

The Immutability of God --- Romans 11:28-32

February 23, 2020

From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; 29for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, 31so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. 32For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.

Introduction

Our text this morning points to a vital attribute of God; namely, God is unchanging. Your life and my life are in constant flux. We experience change in multiple areas of life at different times. If you are young, you are growing up to become an adult, and there are accompanying changes in personality, maturity, and physique as you grow.

If you are newly married, you are transitioning into a whole different way of living. Or maybe you are a young family with a newborn or young children; you will be experiencing all kinds of changes over the next few decades. Maybe you are middle-aged and you are going through the transition of becoming an empty nester. You have lived the majority of your married life with kids in your home, but now they are all gone. These are changes in life.

Then there are the winter months of life. You are growing old. You can feel it in your body and your bones. One preacher compared life to a football game, and those last years are like the fourth quarter. He then said, "But some of you have gone into overtime." We who have grown old have known change our entire lives.

Then there are the other changes in life: changes in employment, changes in where you live, changes in health, changes in friends. There are political changes, cultural changes, technological changes. There are changes that war brings to a nation and, therefore, to daily life. Today we have so-called climate change. I am not against climate change. Last year we had a

polar vortex temperature of minus 30. This year, we are in the 20s and 30s mostly. I am OK with climate change if it results in global warming.

But in the midst of all this change which we cannot control, there is God Who does not change. That is a mind-boggling thought. I want to direct your attention for a moment to a man who matured in his walk with God in such a way that he learned how God does not change, how God is faithful. When he was confronted with the greatest trial of his life, he understood that God is immutable, changeless; and he was able to trust Him through his trial. I am referring to Abraham.

Genesis 21:33; 22:1-2 Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God 1Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 2He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you."

It is noteworthy that after many years of walking with God, Abraham came to know Him as the Everlasting God. The name of God, the Everlasting God, reveals that God is eternal. "Olam" is the Hebrew word that came to mean "everlasting" which is how it is generally translated in our Bibles. Where the word is used of God, it usually includes His immutability, or that God is unchanging. Time changes, people change, situations change, but El Olam, the Everlasting God, never changes. He is eternally the same. His lovingkindness and faithfulness never change.

Psalm 100:5 For the LORD is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting and His faithfulness to all generations.

Isaiah 40:28 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable.

God has no beginning and no end. He has no succession of moments in His own being. He sees all time equally. At the same time, He acts in time.

Psalm 90:2 Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.

Revelation 1:8 *"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."*

God is eternal. He had no beginning and He will have no end. He is above time and sees all things equally. He is everlasting. Closely related to God's eternality is the fact that He does not change.

That God never changes means He will keep His promises. Once He has promised something, He will be faithful to that promise. I have told you before that I like the old, dead theologians. Their writings and thoughts many times seem to be more succinct and poignant than much of what I read from modern authors.

Herman Bavinck was a Dutch theologian born in the mid-nineteenth century. Concerning God's immutability, he wrote, "The doctrine of God's immutability, that He is unchanging, is of the highest significance. The contrast between being and becoming marks the difference between the Creator and the creature. Every creature is continually becoming. It is changeable and constantly striving. But we find rest in God, in Him alone, for only He is pure being and no becoming. Hence, in Scripture, God is often called the Rock."

Psalm 102:25-27 *Of old You founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. 26Even they will perish, but You endure; and all of them will wear out like a garment; like clothing You will change them and they will be changed. 27But You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end.*

Abraham did not know that, although he was over 100 years of age, the greatest trial of his life was coming soon. He may have thought that the rest of his life was going to be easy. He had endured many tests of faith up to that point in preparation for what was to come. He was confident that God rules the future as He has the past, and His character does not change from what He has been in the past. Abraham had walked with God and found that He is trustworthy.

Do you recall what Hebrews 11:17-19 says about Abraham's test? *"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; 18it was he to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED." 19He*

considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead.” Abraham understood that God is unchanging. If Abraham sacrificed Isaac, then God would raise him from the dead because He had made promises.

