

## **Doctrine of God's Immutability**

1. The *Bible* reveals that God has many attributes, one of which is His immutability.
2. The term immutability simply means God does not change. God does not change His mind. God does not change His character. God does not change His purposes, or decree.
3. The immutability of God is part of the creeds of Christendom in general, and the *Baptist Confession of 1689* in particular. The *Baptist Confession* notes the following about God.

### **Chapter 2 Of God and of the Holy Trinity**

- The Lord our God is but one only living and true God; whose subsistence is in and of himself, infinite in being and perfection; whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but himself; a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; who is immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, every way infinite, most holy, most wise, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him, and withal most just and terrible in his judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty. (1 Corinthians 8:4, 6; Deuteronomy 6:4; Jeremiah 10:10; Isaiah 48:12; Exodus 3:14; John 4:24; 1 Timothy 1:17; Deuteronomy 4:15, 16; Malachi 3:6; 1 Kings 8:27; Jeremiah 23:23; Psalms 90:2; Genesis 17:1; Isaiah 6:3; Psalms 115:3; Isaiah 46:10; Proverbs 16:4; Romans 11:36; Exodus 34:6, 7; Hebrews 11:6; Nehemiah 9:32, 33; Psalms 5:5, 6; Exodus 34:7; Nahum 1:2, 3)
4. In contrast to this historic position is a modern theological construct called the Open View Theology, which thinks of God in far different terms than the church has thought of Him historically.
    - God is not static. The God of the Open View Theology is a dynamic God who is constantly changing His mind, and His plans. He is a God who does not know the future, since what will be done is to a degree dependent upon the free choices of individuals.
    - God is not all knowing. According to the Open View Theology, God cannot know in advance what a person will do before he does it. It is argued that if God did know, then individuals would only be robots, living a pre-programmed, determined, and unchangeable life.

- God is not the ultimate author of evil. In addition, according to the Open View Theology, if God determines all future events, then He is ultimately responsible for all that happens, including evil.

*Isaiah 45:7 I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.*

*1 Samuel 16:14 But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him.*

- God is a God of partnership. The Open View Theology argues that the true relationship between man and God is a partnership whereby man exercises his free will, and God, in order to accomplish His own final purposes, constantly adjusts His plans in light of a person's choices. The idea of a Master Chess player comes to mind. There is freedom of movement, but the outcome of the game is certain. The Open View Theology is confident that God has willingly chosen this method of action in order to have a meaningful relationship with His creation.
  - God is a God of passion. The Open View Theology is also confident that God is a God of passion. He feels emotions, and responds emotionally to His creation, based upon their perceived needs and prayers.
  - God is a God of possibilities, not actualities. In the Open View Theology the future is partially open, and partially closed, as determined by God. Much of the future is settled ahead of time, either by God's predestining will, or by existing earthly causes. However, not everything is absolutely and completely determined in the Open View Theology. Since part of the future is decided by individuals, and is unsettled, and uncertain, then God knows the future only in terms of possibilities, not certainties and actualities. He is a God of contingencies.
  - God is a risk taker. The God of Open View Theology is willing to take risks. He does not always get His way. In the Open View Theology God proposes, but man disposes.
5. In order to make its theology case, those who advocate the Open View Theology offer several examples to illustrate that God changes His mind and emotions on certain matters He has previously made known.
- Example. *Jeremiah 18:7 At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; 8 If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent [change my mind] of the evil that I thought to do unto them. 9 And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; 10 If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them.*

According to the Open View Theology this passage becomes meaningless if God knows from all of eternity what He has eternally decided to do.

The Open View Theology rejects the notion of the historic position of the church, that this passage only describes God as He appears, not as He actually is, for God does not have human bodily parts, neither does He have human emotions.

