

No One Like Him

A
Study
of
God's
Perfections

Men of the Word
2022-23

Immutability

Wednesday,
April 26, 2023

I. Definition of Divine “Immutability”

A. What immutability means.

- **The immutability of God refers to His unchanging existence.**
- To be “mutable” means “to be capable of change”—to be susceptible to internal or external influences that can bring change in character or nature—for better or for worse.
 - By definition, anything that is *created* is *mutable*.
 - Created things obviously have a beginning and can also be dissolved.



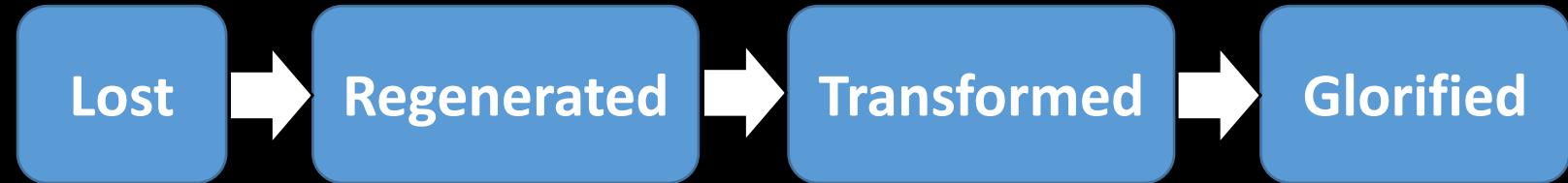
- But God's wholly-other existence is *impervious* to any forces of change.
 - In Himself, He is *perfect* in existence, and therefore can never become better or worse (for if that was the case, He wouldn't be perfect).
 - Outside of Himself, nothing *affects* God in any way that would bring about a change in His existence.
- Only God is *perfect being*; everything else is always *becoming*.
- God is the ultimate agent of all change, but is never changed Himself.

The Mutability of Man

**Physical
Existence**



**Spiritual
Existence**



“Creatures are in a perpetual flux; something is acquired or something lost every day. A man is the same with respect to existence as when he was a child; but there is a new succession of quantities and qualities in him. Every day he acquires something till he comes to his maturity; every day he loses something till he comes to his end. A man is not the same at night that he was in the morning; something is expired, and something is added; every day there is a change in his age, a change in his substance, a change in his accidents. But God hath his whole being in one and the same point or moment of eternity. He receives nothing as an addition to what he was before; he loses nothing of what he was before; he is always the same excellency and perfection in the same infiniteness as ever.”

—Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 1.177



“The doctrine of God’s immutability is highly significant for religion. The difference between the Creator and the creature hinges on the contrast between being and becoming. All that is creaturely is in process of becoming. It is changeable, constantly striving, in search of rest and satisfaction, and finds this rest only in him who is pure being without becoming.”

—Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2.156

- God's immutability is an expression of His *eternality*.
 - God is independent from time, having neither a beginning nor an end; since He does not experience the succession of time in His being, He cannot experience change.
- God's immutability is an expression of His *aseity*.
 - God is not reliant upon anything outside of Himself for existence, but rather supplies life to all. Changing creation has no influence on His essence.
- God's immutability is an expression of His *faithfulness*.
 - God does not waver in His commitment to His decrees and promises. He is reliable not only because of His omnipotence, but because He is unchanging.

Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven 4

Unison

1. Praise, my soul, the King of heav - en, To His feet thy
 2. Praise Him for His grace and fa - vor To our fa - thers
 3. Frail as sum - mer's flower we flour-ish; Blows the wind and
 4. An - gels in the height, a - dore Him; Ye be - hold Him

trib - ute bring; Ran - somed, healed, re - stored, for - giv - en,
 in dis - tress; Praise Him, still the same as ev - er,
 it is gone; But, while mor - tals rise and per - ish,
 face to face; Saints tri - um - phant, bow be - fore Him;

