

# The Implication/Application of the Excellencies of God

## Lesson 5 – Immutability

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### Review

We are studying the excellencies of God. God has made us true worshipers (John 4:23) for the purpose of declaring His excellencies (1 Peter 2:9). His excellencies are the perfect, full manifestation of characteristics that describe His intrinsic eminence, His nature. They are what God has stated and/or exhibited in His self-revelation, the Scriptures.

We are studying the excellencies in order to know God better (have correct, true knowledge) and be impacted by that knowing (grow in sanctification). There is no shortcut to the study of God. God designed growth in the knowledge of Him to be a lifetime pursuit culminating with entrance into glory. This growth is a marathon, not a sprint. It is a lifelong pursuit that we should never be satisfied with in the depth of our learning. Horner notes, “There can be no condensed learning of God; the very thought is an insult to His transcendent majesty.”

- **Transcendence** (or beyondness) means that God is distinct, far above, greater than His creation (including people) and independent from it (them). He is so lofty, so different from His creatures, so perfect and enthroned in glory, that there is no possible way we can approach Him in our own merit or strength, no possible way we can fathom His greatness, no possible way we can compare ourselves to Him.
- **Immanence** (nearness or intense closeness) means that God exists and remains in His creation. He is intimately involved in creation including people, particularly His redeemed. Creation is continually dependent on him for its existence and functioning.
- **Perfection** means that God lacks no qualities that would be desirable for him. There is no excellency that is missing from God and nothing missing from any excellency. Also, there is nothing that can be added to make Him better.
- **Beauty** means that God is the possessor and the sum of all desirable qualities.
- **Blessedness** means that God delights fully in himself and in all that reflects his character. God is perfect in all respects and, therefore, He is perfectly happy because He has perfectly pure character. The transcendent, self-existent, only true God is “self-happy,” “self-content,” or “self-fulfilled”.
- **Aseity** (self-existence, independence) means that God does not need us or the rest of creation for anything, He is absolutely, perfectly independent and self-sufficient. He is without origin. Everything other than God depends on God, but He depends on nothing outside Himself. He “needs” nothing.
- God’s **glory** is the composite of His attributes and essence; the sum total of what He is; the beauty, power, wisdom, and splendor of His character. The sum total of God’s excellencies are so magnificent that they result in an outshining, visible display of brightness that humans cannot endure.

❖ **How does thinking of these excellencies impact you?**

## Introduction

A friend of mine says that “the only thing that is constant is change”. The context for that is career progression, but think about all aspects of your life – physical, mental, emotional, spiritual. In all these areas, there is growth and development over time. Sometimes there is movement in a positive direction, sometimes in a negative.

This is not so with God. He is the same from eternity past to eternity future. Today we will look at immutability.

## Immutability (or Unchangeableness)

Immutability (or unchangeableness) mean that God is unchanging in His being, excellencies, eternal purposes, and promises. He who exists (“I AM”) does not change. He is not subject to change through time or circumstances. He is unchangeable; He never changes. He never differs from Himself. He is always the same. He is never developing.

Immutability declares that God is the same in eternity past as He is today as He will be in eternity future.

<sup>8</sup>Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday and today and forever. (Hebrews 13:8)

## Being and excellencies

By definition, God’s excellencies are the perfect, full manifestation of characteristics that describe His intrinsic eminence and, therefore, cannot change. His attributes are the same from eternity past to eternity future. His character never changes. He never gets “better” or “worse.”

<sup>25</sup>“Of old You founded the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. <sup>26</sup>“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. <sup>27</sup>“But **You are the same**, And Your years will not come to an end. (Psalm 102:25-27)

<sup>17</sup>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**. (James 1:17)

<sup>6</sup>“For **I, the LORD, do not change**; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed. (Malachi 3:6)

❖ **How does the unchangeableness of God’s excellencies provide you hope?**

## Purposes

His eternal purposes also cannot change and will be brought to pass.

<sup>8</sup>Let all the earth fear the Lord; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. <sup>9</sup>For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast. <sup>10</sup>The Lord nullifies the counsel of the nations; He frustrates the plans of the peoples. <sup>11</sup>**The counsel of the Lord stands forever, The plans of His heart from generation to generation**. (Psalm 33:8-11)

<sup>9</sup>“Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; *I am* God, and there is no one like Me, <sup>10</sup>**Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure’;** <sup>11</sup>Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. **Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.** (Isaiah 46:9-11)

<sup>3</sup>Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, <sup>4</sup>just as **He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world**, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love ... <sup>11</sup>also we have obtained an inheritance, **having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will**, (Ephesians 1:3-4, 11)

<sup>13</sup>For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, <sup>14</sup>saying, “I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply you.” <sup>15</sup>And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. <sup>16</sup>For men swear by one greater *than themselves*, and with them an oath *given* as confirmation is an end of every dispute. <sup>17</sup>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, <sup>18</sup>**so that by two unchangeable things** (*Note - promise and oath*) **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. (Hebrews 6:16-18)

#### ❖ How does the unchangeableness of God’s purposes provide you hope?

##### Promises

Finally, God’s promises do not change. We will study this more with the excellency of faithfulness.

