



“College Life Class”

The Attributes of God: Immutability & Eternality

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God's Immutability

Definition of Immutability

God is unchangeable in His nature. Our trust is based on His immutability.

God's character does not change internally;

in relation to creation;

in relation to His people;

in relation to His promises ;

in love and mercy;

in justice;

in will and knowledge.



God's Immutability

Definition of Immutability (cont.)

Immutability, but not immobility. This does not mean that He is disinterested in the creatures He has created. He does not alter His own internal nature nor purpose. God initiates relationships with changing people. For there to be a real relationship, an unchangeable God must have changing relations, yet remain unchangeable in character and purpose.

The unchangeableness of God is central to the biblical view of who God is.

If God is not immutable, there can be little reason to trust that what He has revealed in His Word will occur. Nor can we know that He will be reliable in our times of difficulty.

Definition of Immutability (cont.)

God's immutable essence allows Scripture to make descriptive statements.

The most important is God's self-identification, "I am Who [or That] I am" (Ex. 3:14). This statement identifies God in terms of His immutable and eternal Being.

The LXX translates the statement in an absolute sense of Being (εγω ειμι 'ο ων), and this is the manner in which the NT refers to the Exodus passage in the words of Jesus in John 8:58, I AM (εγω ειμι).

The verbs in Ex. 3:14 connote continuing, unfinished action: 'I am being that I am being,' or 'I am the Is-ing One,' that is, 'the One Who Always Is.' Not conceptual being or being in the abstract, but active being, is the intent of this reply.

It is a reply that suggests that it is inappropriate to refer to God as 'was' or as 'will be,' for the reality of this active existence can be suggested only by the present: 'is' or 'is-ing,' 'Always Is,' or 'Am'.

(Word Biblical Commentary, Exodus, 3.14, John I. Durham)

Biblical bases for Immutability

“God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should change His mind” Numbers 23:19

“He who is the glory of Israel does not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind” 1 Samuel 15:29

“They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment... but You remain the same, and Your years will never end” Ps. 102:26-27; Heb. 1:10-12

“I the Lord do not change.” Mal. 3:6

“God did this so that, by two unchangeable things [God’s Word and God’s oath] in which it is impossible for God to lie...” Heb. 6:18

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” Heb. 13:8

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, Who does not change like shifting shadows.” James 1:17

The use of anthropomorphisms and figures of speech

The Bible often speaks of God in temporal terms and from a human point of view. God “foreknew” (Rom. 8:29), as though He is standing at one moment of time and looking forward to the future. An eternal God does not really *foreknow*; He simply knows in His eternal present.

Anthropomorphisms are no more to be taken literally than:

- God has “wings” (Ex. 19:4),
- “arms” (Num. 11:23),
- “eyes” (Heb. 4:13),
- God’s “repenting” or being “sorry” (Gen. 6:6)
- God’s “forgetting” (Isa. 43:25).

One would expect that a book written **by** humans and **for** humans would often speak to humans from a human perspective.

Objections to God's Immutability

Objection One: Based on God's alleged repentance

God “repented”, which involves a change of mind, therefore, God can change .

God “repented”: that He created human beings (Gen. 1:26)

that He made Saul king (1 Sam. 15:11)

about His promise to destroy Nineveh (Jonah 3:10)

Response: God's “repenting” is spoken anthropomorphically (in human terms). God *appears* to change, when humans actually do, just as the wind appears to change when we turn in the opposite direction.

God has unchanging anger at our sin and unchanging pleasure in our repentance. When we repent, we simply move from under one unchanging attribute of God to another.

When a person moves in relation to a pillar, the pillar does not move.

Objections to God's Immutability (cont.)

Objection Two: Based on prayer

If God cannot change, then why should we pray?

“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” James 5:16

Response:

God is omniscient and an all-knowing Being cannot change His mind. If He does, He is not really all-knowing. Therefore, God cannot change His mind in answer to prayer.

When we pray, God not only knew what we were going to pray, but He **ordained** our prayer as a means of accomplishing *His* purpose. Prayer is not a means by which we change God; it is a means by which God changes us.

Prayer is not a means of getting our will done in heaven, but a means of God getting His will done on earth.

Objections to God's Immutability (cont.)

Objection Three: An unchanging God is not personal

An unchanging God is both impersonal and unapproachable. Why approach someone whom you know in advance will not change His mind? Such a God is impersonal, since He cannot respond to our personal needs.

Response:

This objection wrongly assumes that God does not know about our needs and that He does not care about them even before we ask Him.

However, the Bible declares that God is all-knowing (Ps. 147:5) and all-caring (1 John 4:16; 1 Pet. 5:7); He even answers before we call on Him (Isa. 65:24). God is not reluctant to answer; rather, we are reluctant to ask. "You do not have, because you do not ask God" (James 4:2).

God is unchanging love (1 John 4: 16), and, as such, He is eminently approachable. We can have more confidence in a God who does not change than in one who does. (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 6:18-19)

Objections to God's Immutability (cont.)

