

The Unchangeableness of God

Psalm 102:25-28

This is the second week in a sermon series on the 40 Days of Prayer that is being guided by the National Office of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. We are looking at several attributes of God during these 40 days in order to know more deeply who God is to whom we pray. As I said last week, prayer isn't just a religious exercise; it's communicating with our God and therefore we need to know who our God is in order to rightly communicate with him and to start praying more in accordance with his will and seeing answers to our prayers.

If you've been married for a while, you probably communicate differently with your spouse now than you did when you first got married because you know them much better. There are things you may have asked for early on that you would never ask now, because you know what the answer is going to be. In the same way, now that you know them, you know what to ask for. And the same happens in our relationships with God. We need to know him to better communicate with him and know what to ask for.

Last week we pondered the majesty and mystery of the holiness of God and this week we turn our attention to the unchangeableness of God, or "immutability" (if you like big words). We live in a world that's constantly changing. Our bodies and families and work situations and friendships are constantly changing. Change is inevitable. And I don't know about you, but the older I've gotten, the more I'm convinced that all this change isn't all that great.

Change can be good if it truly makes things better or more enjoyable. But as is often the case, change can be painful and make things worse. Change can even be depressing and crippling in many cases. You lose a job, your spouse dies, your kids grow up and leave the home, your body starts falling apart, change can be devastating and disorienting. And the fact of the matter is that everything in this world changes. Everything is temporary. How are we to stand solid and secure in a world where everything is changing?

We need a firm foundation, an anchor for our lives, a compass to guide our way, and we are not going to find it in the things of this world. But we will find it in God and in a never-ending relationship with him because he is unchanging. So I want to spend a few minutes talking about what that means and then talk about how that relates to our prayers.

What is the unchangeableness of God? This one is a little easier to explain and grasp than the holiness of God, and for that I am thankful! Let's look at a few of the common Scriptures used to affirm the unchangeableness of God.

Psalm 102:25-28

²⁵ Of old you laid the foundation of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.

²⁶ They will perish, but you will remain;
they will all wear out like a garment.

You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away,

²⁷ but you are the same, and your years have no end.

²⁸ The children of your servants shall dwell secure;
their offspring shall be established before you.

Here the Psalmist brings up the beginning of creation and the end. God was there at the beginning, laying the foundation of the earth and putting the stars in place. And he will be there in the end, when the heavens and earth wear out and perish and are changed – by him. So this encompasses all of time and creation and places God before and after – outside of it. This speaks to his eternal nature, but the Psalmist is also using these words to emphasize what he says in verse 27, that God does not change. The heavens and earth will change, but he will remain the same, unchanged by even the beginning and end of creation.

And notice the effect that the everlasting unchangeableness of God has on his servants and their children in verse 28 – they will dwell secure and their offspring will be established. They will have a permanent dwelling and solid foundation – in him. That includes you and me. Praise the Lord, our present and future hope is not dependent on a president or a strong economy or a strong military, or even a strong marriage, family or career – all of these will change. Our hope is dependent on the unchangeability of our God.

There are three pictures that help me see the blessings of this precious attribute. One is a foundation – our unchanging God is a rock solid place to stand on and from which we face all of the winds and waves of life. He is our solid anchor, holding us firm in the midst of the wind and waves of all the changes in life. And he is our north star, showing us the way to go no matter what unexpected circumstances befall us.

We must guard against making anything else our foundation, anchor, and guiding light because all else will fail, but God will not fail, because he alone is unchanging. Are you rooted in him? Are you anchored to him? Are you looking to him? The only way that we can experience the blessedness of the unchangeableness of God is if we take the time to know him, connect with him, and fasten ourselves to him. All these other things that we give so much time and attention to will fail us and leave us flopping about in the wind.

James 1:17 says, *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”* Malachi 3:6 says, *“For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.”* Hebrews 13:8 says, *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”*

Based on the biblical teaching of the unchangeableness of God, Wayne Grudem defines it like this: “God is unchanging in his being, perfections, purposes, and promises...” He is very specific in these things. Scripture shows us that God is unchanging in his being, or his essence. This ties in with what we talked about last week – the holiness of God. The nature or essence of God (who he is) never changes. His holiness was, is, and always will be.

