The Immutable God

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[0:00] My name is Nick Ataya. I have the privilege to get the privilege of serving as the lead pastor at First Baptist Church of Seminole Oklahoma been there for ten and a half years actually came to Christ through the ministry of that church and I was ordained for ministry in that church left that church for 17 years to go do student ministry.

I was a student minister for a long time. I love students. I love being around students. I love joking around with students. I love doing ministry with students. I love teaching in front of students.
I like you all more than most people on the planet. I just like students. There's something unique about where you are in life that I appreciate and I want you to know something.
We're going to cover a topic this evening. It's a pretty heavy topic. I'm not saying that the other ones the other attributes that you guys are looking at at church camp are not also rich in their theological propositions.
But I am going to submit to you that I might make the argument that the richest of all of the propositions of doctrine and theology that you're going to get this one might be in my opinion might be the most difficult to comprehend even though we just talked about the incomprehensibility of God.
[1:33] But I do believe something true about students. The church has been guilty for decades upon decades for not entrusting students with enough.

We have taken so much from you because we think that you're incapable of understanding and doing things for the Lord.
And if you're part of a church that doesn't embrace the beauty of young minds, young hearts, young souls, young bodies doing and serving the Lord and embracing theology with a willingness, I'm sorry if you've been denied that honor.
In 1855, Park Street Baptist Church in London, England, a 21-year-old Charles Spurgeon, in his earliest years as the Prince of Preachers, preached a sermon to his congregation on the immutability of God.
That's our topic tonight. The immutability of God. He was 21 and he knew as a very young man early in ministry preaching to hundreds of people at that time the importance of the rich theological propositions of Scripture that tell us who God is.
[3:14] You can handle this.

You can handle this.
The immutability of God.
Something in Scripture. A attribute of God. What qualifies it as an attribute that we can give to God as a way of knowing who God is, is if the whole of Scripture, the canon of Scripture witnesses that that is an attribute.
Okay? And so, the attribute that God does not change, the attribute of immutability, I believe, is one of the core, if not the core, canonical tendons, a tendon in Scripture that holds all the other attributes together.
[5:32] What I want to do tonight. What I want to do tonight is make an argument to that end. I want to make an argument, a proposition to that end that when we're done with this talk, it's not a sermon.

I'm a preacher, but this is not a sermon. We will look at Scripture. We will dissect some Scripture. But I want to make an argument to that end that you see the beauty of an unchanging God, a God who is unable to change, and how that attribute of God holds all the other attributes together. Because Scripture testifies and gives witness to that from beginning to end. And we'll kind of see that tonight, how from beginning to end, Scripture testifies to that.

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I want to start with a passage of Scripture that's Hebrews chapter 6. If you have a copy of God's Word, I want to invite you to Hebrews chapter 6.
And as soon as you get to Hebrews chapter 6, I want to know you're there because you're looking at me. And then I want us to pray before we dive in to God's Word.
[6:40] So get to Hebrews and chapter 6. And when you're there, look up at me. I won't hear the pages turning anymore, and I'll know we're ready to continue. Let's pray.

Father, we do love you, and we trust you, and we trust your Word. May it be so true of us tonight that in our hearts and in our minds and in the community of saints gathered together, as we look into your Word and we take from your Word what is evidence of who you are, that you would take that and you would shape us, shape us in such a way that our affections for you grow deeper and our worship of you intensifies.
We long for it. We ask this in the name of Jesus the Nazarene and all of God's people said, Amen. I want to start with a passage, and then I want to give you the road map with where we're going tonight, okay?
Hebrews chapter 6, verse 13. This is a New Testament passage. The author of Hebrews writing to, really he's writing to both Jews and Gentiles as Christians, ultimately.
But he's writing in this particular passage about an inheritance that has been promised to everyone who has had faith to believe that God is their only hope in this life and the life to come through the person of Jesus Christ.
[8:32] So there is an inheritance coming to all people who have believed in Jesus Christ. And he goes way back to talk about where this inheritance started.

