

Series: God Is Unchangeable #1719

Title: 1 Samuel 15

God Will Not Change His Mind

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. Whenever we discuss the Bible, Christian theology, language, when we do interpretation of the biblical text, it is important to engage disagreement. That is, to understand a doctrine it is helpful if we can interact with arguments against it. What this does, if done correctly, is it strengthens what we believe. We have that here on the back end of our series *God Is Unchangeable*. For several episodes we have made the case, biblically and reasonably, that God does not change. Now we are ready to engage some texts that make it look like we are wrong; texts that give the impression – on a surface level read – that God does indeed sometimes *change*!

I mentioned a couple of these in just the second episode of our series and I want to come back to them soon. I promised you that and I like to keep my promises. Along on the way, I will mention a couple of other objections to the immutability of God and handle these quickly. And just at the end last time we engaged with those who would say God changed in the creation and in the incarnation. Some say creation produced a change in God. But not so.

In the creation, when God made the first man (Adam) and the first woman (Eve), this did not change the Creator, this only changed the creatures. The man changed from non-existence to existence. The woman changed from non-existence to existence. But God stayed the same. Nothing new happened within God. He is always the same. So the Lord has always set His will to create the world and the people He has put in it. That's His decree again. Think of it this way: at the creation, the change was not *in* God, but *from* God. Out of nothing the Almighty created. He changed man and woman from non-existent to existent without changing Himself.

Theologian Louis Berkhof puts it this way, "The purpose to create was eternal with [God], and there was no change in Him when this purpose was realized by a single eternal act of His will (*Systematic Theology*, 59)."

What about the incarnation? When God became man, when Jesus visited earth in a man's body, did this produce change in God? Again we say, no. When Christ, who is God, assumed the human nature, there was *no* change in God. I am going to receive some help from Thomas Watson on this, by quoting him from his insightful book *A Body of Divinity* and then I will comment on what he writes. Quoting him now, "If the divine nature had been converted into the human, or the human into the divine, there had been a change, but they were not so. The human nature was distinct from the divine. Therefore there was no change (67)."

The Lord Jesus did *not* lay down His divine nature when He became a man. He did not leave His God-nature behind in heaven when He was born of the woman, Mary. Rather, Christ remained God *veiled* in human flesh. It is not accurate to say that when God became Man He was no longer God. Now, *if* that had been the case, then yes, God did change. We could not argue against that. Likewise, Jesus was not a man who became God. For example, that when the Lord was born in Bethlehem He was only human but that when He was ascended into heaven He became God. *If* that had been the case, then yes, God did change.

But this is not what happened. Rather, Jesus was truly God and truly Man. He was fully God and fully Man, simultaneously, always. Watson has a fitting analogy. "A cloud over the sun makes no change in the body of the sun, so though the divine nature be covered with the human, it makes no change in the divine nature (67)." That's what happened in Jesus: the human nature covered the divine nature for a season, but this did not produce any change in God.

You can remember that God does not change in the incarnation the next time you are at the beach or in the swimming pool on a bright, sunny day. You do not even have to look up to see the sun, you can feel its rays shining down on you. Ah, so nice! But then a big cloud floats across the sky and momentarily blocks out the sun. You feel a bit anxious, because you have been counting on that sun to give you a nice tan and to warm up your body and improve your mood. But in that moment you know not to get too upset, because the cloud moves away and there is the sun again. The sun stayed the same. It did not change. But when the cloud veiled the sun it *felt* like the sun changed. This is what Watson is getting at. It may feel to us that when God became man, God changed, but that is not so. The human flesh merely veiled God, like the cloud moving across the sun.

God does not change in the creation or the incarnation. This brings us to certain texts in the Bible, which when read and especially read quickly and without pause, lend the impression that God *does* change. But what is very interesting about this is that *if* God does change, then the Scriptures contradict themselves. And, we do not believe the Scripture has contradictions. Let me show you what I mean. We find this in a very important chapter in the life of the Israelite people – 1 Samuel 15. If you know the story then you will remember that God chose Saul to be King. And the prophet Samuel was instructed by God to anoint him human ruler over Israel.

At the beginning of the chapter God commanded Saul to slay Amalek (the Amalekites). Saul was to obliterate them. Verse 3, **“Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.”** To make a long story short, Saul disobeyed God. Verses 8 and 9, **“[Saul] captured Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. ⁹But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were not willing to destroy them utterly...”**

Listen carefully now to God’s reaction. I am reading verses 10 and 11 of 1 Samuel 15, **“Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel, saying, ¹¹‘I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following Me and has not carried out My commands.’”** When we read verse 11 the sense we have is that God changed. He originally thought making Saul King was a good idea, but now the Lord regrets it. He’s had a change of mind. Verse 35 of this same chapter also says, **“The Lord regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.”** So do these verses indeed mean that God has changed? No! *Within this same chapter*, and just across the page in my Bible, listen to what the prophet Samuel says to Saul when he confirms to Saul that God has stripped Saul of the kingdom.

I’ll pick up the reading in verse 28. 1 Samuel chapter 15 and verses 28 and 29, **“So Samuel said to [Saul], ‘The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to your neighbor, who is better than you. ²⁹Also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind.’”** Capture this: when we put these two texts together, *from the same chapter*, we see that clearly, it is not possible that back in verse 11 God changed, because in verse 29 we read “the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind.” The Glory of Israel was a unique title for God. And God does *not* change His mind. That is divine immutability. Samuel adds, “[God] is not a man that He should change His mind.”

That is, God is not like us. We change our minds. We are mutable. But God does not change His mind. He is immutable. If we were to maintain that God changes, we make God out to be a liar. Listen to Numbers chapter 23, verse 19, **“God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it?”** God does not lie. God does not repent. God does not change His mind, His will, His counsel, or His decree. These verses in 1 Samuel prove to us that any reference to God repenting or regretting or changing cannot mean what we often think they mean. *So then*, the *big* question stands: what *do* they mean? Can you tell us, Swallow?

Yes, I believe I can. Next time you will hear my interpretation of these verses *and* some more on God Is.

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