

God is Immutable

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[0:00] This week we've reached section two of the book Knowing God by J.I. Packer. Section two is the meat of the book, and it covers 11 different attributes of God.

And so for the next 11 weeks, basically, we're going to be talking about God, who He is, what His character is like. And so, if you were putting together, this is a question for you to respond to, I want you to think about it.

If you were putting together a book on the attributes of God and how we know God, what attribute, what characteristic would you put first in line that you would want people to know, to understand, before moving on to anything else?

Roger. The holiness of God. That would be an excellent place to start, wouldn't it? Only one attribute of God is lifted to the third degree, to the superlative, and it's His holiness.

The angels cry, holy, holy, holy. What else? The sovereignty of God. That's all over Scripture, isn't it? God is sovereign.

[1:14] What else would be a good place to start? God is love. Yeah, that's... That would have a... His righteousness, His justice, and His goodness.

Anything else for first place? Mark. Immutable. Did you read the chapter? Oh, all right.

Yes. Yes. We'll stop there, since He stole my thunder. God... God... God... J.I. Packer begins his book with God's immutability.

His unchangingness. God doesn't change. He doesn't change like the shifting shadows. Yesterday, and today, and tomorrow, He's the same.

And you might be wondering, why begin there? What's the thinking behind that? In all fairness, God's love, God's grace, God's righteousness, God's holiness, God's power, those attributes, it just seems like they definitely get more press time in the Scripture.

[2:35] There's more attention given to those in the Bible. And so, why begin with His immutability, His unchangingness? Well, I think the best way to answer that question is to do a review of what we've gone over the last couple weeks.

And this part right here is going to be an argument. So, you need to turn your thinking caps on and think, what is the reasoning behind putting immutability first?

Why is this such an important characteristic? Well, let's do some review. And as we do some review, I think you'll understand why it's necessary that we put His unchangingness, His immutability, right there at the top.

Two weeks ago, we said that God reveals Himself most clearly in His incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. That Jesus is the perfect picture of God.

And it's in Him that we get our best view of God. So let me ask you, where then do we see Jesus Christ? In the Scripture, in the Bible.

[3:41] Then last week, we talked about the Holy Spirit and what He does. He does all sorts of things. But I think if we summarize that entire chapter, we could say His essential work is to reveal to the Christian the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Everything else centers around that. The Holy Spirit's main work is to reveal the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus to the sinner. And so when the Holy Spirit comes to a person, He doesn't find that person ready to see the glory of God.

And so work has to be done just to open eyes, to give eyes to the blind. And that work's called regeneration. And the thing is, is that the Holy Spirit never does that work, the work of regeneration, without the gospel.

The Holy Spirit isn't going through the earth willy-nilly, regenerating people. It's as those people hear the gospel that the Holy Spirit works.

And so His work is always done hand-in-hand with the Scripture. And so from the Christian's new birth, all the way to the end of his life, the Spirit's work is to testify to the believer of Jesus Christ, and to illuminate the written Word of God to him.

[5:10] And so the Holy Spirit brings conviction to Christians, but He brings it hand-in-hand with the Word of God, with the law of God. And the Holy Spirit brings hope and joy to the believer.

But that hope and joy is always attached to a promise, to the promises of God, and believing the gospel. And so the Holy Spirit, His work is always done hand-in-hand with the Word of God.

So the Scripture tells us about Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit's instrument that He uses is the Word of God. And so obviously then, if we're going to know God, if we're going to have a relationship with God, we have to know the Word of God, don't we?

We have to know the Bible. So we must be in the Word. We must be reading it. And not only must that we must be in the Word, but the Word must be in us.

And so the Bible is essential if we're going to know God. So try to remember, we're trying to answer, why begin with immutability? Why begin with unchangingness?

[6:22] And it's precisely at this point that there comes a problem. If our whole relationship with God is based on, is the connection is this Word, the Bible, we have a little problem.

And it's this. When was the Word, when was the Scripture written? Well, 1,900 years ago, Revelation was probably written.

That was the last book. And about 3,500 years ago, the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible were written. And so, we're talking almost 3,500 years ago, the Bible started to be written.

Now, that is a lot of time for God to change, isn't it? That is a lot of time for God to change who He is if He changes.

And so, just because we see it in here, it doesn't mean that God is like that anymore if He changes. Are you following me?

