

## St Martins C3 – November 06, 2022

### Knowing God – Immutability (Unchanging)

Through the scriptures, and human history, we see that the sunshine and shadows of human circumstance may reveal certain contours of God's character one day and different the next, but his character remains fixed, his plans remain steady, his promises remain firm. In an ever-changing world, he is the unchanging reference point upon which we can fix to determine the direction that leads to home.

Through the prophet, Malachi, God declares "For I the Lord do not change" (Malachi 3:6).

The author of Hebrews exults "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

James celebrates the goodness of the God with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change (James 1:17).

But is it really true?

There are passages in the bible where it does appear that God is changing his mind (see Genesis 6:6-7, Exodus 32:14, 1 Samuel 15, Jonah 3:10). These passages use human language to describe the actions of God in a manner that might be more relatable to us.

In each of these situations, we can confidently say that God already knew, and had planned, what he ultimately did, and that the human language used to describe God was used simply to help explain the reason, in human terms, for why God did what he did.

The outworking of the truth that God is Immutable is very important and immensely practical. This is not simply lofty language of theologians in dusty corridors

So, why does it matter?

#### **1. Truly Knowable**

In this series, we are not just looking at God's tendencies but his immutable characteristics. These are intrinsic to his being, his essence. We can have

confidence that this is who he is now and will be because he has revealed them about himself to us before AND we know he does not change.

## **2. Confidence**

God's people can take immeasurable assurance that the eternal covenant of redemption remains because it is not conditioned on the human side but on the immutable nature and will of the triune God. He is the rock of our salvation, and this salvation is assured.

This will affect how you pray – affecting both tone and content.

We approach the throne room of God with confidence.

- We proclaim and agree with His promises over ourselves and this world.
- We pray boldly for eyes to be opened, wisdom and insight given
- We ask for His help to resist sin – knowing it is not a vain request.

## **3. Hope**

Just as my assurance of salvation rests in the fact that God cannot change, my hope of sanctification rests in the fact that I can. The Unchanging One dispels forever the myth of human immutability changing a heart that was once stone to a heart of flesh, changing desires that once sought only to glorify self to those that seek to glorify him.

This will affect how you live and how you speak.

Note that:

- Every circumstance you encounter will change except the circumstance of your forgiveness
- Every possession you own will pass away except the Pearl of your salvation
- Every relationship you enter into will waiver except your adoption by your heavenly father

## **Summary**

Intrinsic in God's essence is that he is immutable – unchanging.

With this knowledge we delight that He is truly knowable, have confidence in our salvation & in how we approach him in prayer and a well-grounded hope; that although we still struggle against the world, the flesh, and the devil, he who began a good work in us will continue it to completion (Phil 1:6) – the very sanctification of our souls.

## **Suggested Questions to Ponder & Discuss**

*What do we mean when we say that God does not change?*

*How do we reconcile the personal, interactive, responding nature of God as seen in scripture and in our experience with His Immutability (unchangingness)?*

*Why does it matter that God's character does not change?*

*What is something that you can have confidence in, when you know that God does not change?*

*How will your prayers be different in light of the sermon?*

*Why does God's immutability give us hope?*

*Does your language reflect that we are able to change but God does not?*

*Why does agreeing that God is immutable make a difference in how you live your life? (What will be different)?*

## Monday's Devotion – Nutting it Out

We have affirmed that intrinsic in God's essence is that he does not change. **Genesis 6:6-7, Exodus 32:14, and Jonah 3:10** are all passages that on first appears seem to indicate that God isn't immutable – that he does change. Have a read of each passage and have a think about why this isn't a contradiction (*before reading below*)

Because we know that God is sovereign and eternal, we know that he created the universe with the end already in mind, so no event in history can surprise or change God's plans.

In each of these situations, we can confidently say that God already knew, and had planned, what he ultimately did, and that the human language used to describe God was used simply to help explain the reason, in human terms, for why God did what he did.

*In Genesis 6:6-7*, God's decision was to punish man's sin with the flood. The ultimate reason for the flood was because sin deserves punishment, but the "human" reason given was that God "regretted" and was "grieved."

*In Exodus 32:14*, God's decision was to not punish the Israelites. The ultimate reason was simply because God has the right to have patience with sin, but the "human" reason given was that God conversed with Moses. It is arguable that God chose to have this conversation with Moses to draw out the argument Moses makes for God to not punish the Israelites, namely, as a witness to the Egyptians. If God had not had this conversation with Moses, we would not have heard Moses say this.

*In Jonah 3:10*, God's decision was to not punish the people of Nineveh because of their repentance. There is simply no contradiction here because God's warning to the people of Nineveh implied that if they changed, or repented, they would be spared. So, because the people of Nineveh repented, they were spared.

God is not flippant. He doesn't do U-turns on his promises or plans.

Spend some time today thanking God for his consistency and for insight that we may rightly read and understand his Word (the Bible).

## Tuesday's Devotion – Truly Knowable

### Romans 11:33

*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out*

In this series, we are not just looking at God's tendencies but his immutable characteristics. These are intrinsic to his being, his essence. We can have confidence that this is who he is now and will be because he has revealed them about himself to us before AND we know he does not change.