And in Hebrews 6, verse 13, the author says, For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater to swear by, he swore by himself.
One verse to start with. The author of Hebrews is remembering something that happened long ago. And he will use that remembrance of something that God did with Abraham a long time ago to root an argument.
He's rooting in argument that God is a God who makes promises and keeps promises, not because we make promises and keep promises.
He makes promises and keeps promises because it's who he is. And who he is is unchanging.
[9:45] He never changes. So I want that to be kind of a baseline for where we go tonight. Keep that in your mind. Remember that. That God makes the kind of promise that cannot change because he makes the promise by himself.

And it's not dependent on anything outside of him. Okay? And so here's the road map for tonight. We're going to start by looking at some passages to define what scripture says immutability is. What does it mean to say that God does not change? And then we're going to tackle some apologetics. We're going to look at some objections that might just naturally surface as we make that claim that God does not change.
And then third, we're going to look at why that matters for us. What does that do for you and I as believers in Jesus Christ? Why does believing that matter for our spiritual journey and our worship?
So here we start with this confession. This confession that says that God does not change. What do we mean when we say God does not change?
[11:02] Well, first of all, we should not think of this as merely one item in a line of divine attributes. It is as Herman Bavnick says, Charles Spurgeon says, D.A. Carson says, and Kevin DeYoung says, and yes, even early church fathers like St. Athanasius would say, that scripture contains this rooted truth that it is not something you tag on to God.

Now, Athanasius didn't say tag on to God. We're using modern English here. But that immutability is a glory that shines through all of God's attributes.
So when we say God is unchanging, we're talking about an attribute that makes its appearance in all of God's attributes.
And because scripture contains everything we need to understand this, we'll start by looking at some of what scripture says. Because if we confess that God is immutable, we mean that who God is and what God purposes never shifts.
It never lacks. It never needs. It never changes. We start by looking at one of the most profound statements in all of scripture given by God himself when he meets, or I should say when Moses meets God in Exodus chapter 3.

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[12:43] In Exodus chapter 3, verse 14, here God appears to Moses through a burning but unconsuming bush. God is making an appearance to Moses because God has purposed, God has decreed that he is going to do something unique with his unique people.

And he is going to use Moses to lead his people out of slavery. And when Moses has this encounter with God, he has a question.
And really, the question is, who are you? What is your name? What shall you be called? And God says to him, I am who I am.
Now, God is not giving that to Moses to be, it's not some rhetorical thing, it's not satirical, it's not sarcastic, it's not supposed to be trivial. When, in the Hebrew, when God says, I am who I am, the I am statement means, there has never been, there will never be, I was not created, I will not die, I have always been, and I am ultimate.
There is none like me. I am the only. I am the true. I am the pure. I am the holy. I am. That's an emphatic phraseology from God to Moses.
[14:23] There is no possibility of mistaking who the I am is. In fact, Athanasius defending, in the fourth century, defending heresy, really a heresy that was in the church.

There was two or three different heresies going around in the fourth century. All of them had to do with the deity of Christ, or the Trinity of God, or the nature of God, or who created God.
These questions were going around in the church. Who created God? Where did God come from? Who created Christ? Where did Christ come from? Who is Christ? How many natures does Christ have? And how could it possibly be one God revealed, or given, or how do we understand three in one?
And so Athanasius summarizes our understanding of the I am who I am, meaning the one and only God, is that there is a God who truly, and Athanasius makes this claim, there is one God who truly is.
One word, is. And what he means by that argument is, he's the only one who is. He's the only one who's holy.
[15:47] He's the only one who's eternal. He's the only one who is all-powerful. He's the only one. He is. One word, God is.

So right there, Moses meets God. God establishes right there, it's just me. I am who I am.
Secondly, we see in Numbers 23, verse 19, something about the nature of the I am.
One of the parts of the nature of the I am is that the I am doesn't change his mind. Numbers 23, verse 19, God is not a man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind.
Now, here the contrast is painfully clear. We lie. God does not.
We change course. God does not. Our plans are loosely held together because we do not see the future.
[17:05] God, in his purposes, they stand unchanging because in his nature, he is constant with what he has decreed, what he has said will come to pass.

