

3 Ways God Is Immutable

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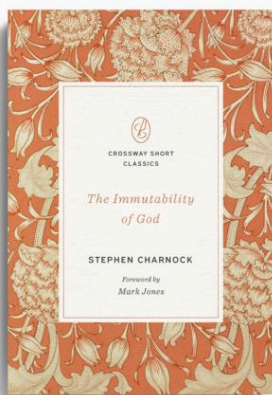
1. God Is Unchangeable in His Essence

He is unalterably fixed in his being, so that not a particle of it can be lost from it, not a mite added to it. If a man continue in being as long as Methuselah, 969 years, yet there is not a day, nay, an hour, wherein there is not some alteration in his substance. Though no substantial part is lacking, yet there is an addition to him by his food, a diminution of something by his

labor; he is always acquiring something or suffering some loss. But in God there can be no alteration by the accession of anything to make his substance greater or better or by diminution to make it less or worse. God is the first being, an independent being; he was not produced of himself or of any other but by nature always has been, and therefore he cannot by himself, or by any other, be changed from what he is in his own nature. Again, because he is a Spirit, he is not subject to those mutations that are found in corporeal and bodily natures. Because he is an absolutely simple Spirit, not having the least particle of composition, he is not capable of those changes that may be in created spirits.

If his essence were mutable, God would not truly be; it could not be truly said by himself, “I am who I am” (Ex. 3:14), if he were such a thing or being at this time and a different being at another time. Whatsoever is changed properly ceases to be because it does not remain to be what it was; that which is changed was

something, is something, and will be something. But if God were changed, it could not be said of him that he is, but it might also be said of him that he is not; or if he were changeable or could be changed, it might be said of him that he is, but he will not be what he is; or he may not be what he is, but there will be or may be some difference in his being, and so God would not be “I am who I am,” for though he would not cease utterly to be, yet he would cease to be what he was before.



The Immutability of God

Stephen Charnock, Mark Jones

In this concise, accessible essay, theologian Stephen Charnock examines Scripture to explain God's unchangeable, eternal nature.

2. God Is Immutable in Regard of Knowledge

God has known from all eternity all that he can know, so that nothing is hid from him. He knows at present what he has known from eternity, and that which he knows now he always knows: “All are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:13). A man is said to be changed in regard of knowledge when he knows now something he did not know before, knows that to be false now that he thought true before, or has something for the object of his understanding now that he had not before. But,

(1) This would be repugnant to the wisdom and omniscience that belongs to the notions of a deity. He cannot be God who is not infinitely wise; he cannot be infinitely wise who is either ignorant of or mistaken in his apprehension of any one thing. If God be changed in knowledge, it must be for lack of wisdom; all

change of this nature in creatures implies this defect preceding or accompanying it. Such a thought of God would have been unworthy of him who is “only wise,” who has no equal for wisdom (1 Tim. 1:17 KJV); there is none wise besides himself.

(2) If God were changeable in his knowledge, it would make him unfit to be an object of trust to any rational creature. His revelations would lack the due ground for belief if his understanding were changeable. For something might be labeled truth now that might prove false hereafter, and something labeled as false now that hereafter might prove true, and so God would be an unfit object of obedience in regard of his precepts and an unfit object of confidence in regard of his promises. A changeable mind and understanding cannot make a due and right judgment of things to be done and things to be avoided; no wise man would judge it reasonable to trust a weak and flitting person. God must needs be unchangeable in his knowledge, but as the schoolmen say, that as the sun always

shines, so God always knows; as the sun never ceases to shine, so God never ceases to know. Nothing can be hid from the vast compass of his understanding, no more than anything can shelter itself without the verge of his power.

God knows by his own essence. He does not know, as we do, by habits, qualities, species, whereby we may be mistaken at one time and rectified at another. His understanding is not distinct from his essence as ours is, but being the most simple being, his understanding is his essence; and as from the infiniteness of his essence we conclude the infiniteness of his understanding, so from the unchangeableness of his essence we may justly conclude the unchangeableness of his knowledge. If his understanding then be his essence, his knowledge is as necessary and as unchangeable as his essence.

