution, but God is perfect unitary Being indivisible by any conception.

C. God is immutable in His attributes.

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is **no variableness**, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

God is unchangeable in His attributes. What they were before creation they are the same now and will remain so forever. They must for they are His very perfection, the essence of His being. Always the same is written on everyone of them. His power is unabated, His wisdom undiminished, and His holiness unspotted. His attributes can no more change than Deity cease to exist.

(1) His veracity is unchangeable (Psalm 119:89).

(2) His power is unchangeable (Job 37:23; Psalm 62:11; 147:5).

(3) His love is eternal and unchangeable (Jeremiah 31:3; John 13:1).

(4) His counsel is unchangeable (Numbers 23:19; Psalm 33:11; Isaiah 46:10; Romans 11:29; Ephesians 1:11; Hebrews 6:17,18).

(5) His holiness is unchangeable (Isaiah 57:15; Habakkuk 1:13).

(6) His truth is unchangeable (Deut. 32:4; Psalm 117:2).

(7) His will is unchangeable, He is both omnipotent and omniscient, no need to revise His decrees (Job 23:13; Isaiah 46:10).

(8) His purpose is unchangeable (Isaiah 14:26,27; Daniel 4:35; Romans 8:28; 9:11; Ephesians 1:11; 3:11; 2 Timothy 1:9).

(9) His knowledge is unchangeable, for He is the only wise God (1 Timothy 1:17; Jude 25). God could not be the only wise God if He knew something today that He knew not

before. He would change from ignorance to knowledge. If God's understanding were changeable, what is revealed as truth now might prove false thereafter, and that which is false now might prove true thereafter making God unfit for our confidence. All stands present to His thought so He can know nothing more (Hebrews 4:13).

Man changes his mind or alters his plan either for lack of foresight to anticipate everything, **or** lack of power to execute his plan. This reveals the infinite distance which separates the highest creature from the Creator. Creature and change go together. If the creature were not changeable by nature, it would not be a creature, but be God. Because the creature changes constantly, nothing less than the sustaining power of God prevents our annihilation. We are entirely dependent on the Creator for every heart beat, and for every breath we draw. "Which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved" (Psalm 66:9). We also read of our nothingness in His presence, "For in him we live, and move, and have our being; . . ." (Acts 17:28). In all change there is resemblance of death; so the idea of change is against the eternity and immutability of God who cannot change. All changeableness implies corruptibility.

D. God's decree, will, and purpose are immutable.

"Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isaiah 46:9,10).

Because God is unchangeable His will and purpose cannot change. The counsel of God is not expressed in the plural, but as counsel (Isaiah 46:10; Hebrews 6:17). The purpose of God is not expressed in the plural, but as purpose (Ephesians 3:11). God knows all things and has a purpose for Israel and a purpose for the Body of Christ. God excutes nothing in time which He has not ordained from eternity, and has appointed all the means and circumstances necessary whereby it should be brought about. God told Adam, "for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17), which had to happen because Christ was foreordained before the foundation of the world to be the Saviour of sinners (1 Peter 1:20). Isaac's birth was to be "at this set time in the next year" (Genesis 17:21). Mercy was to be upon Zion in the set time (Psalm 102:13). Christ stated, ". . . Father, the hour is come" (John 17:1). Pharaoh would not let Israel go until it was God's time (Exodus 7-14). The decree of God is immutable for the person decreeing is in Himself immutable, but the thing decreed may change, and if it were not changed according to the first purpose, it would argue the decree itself to be changed; for while a man wills that this may be done now, and another thing done afterwards, the same will remains, and though there be a change in the effects, there is no change in the will.

God loves righteousness and hates iniquity, this cannot change, but as the angels in their first estate were vessels of His love, yet the ones that fell became vessels of His wrath (Jude 6). There is no change in God, but in the creature. God only acts within Himself. Is the sun changed when it hardens clay or softens butter? or when it makes the flower more fragrant, or the dead carcass reek? The diversity is not in the sun, but in the subject. The sun is the same, but produces different effects by the same quality of heat.

God this moment feels the same towards all His creatures, the sick, the sinful, and the fallen, exactly as He did when He sent His only begotten Son into the world to die for mankind. His affections are always the same, not hot or cold. He has the same attitude toward sin as when He drove sinful man from the garden, and His attitude toward the sinner is the same as when He said, "Adam, where art thou?," and when He said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"

(Matthew 11:28).

God will not compromise, and He cannot be persuaded to alter His Word (Psalm 119:89). All that God is He has always been, and all that He has been, and is, He will ever be. Nothing that God has ever said about Himself will be modified, and nothing the inspired writers have said about Him will be rescinded.