And therefore, he needs not change his mind. He's the one who decided what would happen, how it would happen, when it would happen. Therefore, he's not like you and I.
Not only does he not lie or appear to lie, he doesn't change his mind because he doesn't even have to change his mind. There would be no reason for him to ever need to change his mind because he is not like man.
He doesn't change in that way. Psalm 102. Psalm 102, verses 25 and 27. The psalmist looks at the heavens, looks at the earth, and says and declares, They will all perish, but you will remain.
They will all wear out like a garment. I have clothes that I love. I have shirts that represent something that I care deeply about.
[18:27] And over time, those shirts and those clothes, they wear out. And you get to a point with those clothes where you have to make a decision.

Do I throw this out? Or do I proudly wear it with all the holes and all the stains just as it is? The point is, your garments will wear out. This New York Yankees jersey that's back here.
We don't need for that to wear out. We need to burn it. Some things we don't need to wait for them to wear out. We just need to ditch them and get rid of them. Okay?
I don't like the Yankees. Is that clear? But the psalmist tells us here. Not only is God not like a man that he doesn't lie, that doesn't change his mind.
But he also doesn't wither. He doesn't wear out. He is. Period. He is. By contrast.

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[19:29] You will wear out. I will wear out. I change every year. You change every year.

I don't like the changes I'm going through now. Everything hurts at my age. I can't do anything without something hurting now because I am wearing out.
You may think at the age of 15, at the age of 17, that it's going to be like this forever. It's not. You're going to get ugly.
We all get ugly. You're all beautiful right now. But you're going to get ugly. Some of you will have this. Some of you will start losing things. You're going to wear out.
Okay? But God does not wear out. What appears to be something of a stability issue in creation is not an issue for the one that stands outside of creation.
[20:31] He is outside of all things he has created. So therefore, he does not wear out. He never changes in that way. Isaiah 46. Isaiah 46, verses 8 through 11.

Not only does God not wear out. Not only does he not lie. Not only does he not change his mind. Not only is he the is of all time, for all time. But Isaiah 46, verses 8 through 11 proclaims, I am God, and there is none like me.
Declaring the end from the beginning. Saying, my counsel shall stand. And I will accomplish all my purposes.
Like I said, our plans, they live on what we might call loose leaf paper. Our plans change. Our plans get crossed out.
Our plans get rescheduled. We abandon ideas. There's probably not a person in this room that didn't go into their summer thinking already, I'm going to do this thing this summer, and maybe that's already been abandoned for some reason or another.
[21:46] That's who we are. But God's purpose is more like an unbreakable foundational stone. What he decrees, he accomplishes.

In other words, simply put, what God plans always comes to completion. Everything God plans, because he decrees it, will come to completion.
It will come to fruition. James 1.17 James 1.17 tells us that God is the Father of lights, in whom there is no variation of shadow, and does not change.
I want you to think about how shadows stretch and shrink as the sun moves. That's what James is saying here. As the sun moves, and is filtered through all created things, the shadow shifts.
But God is not like a shifting shadow. He doesn't shift. He doesn't move. As creation moves, God is outside of creation, and he does not move.
[23:09] James is saying there is nothing like that in God. Nothing shifting in God. To summarize some of these passages, one theologian puts it like this, that God's immutability is his perfect unchangeability, his perfect unchangeability in his essence, in his character, in his purpose, and in his promises.

Those are all the categories where God never changes. There are also all the categories where we shift, where we change.
In the finite, we shift and change along with these things. One other passage, very important one, very, very important one, especially for when we get to the end of our time.
Malachi chapter 3, verse 6. The prophet Malachi, giving a, what we call, an assurance oracle. The prophets gave oracles, and oracle was a word from God given to people.
It could only be given from God through the prophet to the people. And a prophet was proved, and if a prophet was, words weren't proved, they were stoned. So a prophet was proved by the words of God because they came true.
[24:35] So a prophet gives an oracle to the people. So from God to the people, this is an oracle of what we call assurance. It's God's way of assuring the people of something.

