



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

TRANSCRIPT

“The Repentance and Unchangeability of God”

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to thee again for the privilege of the study of the Scriptures. We are thankful for the things which Thou hast revealed to us in Thy word concerning Thyself. We are thankful that Thou hast told us some very important things about Thy being, about Thy nature, about Thy attributes, Thy will, Thy purposes, Thy plans. And we pray that as we study tonight that we may grow in our knowledge of Thee and may as a result of our studies worship Thee more intelligently and more pleasingly to Thee. And so we commit the hour to Thee and ask for Thy blessing upon each one of us.

For Jesus'sake. Amen.

[Message] Our subject for tonight is “The Repentance and the Unchangeability of God.” And this is the last in our series of studies on the incommunicable attributes of God. And I'm going to turn again to a passage that we read before, but which also not only speaks of God's eternity, but speaks of his unchangeability. So turn with me to Psalm 102 and let me read a few verses beginning with the 25<sup>th</sup> verse of Psalm 102.

“Of old Thou didst found the earth, and the heavens are the work of Thy hands. Even they will perish, but Thou doest endure. And all of them will wear out like a garment. Like clothing, Thou will change them and they will be changed. But Thou art the same.” (Now literally that is Thou art he, but the force is the same.) “Thou are the same and Thy years will not come to an end.”

The repentance and the unchangeability of God. I want to begin this lecture by setting two passages side by side. And the first is Malachi chapter 3, verse 6 in which the prophet says, “For I, the Lord, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.” Notice what the prophet says: “For I, the Lord, do not change.”

Now the other passage I want to set over against that one is Jonah chapter 3, verse 10. “When God saw their deeds that they turned from their wicked ways, then God relented.” Now the Authorized Version reads repented, and that probably is the rendering of this verb in other places and consequently is at least acceptable. “Then God repented concerning the calamity which he had declared he would bring upon them and he did not do it.” Malachi has said, “I, the Lord, do not change.” But Jonah has said concerning God that God repented concerning the calamity he would bring upon them.

Is God really unchangeable? How is it possible for one prophet to say that he does not change and another prophet to say God repents and does not do what he had said he would do? Now we are, I say, at our last in the series on the incommunicable attributes of God, and we have been following this outline, looking at the self-existence of God, the simplicity of God, the unity of God, the spirituality of God, the infinity of God, I know you can read these: immensity, omni-presence, eternity, and finally the ninth of the incommunicable attributes, the immutability of God.

So tonight we want to consider that. And to add to these few brief words of introduction we want to move into our subject, and Roman I in our outline is the nature of the immutability of God. What does immutability mean? If you remember your Latin

you will remember that the word, the verb, for change in Latin is *muta*. It is the word from which we get such scientific terms as mutation. Immutability. Webster says concerning immutability that it is a quality or state of being immutable. Now, that is not a very clear definition. I think that Webster could probably have been a systematic theology professor, because he has given us a definition but it does not really define. So the next thing you must do is to look up immutable and see what that means. And Webster says, never changing or varying. Unchangeable. So when we think of the immutability of God we should think of the unchangeability of God, if we have difficulty with the word immutable. The theological term is immutability. The common term is unchangeability. What this word means is essentially the thing that we mean when we say our seasons are unvarying, they are unchangeable. Winter is always followed by spring, spring always by summer, and summer always by fall, and fall by winter. Everywhere. Except in Texas. [Laughter]

Now we also, when we speak of the law of gravity, we are speaking of that which is unchangeable. Things always fall. So the law of gravity is an immutable law in God’s creation. It is like Charlie Brown’s failures. They are unvarying, unchangeable. He never succeeds. He never will be anything. He always will be a complete failure. He is an immutable, unchangeable failure. And my final analogy is a dangerous one because my wife is here. But immutable reminds me of a wife’s nagging. [Laughter] That also is unvarying, immutable. It does not change.