[7:26] And so, the only way that we can know God is if we understand that He is the same God as we find in here, as He is now.

To complicate things, the Bible was written in a very different world, in a very different context than we find ourselves, right? We're going into the world of the ancient Near East.

And so, there's all kinds of weird things that we've become so common to because we know our Bibles and we read them. But, just think about how odd it would be to see these things in real life. People sacrificing animals all the time. And then people cutting animals into pieces and taking their kidneys out and cutting off their, what do they call the fatty tail, and they're burning that.

And it's all very strange. And one of the most common motifs in the Scripture is the Lord is a shepherd. How many of you have ever owned a sheep? Raise your hand. Alright. Most of us, like me, have very little experience with shepherding, with sheep.

[8:39] And so, we're entering this very different world. There's no telephones. There's no malls. There's no email. There's no medicine. There's no office buildings. There's no factories. There's no tractors.

There's no place. There's no different world. And as we enter the Bible, as we read the Bible, sometimes it can seem very far away.

And the Bible is all about what God did in that very strange world. Most of the stories take place there.

And we can ask ourselves, what does that have to do with me? What does God doing back 3,000, 4,000 years ago have to do with me?

What's the link? It's not the people. And it's not the culture. It's not the time and the space. Because those are all very different from me. The link between what we find in the Scripture and myself right now, as I read the Bible, it's not any of those things.

[9:45] It's God himself. It's the same God in the Bible as we have to do with today. And so Abraham and Moses had to deal, had to do with the same God that you, in your very different world, very different context, thousands of years later, you have to deal with.

It's exactly the same God. Because he doesn't change. And so that's why Packer begins here. Because the only way that we can know God is through the Word of God.

And if God changes, then this book essentially becomes meaningless. We can't trust anything that it says. Because God could have changed. And so we can't know God.

We can't know God if he changes. But thankfully, God doesn't change. And so you can read your Scriptures, you can read the Bible, and you can know exactly what God is like. What he is then, or what he was then, he is now. And so the Bible isn't describing how God was a long time ago. It's talking about what God is like now.

[11:00] And that's why we need to begin with immutability. Because everything that, everything from here on out depends, it's resting on the fact that God hasn't changed.

That it's the same God back then as it is now. Well, in what ways then is God immutable? Immutable. And this is where we're going to spend the rest of our time.

In what ways is God immutable? He's unchanging. Well, we can say a number of things. The first is that God's life does not change.

God's life does not change. And that simply means that he doesn't age. He wasn't born. He wasn't made.

God hasn't lived any longer today than he did yesterday or the day before. He's forever. He's eternal.

[12:00] Psalm 93.2 says, Your throne was established long ago. Well, how long ago? From eternity. From all eternity.

So when did God begin to be Lord? When did his rule begin? Was it a year ago? Was it 500 years ago? Was it 5 million years ago? Well, it's from all eternity.

His rule, his kingdom, began outside of our time. Which is to say, he never began. And if you think about it, you can imagine something going on forever and ever.

You can imagine that. But can you go backwards in your mind forever and ever to never have been made, to never have been born, to always have existed?

And that is God. There was a time when there was nothing but him. Well, we we change, but he doesn't change.

[13:08] Jeremiah 10.10 says, calls him the eternal king. He's the eternal king. Kings come and go. Presidents come and go. But God has always been king and he always will be king.

So turn in your Bibles to Psalm 102. And look at verse 25. Psalm 102.25. In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth and the heavens are the work of your hands.

They will perish, but you remain. They will all wear out like a garment, like clothing. You will change them and they will be discarded, but you remain the same and your years will never end.

The children of your servants will live in your presence. Their descendants will be established before you. So creation will wear out, but God remains the same.

And our descendants, if Jesus will tarry, our descendants will serve the same king just as we did.

[14:18] Isn't that marvelous? Isn't that a marvelous thought? That after we are gone, that our children and our great-grandchildren and our great-great-grandchildren, they'll be serving the same king that we serve.

They'll be loving him in their lives just as we love him in our lives. Because God is the king eternal. He's always on the throne.

And people and governments and everything else in our world changes. But the ruler never changes. God does not age. He doesn't grow older.

His life doesn't wax and wane. So we go from birth to childhood. We mature into adulthood. And then we begin the slow decline into old age.

