

God Is Immutable: The Constancy of His Nature

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Fluffy white clouds hung in the sky that day. For several minutes my thoughts were similarly suspended: “Is there really a God out there?” “If I died today, would I go to a place called heaven?”

My five senses reminded me daily of the materialness of life. I ate physical food, drove a physical car and occasionally stubbed my physical toe. While other college students said that they believed in God because they felt him, I did not have that sensation.

Nevertheless, I did believe in God and in heaven! Why?

Still gazing at that cumulus panorama, my thoughts jumped back in history to the evening when a man named Jesus declared: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”¹

I knew that I had eternal life—not because I felt it, but because the historical Jesus of Nazareth made an irrevocable promise. This Jesus Christ is called “the Alpha and the Omega,”² “The First and the Last.”³ He is the One “who is, and who was, and who is to come.”⁴ Because he is unchanging, I knew that I could trust his word.

God is Immutable

The immutability of God refers to his unchangeable character. There is a constancy about God, a consistency both in his nature and in his relationship with humanity. In his own words the Lord affirmed, “I the Lord do not change.”⁵

Numerous verses in the Bible refer to God as the “Rock.” This image refers to the “stability, unchangeableness and reliability of Israel’s God.”⁶

One writer has observed that “even reason teaches us that no change is possible in God, since a change is either for better or for worse. But in God, as the absolute Perfection, improvement and deterioration are both equally impossible.”⁷

Some people have viewed immutability as immobility, but this understanding is greatly mistaken. God did not create the world and then leave it to run itself. Rather, the Bible teaches that he is a joint participant with his creation. God has been aptly described as “active and dynamic, but in a way which is stable and consistent with his nature.”⁸

God is Unchanging in His Person

Children of parents with consistent behavior demonstrate greater security than children of parents with inconsistent behavior. As children of God we have great security because of the constancy of our heavenly Father. James 1:17 describes God as “the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”⁹ The fact that God is unalterable means that all of his divine attributes remain constant.

God is always present¹⁰; his knowledge is always complete¹¹; his power is always unlimited.¹² His justice is unchanging, for he “is righteous in everything he does.”¹³ he requires holiness of his people because he himself is always holy.¹⁴

The Bible affirms that God is good, that his faithfulness endures to all generations and that he loves his children with an everlasting (immutable) love.¹⁵ He continually pours out his mercy upon humankind.¹⁶

With deep appreciation we sing “O, the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus,” and with great wonder we declare “How Great Thou Art!” One hymn writer wished for a thousand tongues to praise God’s name. It is the immutability of God which keeps that love consistent, that power unalterable and that greatness unchanging.

God is Unchanging in His Purpose

“The Lord Almighty has sworn, ‘Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand.’”¹⁷ Because God’s nature is immutable, his plans are also unalterable.

The Lord has promised to bring people into relationship with himself. In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we see the fulfillment of this plan. Our Lord’s death was not an accident. Rather, Jesus was crucified according to “God’s set purpose and foreknowledge.”¹⁸ At the right time God revealed “the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ.”¹⁹

Another example of his unchanging purpose is the assertion that earthly history will one day come to a conclusion: “Then the end will come, when [Jesus] hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.”²⁰ The new Jerusalem mentioned in Revelation 21 and 22 is a picture of God’s future plans, which are unalterable.

The Lord's unchanging principles are personal. The psalmist declared, "The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me."²¹ Paul affirmed that "in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."²² While people are free to make choices, God still accomplishes his own intentions. As it is written: "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails."²³

It is at this point that some people question God's immutability. After all, the Bible says that he was grieved that he had made man,²⁴ that he relented from his anger²⁵ and that he changed his mind about punishing Nineveh.²⁶ Doesn't God change his plans according to the choices of people?

Actually, these examples show a consistency in God's nature, a steadiness of purpose. The biblical writers described the actions of God in human terms, which makes it look as if God were changing his mind. But God has purposed to allow himself the prerogative of adapting his actions to changing human situations.

In some cases God prevents evil from occurring; at other times he permits evil; at still other times he overrules it. Yet in all these cases he acts in holiness, with justice, according to his mercy. It would be inconsistent for God to reject someone who comes to him, or to have destroyed the people of Nineveh when they repented. God's apparent changes of attitude are planned responses consistent with his overall nature.

God is Unchanging in His Promises

Because God's nature is consistent, it follows that his promises are also consistent; he does not break his word. Rather, his immutability necessitates fulfillment of his promises, for "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act: Does he promise and not fulfill?"²⁷ God's commitments are guaranteed, "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ."²⁸

Assurance of salvation is possible because of God's constancy. If God were inconsistent, he might provide one plan for eternal life today, but a different plan tomorrow. He might at one time declare salvation by faith in Christ alone, but later change his mind and say that one must believe in man-made gods or prophets. But because God is unchanging in his promises, his decision to offer Jesus as the "one mediator between God and men"²⁹ will not change. "To all who received [Christ], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."³⁰

In a similar way the return of Jesus Christ to culminate history is also guaranteed. Mark records the promise: "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."³¹ The Second Coming is not open to debate: we have God's word on it.

Whether the promise is for comfort, forgiveness, peace, wisdom, help with temptation of God's special closeness, God will deliver on his promises because he is "the same yesterday and today and forever."³²

1. John 14:1-3, NIV.

2. Revelation 1:8, NIV.

3. Revelation 1:17, NIV.

4. Revelation 1:4, NIV.

5. Malachi 3:6, NIV.

6. From "Integrative Theology: Knowing Ultimate Reality, The Living God," by Bruce Demarest and Gordon R. Lewis, Vol. 1, © 1987 The Zondervan corporation, Academie Books, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

7. From "Systematic Theology," by L. Berkhof, © 1939, 1941 L. Berkhof, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids Michigan.

8. From "Christian Theology," by Millard J. Erickson, Vol. 1, © 1983 Baker Book House Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

9. James 1:17, NIV.

10. Hebrews 13:5.

11. Matthew 6:8.

12. Job 42:2.

13. Daniel 9:14, NIV.

14. Leviticus 19:2.

15. Psalms 100:5.

16. Luke 1:50.

17. Isaiah 14:24, NIV.

18. Acts 2:23, NIV.

19. Ephesians 1:9, NIV.

20. 1 Corinthians 15:24, NIV.

21. Psalm 138:8, NIV.

22. Romans 8:28, NIV.

23. Proverbs 19:21, NIV.

24. Genesis 6:6.

25. Jeremiah 26:19.

26. Jonah 3:10.

27. Numbers 23:19, NIV.

28. 2 Corinthians 1:20, NIV.

29. 1 Timothy 2:5, NIV.

30. John 1:12, NIV.

31. Acts 1:11, NIV.

32. Hebrews 13:8, NIV.

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