

Our Unchanging God

Hebrews 6:13-20

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Video – “God Speaks”

Aren't you glad that God has spoken and that He still speaks through His Word? I've been reflecting on a tweet this week: *“God didn't spend 1600 years and use over 40 different authors - most who never met each other - for us to now rely on personal experiences and extra-biblical revelation to determine His will.”*

Isaiah 40:9 says: ***“Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, ‘Behold your God!’”*** We've been learning in our series on the attributes of God that there is nothing more practical than beholding and believing God – for until we know Him, we haven't even begun to live. And once we behold and believe, we'll become and then behave accordingly.

Last week we looked at God's justice and wrath. I want to follow-up with one of the action steps to show how important it is to not seek vengeance. Perhaps you saw the story about the man named George Pappas who murdered George H.W. Bush's former cardiologist on July 20 while he was riding his bike. It came out this week that Pappas did this because he was seeking revenge for his mother, who died on the doctor's operating table *20 years ago!* This story becomes even more tragic because on Friday Pappas was armed and wearing body armor when two police officers confronted him. He was killed a short time later.

What an awful example of how vengeance can end up killing others and ourselves! Like someone has said, *“Bitterness is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die.”*

Our emphasis today is on “Our Unchanging God.” We'll conclude next weekend with, “Our Loving God.”

My sisters and I didn't know what to get my dad for Father's Day this year, so we decided to arrange some tours for him. Because he worked in a

factory for over 40 years and is a US Army Vet, I arranged for him to have a tour of John Deere Harvester Works and the Arsenal Museum on Monday. Our neighbor Gary Hansen, who gives tours at Deere and is in our Growth Group, gave us VIP treatment as he drove us around the factory in a cart. Nick Castillo, who is also in our Growth Group and works at the Arsenal, arranged for a private showing of the museum. It's great to have friends in high places.

My dad was thrilled with both experiences. It was incredible to see the pinpoint process and innovative systems in place for Deere to make world-class combines. At the Arsenal we saw weapons from the 1800s up to the present. As I reflected on all that we saw, what struck me is how much things have changed over the years.

The very first binders used to cut grain were pulled by horses [show pic] and now combines are guided by GPS steering systems with up to 18 different computers on board [show pic]. I also enjoyed learning how the Deere logo has changed over the years, with the new one showing a muscular yet sleek deer bounding upward replacing the older one that showed the deer landing on the ground. Weapons my dad used in the 50s have been upgraded and expanded in incredible ways.

As humans, we are always changing and technology has only increased the pace. Ever since the fall of Adam, when sin was introduced, change has been part of life. The moment we are born, we begin to age.

Values and morals have certainly changed in our culture. Right is being called wrong and wrong is now called right. Proverbs 2:14 says that those who walk in darkness ***“rejoice in doing evil and delight in the perverseness of evil.”*** We're seeing Romans 1:32 lived out in our society as people even ***“give approval to those who practice”*** wicked deeds.

Every value in America is being challenged by some group in some way today. We now live in a society where everything is plausible and nothing seems certain.

Change is everywhere, isn't it? We'll be hearing more about changes to our facility this fall. While we're planning to change how things look and how they function, we will never change what we believe about God and His Word. Our methods may change but the message never will.

There are some changes we love. But when we lose a loved one, or get fired from a job, or experience changes in other areas of our lives, we become very unsettled. We end up resenting, resisting and trying to run from these kinds of changes.

With change as a constant in life, we need someone to hold on to who never changes. I like how Spurgeon says it: *“Would you lose your worries and fears this day? Then you must immerse yourself in the immensity of God...He never changes. His being, and nature, and perfections can't be altered Nothing can be added to the infinite God and nothing can be taken from Him. What God is today He always was. What God is today He shall always be...He is all-wise; He need not change. He is perfect; He cannot change.”*

Our stability in a world filled with instability is this: *God never changes.* We could say it like this: *In our changing world, we can count on our unchanging God.*

Our topic in theological terms, is referred to as the immutability of God. Something is mutable if it is subject to change in any degree. To be immutable means to be unchanging, unchangeable, and not subject to change.

Louis Berkhof, who wrote a thick book on Systematic Theology, defines immutability this way: *“That perfection of God by which He is devoid of all change, not only in His Being, but also in His perfections, purposes and promises.”*

R.C. Sproul put it like this: *“The Lord is immutable — it is impossible for His character or being to undergo any mutation. His power cannot be augmented or diminished. He never learns or forgets, and He cannot be anything other than perfectly holy.”*

Nothing God has ever said about Himself will be modified; nothing the inspired prophets and apostles have said about Him will be rescinded. His immutability guarantees this. All that God is, He has always been; and all that He has been, and is, He will ever be.

