

Dartmouth

Bible Notes



Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Who is God/Who God Is Lesson 8

Scripture: Malachi 3:6; 1st Samuel 15:29

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The Reformation and the Unchanging God

Malachi 3:1-12 (ESV) “I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the Lord Almighty. But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years. “So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me,” says the Lord Almighty. I, the Lord, do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,” says the Lord Almighty. “But you ask, ‘How are we to return?’ “Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. “But you ask, ‘How are we robbing you?’ “In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe,” says the Lord Almighty. “Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,” says the Lord Almighty.

Introduction I wrote this on Friday in my *Friday Fish N Chips* e-mail...

It is true. The Reformation isn’t about racial reconciliation or liberation from oppression of one race from another’s abuses and exploitations. It isn’t about gay people. It isn’t about tax reform. It isn’t about equalization of pay and opportunity between the genders. It isn’t about cops beating up people and then the cops getting shot and getting killed by the people. It isn’t about taking a knee as a millionaire to boycott the American national anthem (there was no America when the Reformation occurred); it isn’t about drug addiction, fat cat big pharma, Islamic terrorism (except for the spread of the Ottoman Empire—Luther did speak to this); and so many other inflamed issues today. The Reformation was about the Church’s intolerance of any dissent, even among her own scholars. It was about an infant northern European nationalism that was fertilized by Rome’s corruption and attempted dominance. It was about returning the Scripture to the place of the primary (even sole) *regula fidei* (rule of faith). It was about a handful of powerful personalities—showing up on the European scene almost

simultaneously, who had good minds and relentless spirits (Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Melancthon, Bucer, Knox and a little later Owen, Flavel, Manton and the great Puritans etc. and a few courageous women too: de Navarre, von Grumbach, Morata, d'Albret, Dentière, von Bora), weaving their energies with the leading of the Lord and synched with the hunger of the people--achieving a clear focus on returning to the basics of the Christian faith, even though they, among themselves, rarely could achieve agreement. It was about the Gospel. It was about sola Scriptura. It was about being pushed back against relentlessly and viciously by the powerful, and the powerful's refusal to open Bibles to discuss the issues there. It was about empowerment, and a corporate refusal to give some to the people. We admit that later in their lives Luther embarrassed us by succumbing to an inexcusable anti-Semitism, Calvin consolidated political power, King Henry revealed his simple narcissism, a combative Zwingli dies on a battlefield and many other shortcomings and mistakes can be cited. But together, they witnessed and brokered a great revival. It took. It took root. It spread and it captured hearts and gave definition to new movements back to the Bible and indeed franchised the very DESIRE to return to Scripture, mine the depths of free grace and justification by faith alone. It accompanied the Dutch and English and Scotch colonists to North America and tempered a new era of compassionate missions (contra Cortez etc.) The Reformation was about deep hope—the kind of hope people desperately still need today. We continue to benefit in countless ways from the happening of the Reformation. I am thankful for a sovereign God—THE sovereign God, who gives these seasons of “return” sometimes.

It is not very often that we celebrate a 500th anniversary of *anything*¹ and it is this month (in two days in fact), that five centuries ago in southern Germany that a Roman Catholic Augustinian monk posted 95 statements on the church door in his town. As world-shaking anniversaries go, this one is probably the most important on in our lifetimes! This monk was not attempting to destroy the church or even shake it up—he wanted answers for why the Church was abusing money issues, specifically the sale of indulgences. He was 33. He was a restless man and struggled to find peace with God despite his utter devotion to the church. And the pope had dispatched an emissary named John Tetzel to move through Germany and raise money for the construction of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome by selling “indulgences” to people for loved ones supposedly in purgatory. The Bible says nothing about any place called “purgatory” but the Church had taught for a long time at that point that there IS such a place and that Christians will go there to “purge” remaining sin from their record. Strictly speaking Martin Luther didn't really have a problem with that, but he did NOT like Rome exploiting his Saxon neighbors and his flock for their own purposes. And the more he had begun to really study the Bible the less he found IN the Bible about such topics as purgatory. Thus, his “95 Theses” were point-by-point statements such as (the first six):

¹ In fact, I think this is my first!