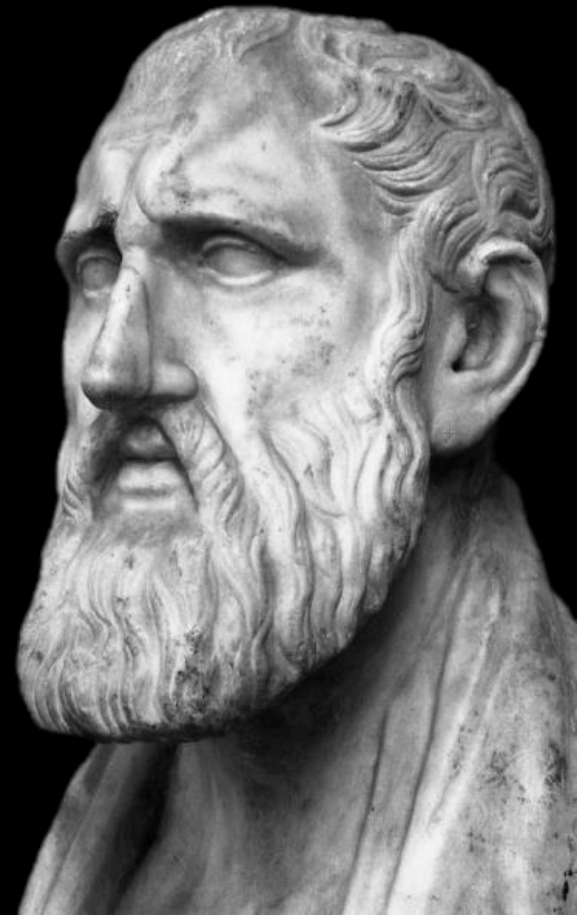
Ev - er - more His prais - es sing. Al - le - lu - ia!
 Slow to chide, and swift to bless. Al - le - lu - ia!
 God en - dures un - chang-ing on. Al - le - lu - ia!
 Gath - ered in from ev - 'ry race. Al - le - lu - ia!

Unison

Al - le - lu - ia! Praise the ev - er - last - ing King!
 Al - le - lu - ia! Glo - rious in His faith - ful - ness!
 Al - le - lu - ia! Praise the high e - ter - nal One.
 Al - le - lu - ia! Praise with us the God of grace.

B. What God's immutability does not mean.

- To affirm God's immutability does not mean that God is impersonal, detached, or motionless—that He is *stoic*.
- Stoicism—an ancient Greek philosophy promoted by Zeno of Athens (3rd-century BC)—taught that a divine force (reason, fate, or providence) ruled the universe and was indifferent to the pleasures and pains of men.
- For Stoics, man's lot in life was to live in harmony with this divine force and endure the pleasures and pains of life through apathetic detachment—i.e., suppressing any and all emotion.



“The divine immutability should not be understood as implying *immobility*, as if there is no movement in God. . . . The Bible teaches us that God enters into manifold relations with man and, as it were, lives their life with them. There is change round about Him, change in the relations of men to Him, but there is no change in His being, His attributes, His purpose, His motives of actions, or His promises.”

—Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 59

“Thus, whenever divine impassibility is interpreted to mean that God is impervious to human pain or incapable of empathizing with human grief it must be roundly denounced and rejected.”

—Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology*, 179

- To affirm God's *immutability* is not to deny that He is a God of real compassion (e.g., Exod 33:19), mercy (e.g., Eph 2:4), love (e.g., John 3:16), and care (e.g., 1 Pet 5:7) . . . or to deny that He is a God of jealousy (e.g., Deut 4:23–24) and wrath (e.g., Rev 9:15).
- But we must be ever so careful never to project our emotions onto God as if He experiences what we experience.
- As creatures, we are *affected beings*—meaning that we are always being impacted, influenced, and changed by forces outside of ourselves, and our emotions are the evidence of that change, and, in turn, give rise to more change.
- God is never improved, informed, or inflicted; He never succumbs, switches, or submits.

