

## Sunday, February 20, 2022 | The Immutable Characteristics of God

Psalms 102:25-28 | “Our Unchanging God”

### Announcements:

- VBS Wednesdays July 20<sup>th</sup>-August 10<sup>th</sup> with a church-wide picnic on August 14<sup>th</sup>.
  - Easter Sunday is April 17<sup>th</sup>. There'll be two services, 9:30am, and 11:00am. There will be no bible fellowship that morning.
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Louis L'Amour, an American author famous for his western novels, said, “The only thing that never changes is that everything changes.” Any who've lived long enough to graduate high school knows, intuitively, how true that statement is. And, considering this year's Superbowl half-time show, fads also have a way of dividing a room. Not everyone likes the changes. But, like some tremendous unstoppable force, things that were once so fashionable are continuously thrown out for newer ones.

### Examples:

For 90's kids, there wasn't a living room in the United States where kids didn't practice the **Carlton**. Or what teen in 95 didn't play with a hacky sack to kill time in between classes? And then there were the toys (i.e., **Gameboy color**, beanie babies, tickle-me-Elmo, Tamagotchi, etc.), not to mention the TV shows (i.e., TGIF, **Boy Meets World**, Friends, etc.). The '90s were indeed the greatest of any era ever. Right?

Here are a few fads from years gone by:

- 80's – **hairstyles**, cabbage patch kids, **fanny packs**, shoulder pads, **Full House**, the Karate Kid
- 70's – Banana bikes, **bell bottoms**, mood rings, **happy days**, **Star Wars**
- 60's – **8-track tape**, **tie-dye**, Twister the Game, Gilligans Island, **the Beatles**
- 50's – **Hula hoops**, **Muscle cars**, **drive-in dinners/movie theater**, **Doo Wop music**, doing the twist, **Elvis Pressley**

While we often think of change happening over a long period, as the examples above show, change can occur in a split second. For instance, as you'll know, this past week, my family drove to OH for my Granddad's funeral. Because both our vehicles have over 300k miles on them, my dad generously offered to pay for a rental. And, let me just say, the vehicle we got was an absolute dream. It was a 2022 Chrysler Pacifica that didn't have more than 200 miles. Needless to say, we were excited as we headed out on our 8-hr-500-mile journey to Dayton, OH.

However, we hit a snag about two hours in while running through some mountains. A driver pulled up alongside me and started to make this sort of "blow up" motion, indicating I should pull over. Something, apparently, was wrong with the minivan. I quickly pull over and learn from this good Smartian that he'd notice our breaks were smoking and throwing sparks about a mile back.

I call the rental company and have a few choice words. We got a replacement vehicle—a 2019 Dodge caravan that looked like it had been used as a getaway car—and then we were back on our way. Yes, we're shaken and frustrated. But we're also thankful that nothing serious had occurred. But, as you'll soon see, our troubles were only beginning.

About an hour after getting our second rental, we hit a snowstorm outside Pittsburgh. Naturally, I go to turn on the windshield wipers and discover that, much to my dismay, they do...not...work. So, we slowly meander our way through the storm, doing our best to stay in-between the lines. When we finally found a gas station, I proceeded to call the rental company once again. I probably don't need to tell you that my words weren't as pleasant as they had been before. After getting off the phone, we then head to yet another one of their branch offices to get yet another rental. And, ironies of ironies, our third rental of the day turned out to be 2022 Chrysler Pacifica.

At this point, we've loaded and unloaded our stuff enough that the third time didn't take but 5 minutes, and then we were back on the road headed west. We stopped for lunch at God's restaurant, Chick-fil-a, an hour later. I reach for my wallet and realize I had left it in the second rental. Once again, I call the rental company. They found my wallet and promised to FedEx it. We hit the road and arrived at my sister's house later that evening. All told, a trip that should've only taken 8 hours took over 11. It was not a good day.

After that, the week we were in Ohio was mostly uneventful, apart from the stress and stuff that goes along with funerals. And so, in the fullness of time, we load up the van on Sunday and start heading back to Baltimore. We pull in to Raking Leaf Dr. at 1:30pm without incident. We...are...relieved and think our troubles are now, officially, behind us. We were wrong.

