

Series: **God is...So What?**

Today's Title: ***"The Unchanging God"***

September 4, 2022 – *Select Passages* – Sermon 3 of 16

---

**Objective:** To help people know the truth and the blessings that God is unchanging.

---

Human beings are interesting – and we are often full of contradictions.

One area of contradiction is the topic of change.

Nobody really enjoys change.

Change is resisted by almost everyone.

- We're unhappy if we're forced to change the normal route we drive to work due to construction – or an accident.
- Some of us refuse to change our hairstyle.
- Change at work is resisted by the employees.
- The stock market doesn't like change – and there is usually a big sell-off and drop in the market when change is in process.
- Churches are notorious for resisting change – holding on to what has become comfortable and knowable.
- Change in the family – when kids start going to school – a job change – the empty nest – kids getting married - retirement – good things, but they are changes to the rhythm of daily life – and it's often difficult for some.

We may like variety – but we often don't like change.

What kind of car did you have 20 years ago? Do you still have it? If you've changed cars...are you glad you're not still driving the car from 20 years ago?

Pop culture is in perpetual change.

What's popular today – is tomorrow's old news.

**But we are quick to complain if things don't change.**

We are an 'upgrade' culture – looking for the next thing – how to improve what we already have.

- Computer upgrades.
- Fashion changes.
- Changing hairstyles.

What about God?

Does God change?

Should God change?

Today we will consider / think about change – and if God changes or not.

***If God changes***, would that be a good thing?

***If God doesn't change***, does that make Him yesterday's news – does it make Him an outdated deity? The deity equivalent of: Windows '97 - Commodore 64 - Floppy Disk - 8-Track tapes - Sony Walkman?

***Opening Prayer***

**God does not change.**

The theological term for this is: *immutability*.

The immutability of God is a clear teaching throughout the Scripture.

It's repeated so many times – it's clear that this is an attribute of God – a perfection of God – that is important for us to know.

Definitions:

**Grudem** – *“God is 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.”* (Systematic Theology, by Wayne Grudem, p. 163)

**Arthur Pink** – *“God is perpetually the same: Subject to no change in His being, attributes, or determinations.”*

(The Nature of God, by Arthur Pink, p. 43)

Classically, when we think about the truth that God does not change, we can think about this in 3 categories.

**1.** His being / essence /nature will never change.  
(Ontologically immutable).

This is connected to His self-existence.

He needs nothing outside of Himself.

Everything outside of God has been created by Him, which means He is sovereign over all things, so nothing outside of Himself is powerful enough to bring about a change in His being.

**2.** His attributes will never change.

This is connected to the perfection of His being – more on this in a moment.

**3. His will / purposes will never change.**

He is all-knowing and all-powerful, so there is nothing that He can learn which will make Him change His mind, and nothing that will prevent Him from accomplishing His will, so He will never have to resort to a ‘plan B’.

**Psalm 102:25-27**

“Long ago You laid the foundation of the earth and made the heavens with Your hands.

They will perish, but You remain forever; they will wear out like old clothing. You will change them like a garment and discard them.

But You are always the same; You will live forever.”

This is a clear statement by the Psalmist that God, as creator, is unchanging.

The creation around us is changing.

Some of these changes in nature are more noticeable and observable than others.

The perspective of the Psalmist – in describing the changes in nature to God changing His clothing (anthropomorphism) gives us a sense of God’s transcendence and greatness, in light of the grandeur of the universe!

In **vs. 27** he says, “But You are always the same...”

Hard to be any clearer!

So, what does the writer mean?

He means God “is always the same” – which is the same as saying God never changes!

**The reason for God’s immutability.**

This is more of a logical and philosophical point – that we can derive from what the Bible says about the nature of God.

***If God would change, would it be a change for the better?***

What needs improvement or upgrading in God?

If anything needs improvement – or an upgrade in the character or nature of God, then He would be imperfect – and in need of change to become perfect.

***Change for the worse?***

Perfection doesn’t need to change - or an upgrade.

If something perfect changed, it would no longer be perfect.

If something perfect changes, it becomes imperfect.

Perfect implies...perfect! No way to improve it!

“Immutability, we are impelled to conclude, is essential and necessary to God’s identity as the perfect, supreme being.”