Now immutability. The immutability of God. As omni-presence resulted from God’s immensity, because he is transcended over space, he is therefore everywhere in space, so immutability is a natural result, a natural issue of God’s eternity. Also, his eternity is a natural issue of his immutability and so these are very closely related. One of our theologians has said, “That which has no evolution and no succession is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” When the ancients wanted to illustrate immutability, they did not speak about Charlie Brown or one’s wife’s nagging, but they spoke about a cube,

and they used a cube to illustrate God’s immutability, because a cube, no matter where you test it, will always be in the same posture because it is equal to itself in all its dimensions. And so they thought of a cube when they thought to illustrate immutability. Immutability. Now what does it mean in connection with God?

And in our outline we are going to follow is capital A. God is immutable in his essence. Now since he is infinite in his being, we have spoken of this, he cannot change. He cannot be something that he was not before. If he were able to be something that he was not before, then we could not have said that he was infinite then. And so he is, since he is infinite in his being, he cannot change. He cannot increase. He cannot decrease. He cannot self-evolve. He cannot develop. God’s essence is immutable. It is unchangeable. He cannot have any new attributes which would suggest change in his essential being. He is exalted above all becoming, if he were to become something, then he would be something he was not before. And so consequently God is immutable in his essence. He is immutable in his being. When we speak about immutability we are speaking about his being. He is immutable in his being.

Second, or capital B. He is immutable in his attributes. Now if any perfection could be separated from God, he would cease to be God. If we were, for example, to think of a God from whom his goodness were taken, then of course he would not be the infinite God that he was before. He cannot be wiser than he was before, he cannot be holier than he was before, he cannot be more righteous or more merciful than he was before, he cannot be less merciful than he was before.

If we think of an immutable God, we not only think of a person who cannot change in his essential being, but we must also think of a person who cannot change in his attributes. And so when we think of God and when we worship God and when we praise God, we do not praise him because he is a little better today than he was yesterday. He is the same in his being and he’s the same in his attributes. He has everlasting strength, he has omniscience in his wisdom, and so on at all times.

Furthermore, thirdly, his immutability means that he is immutable in his will. He is immutable in his plans and purposes. He does not, for example, purpose something today that he changes tomorrow. He does not change his mind. Furthermore, he does not have to sit and think now what shall I do? Shall I do this or shall I do that? Well I think today I’ll try this, or I think tomorrow I will try that. Because God is infinite in his wisdom, then there is no error in the conception of his plans. All of his plans are perfect, and he does not have to reason them out. He has within himself the power to know that which is the finest plan.

I often hear theologians say God could have used several different plans, but that is not true of God. There is only one plan that is his plan, because there is one plan that represents the product of his infinite wisdom. And so he is infinite in his will. Since he is infinite in power there can be no failure in the accomplishment of his plans which fall out of his will either. So he always expresses himself or to us, but he always attempts to carry out, or carries out, the perfect plan, and he always carries it out perfectly, because he is infinitely wise and infinitely powerful. So he is immutable in his will.

Fourth, he is immutable in his consciousness. Since infinite experience is a fixed quantity, then nothing is added to God’s consciousness and nothing old is taken from it. He is immutable in his consciousness.

And finally, he is unchangeable in his place. Charnock, who has written an outstanding book on the attributes of God, has said, “He cannot be changed in time because he is eternity. And he cannot be changed in place because he hath ubiquity.” That is, he is everywhere present.

Well, what do we then understand by those statements in the Bible which say draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you? If God is immutable in his place, how can it be said that he draws near or nigh unto us? Well the answer to that, of course, is that in those passages in which we speak of God as being immutable in his place, that is he is unchangeably omni-present and unchangeably immense, we’re speaking about his

location. But when we are talking about drawing nigh unto God and God drawing nigh unto us we are talking about his spiritual influences toward us. So we spiritually may draw nigh to him, he may also draw nigh to us in that sense. To some of them God cannot change. His being is from himself, not from anyone else. If he were to change, then we would have to say he must change either from better to worse. Well, that is incomprehensible. Or from worse to better. That’s incomprehensible for an infinite God. Or if we granted moral stability, we might say he can change from immaturity to maturity. But again that is contrary to the word, because the word says that he is perfect.