Scripture also shows us he is unchanging in his perfections or attributes, which we are studying throughout this series. In addition to what we’ve seen, we’ll end up looking at his sovereignty, power, love, grace and mercy. There are also the attributes of his independence, eternity, omnipresence, knowledge, wisdom, goodness, righteousness, wrath, freedom, beauty... to name a few. These things never change.

Scripture reveals he is unchanging in his purposes. When God determines that he will bring something about, it will be achieved, period. He doesn't change his purposes. His eternal decrees will come to pass. And he is unchanging in his promises. When he makes a promise, he will always be faithful to fulfill it. We can stand on the promises he's given to us.

This is the unchangeableness of God, and when it comes to prayer, this brings great solace and confidence because we pray to a God who is stable and steadfast and secure. We can depend on him, unlike anything else we know. And if we ask for anything in accordance with his purpose and will, we can know that it will come to pass.

But the unchangeableness of God can also bring up a hesitancy in prayer that I've seen in myself and in other people. If God is unchanging, why do my prayers even matter? I've heard some people resist the admonition to pray in all circumstances and to present our requests to God because they conclude: "If God is unchanging, our prayers don't really matter. If everything is already set in stone, why should we pray?" And it's a necessary question for us to work through – something many of us have wrestled with and it might be hindering your prayers.

For this, I want to go back to Wayne Grudem's definition, because there is a second part to it. Grudem states: "God is unchanging in his being, perfections, purposes, and promises, yet God does act and feel emotions, and he acts and feels differently in response to different situations."

This careful definition acknowledges that God is unchanging in who he is and what he has purposed and promised to do, but it also acknowledges that God is also personal and acts and feels in time and in actual situations of our lives and world. He is not a robot, nor does he operate entirely separate from time and creation. He is a personal being, and he created us as personal beings in his image and likeness, and he relates to us and responds to us in a personal way.

God enters into our lives and situations, and as situations change, he acts and feels differently based on those changes. Therefore, he can feel angry and bring discipline or judgment where there is unrepentant sin. However, if the

sinner repents and humbles themselves before him, he relents from his anger and withholds judgment. How he feels and acts in situations in our lives changes, even though his being, perfections, purposes and promises never change.

We see this all throughout the Bible as God relates to different people. He made it clear to the people of Israel that if they obeyed the rules of the covenant and walked in his ways he would bless them, and if they disobeyed and rebelled, he would bring destruction. And that's what he did – when they walked in obedience he poured out blessings, and when they lived in stubborn disobedience he brought judgment.

The people of Nineveh are another example. In the book of Jonah we see that God was going to destroy them because of their wickedness, unless they repented. He sent Jonah to warn them and when he finally did, they repented and God withheld his judgment. The Bible is full of story after story where God relates personally with people and as situations changed, he felt and acted differently. His being, perfections, purposes, and promises never changed, but his feelings and actions did.

Our prayers fit into all these situations because God has invited us to pray and told us that he hears and answers our prayers. Our prayers are one of the things God uses to change a situation and therefore change the way he feels or acts. However, he will never change in his being, perfections, purposes, and promises, and any prayer that requires that of him will of course be futile. So we must learn to pray according to God's will.

One of the clearest examples that shows the power and importance of prayer is when Moses prayed for mercy for the people of Israel. They were blatantly disobeying one of the central commands in the covenant by constructing and worshipping a golden calf. With such an egregious act of rebellion against him, God was filled with righteous anger and going to destroy them and start again with Moses. But Exodus 32:9-14 shows that Moses interceded on behalf of the Israelites, and God relented. In that situation, the only thing that changed was that Moses' prayed - the Israelites hadn't repented. They were still at the bottom of the mountain indulging in sin. God responded to Moses' prayer and changed what he was going to do. Again, nothing changed about

his being, attributes, purposes, and promises, but his feelings and acts did change.

So here we see the blessedness of the unchangeableness of God when it comes to prayer. We have a rock solid foundation to stand on and can have complete confidence in him in our prayers, and also know that he hears and answers our prayers and will be effected when we pray according to his will.

So I hope this will move us to pray and to seek to know God more. Many of our prayers, if they were answered with a “yes,” would require a change in who God is, or in his purposes, and promises. Therefore, God will never say “yes” to those prayers. He cannot and will not because he is unchanging. But as we grow in our knowledge of his being, perfections, purposes, and promises, our prayers will change and we will begin to make requests that are according to his will – and we will begin to see answers.