<sup>29</sup>for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. (Romans 11:29)

<sup>19</sup>“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? (Numbers 23:19)

<sup>27</sup>As Samuel turned to go, *Saul* seized the edge of his robe, and it tore. <sup>28</sup>So Samuel said to him, “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to your neighbor, who is better than you. <sup>29</sup>**Also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind.**” (1 Samuel 15:27-29)

#### ❖ How does the unchangeableness of God’s promises provide you hope?

##### Impassability

We need to say something about “impassability” at this point. Connected to immutability, and aseity, is the concept of impassibility. Impassibility is from the Latin meaning “not able to suffer, experience emotion”. This is a reasoned, philosophical doctrine that comes from a miss-understanding of Acts 14:15 (particularly noted in the KJV) that often goes beyond what Scripture says in its descriptions of God’s emotions.

When Paul and Barnabas were being worshiped as Hermes and Zeus at Lystra... <sup>15</sup>And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of **like passions** (same nature – NASB/ESV) with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein (Acts 14:15 KJV)

The reasoning goes that people have passions (feelings, emotions) and since Paul lumps he and Barnabas into the human group who have like passions, then God does not have “passions”. The better translation is the NASB and ESV.

The Scriptures are clear that God has emotion.

<sup>5</sup>For *as* a young man marries a virgin, *So* your sons will marry you; And *as* the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, *So your God will rejoice over you.* (Isaiah 62:5)

<sup>40</sup>How often they rebelled against Him in the wilderness And **grieved Him** in the desert! (Psalm 78:40)

<sup>10</sup>Now then let Me alone, **that My anger may burn against them** and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation.” (Exodus 32:10)

<sup>13</sup>Just as a father has compassion on *his* children, **So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him.** (Psalm 103:13)

<sup>17</sup>But **the lovingkindness of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting** on those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children’s children, (Psalm 103:17)

<sup>10</sup>so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, **to please Him in all respects**, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; (Colossians 1:10)

A better understanding of impassability is that the independent, self-existent, immutable I AM is unassailable by involuntary (or sinful) emotions. He does not react in emotion that is not in harmony with all His perfect excellencies.

### ❖ **Do you view God as any single one of His emotions?**

#### The big question

But, what about the times in Scripture where God relents or turns from one thing that He said He would do and do another? Or the times when God seems to regret a decision? Does He “change”?

<sup>9</sup>Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish.” <sup>10</sup>When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then **God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.** ... <sup>2</sup>He prayed to the LORD and said, “Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my *own* country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and **one who relents concerning calamity.** (Jonah 3:9-10, 4:2)

<sup>5</sup>Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. <sup>6</sup>The **Lord was sorry** (regretted – ESV) **that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.** (Genesis 6:5-6)

These, and other, passages do not mean that God's being, excellencies, eternal purposes, or promises change. These passages show that God's actions toward man based on the actions of men, change. These passages express God's present attitude or intention with respect to the situation as it exists at that moment. In all cases, God responds in those situations in accord with His perfect, eternally changeless character.

“A good way to understand God's apparent changes in Scripture is to consider that God reveals himself in his relations to people. They perceive only one aspect of God at a time. God never changes, but creatures do change, and they perceive God's perfections and actions according to their current state. Thus, God's actions do not imply a change of essence or purpose. ... God's perceived “changes” are always in the context of eternal omniscience and will, so they are never because God is surprised and has to adjust. They are done in harmony with his truth and faithfulness (see 1 Sam. 15:29). All his acts that might be perceived as changes are eternally foreknown and predetermined.” (Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth)

#### Error(s) associated with immutability

The primary error associated with immutability (and omniscience) is a doctrine called open theism or openness theology, relational theism, freewill theism, simple foreknowledge, presentism or the risk view of providence. Open theism “theologians” believe that “a new wave of critical reappraisal and competent reconstruction of the doctrine of God is sweeping over the intellectual landscape” (“Preface,” in “The Openness of God”).

The basic premise of this errant theology is that some things happen that are contrary to God's intentions and that He took risks in creating a world in which He does not know and control everything. According to this belief, God does not know how people will respond to Him and is waiting on their response to Himself respond. It believes that there is no purpose to human tragedy and rejects Scripture's clear teaching that “God causes all things to work together for (*the sanctifying*) good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

This theology rejects the classic view of God's immutability and omniscience and believes that God grows, discovers things He did not know, and changes. It believes that God is adding to His knowledge the experiences of all humankind.

This belief is derived from human reason that does not take the Scriptures at face value. Open theism is not just a misunderstanding about who God is or a different way to look at God, it fundamentally describes a different God. One made in the image of man rejecting His self-revelation that declares His immutability.

❖ **Have you been tempted to attempt to explain reality with human wisdom instead of biblical truth?**

## Implications of immutability

Here are some implications/applications of understanding the immutability of God.

- Because God is immutable, He is God. Otherwise, He would be something else.
- Because God is immutable, He is completely dependable.
- Because God is immutable, He is completely trustworthy.
- Because God is immutable, His purposes are perfect, right, and unfailing.
- Because God is immutable, His promises cannot be defeated.
- Because God is immutable, the judgement of those who reject Christ is certain.
- Because God is immutable, your salvation is assured.
- Because God is immutable, your sanctification will occur (still means you do your part).
- Because God is immutable, there is purpose to all events and therefore always hope.
- Others?

### ❖ **Does God's immutability give you hope?**

## Conclusion

We are studying God's excellencies in order to know Him better and be impacted by that knowing. God does not change in His being, excellencies, eternal purposes, and promises. This provides us with hope.

## Additional Study

- Each day this week, reread the passages that we looked at today.
- After reading the passages, spend time in prayer adoring God. Ask Him to search your heart and disclose to you ways in which you are not trusting His perfect plan.
- Memorize Hebrews 13:8.

<sup>8</sup>Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday and today and forever. (Hebrews 13:8)