Furthermore, all the reasons for change which are found in men are lacking in God. The reason we may change is because we err in our minds and we change, or we have inconstancy in our purposes. One day we have one purpose and that fails, the next day we devise another purpose or plan and then when that fails we devise still another. But God does not have this inconstancy of purpose and so therefore he is unchangeable.

Well let’s move on now to Roman 2. The Evidences for the Immutability of God, and first the scriptural evidence. We will just look at the two aspects, the scriptural and the logical and the logical only briefly and then consider our problem of God’s repentance. Now the scriptural evidence for the immutability of God is clear and convincing and only needs citing, but I will say just a word or two about the passages, three of them that I want you to look at. The one we have already read for our scripture reading, Psalm 102, verses 25-27. And here in the Psalms in which the psalmist aims to confirm his thrill in the truth of the divine promises concerning the future. He says concerning the creation the heavens and the earth, “Even they will perish but Thou doest endure.”

And finally verse 27, “But Thou art the same and Thy years will not come to an end.” In other words, when all, if all the fabric of the universe should come unpinned, God will remain the same. And therefore, since he remains the same, the promises that rest upon him and his word will be sure to come to pass. That is the point the psalmist

draws. Over in Malachi chapter 3, verse 6 is our second passage and it’s the one that I quoted in our introduction tonight. Malachi 3:6. Perhaps the best known passage in the Bible on the immutability of God and here the prophet says, “For I, the Lord, do not change. I am unchangeable. Therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.”

I want you to notice, by the way, the order of these words. He says, “I, Jehovah, do not change.” Now remember back when we were studying the self-existence of God we looked at that text in Exodus chapter 3 in which God spoke of himself as I AM, and we pointed out how that expression I AM is the term from which the name for God in the Old Testament, Yahweh, or Jehovah, was derived. And so Yahweh means that he is the self-existent one. He exists. That’s really the name of God. I AM. Now notice that out of the self-existence of God there naturally follows the immutability of God for I, the Lord, I AM, I always am, you cannot say concerning me I was, but I AM. I always am.

Therefore, I do not change and so immutability flows out of the God’s self-existence.

Well this is the second text.

Now the third is one in the New Testament and let’s turn over to that one because it is a beautiful expression of the immutability of God. James chapter 1, verse 17.

Hebrews, James, 1 Peter. James 1:17. Now James writes, he has been talking about the wisdom of God. And he says “Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above. Coming down from the father of lights.” Now what does that mean, the father of lights? Well, he is speaking about the lights in the heavens, he is talking about the sun, about the moon. The father of lights. Not electric lights, the lights in the heavens. With whom there is no variation or shifting shadow, literally shadow of turning, so every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above coming down from the father of light with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow.

Now what he is saying is this. Gifts from above are perfect because they come from the father of lights, the eternal creator. And because he is the eternal Creator, then his gifts are naturally perfect, but unlike them, he is unchangeable. His lights are not.

The sun is changeable. In the morning it comes up and at the dawning the light is not very fierce. In the middle of the day in Texas it is very fierce, in the afternoon we have twilight and then at night no light at all. The moon also varies. One part of the month we have one quarter moon, another part a half moon, still another three quarters, and then we have the full moon. With the lights there is always variation, always shadow cast by turning. But with God there is no shadow cast by turning unlike them he is unchangeable in his wisdom and in his love toward us. So in contrasting the gifts of God the lights with himself, with God, James stresses the unchangeability of God and his wisdom and then his love toward us. You know I think I shall look at the heavens about me in a new light in the light of this passage in James, and every day when the sun comes up and it’s different I’ll think about the fact that God is always the same in his wisdom and love.