1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent" (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.
2. This word cannot be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance, that is, confession and satisfaction, as administered by the clergy.
3. Yet it does not mean solely inner repentance; such inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward mortification of the flesh.
4. The penalty of sin remains as long as the hatred of self (that is, true inner repentance), namely till our entrance into the kingdom of heaven.
5. The pope neither desires nor is able to remit any penalties except those imposed by his own authority or that of the canons.
6. The pope cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring and showing that it has been remitted by God; or, to be sure, by remitting guilt in cases reserved to his judgment. If his right to grant remission in these cases were disregarded, the guilt would certainly remain unforgiven.

You can pick up a copy of the whole 95 in the foyer today if you like...

But since the printing press had just been invented (c. 1450) and these 95 Theses were quickly copied then printed and distributed, it lit off the beginning of what would quickly spread to Switzerland, France, Holland, England, Scotland, Norway and on and on. Martin Luther who at the time was just 32, would be joined by other German, Dutch, Swiss, French, English and Scottish theologians, pastors, politicians and even kings—although Henry VIII didn't much like Luther in starting a complete break-off from the Roman Church, which had itself broken from the Eastern church 463 years earlier.

Luther was quickly condemned and then excommunicated—which meant his salvation was taken from him in the eyes of the church. But he had friends, some of them political leaders who shielded him from arrest and execution. He is hidden for a year in a castle and there he spends his time translating the New Testament into German, for the people. When he comes out of hiding, he finds the movement has spread. Luther had been a monk and a priest. But in April 1523 he marries an escaped nun—Katharina von Bora (he is 41 and she is 26) and they end up having six children. Luther died in 1546 at 62 years old.

CHANGE WAS COMING through many others too: John Calvin, Huldrych Zwingli, Philip Melanchthon, Martin Bucer, John Knox and a number of important women contributed too: Marguerite de Navarre (1492-1549) known as "the diplomat"; Argula von Grumbach (1492-c.1554) known as the Debater; Olympia Morata (1526-1555) known as the Scholar; Jeanne d'Albret (1528-1572) known as the Politician; and Marie Dentière (c. 1495-1561) known as the Lightning Rod. The Reformation opened up a whole new alternative, a completely changed way of relating to God—cleaner, more biblical, more joyful. Theology changed and endless Protestant denominations formed and grew. Others died off.

Nations and powers change. Customs among people change. Priorities among and between peoples change. Technologies obviously change. Morals and ethics change and therefore, laws change frequently. Within Christianity denominations change. The heroes that Christians admire and want to emulate change. Priorities and technologies change as also do (with regret we have to admit) morals and ethics. And laws within churches change.

But amidst all this change, what of God? Does He change? Does He grow, alter His attitude, deepen in understanding? Is the God of the Old Testament different from the God of the New Testament? Will the God who comes again be different still from the Jesus who ascended from the Mount of Olives? Immutability is defined by Tim Challies: GOD CANNOT CHANGE IN HIS BEING, PERFECTION, PURPOSES AND PROMISES.²

We read in Malachi that God said, through that Hebrew prophet ***For I the Lord do not change*** (3:6a).

We read in 1st Samuel 15:29 ***And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret.***

The psalmist wrote in Psalms 102:25-27 ***Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end.***

In the New Testament we read in Hebrews 13:7,8 ***Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.***

James wrote (1:17) ***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.***

So we see that God does not change. And as such, we can believe with confidence that a few other things do not change—

- The Word of God – what God has spoken, remains.
- The Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ – the jewel of the immutability of God, whether He was committing to the people of Israel in Malachi's day: ***So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.*** (3:6b)

² Tim Challies, *The Attributes of God*, 2017 *Visual Theology* chart.

or in Paul's and John's day or in Martin Luther and John Calvin's day, the commitment of God to rescue His people does not disappear.

