

The Doctrines of Grace

Doctrine 1-The Absolute Sovereignty of God

Part A/Lesson Four

Part A- The Character and Nature Of God- continued

God is Immutable

Numbers 23:19

God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?

Malachi 3:6

For I am the LORD , I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

Psalms 89:31

My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.

James 1:17

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

The word, "Immutable," comes from the Latin word, *immutabilis*, which means: *not mutable* [changing]. So to say that God is Immutable is to say that God does not change- that He is the very same today as He has always been and will always be. We already have studied that God does not learn anything (Omniscience) and because that is true- God is Immutable- in that God does not grow in His Wisdom; He does not evolve into being better; and He does not improve- because He is already Perfect.

God *cannot* diminish deteriorate, or regress in any way. All that God is right now- He has always been and always will be. And because all of this is true- a very important Attribute about God is realized:

The one true living God of the Bible *never* changes His Mind

God never overrules one Divine Decree with another one. He does not make a Promise and then change His Vow. God does not set about to do something and as He sees that His effort has failed then change course to try something else. God does not make a determination to Judge and then not fulfill that Judgment, and He does not set upon someone to save them and then back off.

The Immutability of God is one of His most important Character traits because it guarantees that God and His Word will be the same- yesterday, today, and forever- and that makes God to be the only Being in the entire Universe worthy and deserving of absolute Trust.

For example- early on- as God was first revealing Himself to Man- in **Exodus 3:14**- God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush and revealed Himself to Moses by describing Himself as:

... I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.

That Attribute of God comes from the Hebrew verb, *hayah* (**hy`h***), which means: *to be* or *to exist*. This word not only points to God's eternal Nature and Self-Existence- but also to His Immutability in that the one true living God of the Bible not only *always is*- but is *always the same*.

Another example of Immutability is in the inspired and infallible way in which Moses referred to God in **Deuteronomy 32:4** when he said:

He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.

To those living at that time- nothing was more secure and unchanging and permanent than a rock. And it is even more comforting to us to know that even this description of God's "unchangeableness" is not adequate because when all the rocks of this earth are turned to dust- God will remain.

Another important aspect of God's Immutability is that even as God never changes- God's Word always reflects God Himself and therefore that which God has spoken remains True and Steadfast and Immutable.

Numbers 23:19

God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?

Psalms 33:11

The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.

Mark 13:31

Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.

1Samuel 15:29

And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent (regret ESV/change his mind NASB): for he is not a man, that he should repent (regret ESV/change his mind NASB).

1Samuel 15:29 declares that God's Immutability extends even to His Own Counsel and Will. Since God is absolutely Perfect in Knowledge, Wisdom, and

Omniscience- He does not err in what He decrees and He does not alter His Plan due to unforeseen circumstances.¹

God is Effectual

2Chronicles 25:16

And it came to pass, as he talked with him, that the king said unto him, Art thou made of the king's counsel? forbear; why shouldest thou be smitten? Then the prophet forbare, and said, I know that God hath determined to destroy thee, because thou hast done this, and hast not hearkened unto my counsel.

Job 14:1-5

1 Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.

2 He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.

3 And dost thou open thine eyes upon such an one, and bringest me into judgment with thee?

4 Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one.

5 Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass;

Isaiah 14:24-27

24 The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass and as I have purposed, so shall it stand:

25 That I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains tread him under foot: then shall his yoke depart from off them, and his burden depart from off their shoulders.

26 This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth: and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations.

27 For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?

¹ On a surface and shallow rendering- it *appears* that **1Samuel 15:29** is in contradiction to **Genesis 6:6, Exodus 32:9-14, Jonah 3:10**, and even **1Samuel 15:11**- which *seem* to suggest that God *does* change His Mind based upon unforeseen circumstances or the willful disobedience of people. So are we to conclude then that the Scriptures are not infallible and contradict one another? God forbid. Actually the answer to this *apparent* contradiction (paradox) is not as complicated as it might seem. Quoting from Paul Washer: "The Scriptures clearly and repeatedly teach that God's Perfections, Purposes, and Promises are always the same. But this does not mean that His Relationship and Disposition toward His 'always changing Creation' cannot vary. **Genesis 6:6** simply refers to God's Holy Response to Man's sin and His Determination to blot out Man from the face of the earth (verse7). The same is true about **1Samuel 15:11, 26**. In **Exodus 32:9-14**- God "changed His Mind" only to the extent that He graciously answered Moses' prayer (a prayer that God Sovereignly placed within Moses' heart to pray in the first place). In **Jonah 3:4-10**- God simply relented from destroying Nineveh when Nineveh relented from its sin as He does to all who genuinely repent". We must understand that these passages were given to us by God- not to confuse the issue of Immutability- but to simply discuss yet another Character Trait of God in that while God is absolute Immutable- He is not *Immobile*. God *never* changes but the one true living God of the Bible is not static, apathetic, or uninvolved with His Creation. God is *always* the same- but His Relationship and Dealings with patently mutable Man *will* vary according to how they respond to Him (**Jeremiah 18:7-10; Ezekiel 18:21-24**). This is not a contradiction to God's Immutability but rather proof of it. God will respond to Man in varying and different ways – but *always* consistent with His unchanging Character and Nature.