When I was living in Scotland about ten or twelve years ago I think one of the things that impressed me more than anything else was the sun in the wintertime, because unlike Texas when even in the midst of the winter the sun comes up and it’s in the heavens directly above us, in Scotland in the wintertime the sun comes up about ten o’clock in the morning and then goes down about three in the afternoon and it is never over your head. It is always off in the horizon. And so when you see the sun come up you don’t expect to receive much warmth, because it is way off over there not up here, it’s off over there. And so the sun never did have the same sense of, did not have the same regard with me, that it had in Texas. And in the light of James I guess I am to look at that as an illustration of the difference between the father of lights, the lights, and the father of lights, God himself. He is always unchanging in his love and wisdom.

Well now, let’s consider the logical evidence for immutability. These texts are very plain all three of them say just as plainly as it could be said that God is unchangeable. Now I am just going to briefly say a word or two about the logical evidence because I have already looked at some of it.

In the first place, the name Jehovah itself is evidence of the immutability of God. Take that text that says “I AM who I AM.” Now I Am is an expression of his eternity. But when I say I am who I am, I’m saying I am the same that I am. In other words, that is what he is saying. I Am. I am always I am, eternal and I’m the same that I am. I am who I am. And so that text not only speaks of the eternity of God, the I am expresses that, but the same that I am expresses also his unchangeability. If God were unchangeable he could not be the most perfect being. If he were changeable, then today he might not be the most perfect being. And so if we presume that God is changeable, then he cannot be the most perfect being.

If he is the most perfect being it’s obvious he is unchangeable. If he is changeable, he is not the most simple being. Because if he can be changed then there is in that conception the idea that God is made up of parts, because something it leaves when he is changed and it’s no longer with him. So he is not a simple being. He does not possess simplicity, as we were saying and consequently he cannot be eternal. If God is changeable he is not eternal. Something perishes in every change and so consequently if in the case of God he is changeable then he’s not eternal. If he is changeable then he is not infinite and almighty because if something is added then he was not infinite before. If something is taken away the same type of thing may exist then. So it is logical that if God is infinite he is unchangeable.

Now that means that when we pray, for example, we pray to a God who is always the same. Now some of you heard me make reference of this before, but I am going to make reference to it again because it bears right on the point here. About three years ago I was in Canada and I was at the Canadian Keswick Conference about a hundred and seventy five miles north of Toronto, and the schedule of the Canadian Keswick Conference is for the concierges to have breakfast and then they go into a little auditorium which is by Lake Russell called the Delectable Mansion. And in the Delectable Mansion all the people gather around 9:30 or so in order to sing a few hymns together

and have a few expressions of thanksgiving and witness, testimony, a little sharing time we would say now and a brief devotional message, usually about five or ten minutes.

And one morning about three years ago, three or four years ago when I was there, when the time came for sharing one of the men stood up. He was not a regular attender of the conference that week but he was visiting and he said he would like to share something with us. And the attenders at that conference are not noted for their deep spiritual understanding, and this man was in thorough harmony with the ones who were there. So he stood up and he said would like to share a little something that he had gotten from a friend of his not too many days before this.

And he said this friend had told him that it was a wonderful thing to get up in the morning and just the minute your eyes opened to say a few word to God. And he had given him a little formula. And this was the little formula he was saying every morning and he wanted us to say it to. He said it just makes his day wonderful to get up in the morning and say, “Hello God. How are ya? What are you going to do today?” And I must confess that did not strike me as being very theological.

And so when I was preparing a message on the immutability of God here about three years ago when we first went through some of the initial studies on theology that we did I went in asked Mary, I was in my study at home, and I walked around into her studio and I said to her, “What do you think of this as a statement with which we should greet God every morning? “Hello God. How are ya? What are you going to do today?” And she said, “That’s nutty. God is always alright”. And that’s the theological response. That is stupid, you know, to get up and say “Hello God. How are ya today?” Well it sounds real sweet and real devotional, you know. Real nice. But it’s just not true. God is immutable. And so we should remember that in our praying.