But God doesn't experience anything like that. He doesn't wax and wane. He doesn't mature and develop. He doesn't get stronger and then weaker. A.W. Pink wrote this, He cannot change for the better because He is perfect.

[15:24] And being perfect, He cannot change for the worse. He's perfect and that means He doesn't change. Well, God's life doesn't change.

Secondly, God's character doesn't change. God's character doesn't change. So Moses is out on the backside of the desert and he's tending sheep and he looks up and he notices something very odd. And being a bit of a scientist, he gets closer and closer and he sees, yes, I was right. That bush is on fire. It's burning but it's not being consumed.

So it's burning with energy but it's not changing. And curiosity gets the better of him and so he walks closer and closer until he hears a voice.

He says, Moses, take off your sandals. The ground that you are walking on is holy. And of course that was the Lord. And the Lord told Moses to go to Israel and speak for him.

[16:37] And Moses had a very sensible reply. He said, well, who should I tell them is sending me? And you remember the response. It was the Lord.

It was Yahweh. It was the I am that I am. I am ascending you. So Yahweh is the forever present, ever existing, same God.

So let's fast forward in time a little bit. And we go to Exodus 34. Turn there to Exodus 34. And Moses is now on the mountain.

God has delivered the Israelites from Egypt. And so he's on the Mount Sinai. Sinai. And the Lord comes down in the cloud. And look at Exodus 34.

6. Verse 5, excuse me. Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord, Yahweh, I am.

[17:39] And remember the name. It's more than just a label. This is, he's testifying to his character. He's proclaiming who he is.

What kind of Lord is he? So he proclaims his name, Yahweh. And he passed in front of Moses proclaiming the Lord, Yahweh, Yahweh, I am, I am, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

Yet, he does not leave the guilty unpunished. He punishes the children and their children for the sins of the father to the third and fourth generation.

So what does it mean to be the Lord, Yahweh? Well, it means he's forever and ever without changing.

He's forever and ever compassionate and gracious and patient and loving and faithful and forgiving and just. And his character never changes.

[18:53] What he was on that mountain, he is for you today. He has not changed, he cannot change, he's forever the same God. And so what he was on that mountain, he is for you.

He is all those things right now. And what he showed himself to be in Jesus Christ, he is today. God, God's character doesn't change.

People's characters change, don't they? Sometimes suddenly, sometimes very slowly, suddenly, you know, someone has an accident and their brain is damaged and their character can change in a minute.

and then old men, as they grow older, they become grumpier, some of them, and they become cynical and bitter.

And other old men begin that way and as they age, they mellow out and they become kinder and sweeter. See, people change all the time. Christians change, don't we?

[20:02] we were once in sin and in unholiness and everything we did, our character was marred by all sorts of evil and yet, when God got a hold of us, this man who had a temper no longer has a temper.

This man who is impure, he is now pure. Where there was no patience, there's patience. Thank God, people's characters change, but God's character, it doesn't change.

and he hasn't changed. And so, practically, what can we do with that?

I think the first thing that comes to my mind is when we think that God's character does not change, this gives us all kinds of ways that we can praise him. That we can take the scripture where it's talking about what God is like and what he is doing and we can turn that to praise.

And so, we can use that as fuel for worship. And so, when you see God doing something, you can say to yourself, you know what? He hasn't changed. He is still that kind of God and so, I will praise him for that.

[21:14] Do you sometimes struggle with knowing what to say in private worship? When you, you know you're supposed to worship, you know you're supposed to praise God, but nothing comes to mind. God. We'll start here.

God hasn't changed. He's still gracious and forgiving and merciful and kind and just and so you can take all those things and you can turn it to God's praise.

God's character doesn't change. So, we can depend on it. Third, God's truth doesn't change. God's truth doesn't change.

sometimes we have to take things back, don't we? We say something and we have to later take it back.

Sometimes it's because we didn't really know what we meant. Have you ever said things where you thought you were saying the right thing, but as you thought about it later, you're like, you know what? I don't really even think that.

[22 : 15] I wasn't sure what I was saying. You don't know your own mind. And sometimes you have to take things back because you learn new information. You didn't know what you know now and so now you have to correct it.

Your circumstance changes and so you learn things. So you were single and you had all sorts of opinions and now you're married and you had to change your mind.