Isaiah 46:9-11

9 Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me,

10 Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:

11 Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it.

Daniel 11:36

And the king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the indignation be accomplished: for that that is determined shall be done.

Luke 22:22

And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!

The Acts 4:24-31

24 And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is:

25 Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?

26 The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.

27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,

28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

29 And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word,

30 By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.

31 And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God

The Acts 17:24-26

24 God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;

25 Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

26 And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;

Ephesians 1:3-12

- 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:**
- 4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:**
- 5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,**
- 6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.**
- 7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;**
- 8 Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;**
- 9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:**
- 10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:**
- 11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:**
- 12 That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.**

A very popular teaching in the modern Church is that God *wants* to do certain things in the earth- but He *can't*, or He is severely *limited* in doing them because God will never "violate the free will of Man". Thus many times, what God *wanted* to do or what God *wanted* done is left undone. Nowhere is that false teaching more prevalent than in Salvation. But we must know that this concept of God (as popular as it may be) is **not** found anywhere in Scripture, and in fact, this concept is in **direct contradiction** to what the Bible *does* teach about God's Effectualness.

When we refer to God as being Effectual, we are saying that God actually does what He has determined before to do. So, therefore- God doesn't simply *try* to do something; God doesn't *want* certain things to occur and then *hopes* that they will happen- no, God's Effectualness says that God *always* gets what God wants.

Without Being Effectual- God Cannot Be Sovereign

To teach that the God of the Bible is Sovereign, and then turn around and teach that God is not Effectual, and His Ways and Will and Plan can be thwarted or defeated by Man or satan is a very confusing and convoluted theology and is inconsistent on a basic level. But if God is *anything*- He is consistent. Sovereignty therefore *necessarily* includes Effectualness because without God being Effectual- without God actually *achieving* whatever He has purposed to do- Sovereignty is denied on a fundamental level.

The reason that we have trouble with the concept of God being Effectual is because we do not see that all that happens in the earth is "good" or "holy" or "right"

from our human perspective. We look at "evil", "injustice", "pain", "war", "disease", "sin", and "sorrow" and we conclude that since God is Good- God could not possibly be Effectual because God would never "want" or "desire" those evil things to be- so we manufacture a theology (that the Bible does not teach) to try to "rescue" our Good God from the apparent contradiction of our own reality. And as noble as that effort may be- the one true living God of the Bible doesn't need to be rescued at all.

Effectualness teaches that God *does* indeed Sovereignly *allow* certain things that we would call, "evil" to exist and even flourish on the earth (although this Doctrine is very careful to reinforce the Biblical Truth that God is not the *Author* of *moral* evil). God allows certain things to be- but only because by *allowing* these "bad" things- a *greater* Good is brought forth- even though we may never see or even understand that greater Good while we are here on earth.

Romans 8:28

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

Now we know fundamentally that "**all things**" on this sin cursed earth are not "**good**". Some things are evil and terrible. But, this verse does not teach that "**all things**" are "**good**"- but that God Sovereignly and Effectually "**works**" "**all things**" "**together**" (with all the other things that God Sovereignly and Effectually brings into our lives) for the (ultimate and eternal) "**good**" of "**them**" (not all) who are "**the called according to his (God's) purpose**" (the elect)- the *only ones* who have been gifted and graced with love for God.

But, if God is not Effectual in His Sovereignty- then the above verse could not possibly be true- "some things" would never work out at all and "most things" would certainly not work out to the ultimate "**good**" of the called ones. Only by God being in total and complete Command of "**all things**" all the time can He "**work**" "**all things**"- both the wonderful and the wicked "**together**" for the greater "**Good**" of the Glory of God and the ultimate fulfillment of our own joy.