What a different perspective God's immutability gives us about the trials and difficulties of our lives. Abraham, like Job, knew God in greater depth only after suffering tremendous hardship. I do not believe that either of these men would have chosen the trials that they underwent. But having endured them, neither Abraham nor Job would have wanted to miss the lessons that they learned through their trials.

So Abraham learned in his lifetime that God is trustworthy, He is faithful, He is immutable, He does not change. Here we are 4,000 years from the time of Abraham, and we are seeing before our very eyes that this God still has not changed. God made promises to Abraham that He is still fulfilling.

Paul wrote 2,000 years ago in this morning's text in Romans 11:28-29, *“From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; ²⁹for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”* God's choice of Abraham and the covenant that He made with him are unchanging.

My Christian brother and sister, the fact that God is immutable has tremendous impact on your daily life. As we will see as we finish this chapter, all of God's attributes are unchanging. His calling of you to be reconciled to Him and to be in His family, in His kingdom, can never be changed. His effective calling of you is irrevocable. He is trustworthy to cause all things to work together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

Review

Over the last few weeks, we have examined Old Testament prophecies referring to God's promise to bring the Jews back into their land. We see today that God has in fact brought the nation of Israel back into their land, a miracle greater than any so-called miracle claimed today. Last week, we considered Paul's prophetic declaration of Israel's spiritual resurrection and national salvation. We began to study two points as we finish this chapter: 1) The Mystery of Future Jewish Salvation; and 2) The Reason for Future Jewish Salvation.

Under the Mystery of Future Jewish Salvation, we also considered last week verses 25 and 26a of Romans 11: *“For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; 26and so all Israel will be saved.”*

Paul was given a word of prophecy concerning the future of Israel. He refers to this prophecy as a “mystery.” We have seen before that Paul used the word “mystery” for something that, at one time, was not known and could not be reasoned out by any amount of human intelligence. But then the mystery was revealed to us by God through prophets and apostles.

We saw that future national Jewish salvation was a mystery because national salvation for Israel was not something that anyone would have figured out during Paul's time. Not even today could anyone have foreseen it. At the time Paul was writing his epistle to the Romans, Israel had just rejected her Messiah. The Jewish leaders were persecuting the Church. In every synagogue where Paul went throughout the Roman Empire, The Jews were rejecting Christ—the Messiah. So to turn around and say that all of Israel would receive Jesus as their Messiah and be saved seemed to be a massive stretch.

When you add to the equation the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, plus the overthrow of the nation of Israel in AD 70, followed by the scattering of the nation, it appeared that the Jews had been permanently rejected. There was not even a glimmer of hope for national restoration. But what was not clear during Paul's time (nor even up to ours) is what Paul declared by revelation to be a future reality, *“that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written.”*

We went on to contemplate the meaning of the “fullness of the Gentiles” and other portions of the text, which you can review from last week's study on the website at your leisure.

So we dealt with the Mystery of Jewish Salvation last week. Now we come to the second point in the text, The Reasons for Future Jewish Salvation. Under this topic are two points—the first one being: The Irrevocable Covenants of God; the second: The Unchanging Mercy of God.

I cannot say enough about God's unchanging mercy towards you as a believer. There is nothing that can separate you from the love of God and His care for you. If you question that, look at the example of the Jews.

The Irrevocable Covenants of God

*And so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written,
"THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM
JACOB. THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS."
Romans 11:26-27*

Paul used the word "covenant" twice in his letter to the Romans. Both times are in chapters 9-11, chapters which address the subject of God's faithfulness to the Jews.