- The PROMISES AND COVENANTS of God – because God does not change, whatever He has promised will not fail.
- The HOPE that lies deep within the spirit and heart of the true believer is secure. Frankly, I resent the shallow thinking of some Bible students who think we, ourselves, are so powerful that we can disable the immutable grace of God and *fryolate* our own hope. When God gives us grace, the hope that comes with it does not change.
- The future time-line – the unchanging God is not altered by the time line. He is the Master and Commander of the time-line.
- The coming King! – When Jesus comes again we will see that His right to BE King has been there all along. It has always been and is now an immutable title.

And since God Himself does not change, I would like to suggest to you that

- You can depend on Him. Here is the joy of serving and unchanging God. We change all the time. Even the people that you trust the most may change. But God does not waver in His dependability. You can count on Him when you're young, when you're middle-aged and when you're old.
- You can wait on Him – in fact you're probably going to have to wait on Him and doing so, deepens your faith. But know that you CAN wait on Him if you are trusting Him for the big promises. He will show up.
- You can proclaim Him with certainty – if you are around people who doubt Him, you can confidently proclaim what He has said is true.
- You can expect the blessed hope to happen and be yours in all its realities some day in the future, maybe soon!
- You can receive and absorb whatever comes – here is the strength of believing in an unchanging, an immutable God. Since your faith will not be disappointed, you can take whatever comes your way. I don't mean to be glib or cocky about this because sometimes the trials we must endure are hard. Luther and Calvin were both men who labored under many depressions. But they each died fully confident that the Lord Jesus Christ would be their full inheritance. They did not doubt it.
- You can die with confidence. When believers die, yes, we miss them. We may be sad in our own last month or week of life. That's OK. Death is not the end of us. When I die I will move on to His presence. I will be ***absent from the body and present with the Lord.*** (2nd Cor. 5:8).

Let's close with a little tune:

When He rolls up His sleeves
He ain't just puttin' on the Ritz
(our God is an Awesome God)
There is thunder in His footsteps
And lightning in His fists
(our God is an Awesome God)
Well the Lord He wasn't jokin'
when He kicked 'em out of Eden
It wasn't for no reason that He shed His blood
His return is very close and so you better be believin'
That our God is an Awesome God

Our God (our god) is an Awesome God
He Reigns (he reigns) from heaven above
With Wisdom (with wisdom) pow'r and love
Our God is an Awesome God

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

COMMUNICABLE

- BEING
- PURPOSE
- MENTAL
- MORAL
- SUMMARY

INCOMMUNICABLE

To study God's attributes is to study His character, to answer questions like, Who is God? and What is God like? A typical classification of God's attributes divides them into those that are incommunicable (those that He does not share or "communicate" to anyone or anything else) and communicable (those that He shares with other beings). Like most theological classifications, this one is imperfect but still helpful as we seek to understand what is so far beyond ourselves.

God's communicable attributes can be further categorized into: attributes of God's being, mental attributes, moral attributes, attributes of purpose and "summary" attributes, attributes that, in a more particular way, modify each of the others.

It is important to consider that God is not simply the sum of His attributes. His attributes are not separate from one another, but each one modifies or qualifies each of the others.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES:
 Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem
 The Attributes of God by A.W. Pink