Now we are going to come to our problems. There are three of them. If God is immutable, what about creation, what about the incarnation? Did God change any when he created? After all, he created *ex nihilo*, out of nothing, this creation about us. Did he

not lose something when he created this universe and if he lost something did he not change? Well the answer to this is simple. His creation did not affect his essence. There was no pouring out of any of his substance into the creation. It was a product of his eternal will. His will was to create from eternity and there was no change in God. There was change, but the change was in the universe about God, not in God.

But what about the incarnation? After all, Jesus Christ was the Son of God. He was the second person of the eternal Trinity. Now when the second person of the eternal Trinity became man, is not that a change in God? Can we really believe that Jesus Christ is immutable? The immutable God, and at the same time believe that he became man? Now what can we say about that? Is it possible for us to believe that the second person of the Trinity is immutable? Should we then say that the first and third persons only are immutable? The second person became a man, he is not immutable.

Well, no, that’s not true. If Jesus Christ had lost his immutability then he would not be God. And so consequently he cannot when he becomes man lose any of his deity. He cannot redeem us, he cannot save us if he is not God. Now I know that he took to himself humanity, he took to himself an additional nature. Incarnation made no change in the essence of the person of the Son of God. There was no change of deity into humanity. But he took to himself an additional nature, another nature. In other words, before the incarnation the eternal son was as divine nature. After the incarnation he also possessed divine nature, but he has taken to himself an additional nature, human nature. So the divine essence was not transmuted into human nature it assumed a human nature. Just as Paul states in Philippians chapter 2, verse 7, “While he came a man he always existed in the form of God.” He did not cease to be God then when he became man, and he did not cease to be immutable when he took to himself an additional nature.

So that problem is really not so much a problem as we perhaps or man thought at first. But the second problem is a problem of some significance. It is the problem of God’s repentance. Now let’s turn to a couple of passages. The Jonah passage is not the

only one. Genesis chapter 6, verse 6. Now this version that I am reading from, the New American Standard Bible, is a version that is generally speaking a very reliable version. But I have noticed in reading these verses that whoever did the translation in the various parts of it was very fearful of using the word repent of God. And you can understand why. Because they were thinking about the same thing that we are thinking about right now. For example, [name indistinct], would you read Genesis 6:6, if you can find the book of Genesis. Read Genesis 6:6 out of your version for us.

[Inaudible voice reads]

Alright, now in that version you will notice the term repent used. Now the reason I asked [name indistinct] to do that is because my version says and the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth and he was grieved in his heart. So here we have a text that says God repented. God was sorry.

Now can we say that God is immutable and say that he then became sorry? Is he immutable in his will when a few moments later he is sorry? Can we also say that he is omniscient and his purposes are perfect when he can be sorry later? Now let’s turn to Jeremiah chapter 18, verse 10. I think I’m going to begin reading at verse 7 while some of you are finding Jeremiah. “At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, or pull down, or to destroy it. If that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent.” My text says “I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it.” You have repent. “Or at another moment I might speak concerning a nation, or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant it. If it does evil in my sight by not obeying my voice, then I will think better of the good with which I had promised to bless it.” Now again, [name indistinct], would you read the tenth verse in Jeremiah, if you’ve been able to find it. Jeremiah 18.

[Inaudible voice reads]

Alright, now you’ll notice the term repent again used. Let’s turn over to Jonah now. Here we have a good concrete case. The Book of Jonah. Now we declare a slight intermission while we all find Jonah. I have little trouble finding it myself tonight. Jonah.

