



“Getting to Know God”

Section 2: What Can We Know About What God Is Like?



Unit 2.2: The Facts about God’s Freedom

I) Declaring His Divine Independence

- As we begin exploring the incommunicable attributes of God that He has chosen to keep exclusive to Himself, a natural place to start would be our consideration of the *divine independence* of God. This unique reality reveals that God is the only being who is totally free from dependence on anyone or anything because He is *self-existent, self-sufficient, and self-sustaining*. In theological circles, this concept of independence is known formally as the “*aseity*” of God, which simply means that He is a being who exists “*from Himself*.” This term comes directly from the words of **John 5:16**, which proclaims, “*The Father has life in himself*.” Due to this complete independence, we must acknowledge that God is the primary cause of all life, and His will is the primary cause of all activity that is working towards a greater fulfillment of His eternal purpose and plan.

II) Our Creator & Sustainer

- If what we believe about the independence of God is true, this has huge implications for us as created beings made in His image. First, this glorious truth reminds us that God is completely free and in need of no one, but His existence is absolutely necessary to us because we are dependent on His will for our lives as He creates us and sustains us. **Genesis 2:7** reminds us that God is the source of life who “*...formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature*.” But not only did He create us by breathing life into us, He sustains us through every single breath we continue to take. **Acts 17:28** states, “*In him we live and move and have our being*.” **Colossians 1:17** also proclaims that Christ “*...is before all things, and in him all things hold together*.” So, although God has no essential need for us, we have a desperate need for him in every way. As famous Puritan theologian Matthew Henry notes in his popular *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, “*The greatest and best man in the world must say, ‘By the grace of God I am what I am’; but God says absolutely... ‘I am that I am’*” (p. 284).

III) Constant & Unchanging Character

- Once we are convinced of God’s total independence from creation, we can now begin to explore the implications of a totally free and self-sustaining Creator. The first implication that we must examine is the *unchangeable nature* of God. The theological term for God’s unchangeable state is his *divine immutability*, meaning that He does not “*mutate*” and is not capable or susceptible of changing or being modified in any way. As we cited earlier in the Westminster Shorter Catechism of 1646 several units ago, “*God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth*.” Therefore, a more comprehensive definition of the immutability of God is that He is unchanging in His *essence and character* as an eternally righteous being. This means that all His moral perfections, and His eternal *purposes, promises, and plans* that He makes based on those perfections are completely unchangeable. It is difficult for us to process this concept because unlike human beings, God doesn’t *learn, grow, improve, or diminish*. God has been and will always be completely and eternally perfect. As He states in **Malachi 3:6**, “*For I the Lord do not change*.” This reality is further articulated in the New Testament in two key passages. First, in **James 1:17** it states, “*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*.” And second, as we learn in **Hebrews 13:8**, “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever*.” However, as we are reminded by author Millard Erickson in his book, *Christian Theology*, “*...the biblical view is not that God is static but that he is stable. He is active and dynamic, but in a way that is stable and consistent with his nature*” (p. 250).

IV) Standing on the Solid Rock

- So, what are the implications of an unchangeable, perfect God who rules over an ever-changing, broken world? First, if we are not careful when we seek to reconcile these contrasting ideas, we may compromise God's unchangeable perfection and fall into several heresies including **process theology** (the belief that change is the only absolute, so even God Himself changes) or **open theism** (the belief that since humans are truly free, God cannot know everything about the future). Instead, we must recognize that God *can* be unchangeable in His character and purpose, yet still genuinely interact with His creation through each moment of reality despite being fully aware of all future events because He stands outside the confines of time and space. Therefore, since we have an unchangeable God who we can lean on in our constantly changing world, we need to celebrate that when we wear out He remains the same (**Psalm 73:26; Psalm 102:26-28**) and when the ground underneath us is giving way, we can stand on Him as the solid rock that is always higher and more dependable than the world (**Psalm 61:2**).

V) Making Up His Mind

- Another common question that we might have about God if He is unchangeable is “Does that mean He never changes His mind? On the surface, there are several biblical examples where God clearly states that He is going to do something before changing His course of direction when human beings respond in faith (**Exodus 32:9-14, Isaiah 38:1-6, Jonah 3:4-10**). But, does this mean that God actually changed His mind? The short answer is *no*, because as **Numbers 23:19** teaches us, “God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind.” The more detailed answer to this supposed contradiction is that in the foreknowledge of God He already knows all future events that will take place to accomplish His eternal plan. Therefore, it is not His mind that changes, but his **attitude** in response to situations that change through faithful human intervention of repentance and prayer.

VI) Reconciling Old Regrets

- But, what about passages in the Bible where it seems like God has regrets over things that He has previously done? These passages include **Genesis 6:6** (He regrets making mankind after the Fall and was grieved to His heart), or in **1 Samuel 15:11** (He confesses that He regrets making Saul king of Israel). Again, as we previously stated, this is not a result of God making a mistake or having a change of heart. Rather, it is a reflection of God interacting uniquely in each moment according to His perfect nature. He is genuinely grieved over the sin of humanity, but His eternal plans are still secure and unfolding because in His foreknowledge He was already aware these transgressions would take place.

VII) Evaluating God's Emotions

- Now, as we continue to meditate on God's independent and unchanging nature, we must also ask, “Does God have genuine emotions?” This concept of an emotionless God is known as **divine impassibility**, which teaches that God is not subject to experiencing passions or emotions based on the actions of another created being because of His total independence. Unfortunately, this concept is another misunderstanding of how an unchangeable God interacts with His ever-changing creation. Although His emotions are different than ours because He does not need us or depend on us for anything, when He responds to us His emotions are real and genuine as a reflection of His righteous nature responding to each individual moment in accordance with His moral perfections.

VIII) Finding Our Place in His Plan

- Finally, as we meditate on the divine truth that God is completely independent and unchangeable, it is natural for us to ask ourselves, “Are we meaningful to Him and His eternal plan?” The evidence throughout this unit is a resounding yes! This is because God ascribes meaning to us by making us in His image and giving us responsibilities that work together as secondary causes to fulfill the primary cause of His eternal plan. We need to remember that God's plans that are unchanging (**Isaiah 46:9-10; Proverbs 19:21; Psalms 33:11**), but we make genuine choices that bring His plan to fruition, and when we chose to honor Him, the Lord rejoices and finds delight in us (**Psalm 147:10-11; Isaiah 62:5; Zephaniah 3:17**). As A.W. Tozer boldly proclaims in *The Knowledge of the Holy*, “He needs no one, but when faith is present He works through anyone” (p. 36).