The first occurrence of "covenant" is in Romans 9:3-5. *"For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, ⁴who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, ⁵whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen."*

Notice that Paul affirmed that the covenants were still intact and still belonged to the Jews. He did not see them as voided at the time he wrote his letter to the Romans. In other words, he did not reckon Jewish rejection of their Messiah as something that nullified God's promises to them. The second occurrence of the term "covenant" is in our text this morning when the Messiah affirmed the New Covenant promise to the Jews that He will take away their sins.

We need to back up a moment and get a running start at the subject of covenants in the Bible. We have learned that a covenant is a contract or a firm promise between two entities. A bilateral covenant is a conditional contract where both parties are obligated to keep terms of the contract. A unilateral covenant is a contract in which one side promises to fulfill the covenant with no conditions that must be met by the other party. A number of covenants are mentioned in the Bible.

God's covenant with Noah after he got off of the ark is found in Genesis 9:8-16. *"Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying, ⁹'Now behold, I Myself do establish My covenant with you, and with your*

descendants after you; 10and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that comes out of the ark, even every beast of the earth. 11I establish My covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth.' 12God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all successive generations; 13I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth. 14It shall come about, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow will be seen in the cloud, 15and I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and never again shall the water become a flood to destroy all flesh. 16When the bow is in the cloud, then I will look upon it, to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.' "

There is a silver lining concerning the homosexual community adopting the rainbow as a sign. The rainbow was a result of God's global judgment on sin. The rainbow can serve as a reminder that God does indeed judge sin, even on a cosmic level. God will not again judge the earth by a flood, but He does warn of future judgement. So the rainbow can serve as an effective warning as well as a promise. And thus we witness that God has kept that promise thus far.

The Abrahamic Covenant we have unpacked many times. It is found in Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-22. God's covenant with Abraham concerns the nation of Israel and involves Abraham as the father of that nation. God promised Abraham that He would give the nation a specific land for its own, the land of Palestine. And God promised that all of the nations would be blessed through Abraham. It is no surprise that we have the Word of God through the Jews, and we have the Savior of the world who is a Jew.

God's covenants with Noah and Abraham are unilateral covenants, meaning that there are no conditions which Noah and Abraham had to meet. God promised that He would fulfill these covenants by acting alone.

The Mosaic Covenant is the Ten Commandments and all of the directives given in the Torah. This is a bilateral covenant made with the nation of Israel. The conditions are as follows: If a particular generation of Jews

obeyed the Law given by Moses, then they would live securely in the land and be blessed. However, if they disobeyed the Law, then God would drive them out of the land and they would not be blessed. The Mosaic Covenant could not void the one made with Abraham, which is clearly explained in Galatians 3:15 and following. You can read of the blessings and the curses of the Mosaic Covenant in Deuteronomy 28:1-30:20.

The Davidic Covenant, found in 2 Samuel 7:4-16, is where God promised David that He would establish David's throne and kingdom forever. This was a promise concerning the Messiah. Since there were no conditions that David had to keep, his covenant was also is a unilateral covenant.

The New Covenant (found in Jeremiah 31:31 and following; 32:40 and following, plus many other places) states that God will bring the nation of Israel back to their land, and He will cleanse them and forgive their sin and put His Spirit within them. Many of these passages contain promises that have not been fulfilled to the nation. The New Covenant too is a unilateral covenant.

We can gain a sense of the importance of the covenant idea by keeping in mind that our Bibles are divided into two covenants, the Old Covenant (Testament) and the New Covenant (Testament). I think we should just start calling them that in order to gain a right perspective. Furthermore, we speak of the New Covenant every month when we take the Lord's Supper as we read in 1 Corinthians 11:25, *"In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'"*

We can see the unilateral nature of the New Covenant in our text this morning in verse 27 which says, *"THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS."* This is God's promise to do something on a unilateral basis. I have mentioned to you before the ratification of the Abrahamic Covenant when God told Abraham to take a bull, a goat, a ram, a dove, and pigeon and to split them in two (except for the birds because nothing would be left) and to place the halves across from each other.