- TRANSCENDENCE** → GOD TRANSCENDS ALL CREATION AND IS UNKNOWABLY APART FROM OUR SELF-INITIATED REVELATION.
- IMMANENCE** → GOD IS ACTIVE IN THE WORLD AND IN OUR DAILY LIVES. GOD CARES ABOUT EVERY ASPECT OF OUR EXISTENCE AND WANTS US TO WELCOME HIS GUIDANCE, GRACE, AND LOVE.
- ASEITY** → GOD IS SELF-SUFFICIENT AND DOES NOT REQUIRE OR NEED OF HUMAN BEINGS OR THE REST OF CREATION.
- OMNIPRESENCE** → GOD HAS NO GOD OR SHAPE AND IS PRESENT IN ALL PLACES WITH HIS ENTIRE BEING.
- UNITY** → GOD'S WHOLE BEING INCLUDES ALL OF HIS ATTRIBUTES AT ALL TIMES. THESE ATTRIBUTES ARE NEVER IN CONFLICT.
- ETERNALITY** → GOD HAS ALWAYS EXISTED, NEVER HAD BEGINNING AND NO END, AND EXPERIENCES NO SUCCESSION OF MOMENTS.
- IMMUTABILITY** → GOD CANNOT CHANGE IN REGARD TO HIS CHARACTER, PURPOSES, AND PROMISES.
- GLORY** → THE GREAT BRIGHTNESS THAT SURROUNDING GOD'S REVELATION OF HIMSELF.
- BEAUTY** → GOD IS THE POSSESSOR AND THE SOURCE OF ALL DESIRABLE QUALITIES.
- BLESSEDNESS** → GOD ENJOYS FULLY HIMSELF AND IN ALL THAT REFLECTS HIS CHARACTER.
- PERFECTION** → GOD FULLY POSSESSES ALL EXCELLENT QUALITIES AND LACKS NO QUALITIES THAT WOULD BE DESIRABLE FOR HIM.
- JEALOUSY** → GOD ALWAYS SEEMS TO PROTECT HIS OWN HONOR.
- GOODNESS** → GOD IS THE FINAL STANDARD OF ALL GOODS, AND ALL HE IS AND DOES IS WORTHY OF APPRAISAL.
- PEACE** → GOD, IN HIS BEING AND ACTIONS, IS SEPARATE FROM ALL CONFLICT AND DISORDER.
- HOLINESS** → GOD IS SEPARATED FROM SIN AND HE IS COMMITTED TO SEEKING HIS OWN HONOR.
- LOVE** → GOD ETERNALLY SEES OF HIMSELF TO OTHERS.
- MERCY** → GOD IS GOOD TO THOSE IN TRIBULATION AND DISTRESS AND HE IS GOOD TO THOSE WHO DESERVE PUNISHMENT.
- RIGHTEOUSNESS** → GOD IS THE FINAL STANDARD OF WHAT IS RIGHT AND HE ALWAYS ACTS IN ACCORDANCE WITH WHAT IS RIGHT. (THIS IS ALSO KNOWN AS GOD'S JUSTICE)
- WRATH** → GOD ETERNALLY HATES ALL SIN.
- TRUTHFULNESS** → GOD IS THE TRUE GOD WHOSE WORDS AND WORKS ARE BOTH TRUE AND THE FINAL STANDARD OF TRUTH.
- KNOWLEDGE** → GOD FULLY KNOWS HIMSELF AND ALL ACTUAL AND POSSIBLE THINGS (THIS IS ALSO KNOWN AS GOD'S OMNISCIENCE).
- WISDOM** → GOD ALWAYS CHOOSES THE BEST IDEAS AND THE BEST MEANS TO THOSE GOALS.
- WILL** → GOD APPROVES AND DETERMINES TO BRING ABOUT EVERY ACTION NECESSARY FOR THE EXISTENCE AND ACTIVITY OF ALL THAT EXISTS.
- FREEDOM** → GOD DOES WHATEVER HE PLEASES.
- OMNIPOTENCE** → GOD IS ABLE TO DO ALL THINGS AS HE WILLS. GOD EXERCISES COMPLETE POWER OVER HIS CREATION AND RULES AS SOVEREIGN.
- INVISIBILITY** → GOD'S TOTAL BEING, ALL OF HIS BEING, WILL NEVER BE VISIBLE TO US.
- SPIRITUALITY** → GOD IS A BEING WHO'S NOT MADE UP OF MATTER AND WHO CANNOT BE PERCEIVED BY OUR SENSORY SENSES.