Now let me read this entire chapter. There are just ten verses and it will do us good to get the context and remember that Jonah had been called of the Lord to go to Nineveh. He disobeyed and he had gone west. He had followed Horace Greely instead of God. Then in the second chapter after his great experience in the belly of the great fish, he has prayed to the Lord and as a result of his prayer when he finally said Salvation is of the Lord, then the Lord commanded the fish and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land. I’ve always thought it was so interesting that Jonah prays to the Lord, he is in the belly of the great fish, he makes a vow unto the Lord, he’s still in the belly of the great fish. He does all sort of things he said he will look forth to the temple of the Lord, he’s still in the belly of the great fish, but when he says Salvation is of the Lord, immediately he is on dry ground. And that text is the one that’s version said many years ago, he learned that line of good theology in a strange college. Now we would say seminary today.

Now in chapter three he is going to resume his ministry to Nineveh. He is going to carry it out. “Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time saying arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you. So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three day’s walk. Then Jonah began to go through the city one day’s walk and he cried out and said Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” Now notice this is the word of God, forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.

I think all of us would say if we knew that God was immutable, “Well, Nineveh is going to be overthrown in forty days.” “Then the people of Nineveh believed in God and they called a fast and put on sack cloth from the greatest to the least of them. When the

word reached the King of Nineveh he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him covered himself with sack cloth and sat on the ashes. And he issued a proclamation, and it said, in Nineveh and the king of its nobles, do not let man, beast, herd or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water, but both man and beast must be covered with sack cloth and let them call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. Who knows, God my turn and repent (my text again has relent) and withdraw his burning anger so that we shall not perish. When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God repented,” my text says relented again, “repented concerning the calamity which he had declared he would bring upon them and he did not do it.”

Now is God immutable? Is God immutable? How can we read in one part of the New Testament there is no variation in God, one part of the Old Testament, “I, Jehovah, am the Lord, I do not change.” And then we read here that God repented of what he had said to what he planned to do with reference to the Ninevites. So we have the problem of God’s repentance.

Now this term repentance does not refer to any change in his being or in his attributes. If it were true then, as we’ve been saying, God would not be God. It refers to his manner of treating men. I think it is an accommodation to our weakness, and when we read in the Bible that God repents we are looking at the evidences of the working of God among men. In other words, we’re looking at it in an anthropomorphic way. To the Ninevites it certainly appeared that God had changed his mind. Because he had said through Jonah, yet forty days and I’m going to overthrow Nineveh. In the meantime Nineveh repented and he did not do it. So the Ninevites said, God repented; God changed his mind. These expressions in the Bible such as the expressions concerning his body, those anthropomorphic expressions we referred to before -- God has nostrils, God has eyes, God has ears -- they are human ways of speaking of the actions of God. And so

repent is a human way of speaking of the thought of God. It is what we would call phenomenal language, that is, language that is adjusted to the phenomena that men see.

Now the proof of this, I think, is evident in the fact that in Jeremiah chapter 18 he had laid down certain conditions of his learning of men. You weren’t listening, of course, and neither was I particularly, when I read those verses because we were interested in the word repent. But I want you to notice what that text says. Let’s turn back to Jeremiah chapter 18 and let me read these verses beginning with verse 7. And I want you to notice here how that God expresses himself concerning his plans and purposes for the nations.

Now verse 7. “At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down or to destroy.” Now that is exactly like he spoke about Nineveh. He said he was going to destroy Nineveh. So God says at one point I might speak concerning a nation to destroy it. If that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil I will repent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it. In other words, my purpose, my eternal purpose is my plan, my omniscient plan, is to destroy nations that do not repent, but if they do repent my purpose is to not destroy them.

Now he has not changed. He is speaking with regard to changes in men. Changes in men produce certain things in their dealing with God. Look at it from the other side. Or at another moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant it. If it does evil in my sight by not obeying my voice then I will think better of the good with which I promised to bless it. Now it is evident then that God’s purposes are unchanging. His purposes are the same. But when man responds to them in one way, a certain thing takes place. When he responds to God in another way, a certain other thing takes place.