3. God Is Unchangeable in Regard of His Will and Purpose

A change in his purpose is when a man determines now to do that which before he determined not to do, or to do the contrary—when a man hates that thing which he loved or begins to love that which he before hated. When the will is changed, a man begins to will that which he willed not before and ceases to will that which he willed before. But whatsoever God has decreed is immutable; whatsoever God has promised will be accomplished:

So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;

it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose.
(Isa. 55:11)

To make this out, consider,

(1) The will of God is the same with his essence. If God had a will distinct from his essence, he would not be the most simple being. God has not a faculty of will

distinct from himself; as his understanding is nothing else but *Deus intelligens*, “God understanding,” so his will is nothing else but *Deus volens*, “God willing.” The immutability of the divine counsel depends on that of his essence. He is the Lord Jehovah; therefore he is true to his word: “Henceforth I am he; / there is none who can deliver from my hand” ([Isa. 43:13](#); cf. [Mal. 3:6](#)). He is the same, immutable in his essence, therefore irresistible in his power.

Not all the combined devices and endeavors of men can make the counsel of God to totter.

(2) There is a concurrence of God’s will and understanding in everything. As his knowledge is

eternal, so is his purpose. Things created had not been known to be had not God resolved them to be the act of his will; the existence of anything supposes an act of his will. Whatsoever is eternal is immutable; as his knowledge is eternal, and therefore immutable, so is his will. He wills or nills nothing to be in time but what he willed and nilled from eternity; if he willed in time that to be that he willed not from eternity, then he would know that in time which he knew not from eternity. For God knows nothing future but as his will orders it to be future and in time to be brought into being.

(3) There can be no reason for any change in the will of God. When men change in their minds, it must be because they lack foresight, because they could not foresee all possibilities that might suddenly offer themselves. Hence men often will something that they afterward wish they had not willed when they come to understand it more clearly. But none of those can be in God. What is lacking from an infinite

understanding? How can any unknown event defeat his purpose since nothing happens in the world but what he wills to effect or wills to permit, and therefore all future events are present with him? His eternal purpose must either be righteous or unrighteous: If righteous and holy, he would become unholy by the change; if neither righteous nor holy, then he was unrighteous before the change; whichever way it falls, it would reflect on the righteousness of God, which is a blasphemous imagination. If God did change his purpose, it must be either for the better—then the counsel of God was bad before—or for the worse—then he was not wise and good before.

Nor can God's will or purpose change because he lacks strength. Who has power to control him? Not all the combined devices and endeavors of men can make the counsel of God to totter: "Many are the plans in the mind of a man, / but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand" ([Prov. 19:21](#))—that and that only will stand. Man has a power to devise and imagine but no

power to effect and execute of himself. God lacks no more power to effect what he will than he lacks understanding to know what is fit.

Though the will of God be immutable, the things themselves so willed are not immutable. Though God be firm in willing these things, he does not will that they should always be. God decreed that Christ should suffer, but he did not decree that Christ should always suffer; so he willed the Mosaic rites for a time, but he did not will that they should always continue; his immutable will had fixed a period.

The changing of those things that he had once appointed to be practiced does not make God's will or purposes changeable since he decreed both their abolition and their continuance, so that the removal of them was pursuant to his unchangeable will and decree. The decree itself was eternal and immutable, but the thing decreed was temporary and mutable.

*This article is adapted from **The Immutability of God** by Stephen Charnock.*



Stephen Charnock (1628–1680) was a prominent English Puritan theologian and preacher in England and Ireland during the seventeenth century. Trained at Cambridge and Oxford, he served as chaplain to Henry Cromwell, the chief governor of Ireland, and is known for his discourses on the existence and attributes of God.