No change is possible in God, because God is absolute perfection. A.W. Pink captured it this way: *“God cannot change for the better, for He is perfect; and being perfect, He cannot change for the worse.”*

It's not our practice to recite creeds or use catechisms but I appreciate how the Westminster Shorter Catechism captures the essence of who God is, focusing on His immutability.

Question 4: *What is God?* (I would change this question to, “Who is God?”)

Answer: *God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.*

Biblical Survey

There are many verses in the Bible that teach the immutability of God. Here's just a sample:

After Moses thought about what God was asking him to do, he became filled with fear and wanted to know what he should tell the people when they asked who sent him. In particular, he wanted to know God's name. In Exodus 3:14, God answers Moses: ***“I AM WHO I AM.”*** This is God's covenant name: *Yahweh*, or *Jehovah*. He is who He is and because He does not change, He has *always been* who He is and He will *always be* who He is.

Numbers 23:19: ***“God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?”***

Psalm 90:2: ***“Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.”***

Psalm 102:25-27: ***“Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. 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, but you are the same, and your years have no end.”***

Malachi 3:6: “For **I the LORD do not change**; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.” Because God is a covenant-keeping God, we can count on Him to not consume us.

James 1:17: “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**.” In the Jewish mindset the heavenly lights referred to the sun, moon, stars and planets. God is the Creator of all things and stands above all that He has made. These heavenly lights turn and rotate and shift and cause shadows. There might be a dark side of the moon but there is no dark side to God. God’s light does not dim and He never shifts or changes.

One metaphor that is used frequently in Scripture for the immutability of God is that He is our rock. I read Psalms 18:1-2 to someone Friday morning before she had a medical procedure. I could hear how God used this Scripture to provide stability for her: “**I love you, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.**” Verse 31 says, “**For who is God, but the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God?**”

God is immutable in His essence and in His attributes. *In our changing world, we can count on our unchanging God.*

How God’s Immutability Helped Abraham

The truth of God’s unchangeability is seen very clearly in the life of Abraham even while he went through a lot of change. The author of the Book of Hebrews uses him as an example to help discouraged and distraught believers. Please turn to Hebrews 6:13-20 where we will discover four truths we can trust even when things around us are in turmoil.

1. God’s Promises Never Change. Verses 13-15: “**For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, ‘Surely I will bless you and multiply you.’ And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise.**” While it’s common for humans to swear by someone greater in a courtroom: “*I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God,*” God doesn’t have to do that because there is no one greater than He is.

God's pledge is based on His own character. The word, "**surely**" is a strong affirmation that can be translated, "*assuredly*" or "*yes, indeed!*"

Abraham was given a promise and Genesis 15:6 tells us, "***And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.***" Now, why did Abraham believe God's promise? It certainly wasn't because it was fulfilled right away!

Romans 4 tells us that Abraham believed against all hope. He knew the odds were against him because he was almost 100 years old! In Romans 4:21 we read that Abraham was "***fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.***" Abraham dialed in to the promise that God would never change what He had promised. Psalm 119:89 says, "***Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.***"

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2. God's Purposes Never Change. We see this in verse 17: "***So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath.***" The phrase "***show more convincingly***" has the idea of "***showing off abundantly.***" His Word needs no confirmation but He confirms it anyway.

The word "***unchangeable***" literally means, "***never changing, fixed and unalterable.***" God has promised that His purposes will never change even when circumstances cause us to be unsettled.

When Abraham was asked to sacrifice Isaac in Genesis 22, Abraham obeyed and was about to slay his son when the Lord stopped him. After Abraham's obedience, God uttered an oath or guarantee. Listen to Genesis 22:16-17: "***By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore.***"

God pronounced a promise and if that weren't enough He also made a pledge to keep that promise.

You and I change our plans all the time but God's purposes never change. Isaiah 14:24: ***“The LORD of hosts has sworn: ‘As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand.’”***

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3. God's Personality Never Changes. Take a look at the first part of verse 18: ***“So that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie...”*** Abraham's faith rested on the unchanging character of God. You and I can count on God's personality to be the same today as it was yesterday and what it will be tomorrow because He does not change who He is.