Classical theologians of the church desire to reconcile passages such as Jeremiah 18:7 with other verses such as 1 Samuel 15:29 *And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent [change His mind]: for he is not a man, that he should repent [change His mind].* There is also Numbers 23:19. *God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: [change His mind] hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?*

Example. The expanded life of King Hezekiah is offered by advocates of the Open View Theology whereby God changed His mind. In 2 Kings 20:1-6, Hezekiah is informed by the prophet Isaiah that he would die from his current sickness. However, after Hezekiah prayed and wept bitterly before the LORD, God appears to reverse Himself and gives the king an additional fifteen years of life. *2 Kings 20:1 In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live. 2 Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the Lord, saying, 3 I beseech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore. 4 And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the Lord came to him, saying, 5 Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the Lord. 6 And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake.*

- Example. According to the Open View Theology, in 1 Samuel 15:35 God expresses the emotion of regret at having made Saul king over Israel. *“And Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death: nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul: and the Lord repented [changed His mind] that he had made Saul king over Israel.”* Advocates of the Open View Theology reason that someone can only regret a decision made if the decision produced a result other than what is expected or hoped for.
  - Example. In Exodus 4:10-15 the Open View Theology notes that God expressed His anger at Moses. *“And Moses said unto the Lord, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue. 11 And the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? Or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the Lord? 12 Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say. 13 And he said, O my Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send. 14 And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses, and he said, Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he cometh forth to meet thee: and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart. 15 And thou shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth: and I will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do.”*
  - Example. In Ezekiel 22:30 the Open View Theology teaches that God expressed frustration at not being able to find someone to stand in the gap on the behalf of Israel. *“And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none.”*
6. With only these verses in mind it would seem that a strong case can be made to believe that God has human emotions. Since emotions are a state of change, the logical conclusion is that God Himself changes, and is not immutable. The historic teaching of the church on God’s immutability is wrong. The *Baptist Confession* is wrong to affirm, *“The Lord our God is... without body, parts, or passions, [and] is immutable...”*
  7. While there is much emotional excitement in challenging a traditional view of the church, the biblical exhortation is still valid: do not move the boundaries. *Job 24:2 Some remove the landmarks; they violently take away flocks, and feed thereof.*
  8. Conservative Christians are to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. *Jude 3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*
  9. The faith of the church down through the centuries, based upon biblical revelation, is that God is an All-Mighty God. He is powerful and omniscient. He is majesty and beauty. He is sovereign and omnipotent. He is immutable. Nothing has ever happened in the existence of

the world without His knowledge, nor can anything occur in the future that He will have to find out by coming into knowledge.

10. With His mighty hand God created man as one of His greatest achievements. He gave individuals a will, wisdom and knowledge. These qualities reflect the likeness of God in His very essence.
11. God respects the will of an individual, and interacts with people in time; not because He Himself is in time, but because He desires to interact with His creation.
12. As the All-Mighty Creator of the universe, God is the Author of time. He is as far above time as infinite is above finite. All of our actions are known to God long before they came to be. Why? Because the future is better known to Him than the present is to us.
13. God is completely sovereign. His plans depend upon nothing but Himself. His plans cannot be changed from within or from without. We accomplish His plans in accordance with our own will.
14. While this is a great mystery, it is also the clear teaching of the Bible. Human responsibility, along with free agency, does not contradict divine sovereignty. While a paradox is present, there is no contradiction. Like parallel railroad tracks that stretch into eternity with no end in sight, both concepts are part of creation.
15. If no other thought is remembered, let it be stated, and affirmed, that God is immutable in every respect, and does not change in the least bit.
16. In the words of the Puritan minister Stephen Charnock (1628-1680) *"He [God] wants nothing; he loses nothing; but doth uniformly exist by himself, without any new nature, new thoughts, new will, new purpose, or new place."*
17. The immutability of God is set forth in the following passages.
  - *Numbers 23:19 God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? 20 Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it.*
  - *1 Samuel 15:29 And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent.*
  - *Isaiah 14:24 The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand."*
  - *Isaiah 46:10 Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: 11*

*Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it."*

- *Malachi 3:6 For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.*
  - *James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*
18. Even God's very name "I AM" implies that He does not change. In the words of Dr. Norman Geisler, *"this statement identifies God in terms of His immutable and eternal Being."* Dr. Geisler suggests the Hebrew word for "I AM" found in Exodus 3:14, can be translated *"the One Who Always Is."* God's name is not *"I will be"* or *"I have been"* but "I AM".
19. Taken together, these passages clearly, and convincingly declare God does not change. He is immutable.
20. Immutability, or God's unchangeableness belongs to all the attributes of God. God's immutability is the center of His essence where all of the attributes unite.
- God is immutable in regard to knowledge. On this point Stephen Charnock writes, "God hath known from all eternity all that which he can know, so that nothing is hid from him. He knows not at present any more that he hath known from eternity: and that which he knows now he always knows." God does not know as we know. He does not get his understanding from without by seeing what individuals will do. God gets His knowledge from within His essence. His understanding is His essence. His essence is infinite, so then must his understanding be infinite.
  - God is immutable in regard to His expressions of emotion. A.W. Tozer writes *"God never changes moods or cools off in His affections or loses enthusiasm. His attitude toward sin is now the same as it was when He drove out the sinful man from the eastward garden."* Tozer continues *"God will not compromise and He need not be coaxed. He cannot be persuaded to alter His Word nor talked into answering selfish prayer."* God is not standing on *"today"* in the calendar of mankind, looking toward the future or past. He knows the future and past perfectly in Himself, in one eternal *"now."* Past, present, and future are indistinct in Him.
  - God is immutable in responding to prayer. God is a God who is completely trustworthy. He is responsive to prayers because He knows what we will ask before even we do. In fact, He has known from all eternity what we will pray, and how He has determined to answer our prayers. We know God is capable of this as we see He made this very promise to Israel in Isaiah. 65:24 *"Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear."*

21. Understanding and affirming the Doctrine of God's Immutability is important because of the negative consequences of a mutable God.

- Implication. If God is mutable, or changeable, then He cannot know the future acts of His creatures with certainty. He is therefore not omniscient after all for He must come into knowledge before He can act. If God is changeable in knowledge, then He is defective in knowledge, lacks ultimate wisdom, and is an untrustworthy source for revealed truth. He is simply making a best guess, which may be, or may not be correct.

If God is mutable then the Biblical revelation about His omniscience is false. For example, how could God have known with certainty that Adam would fall if He is mutable?

Yet, Ephesians 1:4-5 states God planned salvation before the creation of the world, which presupposes a Fall and the need of a Savior. *According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: 5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,*

- Implication. If God is mutable, then He cannot be all-powerful. If God can be changed by an inside influence, this indicates a lack of power to preserve Himself in perfection. If God can be changed by an outside influence, then He would be inferior in strength, knowledge, and power to that which changes Him either in His nature, knowledge, or will; both in an ability to stay the same, or an ability to resist the power of another to change Him. God cannot be omnipotent if He is not immutable.
- Implication. If God is mutable then He is not perfect. All that is God is unchangeable. His essence and His properties are the same. Whatever belongs to the essence of God also belongs to every perfection of the nature of God. If God were not immutable, then He could change in His goodness, wisdom, and love. If He changes to a greater perfection in any of these attributes, then He was not perfect before. If He changes to a lesser perfection in any of these attributes, then He changes into something that is not perfect. If God is imperfect in any of His attributes, He ceases to be perfect, period, and He ceases to be God.
- Implication. If God is mutable, then He is not eternal. Anything that is acquired, or lost, is not eternal. If God were to change, then He could not be eternal because He would not always be the same, there would be some form of change in Him. God cannot have a true eternal identity if He acquires a new knowledge, a new purpose, or a new essence. He would be in a constant state of change, each change producing a new God.
- Implication. If God is mutable, then He cannot be trusted. The fear of change in a person hinders a full reliance upon him at the deepest level, while an assurance of stability encourages hope and confidence. A.W. Tozer writes *"In this world where men forget us,*

*change their attitude toward us as their private interest dictate, and revise their opinion of us for the slightest cause, is it not a source of wondrous strength to know that the God with whom we have to do changes not?"*

There is a sense of confidence in an unchangeable God. We can know that He can, and will keep His promises. We can stand firmly on them. We can depend totally on them. We need not be concerned that some unforeseen incident may occur that will require God to rescind His promises to us. It is only in an unchangeable God that we can truly find eternal security. Only an omniscience, omnipotent, and perfect God can give us this security, because only He has the knowledge, wisdom, and power to accomplish all that He promises.