A.W. Tozer in his book *The Knowledge of God* states:

*What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us*

What comes to your mind when you think about God?

In this series the attributes of God that we have (*and will be*) investigating are:

- Transcendence
- Immanence
- Sovereignty
- The nature of the Godhead – the Trinity
- Holiness
- Love
- Grace
- Justice
- Immutability – unchangingness

Spend some time reflecting on these attributes of God. If you have the sermon notes why not flick back over them to remind yourself of what they are and mean or if you have some time today, why not go back and listen to the sermon recordings on one of these topics – the sermons can be found on our website and Spotify at

<https://open.spotify.com/show/6Hsxchne2AB47hviuP6Zng?si=mzKJCHouTMuzKIXanss5Q>

# Wednesday's Devotion – Confidence

## Hebrews 4:12

*For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it pierces even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

In scripture, the virtue in God's changelessness (his immutability) lies in the assurance that God is reliable in his promises not only because he *wills* to be faithful to his word but because he *cannot* change his eternal counsels regardless of what creatures do. God is all-knowing. He knows the end from the beginning including the secrets of the heart. Nothing catches God by surprise.

This is true both for the whole sway of human history and your own individual life.

- God knew that Adam would sin
- He knew that Israel would fall as well
- He knew that we would crucify his son & that he would rise again
- He chooses us, even before we choose him
- God knows you:
  - He created you
  - He knows the choices you make,
  - The struggles you face
  - The sin that particularly entangles you
  - He knows what is coming

God's unchangeable decree is presented as the basis for the believers' comfort that even if we are faithless he remains faithful for he cannot deny himself (2 Timothy 2:13).

This will affect how you pray. It will affect the tone of our prayers as well as their content.

We approach the throne room of God with confidence.

- We proclaim and agree with his promises over ourselves and this world.
- We pray boldly for eyes to be opened, wisdom and insight given
- We ask for his help to resist sin – knowing it is not a vain request.

Spend some time now praying to God with confidence and boldness.

## Thursday's Devotion – Hope that we can Change

Just as our assurance of salvation rests in the fact that God cannot change, our hope of sanctification rests in the fact that I can.

*The following are extracts from Jen Wilkin's book "None Like Him"*

I tell myself that my love of routine and my aversion to change are longings for the God who does not change but if I'm honest they are just plain idolatry. In truth, I am telling you temporary changing things I need you to be. God please just stay the same, but the worst part is not that I asked the world around me not to change (or to at least act convincingly as though it is not). The worst part is that when confronted with my own entrenched sin my immediate defense is to say "That's just who I am, I can't change."

I can't change. Immutable.

Lie.

Lie from the pit of hell.

Whether uttered in hopelessness or defiance this statement is a lie.

Only one person does not change and that is God.

But when faced with the need to turn from sin I answer the question of who is unchanging with "I am".

What greater disavowal of the gospel of grace than to claim that it is capable of changing every sinner's heart but mine?

No doubt as unbelievers we feel the hopelessness of our plight apart from grace, we rightly surmise that aside from a miracle we cannot change for the better, but when the miracle of grace has been applied to our hearts change becomes gloriously possible.

The Unchanging One dispels forever the myth of human immutability changing a heart that was once stone to a heart of flesh. Changing desires that once sought only to glorify self to those that seek to glorify him.

This is the heart of sanctification – being made like him for his glory.

**Pray** – *Thank you God that whilst you do not change, by your grace you are changing me to be more like your Son, Jesus. Help me to let myself be shaped by you. Help me to see the areas of my life that I block you off from and claim that I can't change – you are so much bigger than the challenges I see. I agree with you and welcome you to do your work within me.*

## Friday's Devotion – Hope and my tongue

Our hope of sanctification rests in the fact that we can change, whilst God does not.

The way we use our language reveals our soul and it is often not a pretty sight. Perhaps nowhere do we demonstrate more clearly our commitment to the myth of human immutability than in the way that we argue with each other:

“You never listen when I talk to you”

“You always leave your socks on the floor”

“You're never ready on time for school”

When we apply the terms *always* or *never* to other people, we speak an untruth. Human beings don't *always* or *never* anything we just aren't that consistent. We *frequently*, we *fairly*, we *regularly*, we *often* or *habitually* but we do not *always* or *never*. Idolatry takes hold of you and me when we depend on a human relationship or circumstance or possession to *never leave nor forsake us*, to always remain.

Idolatry takes hold of us when we believe that a difficult relationship or circumstance will never change – will always be hopeless, wounding or sorrowful.

But here is the truth to topple idols

- every circumstance you encounter will change except the circumstance of your forgiveness
- every possession you own will pass away except the Pearl of your salvation
- every relationship you enter into will waiver except your adoption by your heavenly father

**Pray** – *Lord Jesus I commit my tongue to you - conform it to your will. May I speak truth in my relationships, even when I get really worked up. Forgive me for elevating anything or anyone above you and help me to see the truth that will hold me fast to you in every circumstance I face.*