(None Greater, by Matthew Barrett, p. 95, quoting Charnock, Existence and Attributes of God, 1:318)

If we said that God could / should change, then we would be saying that God has potential.

*'He has potential to become something better.'*

*'He has not yet arrived at perfection, but He has the potential to be perfect if / when He makes the correct changes to His being, His attributes, and His will.'*

No... God does not have 'potential'.

He is not developing or maturing into a better, more perfect God.

The truth is that each of God's attributes are perfect – they have always been perfect.

God's nature is evidenced by His attributes – His mercy, love, grace, kindness, power, righteousness – each of these are perfect.

There is no part of God that needs to change.

If God were to change it would only bring harm to or degrade that which is perfect.

### **Challenges to God's immutability.**

Process theology – is a modern challenge to the doctrine of God's immutability.

Process theology believes that God is 'in process' – that He is evolving and learning – improving Himself as events of history unfold.

Process theology teaches that *"...process and change are essential aspects of genuine existence, and that therefore*

*God must be changing over time also, just like everything else that exists.”* (Systematic Theology, by Wayne Grudem, p. 166)

***This teaching is false*** – it blatantly contradicts the Bible’s clear teaching.

It’s based in the desire to make our human lives more significant – that our actions and experiences are so significant they can affect who and what God is.

This is not only false, but it’s an incorrect assumption regarding our significance.

We are already significant – because God has said so (Psalm 8:4-5) – He has created us in His image (Genesis 1:27) – and He has given His life for ours (Gal. 2:20).

**But process theology is not the only challenge.**

What about passages that seem to speak of God ‘repenting’ or ‘relenting’ or ‘changing His mind’?

**Exodus 32:14**

“And the LORD relented from the disaster that He had spoken of bringing on His people.”

**Genesis 6:6**

“And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him to His heart.”

**Jonah 3:10**

“When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that He had said He would do to them, and He did not do it.”

1. The Bible often uses *Anthropomorphic* language to describe God.

The writers use human expressions to portray God in a way we can better understand.

In speaking of Himself, God often describes Himself in bodily terms; Eyes, Ears, Hands – even though God is Spirit and has no body.

**Psalm 78:65** “Then the Lord awoke as from sleep, like a strong man shouting because of wine.”

**Jeremiah 7:13** declares the LORD, “and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking...”

2. God acts *in a just way* according to the situation.

Situations may change, and God will act accordingly. His justice and holiness require Him to act differently when a people repent of their sin – when prayers are offered.

In **Exodus 32** God told Moses He would wipe out Israel and create a new nation from Moses. Moses prayed, and in response to Moses’ prayer, God “relented” from His judgement of Israel.

God told Jonah to tell the people of Nineveh that because of their wickedness they would be destroyed in 40 days.

They repented.

God, being a just God, did not destroy them.

That was not God changing.



It was God, in His justice, acting in a way that accounted for the situation that had changed. These are how we understand those passages that seem to indicate God has changed in some way.

***Apply it... So What?***

Don't get all excited – we're not almost done! We're just ½ way through. But the remaining points all discuss the “**So what?**” part of this topic. Each of these will explain why the immutability of God is important – and how it applies to our life – and our future.

**God's immutability = we can trust what God has said.**

**There are 2 areas this applies.**

1. God keeps His promises.

Malachi is the last book in the O.T. In the O.T. we read of the history of the nation of Israel. We read of God's covenant with Abraham – and Abraham's descendants (Genesis 15). This was a covenant which was unilaterally dependent on God, not on Abraham or His descendants – the Jewish people – the nation of Israel. Now, within this covenant there were things the nation of Israel was obligated to do.

But over Israel's history, they did a poor job of living up to this covenant and as a result God disciplined them through a variety of means.

Malachi was a prophet who spoke to the nation on behalf of God.

He brought them a message from God.

When we get to Malachi, Israel was going through all the motions of their covenant with God, but their external obedience was hollow.

The message Malachi brought from God was one of judgement – but also of hope and comfort.

**1:8, 10**

“...you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? ...that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on My altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand.”

**2:3**

“Behold, I will rebuke your offspring, and spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings, and you shall be taken away with it.”

**2:8 – to the priests God said:**

“But you have turned aside from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the LORD of hosts...”

These are horrific statements from God of Israel's guilt – of their evil.