Objection Four: Based on "Immutability" being rooted in Greek philosophy

Response:

1. There is a strong biblical basis for God's immutability. Early church Fathers offered biblical support and philosophical arguments. The NT alone was quoted by the Fathers in the first few centuries >36,000 times, including all verses except 11!
2. Genetic fallacy: Rejecting a view because of its source. It's not a matter of whether the reason is Greek, but whether it is correct.
3. Many things about classical Christian view of God that are contrary to Greek thought, including:
 - a. the concept of a Trinity as one essence and three Persons.
 - b. The Greeks never identified their God(s) with their ultimate metaphysical principle.
 - c. The ultimate in Plato's system was not God, but the Good.
 - d. Aristotle never considered his many unmoved movers to be the object of worship, but simply to be the explanation for movement in the universe.

The unique (but not Greek) contributions of Christian thinkers was to identify their ultimate metaphysical principle with the God they worshipped.

Objections to God's Immutability (cont.)

Objection Five: Based on God's alleged inability to know a changing world

If God is absolutely unchangeable, how can He know a changing world? His knowledge is unchanging. How can God have unchangeable knowledge of what is changing?

Response:

God knows everything in one eternal now, including the past, present, and future. God knows the future before it happens in time. God knows what we do, but not in the same way that we know it, i.e., in successive time frames. God knows the whole of time from eternity, but He knows what is before and what is after the temporal now of human history.

So, God knows the changing times, but He does not know them in a changing way. He has unchanging knowledge of the changing, and eternal knowledge of the temporal. Each being must know in accordance with its own being: Temporal beings know in a temporal way, and an immutable Being knows in an immutable way.

God's Eternality

Definition of God's Eternality

Classical theism affirms that God is above and beyond time. God has no past, present, or future; He simply has an enduring eternal present.

Eternality does not mean time without beginning and endless time. An infinite number of moments is impossible: If an infinite number of moments occurred before today, then today would never have come, since it is impossible to traverse an infinite number of moments (yet the time up to today has been traversed).

Eternality means non-temporality or timelessness.

“God's eternity may be defined as follows: God has no beginning, end, or succession at moments in His own Being, and He sees all time equally vividly, yet God sees events in time and acts in time.”

Systematic Theology, Wayne Grudem, 1994, p 168

Biblical bases for God's Eternality

- Genesis 1:1 “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”
 - Since time does not begin until the universe does, this places God beyond time.
- Hebrews 1:2 “in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son... through whom He made/framed the world/ages”
 - The word ‘ages’ (αιωνας) is not a reference to the material nature of the universe (κοσμος), but to its unfolding temporal periods.
- Exodus 3:14 “And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM” (LXX, “εγω ειμι 'ο Ων”); and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘ I AM ('ο Ων) has sent me to you.’ ”
 - As the self-existent One before anything else existed, God is prior to time (nontemporal).
- Psalm 90:2 “Before the mountains were born, or Thou didst give birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God.” (LXX, του αιωνος)

Objections to God's Eternality

Objection one: Based on the creation of a temporal world

The heart of the objections against God relating to time is that an unchangeable Being cannot relate to a changing world, because the temporal process involves a past, a present, and a future.

Response:

There was **no** time before God made the temporal world; time began with its creation.

Hebrews 1:2 “by whom also He made the worlds/ages” (εποίησεν τους αιωνας)

Prior to creation, the world had no relationship to God, since it did not exist. Prior to creation God was God, but not Creator. That is, at creation God gained a new **relationship**, but not any new **attributes**. He did not change in His **essence**, His external **activity**. There is no change in what God **is**, but in what He **has done**.

The error here is that this objection assumes that to act in time is to be temporal. It does not demonstrate that the actor is temporal; only that his acts are temporal. Classical theists do not deny that God's actions are temporal--they only insist that God's attributes are not temporal.

Objections to God's Eternality (cont.)

Objection Two: Based on the Incarnation

1. God became human in the incarnation of Christ.
2. Human beings are by nature temporal beings.
3. Therefore, God by nature became a temporal being in the incarnation.

Response to Objection Two:

This objection is based on an unorthodox assumption, namely, that the divine nature became human in the Incarnation. The Eternal did **not** become temporal, nor did the divine nature become human at the Incarnation any more than the human nature became divine.

(Monophysite heresy- confusing the two natures of Christ-Council of Chalcedon A.D. 454)

Rather, the divine **Person** (*Word*; John 1:1,14) became human. He assumed a human nature in addition to His divine nature (Phil. 2:5-11). It does not say that God became flesh. It is as impossible for God to become man as it is for an infinite to become a finite or an uncreated to become created. As Athanasius (c. 293-373) would say, the Incarnation was not the subtraction of deity, but the addition of humanity. God the Son did not change His divine nature; rather, He added a distinct human nature to it.

Objections to God's Eternality (cont.)

Response to Objection Two:

Phil. 2:5-11

⁵Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

⁶who, although He existed [ὑπαρχων] in the form of God [μορφη θεου], did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,

> existed [ὑπαρχων] = continuous action verb. He never stopped existing in the form of God.

> form of God [μορφη θεου] = 'form' has to do with the essential nature of...

⁷but emptied [εκενωσεν] Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant [μορφη δουλου], and being made in the likeness of men [ομοιωματι ανθρωπων].

> emptied [εκενωσεν] NASB: 'laid aside His privileges'; 2 Cor. 8:9

⁸And being found in appearance as a man [σχηματι ανθρωποσ], He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.