But when God caused Abraham to fall into a deep sleep, God walked between the sacrifices by Himself, thus covenanting by Himself that He would fulfill His promises to Abraham. This was not covenant making

between equals where God promised to do something and Abraham promised that he too would do something. In this covenant, God made all the promises while Abraham was not required to do anything. He slept.

The same is true with the New Covenant. There are no conditions in it for the Jews. God promised to bring them back into their land, purge the nation, save them through the Gospel of Christ, and put His Spirit in them. The God that does not change—the God who is immutable—will fulfill His promises, which is what we see Him doing today.

So the first reason why there will be future salvation for the Jews as a nation is that God made irrevocable promises to Abraham, David, and the nation. These are the Irrevocable Covenants of God. Now the second reason why the nation will be saved is . . .

The Unchanging Mercy of God

*From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake,
but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers;
for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.*

Romans 11:28-29

Here we come to Paul's summary of what he was laboring to convey about God's interaction with the Jews. We have learned that God purposed to set the Jews aside for a time for the sake of Gentile salvation. However, it is only for a time, and then God will again turn His attention to the Jews. Widespread conversion will sweep the nation of Israel at Christ's return.

This truth is summarized here in verses 28-29. God will fulfill His promises to the nation of Israel because of the unchanging love He demonstrated towards Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God chose the Jews to be His special people. Nothing that has happened since, and nothing that *will* happen, can change that choice or relationship.

Leon Morris put it this way, "God had made promises to Israel, and these promises will be kept. Israel's refusal to accept the gospel did not mean either that the gospel was a failure, or that God would not perform all He had promised to His ancient people."

We need to turn our thoughts for a moment to the phrase in verse 29, "*For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.*" What are the "*gifts and the calling*" to which Paul referred? The gifts mentioned here in the context

of the Jews are the many advantages and privileges that Paul already listed earlier in his letter.

Romans 3:1-2 *“Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? 2Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.”*

In Romans 9:4-5, Paul said of the Jews, “[to them belong] *the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, 5whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.*”

The Jews have been given a number of advantages and gifts from God that set them apart. They have been given the Word of God, the covenants, and the promises. On top of these things, they are the nation through whom the eternal God entered into the flow of humanity; namely, *“the Christ according to the flesh.”* These were all given by the mercy and grace of God, and they are unchanging. God set apart the Jews as a chosen people to Himself. He has called them as a holy nation. God is stating that, regardless of their unbelief, the people of Israel remain God's chosen covenant people.

One pastor thought through and recorded for us an imaginary dialogue with God concerning Israel. This conversation helps us understand God's loyal love for Israel while Israel persisted in utterly rejecting Him. The dialogue goes something like this

“ 'But God! When You chose Abraham to be the father of a special people, didn't You know that he would be weak in faith himself? Didn't You know that he would step aside from his high calling and go down to Egypt, where he would be willing even to sacrifice the honor of his wife to save his own skin?'

“ 'Yes,' says God, 'I knew that. But I called him anyway, and My gifts to him and My calling of him were irrevocable.'

“ 'But God! Surely you knew that the people who came along in the line of Abraham would be unfaithful. You gave them the law through Moses. But even Moses, great as he was, dishonored You by taking Your glory to

himself. He struck the rock contrary to Your command, saying, "Must we bring you water out of this rock?" (Numbers 20:10) You even kept him from entering the Promised Land as a result. Did You really take all that into account when you called the Jews to be a special people?'

" 'Yes,' God replies, 'I knew what Moses would do. But My gifts and My calling are irrevocable.'"

" 'But God! What about David? David committed adultery with Bathsheba and even had her husband, Uriah, killed to escape detection. Certainly, if you had known what David would be like, You would have done things differently. Did You really consider David's sin when You set Your electing love upon this people?'

" 'Yes,' God answers, 'I did, and My call is irrevocable.'

" 'But God! What about the kings that followed David? And the people who copied the debased morality of those kings? How could You have set upon such people an eternal love, expressed in an irrevocable covenant?'