You used to be a liberal and now you're a conservative. You used to be an Arminian and now you're a Calvinist. we change and so the words that we say are very unstable.

But the grass withers and the flowers fall but the word of our God stands forever. Psalm 119 says, Your word, O Lord, is eternal.

It stands firm in the heavens. So all the promises, all the commands, all the declarations, all the statements that God addresses to you as a New Testament believer are still in effect.

[23 : 24] They're still true. There's not one jot, not one tittle that has changed about what He has said. And so if God says to you, Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice, that word that Paul wrote 2,000 years ago is God's word for you at the present moment.

That command is still in effect because God's truth doesn't change. It's not a command that's only an ancient artifact that you can stick in a museum somewhere. This is God's freshly breathed command to you.

It's coming straight from His mouth without any change. And so it comes with as much power and it comes with as much authority as it ever did. And if Jesus says, I will be with you even to the end of the age, then you know what?

You know He made that promise and it's still true. It's still as true as it ever was. And so you can take it to the bank because God doesn't change.

He hasn't changed His mind. He hasn't learned something new. His situation hasn't changed. His word is still the same for you. It's good. And so the scripture is God breathed.

[24 : 47] And so it comes out of God. It's exhaled from God. And because He is unchanging, His word is unchanging. What comes from His mind and heart don't change.

So take your Bibles and read them. And when you do, you're reading what God's mind is for you now. You're reading what God wants you to know now.

And you're reading what God is like now, not what He was like as opposed to what He was like a hundred thousand years ago or whatever. What He was back in the Bible times, He is that for you because His word does not change.

And so you can have confidence in your Bibles that they are clearly telling you what you need to know to be saved and what you need to know in order to live.

Fourth, God's ways do not change. God's ways do not change. If God's character doesn't change, then His methods, His ways aren't going to change either.

[25 : 59] There is such a consistent pattern of how God deals with people in the word of God. You start to see patterns over and over again in what He does.

And the reason those patterns exist is because God doesn't change. He's very dependable in the way He behaves. Do you ever wonder why there's so many stories about barren women in the Bible?

If you were to read the Bible, you would think barrenness is just really common. It's not. But God consistently loves to choose things and make situations that are impossible.

And so when He works in that situation, then everyone can say, wow, did you see what God did there? That's one of God's ways. He likes to create impossible situations and work through them to His glory.

And so that no human can say, you know what, I had the power in this situation. God loves to do extravagant things so that every eye will see Him.

[27 : 09] That's the way He was and that's the way He is. That's why Jesus encourages us to pray, pray, pray, whatever your circumstance, whatever you desire, pray for it.

Because God is the kind of God that loves to answer prayer. prayer. That's one of His ways. And so Elijah prays for rain.

And God, after three years, sends rain. And Abraham's servant prays for a wife for Isaac. And God answers. And Rebecca is the first one at the well.

And Peter and the apostles pray for boldness. And God shakes the building where they're at. And He answers that kind of prayer. And so God's ways are still the same.

And that's why there's so many commands to pray. Because God hasn't changed. And to this day, God loves to choose the things that are weak, the weak things of the world, to shame the strong.

[28:11] And He loves to choose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. And He loves to choose the lowly so that He can put to shame those who think they're something.

He loves to choose those who are not, like you and me, to shame, to show how foolish the things that are. And He is still sovereign in what He does in salvation.

He consistently shows Himself to be sovereign in salvation. salvation. So, Esau and Jacob are twins. And God passes over Esau and chooses Jacob.

And to this day, He loves to show His freedom in giving grace and withholding grace. So that no man can say that God owes grace.

He moves some to repentance and He leaves others in their unbelieving condition. And so the consistent message of the Bible is God doesn't owe mercy to anyone.

[29:26] And yet He is rich in mercy. And He gives it abundantly. And salvation is always of grace. And the way He was then is the way He is now.

Fifth, God's purposes don't change. His purposes don't change. Let me ask you, what is the chief end of God?

His glory. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. The chief end of God is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. That is the one purpose that God always has in mind.

And there's all sorts of other smaller purposes that fit under that great purpose. But through all generations He's had one end in mind and that is to glorify Himself, to make Himself known.

And God knows exactly the best way to do that. He has from eternity past had in mind the best way to reach the greatest glory and the most enjoyment for Himself.