Abraham believed that God told the truth about Himself, and God was true to His personality, which he expressed in two unchangeable ways – one was the original promise, the other was the oath He took to fulfill that promise. Even without a baby in the crib for 25 years, Abraham hung on to the promise of God. And when he was asked to sacrifice his son, he obeyed. Since it is impossible for God to lie, His promise and His pledge are secure.

God is not fickle in His feelings, nor does He experience mood swings. He never has bad days or good days. He doesn't treat us according to the whims of the moment. He is always completely consistent with Himself.

What would happen if God's personality changed? How would we approach Him if His character was in a constant state of flux? We would never pray. We would never trust Him or venture out in faith. We would never ask for His help.

God's personality is the same today as it was during the time of Abraham. That's why the Bible calls Him the ***“God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”*** Even though people come and go and let us down, God remains the same. He's the same today that He was then, which means that He is absolutely reliable and completely consistent with His personality.

Jen Wilken points out that there is great comfort in knowing that God does not change. Because He does not change, we can rely on the unchanging truth of Scripture: *“What He pronounces as sin will always be sin. What He pronounces as good will always be good. All that He has promised to do*

must come to pass...our great hope of salvation lies in His remaining exactly as who He says He is, doing exactly what He has said He will do."

When American astronaut Alan Shepherd was getting ready to go into space for the first time, a reporter asked, "What are you depending on in this flight?" His answer is so good: "I'm depending upon the fact that God's laws will not change." God's laws do not change because God's Word does not change.

Someone said it like this...

Because God is omnipresent, it means He is here.

Because God is omniscient, it means He understands what is going on in our lives.

Because God is omnipotent, it means He can help.

And because He is immutable, it means that this will never change!

In our changing world, we can count on our unchanging God.

4. People Can Change. We see this in the last part of verse 18 and verses 19 and 20: "***...we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.***"

Because God is our rock we can flee to Him for refuge. And we can hold fast because He holds fast to us. To "***hold fast to the hope***" means to "*grip or grasp onto God himself.*" This is further developed in Hebrews 10:23: "***Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.***"

Because God's promises, God's purposes, and God's personality never change, people *can* change! It's great that God never changes, but wouldn't it be awful, if you and I never changed? It is precisely because He is immutable that you and I can experience the hope of lasting change – from the inside out.

We should never say, “*I can’t change. That’s just who I am.*” In essence we are claiming to be immutable. But that’s a lie. Wilken writes, “*Just as my assurance of salvation rests in the fact that God cannot change, my hope of satisfaction rests in the fact that I can...The Unchanging One dispels forever the myth of human immutability, changing a heart that was once stone to a heart of flesh, changing desires that once sought to glorify self to those that seek to glorify Him.*”

Note that this hope of change is a “***sure and steadfast anchor of the soul.***” Our hope is firm and fixed, certain and steady. This implies at least two things.

- Your soul is prone to drift
- Your soul needs an anchor

An anchor is a steadying force and prevents drifting in the choppy seas of our lives. It keeps us from sliding away and keeps us from being swept away by the winds of trial and temptation and the sinful shifts in our society. An anchor is like an immovable rock that we can hold onto. This idea of drifting is introduced in Hebrews 2:1: “***Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.***” Coasting Christians and drifting disciples were big problems in the early church, just as it is today. In fact, some of you may be drifting right now.

In our changing world, we can count on our unchanging God.

I read about a shipwrecked sailor who clung to a rock until the tide went down. After he made it to safety, a friend asked a question, “*Didn’t you shake with fear when you were hanging on to the rock?*” The sailor simply smiled and said, “*Yes, but the rock didn’t.*” Life and its uncertainties may shake us, but God – who is the Rock of Ages – does not shift. If we cling to Him, His steady strength will sustain us.

An anchor serves another purpose as well. The biblical image here is one of moving ahead in safety and confidence by casting our anchor *forward* and then, as the New English Bible translates it, “***grasping the hope set before us.***”

There was an ancient sailing practice called “*kedging*” that helps us understand this verse. When storms or turbulent seas would threaten a ship

docked in harbor, a crew of sailors would jump into a smaller boat and haul the ship's anchor out to sea as far as the chain would allow them to go. The anchor would then be let down so the ship could pull itself forward into deeper water on the anchor chain.

Friends, that's exactly what Jesus has done for us. He is the anchor for our soul that verse 19 says is ***“sure and steadfast.”*** Our anchor is in heaven, but our ship is on earth. And, Jesus provides us with stability in the midst of storms so our lives *can* change now.