Something he has said, something he has decreed, something about who he is. He wants to give an assurance. And the prophet Malachi says this, For I, the Lord, do not change.
Therefore, you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. Here, immutability is not an abstract thought.
It explains why God's people are not destroyed. God's people are not destroyed because God doesn't change.
If God changed like you and I do, then God's people would not be sustained. We would be destroyed.

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[25:38] Israel survives in the midst of their repeated unfaithfulness. They're an unfaithful people to God.

And yet God says, I'm not going to destroy you. Why? What was that first passage that we read? Hebrews chapter 6. Hebrews chapter 6 tells us that because God is unchanging, His people have a unique assurance of something.
That what God says will happen, will happen. And in this instance, Malachi is saying, God made a promise to you.
A promise that He would preserve you as His people. And since God doesn't change and God can't break His promises, you can be assured that you will not be destroyed.
Now in Hebrews chapter 6, it's reflecting back on Genesis chapter 15. In Genesis chapter 15, God makes a covenant, a promise, with Abram.
[26:50] It's not Abraham yet. With Abram. And here's how a covenant promise was made in the Old Testament. They would take a collection of animals and they would split those animals in half.

And there would be a blood trail between the two halves of the carcass that you had to walk through and make an oath. And it took two people to walk through the sacrificial carcasses across the blood to make an oath so that they could be held accountable to one another.
And so God tells Abram, you go and you get the sacrificial animals so that we can make a covenant or that I can make a covenant. And He goes and He does that. And He splits them all in half.
And then God puts a sleep over Abram. And He goes to sleep and God reveals something to him in that moment. And when He wakes, He wakes to a kettle with a flame and a torch passing through the covenant promise sacrifice alone.
And God says, there is nobody else who can make this oath with me. Because remember, He is the I am.
[28:16] He is. He is unique in this unchangeability. Everything else changes but God. And so there's no accountability to God that's on the same level as God.

God. And so God makes this promise, this covenant. He takes this oath by Himself. Now I want you to see how Scripture speaks to this nature of unchangeability.
From Genesis 15 to the assurance of salvation in Hebrews chapter 6 and all along the way in many of those passages that we read there is this one tendon immutability God's unchangeability that holds all the attributes of God together including the attribute of God being a promise maker and a promise keeper.
That is the most important thing to understand about the immutability of God, the unchangeability of God. That if He makes a promise to you and He makes a promise to me like He made a promise to Israel through Abraham that He's going to keep that promise.
And so that as you navigate through the Scriptures and you see all the way that Scriptures show you about how God loves you, about how God has mercy toward you, when you see the Scriptures that teach about how God is holy, therefore His wrath is poured out.
[30:00] All of it is connected to His immutability, His unchangeability. And so the biblical theology, if you will, the canonical tendon of God's immutability is rich in Scripture.

So quickly let's summarize that. Here's the summary of what we just talked about. One, God is immutable in His essence. His nature cannot increase or decrease.
God's nature never changes. So He's immutable in His essence, the very essence of who He is. Two, God is immutable in His knowledge.
He never learns more, forgets anything, or grows in understanding. He doesn't change in that way. He is all-knowing as He is. He doesn't need to learn anything else. His counsel stands forever. And third, God is immutable in His will and His purpose.
[31:12] What God says will happen will happen. So unlike us, God doesn't have any untapped potential.

You and I have untapped potential. There are things that we can increase in. We can increase in knowledge, we can increase in skill, we can increase in wisdom, we increase in the way that we change, and we also decrease in those areas.
But God does not change. There's no untapped possibilities or untapped potential with God. Remember, He is. So I want you to think about it like this. Think of a pure, steady white light shining through a prism.

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You know what a prism is, right? A prism is a light coming through some kind of device that has different shapes and sizes of what we call spectacles inside it.
And as it comes through that and comes out the other side, it takes on different forms, different colors, different shapes, and those kinds of things. So when you think about how God is unchanging, think about a light that hits a prism.
[32:29] The light that is hitting the prism never changes. But what comes out on the other side reveals itself in a multitude of ways.

