

[1975. In *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*. Howard Vos, Charles Pfeiffer and John Rea, eds. Chicago: Moody Press.]

IMMUTABILITY. The term appears in the KJV in Heb. 6:17-18: “Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie...” By the immutability of God is meant that in His essence, attributes, consciousness and will God is unchangeable.

The doctrine of God’s immutability is further deduced from biblical passages such as: “They shall be changed, but thou art the same” (Ps 102:26-27); “I am the Lord, I change not” (Mal 3:6); “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever” (Heb 13:8); and “with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning” (Jas 1:17, ASV). In such verses change is explicitly denied to God. This does not mean God is immobile, however, for He acts in history. His immutability is dynamic, not static.

Immutability is also indicated in other verses where the idea is implicit rather than explicit. For example, all those passages that teach omniscience (q.v.) imply immutability; for if the amount of knowledge in the divine mind increased or diminished, there would be a time in which God would not know all things (but cf. Heb 4:13). Omniscience allows no change nor temporal sequence of ideas in God’s mind. God can neither forget what He now knows nor think of something additional that He never thought of before. Omniscience therefore involved immutability.

Occasionally the Bible attributes repentance or regret to God in I Sam 15:11, 35 it is stated that God repented (Heb. *Niham*, “feel compassion, grief, sorrow”) of having made Saul king over Israel. This seems to indicate a change of mind or emotion in God. But between these two verses, in v. 29 we read that “The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent.” God’s seeming change of mind or attitude therefore should be taken as an anthropopathism, the attributing of human emotions to God, just as we understand the arms and eyes of the Lord as anthropomorphisms.

Other passages which speak of God as repenting of judgment (e.g. against Israel, Ex 32:14; Nineveh, Jon 3:10) reveal that His threats are often conditional upon human

repentance (cf Jer 18:7-10; 26:3, 13, 19). Therefore God abides by the same unchanging moral principles in all dispensations of His government.

A greater difficulty relates to the act of creating the world. All orthodox Christians admit that God eternally willed to create; but since He actually created at a particular moment, this act seems to be a change in God. Charnock, the Puritan theologian (VI, iv, 1 {pg. 213}), tried to resolve the difficulty by saying, “There was no change in God by the act of creation, because... there was no new act of his will which was not before. The creation began in time, but the will of creating was from eternity... But though God spake that word which he had not spoke before, whereby the world was brought into act, yet he did not will that will he willed not before. God did not create by a new counsel or new will, but by that which was from eternity (Eph 1:9).”

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