As we're getting the kids ready for school the following day, my wife asks if she could drive the rental one last time before we return it that afternoon. I, of course, agree, and we hit the road with our kids and neighbor's kids in tow. As we were headed down Philadelphia Road, it started snowing. Nothing substantial. To call it a "light dusting" would be saying too much. Though, admittedly, it *was* enough that it made the roads slick in some places. So much so that when

my wife went to press the brake pedal, the breaks did not work. And so we slid into the back of a 2021 black Mercedes Benz GLE Class SUV.

Thankfully, no one was hurt. It turned out to be nothing more than a minor fender bender that the insurance companies will take care of at no additional cost. What's more, I am incredibly thankful that my dad insisted that we get the added insurance through the rental company. I perish to think what we would've been on the hook for had we not had that added level of protection.

Now, why do even I tell you that story? For three reasons. First, it needed to be recorded in some official capacity for posterity. Secondly, when going on a long trip and you're in a rental, spring for the added insurance. And, lastly, to illustrate a principle we all know: life is ever-changing.

Whether it's some fad of some by-gone era or a simple road trip, existence isn't static. Things change. But while the world is filled with change, our God is unchanging. He is unchanging in his being. He is unchanging in his promises. And He is unchanging in his will. Our God is, what theologians call, an immutable God. "Immutable" is the opposite of "mutable," which is, itself, the root word of "mutation." In other words, God never mutates into something or someone else. Who He was and is today is who he will *always* be. Our God does not change.

Imagine being lost at sea. The waves are tossing your boat back and forth. As you try to grasp where you are, you realize you cannot find any markers to help you. The water is constantly shifting and changing. However, you remember that sailors have used one of the only constant things you can see: the stars for generations. They would observe the North Star and various constellations. Those familiar benchmarks would guide them home—and they can lead you home, too. In an ever-changing world, it's hard to find something constant, stable, and faithful. But for Christians, the only consistent thing we have in our life is God.

Now, a month-long study could be done on God's unchangeable nature. I suspect if we were to walk through each and every example of it in the Scriptures, we'd be here till next week. So, rather than given an exhaustive study of the topic, I want to give you a few passages which best illustrate this principle.

**READ:** Malachi 3:6 (ESV)

“For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.

Malachi is the last book in the OT for those who aren't aware, and, as such, it is the last word that the Jews will hear from God for next four centuries. Meaning that right before God goes silent for 400 years, He reminds his people that he does not change.

Now, for those bible Geeks in the room who might say, "What about passages in the bible where we're told, explicitly, that God changed his mind?" And that is an excellent question. Though it is impossible to misunderstand the meaning of Malachi 3:6, we still find instances where it appears that God changed (cf. Ex. 32:12-14; 1 Sam. 15:29; Jer. 18:8; 26:3, 13, 19; Am. 7:6, 3; Jon. 3:9-10; 4:2).

When we say that God does not change, we are saying that God is unchanging in his nature even though he is a being with "conflicting" personality traits. For instance, is God just? Yes. But is he not also compassionate? Yes. We know from Scriptures that while man's sin deserved instant punishment, God withheld judgment for a season so that he might show us that he is also a being of forgiveness and grace (cf. Ac. 17:30-32). And aside from the life of Jesus—which perfectly illustrates this principle—two other examples show that God is consistent in his nature though he might appear to change his mind.

The first example comes in Ex. 32. The children of Israel recently saved from their bondage in Egypt were debasing themselves before an idol. God, at that moment, set his mind to wipe the slate clean and start over. But Moses interceded on Israel's behalf effectively staying God's hand. It's a fantastic story that illustrates the power of prayer and shows us that God is both righteous and gracious. When he chooses one over the other, he hasn't become inconsistent; instead, he's being consistent to his nature.

The second example comes in the book of Jonah. There we find a messenger of God who, unlike Moses, wanted God's hand of judgment to fall. The Ninevites were the Jew's enemy, and Jonah wanted nothing to do with them. So, when he heard that God would destroy them because of their sin, Jonah was happy. That is until God also commanded him to go and preach a sermon about repentance. After being persuaded by a whale, Jonah eventually goes to Nineveh, preaches his sermon, and the entire city repents. Remarkably, by the end of the story, though Jonah was used by God to change the hearts of many, his own heart hadn't changed. In the book's last chapter, we're told that Jonah is angry at the revival. And he explains his anger to God by saying, "I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster" (Jo. 4:2).