And we would call that all of the different expressions of God's attributes and his character and who he is. And we'll even talk about in one of the objections what that means for how we perceive what God is actually doing.
So that's how we're to think about it. So that's what we mean biblically when we say that God does not change. Now, that naturally raises some objections.
Now, I don't want you to think about objections like a fist in the air type of objections. We get too easily worked up about people having questions about things. Okay? This is not a well if God's unchangeable then what about this?
Not like that. Okay? These are natural objections that we might conclude and want to reason behind when we think about how God does not change. The first objection that we might have that we need to wrestle with is did God change when he became a man?
[33:42] did God change when he became a man? So we say if the son of God became man and he learned obedience and he suffered and he died does that not mean that God changed?

Now, the church has always answered this with the doctrine of the two natures of God supremely seen in the son of God the two natures the divine nature and the human nature in the incarnate son of God Jesus Christ so these two natures are held together by one God God but they are two natures three minutes of hard thinking so stick with me okay think about it like this what is true of Christ according to one nature can be truly said of the person without needing to be true of the other nature right I know okay I'm gonna say that again what is true of Christ according to one nature can be truly said of the person without needing to be true of the other nature see I still need more I got more for you so we rightly say this the son of God died right we believe that right the son of God died because death truly happened to the son of God in one nature yet we do not say that God's divine nature died okay so what can be said of one nature can be true without needing to be true of the other nature keeping one truth what so then how does that actually look when we think about Jesus becoming something okay because remember Jesus was not created this is a fourth century heresy in the church that Jesus was created God did not create Jesus he sent Jesus and there's a big difference in fact it makes all the difference okay Jesus is not created the Bible tells us the word became flesh not by turning deity into humanity but by assuming humanity so the divine Jesus assumes bodily form he assumes humanity there's one of my favorite newer hymns that's been written talks about how he condescends to us
Matt Boswell writes that Jesus condescended to you and me taking on a form never giving up his divine nature and this is what Athanasius the great saint of the argument of the deity of Christ argues when he says the word is not changed into flesh but takes flesh to himself he explains the union by this analogy just as soul and body are one man so God the word and the assumed humanity are one Christ emphasizing a real personal union that a mere moral with a moral and external connection so the incarnation okay God did God change when he became man so the incarnation is not an internal change in the divine essence it is the immutable son taking on a created human nature in time while remaining fully unchangeably
[38:49] God okay that three minutes is over okay alright maybe you took some notes on that or read Athanasius if you want to understand the unchangeable son of God the nature of Christ read Athanasius you will be better off for it what about this other objection that we see in scripture in Genesis chapter 6 when God regretted making man and in 1st Samuel 15 when God regretted making Saul king wait a minute regret that sounds like change right so the second objection might be how much time do we have when do I have to stop I'm good alright the second objection what about God repenting changing his mind regretting so the better word used in the

Old Testament both in Genesis 6 and 1st Samuel 15 is not regret but actually repent the reason that most modern translations don't use the word repent is because we automatically lose our mind when we see that word wait a minute God repented there's no way God would ever need to repent right he doesn't sin this just messes the whole scripture messes everything up for me but you have

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to remember what the word repent means the word repent means to change your mind on something okay in the purest sense of the way that in Genesis chapter 6 when it says God repented from making man and in 1st Samuel 15 when God repented from having made Saul king what is really happening there is that God looking through the window of his decree of his purposes knowing everything that he has decided he is now in real time in
Genesis 6 and in real time in 1st Samuel 15 now at a place where he is expressing a little frustration not with himself with his creation so think about it like this okay there's two ways of understanding how God relates through the scriptures to us God tells us in the scriptures that when he rescued Egypt he did it with an out stretched arm that's called anthropomorphism I know anthropomorphism God using the our human understanding of the physical body to help us understand what God did in rescuing his people we all understand the visual of a hand being outstretched to rescue someone right so what
God does is he condescends in language to help us understand what it meant for God to grab his people and pull them out of Egypt okay there's another word called anthropopathism anthropopathism that's emotive emotion it's relating to the experience of emotions that we have so when the scriptures say that God regretted repented of having done those things it's God's way of again condescending in language to us so that we could understand what was really happening in real time even though God had already planned all things for all time but in that moment in Genesis 6 God looks over the face of the earth he sees sinful people and he wants us to understand what that's like for a holy God to be gazing upon sinful people
I regret this same with Saul the people wanted a king God was reluctant to give him a king he did it for them by his loving kindness and then there comes a moment in real time when God expresses what that's like for him to look upon what's happening so that we can understand how holy God is in his nature so no God is not repentant as we understand repentance he is giving us an understanding of how he responds to us let me just do we've got a couple more objections here but let me just give one more what about God's emotions what about God's passions if God has emotions and God has passions and doesn't that mean he has to change because we understand that passions and emotions not only do our emotions and passions change but they also change us they also do something to us and cause a change in us so if
[44:22] God does not change what about his love his anger his grief his compassion doesn't that mean that God is a classic cold unfeeling God the Westminster confession puts it like this it says that God is without body without parts and without passions particularly as we understand passions does it mean that God expresses yes it does but not as you and I express God expresses having already realized and known what he has planned and what he has decreed the best way to understand it is like this I know that I am going to have to bury my mother someday I know the day is coming when my mother will die I don't look forward to that day but

