

Well, good morning; how are we? Good, good! I want to give a quick shout-out to my people joining us in our online community! I'm so glad you're joining us in worship and studying God's Word from wherever you're at. I absolutely love it. If I haven't been able to meet you yet, my name is Doug; I'm one of the Pastors here, and I would love to connect with you on the patio after we worship together. So, be sure to come and say hi.

But, as I was saying, I just love that the Foothills family is a unified body with the same goal of connecting people to Jesus and teaching them to grow in their love and service to Him wherever we are at! Whether we are in the room together right now, or traveling on vacation or just can't be here in person, we are a family. And this family of disciples, of people who love Jesus, who submit themselves to His teaching and live to obey Him has an extended family.

We are part of the larger family of disciples, of Jesus followers, around the world who are part of the Christian & Missionary Alliance. That's us. That's our denomination. We are an Acts 1:8 family. That is, we are followers of Jesus who are empowered by the Holy Spirit to go into all of the world and testify to who Jesus is and what He has done. It's "All of Jesus, for all the world!"

This greater family is called the Alliance World Fellowship. We are in 88 countries, there are 22 thousand churches just like us that are made up of 6.2 million followers of Jesus! I LOVE THIS!

I just returned this week from France with a team of students where we got to partner with some of this extended family. We met up with Aaron and Kelly, who are Alliance missionaries in the city of Toulouse, France. Toulouse is a city of 1 million people. Of that, 100,000 of them are

university students. It's the home of Airbus which is the European version of Boeing. Of the 1 million people in Toulouse, only 20,000 of them are professing Christ as their Lord and Savior. France is quite similar to the rest of Europe in that it is a post-Christian nation. This is why it is not surprising that of the 1 million people in Toulouse, only 2% are followers of Jesus. Though they are post-Christian, they are not unspiritual. In fact, 1 in 4 French people see a medium, palm reader, or psychic.

So, as Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful...but the laborers are few (Matt. 9:37)." In this Alliance family, there are only 1,700 missionaries. In fact, in France, there are 40 evangelical churches, but only 5 of them have pastors. 35 communities longing for a shepherd.

So, this team and I went to be an encouragement to the laborers in Toulouse. It's known for being incredibly challenging for missionaries, many of them ultimately leaving the field. We also went with open hearts and minds to have a cross-cultural experience and see if a life of missions or pastoral ministry may be something that the Father has for some of those on our team.

I would have loved to have all 15 members of the team share today, but we just don't have time. But! These three have been kind and brave enough to share with you some of their experience.

Interview.

It was quite the experience. For me personally, it was so encouraging to interact with a number of pastors and missionaries that gathered for the Alliance World Fellowship conference. I was able to connect with pastors and leaders from Australia, Spain, Brazil, Colombia, Iraq, Canada, Russia, and others and to hear about what God is doing in their locations. I was able to hear about the great things that Jesus is doing while also hearing horrible and heartbreaking stories. As I was talking with one pastor from an undisclosed location in the Middle East, he shared a story about a young Muslim lady who was curious about the Bible and Jesus. When her family heard this, they were angry that she was looking into who the

Christians say Jesus is, and her brother killed her. It's horrendous. I think that it's quite common for those of us here in the States to forget or not realize the reality of the offensiveness of Jesus in the rest of the world.

So, these laborers are working tirelessly to bring the hope of Jesus to the ends of the earth. It is not convenient. It is not comfortable. It is not what most people would choose. In fact, of the 6.2 million Christians in the C&MA around the world, only .02% are serving in this way. It's very humbling.

Let's take a moment to pray. Let's pray for the laborers.

This summer, we are going through a series called "What's God like," and in the little time we have left together, I'd like to take some time and talk about another attribute of God and really look at how this reality impacts us and our relationship with Him and in turn the way we live our lives.

The characteristic we're going to unpack is that God is immutable. A simpler way to describe this attribute is that He is "unchangeable." Theologian Wayne Grudem defines the immutability of God as "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."¹

We see this characteristic emphasized throughout the Scriptures in places like the Psalms, for instance, 102:25-27 where the Psalmist describes God's immutability in saying,

²⁵ "Of old you laid the foundation of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.

²⁶ They will perish, but you will remain;

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England : Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Academic, 1994), 163.

they will all wear out like a garment.