" 'Your ways are not My ways,' says God. I knew the people would be wicked. Everyone is wicked. *"There is not one righteous—not even one—there is none who understands, no one who seeks God."* I wrote that, remember. Still I have fixed My covenant love upon these people, and My call is irrevocable. My will for them has not changed.'

" 'But God! Surely Your call must change in light of the way these people treated Jesus Christ. Jesus was loving and compassionate. His greatest offense was to be holy and to speak the truth. Yet they rejected Him. They hounded Him to death and eventually secured His execution on a cross between two thieves. If You had foreseen that, You would never have made the promises You did. If You had foreseen that, You would never have made the promises You did. Or now, having seen their treatment of Jesus, surely You would repudiate whatever relationship You have with them. Surely You are going to cast them off forever!'

" 'No,' God replies. 'I know the end from the beginning. I knew how it would all turn out. Yet, in spite of what they did, I set an irrevocable love upon them.'

God does the same for each one of you. He saw all your sin from the very beginning: the past sin that was yours before you became a Christian; the present sin that you confront every day; and the future sin that you will commit. He saw all of it, yet He called you with an irrevocable love and calling. Paul emphasized this unchanging mercy beginning at verse 30. *“For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. ³²For God has shut up all [Jews and Gentiles] in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.”*

These verses describe the unchanging mercy of God. This passage supports the equality of all mankind in one important arena, in particular, that all human beings are rebels against God in need of His mercy. Sin lowers everyone to the same needy level. Christianity's doctrine of total depravity bonds all humans together.

Verses 30-32 provide a concise summary to all that Paul has written reaching all the way back to his thesis statement in Romans 1:16-19.

Romans 1:16-19, 20c *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.” ¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them They are without excuse.*

Romans 11:32, *“For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.”* This verse is not a statement of universal salvation. The context makes it evident that Paul had in mind both Jews and Gentiles. God's mercy goes out to all of mankind.

Paul mentioned “mercy” four times in this last section. There are many great Bible texts that talk about mercy. In my opinion, one of the most profound passages is when Moses asked to see God's glory. God hid Moses in the cleft of the rock and covered him with His hand while His glory passed by. God said in Exodus 33:19, *“I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I*

will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.”

God declares that, at the very heart of His being, He is a merciful God.

Exodus 34:6-7 Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; 7who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.”

The very essence of God is mercy, grace, compassion, and lovingkindness.

Isaiah 55:6-7 Seek the LORD while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. 7Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the LORD, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

Ephesians 2:4-5 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved). ”

If any individual is to be saved, it must be by mercy alone. Mercy is an entirely different category from justice. What people deserve has everything to do with what they have done, concerning their deeds. Mercy has nothing to do with what people deserve according to their deeds. Mercy finds its source in the will of God alone.

I told you that Paul used the word “mercy” four times in these verses. He also uses the word “disobedient” four times in these verses. There is a reason for that. It is only after people begin to grasp the depths of their sin and disobedience against God that they will begin to appreciate the mercy He demonstrated on their behalf in the death of Jesus. In order for God to show mercy, there must first be in men and women an awareness of sin and guilt. That is exactly our condition as fallen mankind: *“The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.”*

Conclusion

I want to close with an account that Jesus mentioned in Luke 18:9-14.

“And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt.” Let me remind you that before you became a believer each one of us trusted in ourselves that we were righteous and contemptibly viewed others.

“¹⁰Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’” We have a different understanding of Pharisees than their contemporaries. People who knew the Pharisees evaluated they were serious about their walk with the Lord—they were not unjust; they tithed; they took care of the poor; and so much more.

On the flip side is the tax collector *“¹³But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ ¹⁴I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

What does Christ say here? He's saying one thing: He refers to the importance of our deep need for God—to know the unchanging God and His unchanging mercy.

Romans 11:32 *For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.*