Now God has not changed. It is man who has changed. And I think the best illustration of this, of course, is the illustration of the thermometer. Now is a thermometer changeable or unchangeable? Well, I’ve never known a thermometer to be unchangeable in one sense. Now it changes all day long, and it changes every day, and it changes

every month. As a matter of fact, the mercury goes up and down, as you know, with the temperature. And so we could say it is changeable in that sense. It responds to the heat. But its changeability is according to an unchangeable law. So the thermometer is really not changeable. It is the term that is changeable. And the thermometer merely reflects that. It acts according to a certain law. So in the Bible when we read that God repents, we’re not to think of God as a changeable God. The changing is done by man. He is unchangeable in his purposed and his desires toward man. He is unchangeable in his determination. He curses evil he blessed that which is good. And if man changes then there will be change, but it is phenomenal. God does not change. He does not change in his inner man. He has expressed his purpose and it is a continual purpose.

Shedd, one of our theologians, has said if God had treated the Ninevites after their repentance as he had threatened to treat them before their repentance, this would have proved him to be mutable. It would have showed him at one time to be pleased with impenitence and another with penance, so if he had not changed he would be unchangeable rather than or changeable rather than unchangeable. So these texts which speak of God repenting then are texts in which the language of men is used. It is phenomenal language. It is anthropomorphic language. That is, it expresses the feelings of men as they look at the things that God does. So from the standpoint of men it may appear that God has changed his mind or that he was sorry. But he has not.

Now the third problem is the problem of immobility. If we think of a God that does not change, then we might err by thinking of a God who never did anything. And unfortunately philosophers have occasionally misunderstood the biblical teaching concerning the immutability of God and they have claimed that such teaching means that God does not do anything. He is always the same, consequently he cannot even act. But when we deny change to God, we do not deny to him action. As a matter of fact, he is pure action. There is change about him, constantly. There are changes that are produced by him often. But there is no change in him, no change in his essence, no change in his

being, no change in his purposes, no change in his plans, no change in his consciousness, no change in his location, he is unchangeable. But things are happening all around God all of the time.

Now let’s come to our application. Roman III. In our application of this doctrine we’re going to look at the application of it in admonition, in comfort, and in exhortation. One might say after hearing a discourse on unchangeability or immutability what use is God’s immutability to me? It’s all metaphysical speculation. Now that is not true. In the first place, the application of the immutability of God is of great significant to us, particularly in the realm of admonition. How foolish it is for a man to continue in sin against God if he is immutable. Job expresses it this way in chapter nine, verse 4. Who hath hardened himself against him and has prospered if God is immutable he is immutable in his sovereignty.

And if you are in the audience tonight and you have never believed in Jesus Christ as your Savior, the word of God states that you are under divine condemnation and that you shall suffer eternal wrath and the being who makes the statement is an immutable being. He never changes his mind. There is no hope whatsoever in the future that you shall escape the judgment that God has set forth in his word. And for us who are Christians, he is immutable in his displeasure over our sins. And when we are disobedient to God, his immutability applies to us. There is no way to escape it.

He will be just as angry against our sins tomorrow as he is today, and he will be just as angry against that secret sin that you committed five years ago today as he was then. His attitude does not change. It is as if you committed that sin just a moment ago with God. He is immutable. Time does not wipe out any memory of sin, nor does it wipe out any of the significances of personal sin. The only thing that does that is the forgiveness that comes from confession. And so his immutability has tremendous significance to me as a Christian in admonition.

Now we’re dealing with an infinite, eternal, unchangeable God. By the way, that is why eternal punishment is eternal, too. The idea of a person being guilty for ten days or guilty for five years is Hibernian, it’s not Christian. Now we say a man committed a felony. He is sentenced to ten years. But that is not true with God. You know we often say even among Christians, well time heals a lot of wounds. But time has no effect whatsoever on the guilt of sin before God. Because he is eternal, unchangeable and those sins are sins that are right before his eyes today. And that’s why eternal punishment is a necessity, because sin is eternally guilty for guilt bringing before God.