So, as disturbing as Effectualness working through Sovereignty may be to us on certain levels- a much *greater* disturbance would exist if God were *not* Sovereign or Effectual at all. Because without God being Effectual- things and events and circumstances (including our trials) are all random with no Divine Purpose or meaning at all and with no Righteous Conclusion in mind and Man is then left with having to "make things happen" *himself*- based upon his *own* frail power and limited wisdom.

How comforting it is to know that even when things look terrible to us- that God is in complete charge, and whatever God has *determined* before to do- that is exactly what will happen! And by knowing this to be true- we are then able to join with the Apostle Paul and say:

Romans 4:16-21

16 Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of

Abraham; who is the father of us all,

17 (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.

18 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations; according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.

19 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb:

20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

God is Self Existent

Psalms 90:2

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.

John 1:1-5

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2 The same was in the beginning with God.

3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

The Acts 17:22-31

22 Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.

23 For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

24 God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;

25 Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

26 And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;

27 That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:

28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

29 Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.

30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:

31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

Colossians 1:15-20

15 Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:

16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:

17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

19 For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell;

20 And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.

The Revelation 1:8

I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

When the Bible declares that God is the Creator of the Universe- this title indicates that God Himself is *not* created. There is a crucial distinction between the Creator and that which is created. The Creation bears the stamp of the Creator and witnesses to His Glory. But the Creation is never to be worshipped- it is not Supreme.

It is impossible for something to create itself. The concept of self- creation is a contradiction in terms- it is an absurd statement. Nothing can be self- created. Even God cannot create Himself. In order for God to create Himself- God would have to exist prior to creating Himself- and even God can't do that.

It is true that every effect must have cause. But God is not an effect- God has no beginning and therefore no antecedent cause. God is eternal- He always was and always will be. He has within Himself, the power of being. God requires no assistance or cooperation from any outside source to continue to exist. This is what is meant by the concept of God's Self- Existence.

God- like us- cannot be Self- *created*. But God- *unlike* us- can be and is Self *Existent*. This is one of the main differences between the Creator and all of Creation. This is what makes God to be the Supreme Being and the Source of all other beings.

The concept of Self-Existence violates no law of reason, logic, or science. It is a rationally valid notion. Self- creation, on the other hand, *does* violate the basic laws of reason, logic, and science- the law of non-contradiction. Self- *existence* is rational- self *creation* is irrational.

The notion of something being self- existent is not only rationally *possible*- it is rationally *necessary*. Reason demands that if anything is- then something must have, within itself, the power of being. Otherwise there would be nothing. Unless something existed in itself- nothing could possibly exist at all. Perhaps the oldest and deepest question of all is:

Why is there *something* rather than *nothing*?

A necessary answer to at least part of that question of why things exist is because God exists. God exists in Himself *eternally*. He is the Source and Fountainhead of all being. He alone has, within Himself, the power of being. Paul declares our dependence upon the power of God's Being for our *own* existence, when he said in **The Acts 17:28a**:

For in him we live, and move, and have our being;...

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.

Recap- Lesson 3

1. Why would Immutability be one of the most important Character traits that God has? _____

2. Explain how God's Own Personal Immutability is attached to the Scripture's Immutability _____

3. Reconcile the *apparent* contradiction between **1Samuel 15:29** and **1Samuel 15:11&26** _____

4. If God forgives people when they repent doesn't that mean that God changes in His Disposition as circumstances change? _____

5. What does it mean to say that God is Effectual? _____

6. How does this Biblical Truth conflict with what you have been taught about God? _____

7. Is it possible for God to be Sovereign and *not* be Effectual? _____

8. What is one possible reason why people developed a theology that does not allow for God to be Effectual? _____

9. Explain **Romans 8:28** with God's Effectualness in mind _____

10. Explain **Romans 8:28** with God *not* being Effectual _____

11. Complete this sentence, "without God being effectual- things and events and circumstances (including our trials) are all _____

12. In what way is God's Effectualness comforting to believers? _____

13. In what way might God's Effectualness be frightening to the lost? _____

14. If God is Creator- does that mean that God Himself was created? _____

15. Why or why not? _____

16. What is one of the oldest questions of Mankind? _____

17. How does that question attach to the Divine Purpose of God? _____