Immortal, Invisible 36



• 1. Im - mor - tal, in - vis - i - ble, God on - ly wise,
 • 2. Un - rest - ing, un - hast - ing, and si - lent as light,
 • 3. To all, life Thou giv - est, to both great and small;
 • 4. Great Fa - ther of glo - ry, pure Fa - ther of light,

In light in - ac - ces - si - ble hid from our eyes.
 Nor want - ing, nor wast - ing, Thou rul - est in might;
 In all life Thou liv - est, the true life of all;
 Thine an - gels a - dore Thee, all veil - ing their sight;

Most bless - ed, most glo - rious, the An - cient of Days,
 Thy jus - tice, like moun - tains, high soar - ing a - bove
 We blos - som and flour - ish as leaves on the tree,
 All praise we would ren - der; O help us to see

Al - might - y, vic - to - rious, Thy great name we praise.
 Thy clouds, which are foun - tains of good - ness and love.
 And with - er and per - ish but naught chang - eth Thee.
 'Tis on - ly the splen - dor of light hid - eth Thee!

II. Biblical Testimony to God's Immutability

- The biblical witness to God's unchangeableness can be arranged into four categories. God is immutable in:
 - (1) His existence;
 - (2) His perfections;
 - (3) His purposes; and
 - (4) His promises.
- The first two categories relate to God's *ontological* immutability.
- The second two categories relate to God's *ethical* immutability.

A. God is immutable in His existence.

- **Psalm 90:2** – “Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.”
- **Psalm 102:23–27 (cited in Hebrews 1:11–12)** – “He has weakened my strength in the way; He has shortened my days. I say, ‘O my God, do not take me away in the midst of my days, Your years are throughout all generations. Of old You founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. Even they will perish, but You endure; and all of them will wear out like a garment; like clothing You will change them and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end.’”

“He cannot change for the better, for He is already perfect; and being perfect, He cannot change for the worse. Altogether unaffected by anything outside Himself, improvement or deterioration is impossible. . . . He is altogether uninfluenced by the flight of time. There is no wrinkle upon the brow of eternity. Therefore His power can never diminish nor His glory ever fade.”

—A. W. Pink, *Attributes of God*, 47

perfect

B. God is immutable in His perfections.

- **Psalms 100:5** – “For the LORD is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting and His faithfulness to all generations.”
- **Psalms 119:90** – “Your faithfulness *continues* throughout all generations; You established the earth, and it stands.”
- **Malachi 3:5–6** – “‘Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me,’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.’”

- **James 1:17** – “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.”

“Whatever the attributes of God were before the universe was called into existence, they are precisely the same now, and will remain so forever. Necessarily so; for they are the very perfections, the essential qualities of His being. *Semper idem* (always the same) is written across every one of them. His power is unabated, His wisdom undiminished, His holiness unsullied. The attributes of God can no more change than Deity can cease to be.”

—Pink, *Attributes of God*, 47

C. God is immutable in His purposes.

- **Job 42:2** – “I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.”
- **Psalms 33:11** – “The LORD nullifies the counsel of the nations; He frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of His heart from generation to generation.”
- **Proverbs 19:21** – “Many plans are in a man’s heart, but the counsel of the LORD will stand.”
- **Isaiah 14:24** – “The LORD of hosts has sworn saying, ‘Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand.’”

- **Hebrews 6:17–18** – “In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.”

“God’s purpose never alters. One of two things causes a man to change his mind and reverse his plans: want of foresight to anticipate everything, or lack of power to execute them. But as God is both omniscient and omnipotent there is never any need for Him to revise His decrees.”

—Pink, *Attributes of God*, 48

D. God is immutable in His promises.

- **Numbers 23:19** – “God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?”
- **1 Samuel 15:29** – “Also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind.”
- **Psalms 119:89** – “Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven.”
- **Luke 21:33** – “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.”



Great is Thy
Faithfulness

“In Scripture, the virtue in God’s changelessness 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.”

—Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 236

III. What Immutability Demands from Us

A. Remember how *different* God is from you.

- God's immutability is one of the most striking evidences of the infinite difference between us and Him.
- A. W. Pink: "Immutability is one of the divine perfections which is not sufficiently pondered. It is one of the excellencies of the Creator which distinguishes Him from all His creatures" (*Attributes of God*, 46).
- Bavinck: "The difference between the Creator and the creatures hinges on the contrast between being and becoming" (*Reformed Dogmatics*, 2.156).

HUMILITY

“What an infinite distance is there between the immutable God, and the mutable man, and how should we bewail this flittingness in our nature! There is a mutability in us as creatures, and a creature cannot but be mutable by nature, otherwise it were not a creature but God. The establishment of any creature is from grace and gift; naturally we tend to nothing, as we come from nothing. This creature-mutability is not our sin, yet it should cause us to lie down under a sense of our own nothingness, in the presence of our Creator.”

—Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, 1.350

B. Refuse *to trust* in mutable things.

- i·dol·a·try: worship of a mutable object.
- **Isaiah 44:9–20** – “Those who fashion a graven image are all of them futile, and their precious things are of no profit; even their own witnesses fail to see or know, so that they will be put to shame. . . . The man shapes iron into a cutting tool and does his work over the coals, fashioning it with hammers and working it with his strong arm. . . . *Another* shapes wood, he extends a measuring line; he outlines it with red chalk. He works it with planes and outlines it with a compass, and makes it like the form of a man, like the beauty of man, so that it may sit in a house. . . . He falls down before it and worships; he also prays to it and says, ‘Deliver me, for you are my god.’ . . .”



“Perishing things can be no support to the soul; if we would have rest, we must run to God and rest in God. How contemptible should that be to us, whose fashion shall pass away, which shall not endure long in its present form and appearance; contemptible as a rest, not contemptible as the work of God; contemptible as an end, not contemptible as a means to attain our end! If these must be changed, how unworthy are other things to be the center of our souls, that change in our very using of them, and slide away in our very enjoyment of them!”

—Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, 1.316

C. Rely upon the *promises* of God.

- What hope would there be if the gospel and all its promises were made by a god who is different today than the day he made those promises?
- Conversely, why would you not believe in the promises of One who cannot change?
- **Isaiah 54:10** – “‘For the mountains may be removed and the hills may shake, but My lovingkindness will not be removed from you, and My covenant of peace will not be shaken,’ says the LORD who has compassion on you.”

“The greatest and only consolation of Christians in their adversities, is knowing that God lies not, but does all things immutably, and that His will cannot be resisted, changed, or hindered.”

—Martin Luther



4. Reverence God that He changes not.

I Hear the Word of Love (Horatius Bonar, 1861)

I hear the words of love,
I gaze upon the blood,
I see the mighty sacrifice,
And I have peace with God.

'Tis everlasting peace!
Sure as Jehovah's name,
'Tis stable as His steadfast throne,
For evermore the same.

The clouds may go and come,
And storms may sweep my sky;
This blood-sealed friendship changes not,
The cross is ever nigh.

My love is oftentimes low,
My joy still ebbs and flows;
But peace with Him remains the same,
No change Jehovah knows.

That which can shake the cross
May shake the peace it gave,
Which tells me Christ has never died,
Or never left the grave!

Till then my peace is sure,
It will not, cannot yield,
Jesus, I know, has died and lives—
On this firm rock I build.

I change, He changes not,
The Christ can never die;
His love, not mine, the resting place,
His truth, not mine, the tie.

The cross still stands unchanged,
Though Heav'n is now His home,
The mighty stone is rolled away,
But yonder is His tomb!

And yonder is my peace,
The grave of all my woes!
I know the Son of God has come,
I know He died and rose.

I know He liveth now,
At God's right hand above,
I know the throne on which He sits,
I know His truth and love.

No
One
Like
Him

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

—Hebrews 13:8