- Implication. If God is mutable, then no prophetic utterance is certain.
22. An immutable God is more worthy of our praise. He is a rock, solid and firm upon which we can always count on to be solid and firm. Prayer does not cause any change in God, but is offered to God to bring about those things that God has eternally determined to give us only as a result of prayer. This is in agreement with *Scripture* that we should pray in accordance with God's will.
    - *James 4:15 For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will , we shall live, and do this, or that.*
    - *Luke 22:42 Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.*
  23. Prayer in the Open View Theology seems to be more selfish. There is no talk of praying God's will. It is more about God being in a better position to respond to me and my needs. God's plan and purpose are not addressed.
  24. The fact is that the God of biblical revelation is able to be more responsive to prayers. If we pray to the God of Open View Theology, He can simply react to the current circumstances, whereas the God of the Bible is proactive.
    - *Isaiah 65:24 Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.*
    - *Daniel 9:21 Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation.*
  25. The God of the *Bible* is a powerful God, who is already aware of our needs and prayers and is in a perfect position to respond to His creation.
  26. Part of the problem in discussing whether or not God changes His mind, is the fact the Bible uses anthropomorphic language.



27. The word “*anthropomorphic*” is made up of two words, *anthropos*, man, and *morphe*, form.
28. Anthropomorphic language is language attributing human characteristics to God, such as an eye, arm, mouth.
29. Jesus said in John 4:24, “*God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*” It is obvious that God does not have literal eyes, a literal arm, a literal mouth, and yet there are *Scriptures* which speak of Him in these human terms.
- *Genesis 6:8 But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.*
  - *Isaiah 53:1 Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?*
  - *Isaiah 40:5 And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.*
6. It is important to realize these anthropomorphic passages in interpreting the *Bible*, and in coming to understand the divine attributes.

***Special Note.***

An attribute is anything that is true about God. The *Bible* says that God is a Spirit. Spirituality is an attribute of God. The *Bible* says God is love. Love is an attribute of God.

7. Anthropomorphic language becomes ridiculous when pressed too literally.

- Example. In *Psalms 91:4* says, *He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.* God is not a Cosmic Chicken with feathers, and yet the concept of divine love, and protective faithfulness is understood.
- Example. In Hebrews 10:17 God promises, “*And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.*” God does not suddenly develop divine amnesia, and yet the language is understood, God will not hold the sins of the elect against them.

Anthropomorphic language also includes language that ascribes to God human emotions, which God does not have, but we ascribe them to Him in order to understand His essence.

30. When the concept of anthropomorphic language is understood, then we can look more carefully at *Scripture* to discover a biblical definition of what we call human body parts and human emotions. For example. Love in the Bible is not defined in terms of emotions as much as in terms of what is done, or not done. A detailed study of 1 Corinthians indicates this truth. In John 3:16 we read how God so loved the world that He gave. As someone has noted, “*Love is a verb.*” Love is an action word.

31. So, does God change His mind? The answer is no.

- Question. Does not Jeremiah 18:7-10 teach that God changes His mind? *Jeremiah 18:7 At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; 8 If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. 9 And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; 10 If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them.*

Response. In this passage, the Hebrew word *nacham* translated “*repent*”, can also be translated “*have compassion.*” Strong’s Hebrew dictionary says that *nacham* (naw-kham’); means to sigh, i.e. breathe strongly; by implication, to be sorry, i.e. (in a favorable sense) to pity, console or (reflexively) rue; or (unfavorably) to avenge (oneself):

Also in this passage God is stating a general rule, or governing principle for how He deals with nations-any nation. If a nation does evil, they will be punished. If that nation turns from evil, the punishment will end. This is consistent with traditional theology. When any person is in rebellion against God, that person will fall under His wrath, or judgment. When a person repents, they will fall under His mercy. God does not change; the nation's relationship to God changed by way of their changing from rebellion to repentance.

- Question. Does not the Lord’s dealing with King Hezekiah reveal God changes His mind? How could God tell Hezekiah he was going to die, all along knowing that He was going to extend his life?

Response. There is no contradiction. God does not change His mind, but He does change His acts in accordance with His foreknowledge of the actions of free will beings. There is nothing contradictory in saying that God foreknew that Hezekiah would pray and God would respond to his prayer by giving Hezekiah fifteen additional years of life.

It is also interesting to observe that God could not have promised Hezekiah an extended life if He could not foresee the future. After all, according to the logical outworking of Open View Theology, there is nothing to prevent another free will creature for assassinating Hezekiah, thus making God a liar.

32. It is far better for the conservative Christian to take refuge and comfort in the Biblical revelation of an immutable God.

- *1 Samuel 15:29 And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent.*

- *Numbers 23:19 God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?*

33. Christian, when you pray, rejoice in the knowledge that from eternity past God knew what you would pray for, and has ordained all of life according to His good purpose after the counsel of His own will.

- *Ephesians 1:11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:*