You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away,
27 but you are the same, and your years have no end.”²

In this passage, we’re confronted with the reality that things may seem permanent to us, such as the earth and the heavens, yet God existed before these things, and He will exist long after.

We also see His unchangeableness in Malachi 3:6, where God Himself explains that though the people have failed to uphold His statutes, He declares, ⁶ “I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.”³

And in the New Testament, James mentions the immutability of God in James 1:17 when he says, ¹⁷ “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.”⁴

Now to unpack this unchangeableness or immutability at a deeper level is to understand that there are many layers to this doctrine. First, there is no quantitative change with God. What I mean by that is that God cannot increase in anything because He is already perfection. At the same time, He cannot decrease either. To do so would cause Him to not be God.

But there isn’t just no quantitative change, but also there’s no qualitative change. Here’s what I mean by that. God’s nature, His essence, does not change and cannot be modified. His will cannot be changed. This is critical in that God is forever faithful. For example, in His covenant with Abraham, God gave His word, and He will not change His mind or go back on His promise.

² *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Psalm 102:25-27.

³ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*, Malachi 3:6.

⁴ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*, James 1:17.

Before we move on and look at the significance of this reality, I do want to mention something here. It can be confusing to look at certain Scriptures and ask if God is unchangeable, can God change His mind? Certainly, there are certain passages that would make you say, "wait, did God just change His mind? I thought He was unchanging?"

And this is a fantastic question. On the surface, it can look like God changes His mind. In fact, there are statements where it says that God turned from what He was going to do and did something different. But we must be careful in reading things at face value and not practicing solid Biblical interpretation. For example, with this, we have to understand that the Scriptures affirm that God is omniscient, meaning He is all-knowing. That includes the knowledge of the future. Even the knowledge of future thoughts of people as well as their actions. So, because God has complete knowledge of the future, it is impossible that anything could happen that would make him change His mind because He already knows about it. If you already know what is going to happen, it's already factored into your future plans.

I'd like to close our time by looking at why the immutability of God is so important. The great Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck explains,

"The doctrine of God's immutability is of the highest significance for religion. The contrast between being and becoming marks the difference between the creator and the creature. Every creature is continually becoming. It is changeable, constantly striving, seeking rest and satisfaction, and finds this rest in God, and in Him alone, for only He is pure being, and no becoming. Hence, in Scripture, God is often called the Rock."⁵

⁵ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 164.

God is not striving, seeking, or becoming. He declares I AM. He is perfection. For Him to become more would mean that He was not before when we first trusted Him. And how could we be sure that now He is the best possible that He could be?

Or, what if God could change for the worse? What kind of God might He become? Could He become just a little bit evil and not wholly good? How would we know that He wouldn't become wholly evil? If either option were possible, how could we trust a God who could change? How could we commit our lives to Him?

This same problem exists in His purposes. If God could change in His purposes, then how could we trust Him completely for eternal life? Meaning God had promised the Messiah, He has promised eternal life through the Messiah, and the forgiveness of sins, He has promised that there is "no condemnation now for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1)." Perhaps God has changed His mind on those promises. Or, maybe His omnipotence, His being all-powerful, could change one day so that maybe He wants to keep His promise, but He doesn't have the power to do so.

You see how significant this characteristic of God is. It's huge! Thankfully, God is unchangeable. He is the same today, yesterday, and tomorrow. Which means that we can confidently trust Him. We can confidently trust His Word. We can confidently live in the reality that for those of us who believe in Him, who have submitted our lives to Him, who have been saved by Him, we are secure in our eternal salvation.

This greatly affects the way we live out our lives every day. Because God is unchanging, you and I don't have to work tirelessly to earn His favor, to earn our way into His grace. We don't have to walk around with guilt and shame because of our pasts or our current failures, instead, we get to live in the reality of our freedom in Christ, that we are not condemned, and nothing can change that because the God who does not change has declared it!

We are not at the mercy of changeable people, we don't live in the confidence of our identity because of changeable people, but we have been adopted, grafted in, and made new, and that is unchangeable because God is unchangeable. So, as we walk through life and run our businesses, work with co-workers, or lead our families, we do so with confidence because we have a God we can trust who will never abandon us or forsake us, or stop loving us. We are secure.

I hope that encourages you as you go out into the community and represent Him. You have what billions of people on this earth don't have. And you have the mission to connect them to Jesus, connect them to the One who is never changing.