I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that my mother will die and every day of my life as I have that knowledge that one day she will die doesn't change my emotions on the day that she does die so even though I've known this my whole life that my mom will die one day and we have a memorial service on the day that she dies something emotionally and passion is going to happen in me I'm going to be sad okay that's a finite understanding of those two realities knowing and still feeling God infinitely knows he infinitely decrees and in real time he once again condescends himself so we can see him in love we can see him in mercy we can see his passion for his people we can see his passion for his son who he sends to the cross to die so those are just a few arguments for does God change as I think about the unchangeable God in this way now let's get to the last part here then why it matters to me why it matters to you that God does not change I will say this the immutability of God is meant to transform worship it's meant to deepen assurance it's meant to magnify the cross and it's meant to sustain ministry immutability and worship first we have to see that God as the unchanging I am should enlarge our understanding of worship we are consumed in a world that worships almost everything and in almost every way there is no limit to what man will decide is worthy of worship but to the one who understands that when
God makes this claim I am there is none like me I am perfect in all ways it enlarges our understanding of worship I like how one theologian puts it he's a pastor theologian John Piper puts it this way he says our understanding of the immutability of God should cause us to just say these three simple words behold your God this is big God theology and God's people coming to an understanding of big God theology we're supposed to simply just behold that's worship worship

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your God well then there's immutability and assurance immutability and assurance listen our eternal security rests not on how tightly we cling to God but on how unchangeable how unchangeably God has pledged himself to us in Christ going back to Malachi chapter 3 verse 6 I am the Lord I do not change therefore you oh children of Jacob are not consumed if God's love rose and fell with your performance how well you do before him some days you're up some days you reject and resist sin other days you don't some days you're perfectly obedient to all the things that God has told you in his word to be obedient to others days you're not if God's love rose and fell based on our love and obedience towards him we are doomed but the scripture tells us we're not doomed we have this assurance it's God and God alone who holds the covenant and his promise together an immutable

[50:04] God is a perfect object of worship and assurance for weak wavering saints that ought to change your perspective and your worship and I think that we'll actually end there when you think about your life in Christ having one day in your life come to the realization that you have sinned and the only hope you have in this life and the life to come is Christ Jesus his death on the cross his substitutionary atonement him dying in your place his blood being shed not your blood being shed and God being pleased in his son to save all people who believe in his son as their only hope in this life and the life to come your assurance comes from knowing that

God never changes his mind about that thing he will never change his mind about his son being enough for you to be saved for all of eternity that's the beauty of an unchangeable and unchanging God so worship him because he's a big God worthy of worship rest in him because he's a true God that never changes and your hope is anchored in his promises let's pray father we love you we trust you we are thankful for the gift of your word the ministry of your spirit and the life death and resurrection of your son Jesus Christ may we be ever grateful ever changed growing in deep affection for who you are knowing that you don't change and even though we do and even though we stumble because you don't change we can have assurance in your unchanging promises we love you we trust you it's in the name of

Jesus the Nazarene that we pray and all of God's people said amen

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