We see the unchangeableness of God in its most perfect beauty when viewed against the changeableness of man. In God no change is possible, but in man change is impossible to escape. Both man and the world he lives in are in a constant state of flux. Man appears for a little while to laugh and weep, to work and play, and then dies to make room for those who shall follow in this never ending cycle. The law of change and mortality belong to a fallen world, but God is immutable, and in Him, and only in Him, men find at last eternal permanence.

E. Change for the saints of God is good.

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Because of the redeeming work of Christ we have the ability to change, i.e. to move from one sort of person to another, which is the essence of repentance. Change for the believer works for us, and not against us. This change is deeper than any eternal acts can reveal because it includes a life of another and higher quality, i.e. the life of God, Christ in you, the hope of glory. A life lived by the faith of the Son of God. In the working out of His redemptive processes the unchanging God makes full use of change, and through a succession of changes a believer arrives at permanence at last, for God writes His law upon the fleshy tables of the heart (2 Corinthians 3:3). How grateful that an unchangeable God works a change in fallen man. It fits us for eternity with Him.

In this change the whole moral texture of the life is altered. The thoughts, desires, and affections are transformed, and the man is no longer what he had been before. The liar becomes truthful, the thief becomes honest, the lewd becomes pure, and the proud becomes humble. He is "renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him" (Colossians 3:10). He is ". . . changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18). "For the which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16).

While we may deplore the lack of stability in all earthly things in a fallen world such as this, the very ability to change from worse to better through the redemptive work of Christ is a golden treasure, a gift from God that calls for constant thanksgiving. In all our efforts to find God, to please Him, and to commune with Him, we must remember that all change must be on our part. We have but to meet His clearly stated terms, bring our lives into accord with His revealed will, and His infinite power will become instantly operative toward us in the manner set forth through the gospel in the Scriptures of truth. God Himself is outside the law of change, and unaffected by any changes that occur in the universe. "And all things as they change proclaim, The Lord eternally the same" (John Wesley).

F. Practical use of the knowledge of God's immutability.

"Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil" (Hebrews 6:17-19).

(1) Stability. There are never any doubts as to our relationship to God through His redeeming grace. There are never any changes in the gospel, in redemption, in justification, in reconciliation, in sanctification, in faith, in love, or in hope. These all remain the same because God is immutable.

(2) Peace. Because God changes not it brings peace to our heart. In coming to God at any time we need not wonder if we will find Him in a receptive mood for He is always receptive to misery and need, as well as love and faith (Hebrews 4:16; Ephesians 2:18; 3:12). God does not keep office hours, or set aside periods when He will see no one, neither does He change His mind about anything. Nothing can satisfy the soul of man but rest, and nothing can give it rest except that which is perfect and immutably perfect.

(3) Comfort. The Scriptures exhort us not to put trust in man, but in God who changes not. In this world when men forget us, change their attitude toward us as their interests dictate, revise their opinion of us for the slightest cause, it is a source of wondrous strength and comfort to know that God changes not. God thinks the same of us now as he did in eternity when He elected us to salvation. We could not rest in hope for the future, confide in Him, or be sure of life if God changed. But all praise to His glorious name He is ever the same, His purpose is fixed, His will is set, and His Word is sure. Here in Him we can fix our hope while all around us is being swept away.

(4) Encouragement to prayer. Prayer is an acknowledgment of our dependence upon God; which dependence could have no firm foundation without unchangeableness. Prayer doth not desire any change in God, but is offered to God that He would confer those things which He hath immutably willed to communicate; but He willed them not without prayer as the means of bestowing them. Prayer according to the will of God is answered. If God changed He might grant a petition one day and deny it the next. Why pray to God whose will is already fixed? Because He so requires it. What blessings has God promised without our seeking? He has willed everything for His people's good.

(5) To bear witness for Christ because of the terror for the wicked. "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade man; . . ." (2 Corinthians 5:11). Even though God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, He must exercise judgment for He cannot alter His will or purpose. He hates sin, eternally hates it, thus the eternity of the punishment of all who reject His mercy and die in their sins.

In this world of change where men forget us, change their attitude toward us at the drop of a hat, and revise their opinion of us for the slightest cause, it is a source of great strength to know that God with whom we have to do changes not. That His attitude toward us now is the same as it has ever been or ever will be. It brings peace to our heart to know that our heavenly Father never differs from Himself.

A poem from Walker's collection.

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 for ever art the same,
I AM is Thy memorial still.