Jesus has entered the ***“inner place behind the curtain,”*** ushering those who are saved into the very presence of God. In the Old Testament no one could follow the high priest into the Holy of Holies but when we place our faith in the ***“forerunner”*** we have unfettered access forever. Hebrews 13:8 says that, ***“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”***

We are not to just drop an anchor so that we can “hold on” during life's difficulties. Because we are anchored to Christ, who pulls us along and changes us on a daily basis, we can move upward as we move ahead.

Trevin Wax wrote a provocative post this week called, “4 Challenges Facing the Church in the West Today.” The first challenge he lists is this: *“We live in a society enthralled by expressive individualism.”*

“Be You” and “Be True to Yourself” are society's favorite slogans—the first and greatest commandments for this way of life. Expressive individualism poses a challenge for the church because God's Word challenges the “Me” with the “Us” and then sets the “Us” under God. The human tendency is to look inward when God's Word says to look upward. We resist the upward look because it implies that someone or something is above us, and that Someone might have authority. And, formed by Western assumptions about freedom and happiness, we chafe against claims of moral authority over us, or institutions that ask something from us. We resist anything that might stifle our self-defined freedom.

But when we surrender to His authority, God will change our lives. Because He does not change, it is possible for you and and I to change. Because His promises, His purposes, and His personality never change, we can change –

or better yet, we *must* change! Once we know God through Christ we *will* change. Our unchanging God delights in changing His people.

Jonathan Edwards said immutability provokes sinners to enmity. The world hates God because it knows that His unchangeableness guarantees He cannot forget or overlook its rebellion. He will not somehow alter His will, revoke His Word, lower His standards or rescind His judgment. The only way to be saved is through Jesus Christ.

But for Christians, the unchanging character of God is the rock upon which we stand in all of our storms and circumstances. Psalm 61:2 says: ***“Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”***

On Monday my dad and I were tourists at Deere and the Arsenal. This made me think about a book by Mark Buchanan called, “Your Church is Too Safe.” Here’s an excerpt.

Historian Daniel Boorstin documents a momentous shift that occurred in North America in the nineteenth century: we stopped calling people who went on trips travelers and started calling them tourists.

Traveler literally means “one who travails.” He labors, suffers, endures... To get there, he immerses himself in a culture, learns the language and customs, lives with the locals, imitates the dress, eats what’s set before him. He takes risks, some enormous, and makes sacrifices, some extravagant. He has tight scrapes and narrow escapes. He is gone a long time. If ever he returns, he returns forever altered

A tourist, not so. Tourist means, literally, “one who goes in circles.” He’s only passing through, sampling wares, acquiring souvenirs... He retreats each night to what’s safe and familiar. He picks up a word here, a phrase there, but the language, and the world it’s embedded in, remains opaque and cryptic, and vaguely menacing. He spectates and consumes. He returns to where he’s come from with an album of photos, a few mementos, a cheap hat. He’s happy to be back. He declares there’s no place like home.

We’ve made a similar shift in the church. At some point we stopped calling Christians disciples and started calling them believers. A

disciple is one who follows and imitates Jesus. She loses her life in order to find it. She steeps in the language and culture of Christ until His Word and His world reshape hers...

A believer, not so. She holds certain beliefs, but how deep down these go depends on the weather or her mood...

You can't be a disciple without being a believer. But—here's the rub—you can be a believer and not a disciple. You can say all the right things, think all the right things, believe all the right things, do all the right things, and still not follow and imitate Jesus.

The kingdom of God is made up of travailers, but our churches are largely populated with tourists. The kingdom is full of disciples, but our churches are filled with believers.

Are you a tourist or a traveler?

We're going to end by singing the famous hymn written by Martin Luther, "A Mighty Fortress is our God."

The words come right from Psalm 46:1-5: **"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns."**

There were a lot of changes going on in 1527. Luther was being buffeted by political and theological storms. He was ill and the plague was approaching. His close friend had just been martyred. As we sing it, ponder the words that celebrate the sovereign power of our immutable God and rejoice that no matter what you are facing today, if you know Jesus Christ through the new birth, He is the anchor for your soul.

*A mighty fortress is our God,
A bulwark [a defensive structure; a wall of protection] never failing;
Our shelter He, amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing.*

In our changing world, we can count on our unchanging God.

Closing Song: **“A Mighty Fortress is our God”**