But God made a covenant with Abraham’s offspring – and the covenant was dependent solely on God’s faithfulness.

So, God tells them...

**Malachi 3:6**

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

Since God does not change – He is bound by His very nature to keep His promises – even if we are underserving of the blessings in those promises!

*For us, the greatest promise He has given us is the promise of salvation* – the forgiveness of our sins when we put our faith in Jesus as our Savior.

God’s immutability means that everything He has promised will come to pass.

It means He will not change His mind about His commitment to us and our future.

“Whether or not God's oath, on which our salvation depends, is reliable depends entirely on the unchanging nature of His holy character. Whether all the covenant promises will be yours rests not only on God's faithfulness to the covenant but on the unchanging nature of God Himself.”

(None Greater, by Matthew Barrett, p. 109)

**Numbers 23:19**

“God is not man, that He should lie, or a son of man, that He should change His mind. Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not fulfill it?”

**2 Timothy 2:13**

“...if we are faithless, He remains faithful...”

***When Jesus told*** the thief on the cross “...today you will be with Me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43) ...

***When He told*** His followers, “I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also.” (John 14:3) ...

***When He said***, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” (John 10:10) ...

***When Jesus told*** the paralyzed man, “Your sins are forgiven...” and went on to say that He “...has authority on earth to forgive sins...” (Matthew 9:5-6) ...

We can have great confidence in what Jesus said and promised about our salvation – our forgiveness of sins. We can rest in His promises and not be worried or fearful about what lies beyond the grave for those who have faith in Christ... because the Bible says:

**Hebrews 13:8**

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”

**2. God’s moral code has not changed.**

What the Lord has said regarding moral / ethical living has not changed.

We must understand that many commands in the O.T. relate to Israel's sacrificial system – and to the civic life of ancient Israel. These commands don't carry over to the N.T. or to us.

But the moral commands of God do not change – since they have their origin in the very nature of God!

**God doesn't update His morality – His standards of holiness because the culture has changed its standards!**

Since God is unchanging – immutable – we can rest in His promises and His unchanging truth.

*He will not rewrite the rules on us.*

His immutability means God is dependable and consistent to what He has said – He keeps His promises.

**God's immutability = we can trust God in difficult times.**

Turn to James 1... p. 1,011

James, the writer of this letter, was the brother (or ½ brother – Matt. 13:55) of Jesus.

He wrote this letter to the Christians who had been scattered or 'dispersed' due to persecution (James 1:1).

He begins by saying,

“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” (1:2-4)

As he writes he deals with the issue of persecution and difficulties due to one's faith, assuring his readers that God is using these difficulties for His purpose and their suffering is not in vain – but those who suffer will “...receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love Him.” (vs. 12).

He tells them that God is good, and He gives good gifts to His own.

Then, in vs. 17 he says, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights...”

What does “Father of lights” mean?

It's a reference to creation – that God created the sun, moon, and the stars (Genesis 1; Psalm 74 & 136).

These lights demonstrate the goodness of God in His creation.

The “lights” that rule over day and night bless us and help us in life.

We know the “lights” of creation change – and shift.

**Stars** are not in the same location in the night sky throughout the year.

From our perspective - the sun is not in the same place.

**The sun** ‘rises’ in the east and sets in the west.

Our shadow from the sun changes, depending on the angle of the sun and the time of day – and the season.

**The moon** varies from just a sliver in the sky to a full harvest moon with a variation of colors as it rises.

These are the objects in creation that God – the “Father of lights” has created.

He then writes:

**Vs. 17b**

“...with whom (God) there is no variation or shadow due to change.”

When your world is in turmoil – when you are suffering great loss and pain – nothing seems stable or grounded. Everything seems to be shifting – moving to put you off-balance and unsteady.

But James tells his suffering readers that in God “there is no variation or shadow due to change.”

The allusion he gave from nature of the “lights” show the goodness and power of God – but they change – they shift – they move.

But God doesn't change – or shift – or move.

He is stable – steady.

In God “there is no variation or shadow” because God doesn't change.

In the midst of the persecution James' readers were experiencing – this was a huge encouragement.

They could trust in God – that He will always be good – He will not change – He will be there for them – He will

reward them for their faithfulness in the face of great pain and loss.

**Psalm 110:4a**

“The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind...”

*Closing prayer*