[30:39] Psalm 33 11. His plan never changes. Psalm 33 11. The plans of the Lord stand firm forever. The purposes of His heart through all generations.

So what God was doing in our great grandfather's lives, He is doing in our life. What His plan was 300 years ago, His plan and purpose is still for you today.

He is going for His own glory and He has a plan from the very beginning. And His plan centers around Jesus Christ. He from eternity past planned that Jesus would die and that He would rise again on the third day.

And so that's how Revelation can say that He was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the earth. Jesus was plan A and there was no plan B.

It was that or it was nothing and it wasn't going to be nothing. There was no other plan. And so nothing can turn the Lord from His purpose.

[31:42] He will have glory. Whether you participate in it or not, whether you join Him or not, He will have glory and He will have it through His Son because His purposes don't change.

And that brings us to our last point. And that is that God's Son does not change. Hebrews 13.8 says, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

So, when you read the four Gospels, the Jesus that you see there is the Jesus who is your Savior, who is your Lord, who is the one who is offering Himself to you if you don't know Him.

He still has the same healing touch, He still has the same resurrection power, He still has the same ability to speak, and His lambs hear, He still has the ability to speak, and the dead come out of the grave, and He still intercedes for His people.

That's what you see in John 17, Jesus praying for His disciples, and Jesus is still doing that. Turn in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 7. Hebrews chapter 7 and verse 23.

[33:14] 7-23. Now there have been many of those priests, speaking about the Old Testament priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office.

So those priests died and they couldn't continue in their office. But because Jesus lives forever, He has a permanent priesthood. Therefore, He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him because He always lives to intercede for them.

Because Jesus, the Son of God, always lives, He never changes, He is able to save completely all those who come to God through Him.

So brothers and sisters, our eternal destinies are in the hands of the same Jesus Christ, the never changing hands of Jesus Christ.

And so you are as safe now. You are as safe now as you ever have been. and you are as safe now as you ever will be.

[34 : 24] Not because of you, not because of your ability to keep going in the Christian life, but because Jesus is interceding for you and He never stops praying for you.

So He's praying for you all the time that in some terrible situation, He's praying for you. I pray that your faith won't fail. And He's praying that for us. So it doesn't depend on me.

As long as He's living, He's interceding for me. And He ever lives. And He never leaves me. He never leaves me to myself. And He never leaves me to God's wrath. And that's why we can have confidence when we have sinned that we will be forgiven.

Not because we're going to work up some repentance and I'm going to make myself feel bad enough and God will look on that and pardon me. It's because Jesus is praying for me.

It's all resting on His hands. And we can have confidence in death's approaching hour. Because Jesus won't leave me then.

[35 : 27] He'll intercede for me then. And He will take my hand as we go through the water. And we will come out on the other side. And when it's time for me to answer, He will speak for me. And He'll say, this is one of mine.

He is with me. His righteousness is my righteousness. So what is your only hope in life and in death?

Heidelberg Catechism question one, what is your only hope in life and death? That I, body and soul, both in life and in death, are not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

And brothers and sisters, that is good news. That we don't belong to ourselves, we belong to Him. But that is only good news because Jesus doesn't change.

And He's not going to bail out on us, He's not going to get tired of us, He's not going to grow weary, He's not going to stop praying for us, He's not going to stop being gracious to us, because He doesn't change.

[36 : 31] And so He's our only hope. In life and death, He's our only hope, but He's the only hope we need. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, I ask that You would exalt Jesus Christ in our eyes as the never-changing, ever-interceding, glorious Savior.

Help us to see Your love in Him. Thank You that You are at peace with us because of what Jesus Christ did on the cross.

And now we stand in that grace. grace of peace. You're not at war with us. You have nothing against us because all our sins have been laid on Jesus Christ.

They're all washed away as far as the east is from the west. so far our sins removed from us. Thank You, Lord Jesus. Thank You, God, that You don't change, that You don't shift and move like shadows, but You're dependable, You're solid, God, and that when You speak to us in Your Word, You mean it.

You still mean it. Will You help us to respond accordingly? Will You help us to respond in praise? Will You help us respond in trust, in faith, in whatever circumstance?

[37 : 59] for those who don't know You, Lord, who are still unreconciled, still strangers, I pray, Lord, that You would call and save.

Bring conviction and bring grace to that person, to those people. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.