It is important to note that God's unchanging nature is not distant or cold. As theologian Wayne Grudem explains,

“God’s unchangeableness does not mean he will not act nor feel differently in response to different situations (for he would hardly be good or just if he did not respond differently to sin than to repentance and righteousness). Nor does unchangeableness mean God doesn’t act or feel emotions. In fact, one of the ways God demonstrates he is “God and not man” is by not executing his “burning anger” and destroying a people; instead, as his “heart recoils within” him and “compassion grows warm and tender,” God withholds his judgments and says, “I will not come in wrath” (Hos. 11:8-9).”<sup>1</sup>

God is a personal God who is unchanging, but he does "adjust" according to how we respond to him.<sup>2</sup> This immutability means that he is unchanging in his attributes even though some of his characteristics may "override" some other aspect of his nature (i.e., anger/love, justice/mercy, etc.).

God is like a good Father who, though he's established house rules, will, at times, be longsuffering with his children so that they might learn that he is loving. This does not mean the rules have changed. Breaking the rules is still breaking the rules. But it does mean that God is a relational being that understands our flawed natures and gives us leeway to make mistakes, and he will forgive us when we turn back to him (cf. Heb. 4:15). He even went so far as to satisfy the standard of justice by sending his own Son to die for us so that we might be reconciled back to him. What a remarkable God who not only sets the standard but pays the price when it gets broken.

Malachi isn't the only passage which speaks of God's immutability.

**READ:** Hebrews 6:17-18 (ESV)

<sup>17</sup> 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, <sup>18</sup> 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.

**READ:** Hebrews 13:8 (ESV)

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

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<sup>1</sup> Grudem, Wayne, and Elliot Grudem, *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Evans, Tony, *God Himself: A Journey Through His Attributes*, (Chicago, IL; Moody Publisher, 2020), p. 30.

According to theologian A.W. Tozer, the premise for the entire book of Hebrews is how an unchanging God uses change to perfect his work.<sup>3</sup> For instance, worship transitioned from an earthly tabernacle to a heavenly tabernacle where those who follow God must worship God in spirit and truth. Or how, before, many earthly high priests helped prepare the sacrifices for forgiveness but now there is only one great High Priest who makes intercession for us today. And similarly, rather than having a long string of earthly sacrifices year in and year out, Jesus was that one great sacrifice that paid for both the interest and principle of our sin debt.

But probably the best passage, in my opinion, which explains God's unchanging nature is in the Book of Psalms

**READ:** Psalms 102:25-28 (ESV)

<sup>25</sup> Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. <sup>26</sup> 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, <sup>27</sup> but you are the same, and your years have no end. <sup>28</sup> The children of your servants shall dwell secure; their offspring shall be established before you.

Nothing is more reassuring than God's immutability. It is the nail upon which all the other attributes hang and, without its virtue, would render the rest of God's characteristics meaningless.

For better and worse, life is defined by change, and nothing is immune to its effects. Given enough time, rivers shift their banks, and even mountains alter their shape. But the Lord does not change. He is the one constant in the universe. What permanence we might perceive in this life is nothing more than a cheap imitation of our changeless God.

Our word changes, but our God never does.

**SO, WHAT'S THE TAKEAWAY?**

God's immutability means we have ever-lasting stability.

**READ:** James 1:17 (ESV)

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.

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<sup>3</sup> Tozer, A.W., *The Attributes of God: Deeper into the Father's Heart*, Volume 2, (Chicago, IL; Moody Publishers, 2001), p. 108.

God's nature does not change. Unlike the sun, moon, and stars, whose light appears to fluctuate from our perspective, God's light never changes from any perspective. When you look to him, though it is in the darkest night, you will find him shining undimmed and undiminished. There is no degree, "variation," or even a "shadow" of turning in God's unfailing light.

Whatever truth we knew about him as children has not changed now that we are adults. Wherever we might go in this life, he is already there. Whenever we are surprised by some turn of events, he is already aware. He is and will be who he has always been. And in a vast sea of uncertainty, this anchor steadies my heart more than anything else.

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**God's immutability means we have ever-lasting stability.**

## Video Description

The Immutable Characteristics of God | Week 1 | “The Unchanging God”

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But, unlike some trends of some by-gone era, God’s nature does not change. Nor He is like the sun, moon, and stars whose light appears to fluctuate from our perspective; God's light never changes from any perspective. When you look to him, though it is in the darkest night, you will find him shining undimmed and undiminished. There is no degree, "variation," or even a "shadow" of turning in God's unfailing light.

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Pastor’s manuscript can be found here: <https://docdro.id/D8SyhBD>