Now second, in comfort. Since he does not have the inconstancy of a camelion, I’m encouraged to pray for him. He’s not a kind of person who changes his opinion toward me. One day he does not feel good and the next day bad. He does not keep office hours, come from nine until two. But thereafter you’re not welcome. He does not change his moods. He’s not unhappy and then happy. He’s not depressed and then excited. But he is always the same and those expressions of his in the word of God are always applicable to me, no matter what time I may come. So since he is not like a chameleon, constantly changing his color, I can come to him and pray to him at any time.

Furthermore, since he is immutable his covenants that he has made with me are immutable covenants. For example, when the Bible speaks about the everlasting covenant and when the writer of the Hebrews asks that through that everlasting covenant God made perfect his work in me so that I do his will. Well that is going to be carried out because that covenant is an everlasting and immutable covenant. That covenant will come to pass. All of the promises that God makes to me will come to pass because he is immutable, he does not change his purposes. Let me read Hebrews chapter 6, verse 17. “In the same way, god desiring even more to shield to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of his purpose interposed with an oath.”

Now notice the expression the unchangeableness of his purpose, a reference to the Abrahamic covenant and the blessings of it. Unchangeable in his purpose, and so

therefore the promises he has made to me are promises that shall come to pass. So when I read in the Bible that I am going to be blessed through the everlasting covenant that was made in the blood of Jesus Christ on the cross at Calvary and since God has brought me to Jesus Christ I know I am going to experience all the blessing of that everlasting covenant, and furthermore God is not going to down through the centuries forget those promises to me. He is going to immutably make them real in my life.

Finally, in exhortation. Now if it is true that God is immutable, it is also true we know from other texts of scripture, that the creation is mutable. Now we know that the Bible states, for example, that the fashion of this world passes away. Paul in 1 Timothy chapter 6, verse 17 speaks about uncertain riches. So the fashion on the world is mutable, it is passing away. The riches that we so seek to acquire for ourselves, they are uncertain. They’re not immutable. He is immutable. And consequently in the light of that my affection is not to be set upon the immutable, passing world and the material possession that it provides. My affections are to be set upon him who is immutable, who is unchanging, who is always a source of blessing.

Furthermore, I think his providences that come to us, and often they involve tragedy, they teach us patience because if we realize that they come from a God who is immutable in his desire to bless us, then we can endure the things that come to us in patience. Because we have this loving, immutable, unchangeable God who has covented with the blood of Jesus Christ to fulfill his purpose to us and in us. And so the intervening tragedies, the intervening struggles, the intervening trials, well I look at them in an entirely new light in view of his immutability.

Well, to close and sum it up, then, the Bible says, “I, the Lord, do not change.” The Bible says God repents, but that is human language. Jonah learned that was human language. By the way, there was one thing I forgot to say. It occurred to me just a moment ago. In Jonah’s message, there was an indication of the fact that God in his purpose had allowed for a change in Nineveh, for remember the message that Jonah God

preached in Nineveh was this, Yet, forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed. Why did he say Yet, forty days? Well because there was a condition unexpressed. Why he could have just wiped out Nineveh immediately. But the forty days was forty days designed to give Nineveh a chance to repent. So his purposes are immutable. Man’s actions are changeable.

You know I’m glad that man is changeable and not immutable. Because if he were immutable, then those great promises in the Bible, he must be born again, would not really be applicable to him. And so man is mutable and changeable, and we can bless God for that, for the new birth may begin a new life for man, but he is immutable.

Next time, next Tuesday night, we will begin our study of the communicable attributes of God. Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to thee for the immutability of our great God. Our unchangeable, in Thine essence, in Thine attributes, purposes, plans. And we thank Thee that out of the immutability of our God there comes the great comfort of the unchangeability of the promises to us. Enable us, Lord to be grateful and thankful and may the sense of Thine immutability stir us to worship and praise in thanksgiving and service to the glory of Thy name. We ask through Jesus Christ, the immutable son. Amen.