

Series: God Is Unchangeable #1721

Title: Genesis 3.6-11

God In the Garden

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. I have been making the case that when the Bible describes God as repenting or regretting or changing His mind – these are not reflective of an actual change in God. Rather, this is language that is anthropomorphic and anthropopathic. This is language we humans can understand and to which we can relate. As we get going, let me remind you how we define these terms, especially because these are not common to our everyday discourse.

By anthropomorphic we mean language that conceives of God as having human characteristics or existing in human form. By anthropopathic we mean language that conceives of God as having human emotions. The Bible talks about God experiencing joy, grief, anger, love, and jealousy. *And*, pertinent to our study, God as regretting, repenting, and changing. God speaks in a language we can understand.

As we have learned and re-learned, emphasized and re-emphasized, God does not change. He says this of Himself in Malachi 3, verse 6, **“I, the Lord, do not change.”** And the unchanging nature of God comes through in other Scriptures we have studied. For example, James 1, verse 17 describes God as, **“The Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.”** So that when we read in passages like Genesis 6 and Exodus 32 that the Lord repented and regretted and changed His mind, we must be careful to emphasize this is not changing His mind like we change our minds. Rather, this is an anthropopathic way of stating the action of God in a way we can grasp.

I shared this with you last time and will repeat it, because I *really* want you to get this. It becomes abundantly clear in reading the Bible that it uses language from the mutable (the changeable) creature – men and women – to describe the immutable (unchangeable) being of the Creator – God. Again, it becomes abundantly clear in reading the Bible that it uses language from the mutable (the changeable) creature – men and women – to describe the immutable (unchangeable) being of the Creator – God.

But we must be careful with this. We do not have permission from God to say that because He uses anthropopathic language, like describing His emotion as changing, we should interpret this to mean that He *does* indeed change. The language that we require in order for Him to communicate truth about Himself to us cannot be language that is then used to inaccurately define His being, His essence, His Person, or His form. We cannot attribute to God the qualities of His creatures.

To solidify this in our minds (and hearts), let's look at anthropomorphic, anthropopathic language in another text and from another angle today. If you have your Bible handy, open to the very first Book, Genesis and chapter 3. I will begin reading in verse 6. Genesis 3, verse 6. Leading up this, Adam and his wife Eve have received a clear command from God not to eat of the tree in the middle of the garden. But, verse 6, **“When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make *one* wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.**

⁸ They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ ¹⁰ [The man] said, ‘I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.’ ¹¹ And [God] said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?’”

I want to follow the very insightful work here of A.B. Caneday in a chapter he writes in the book *Beyond the Bounds* dealing with the aforementioned Open Theism. His chapter is about God's anthropomorphic self-disclosure. These ideas are his. I am applying them to us. He correctly states that the Lord “reveals

Himself to the man and woman in the form and likeness He had given them when [God] made them...Genesis 3.8-11 sketches a portrait of God who shows Himself in human form and likeness (168)."

Notice the text portrays God as walking in the garden. What this means is that God took on Adam's form so that He could reveal Himself to the now sinful Adam and his wife Eve. Commentators and scholars debate. Did God actually take on human appearance as He does elsewhere throughout the Old Testament, and as He likely did previously on the sixth day when Adam named the animals? Or does the sound in the cool of the day simply indicate to the couple that God's Spirit was there? And God's voice came from heaven? For now, let's grant God did take on human form here. What this means is God was *truly* walking in the garden. He appeared in such a way that Adam and Eve know it is Him.

But to say that this is God *as He is in Himself*, is not accurate because that would be to say God has a physical body. He has physical feet (when He walks) and a physical mouth (when He speaks). "It is unwarranted to conclude that, since God disclosed Himself in human form, God has physical features (169)." Now here is the key, according to Caneday, "While we must avoid *physicalizing* God, on the basis of Genesis 3.8-11, we must also protect against *etherealizing* God, as if Moses' narrative does not portray God as *truly* revealing Himself to Adam and Eve in the garden (169)." Close quote.

Did you catch the twin dangers he poses? We cannot use Moses' language to make God a physical being. As if He has a body like we do. He does not. And yet we cannot cancel out Moses' language by saying God did not reveal Himself in ways that are physical. Just like we cannot deny that texts like Genesis 6 and Exodus 32 and 1 Samuel 15 say God changed His mind, but we also cannot conclude, therefore, that means God actually changed His mind, His will, or His counsel (His eternal decree). He does not. I hope you see the connection.

Caneday then presses this further with God's questions in Genesis 3. He writes, "If we claim that the narrative of Genesis 3.8-11 portrays God *as He truly is in Himself*, we must also claim that God does not fully know either the present or the past, based upon the questions He asks. The Lord's questions are as much God's self-revelation in human likeness as His walking and speaking are self-disclosures in human form. 'Where are you? Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' – such questions are not seeking information, as if God does not know.

Rather, precisely because God knows, He uses the questions to draw from the man and the woman acknowledgment that they had lusted for wisdom and grasped after His likeness on their own terms. The Lord is showing Himself *anthropomorphically*. His questions are anthropomorphic in character. That is to say, His interrogatives are the kinds of questions we humans ask of one another, not because we do not know the answers to our questions, but precisely because we do know...These are questions a prosecutor, who knows the facts of the case, asks a defendant, to seek not information but conviction (169)."

Dr. Caneday then gives us an example from Jesus in the New Testament Gospel of John. John 6, verses 5-6 reads, "**Therefore Jesus, lifting up His eyes and seeing that a large crowd was coming to Him, said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?'** ⁶**This [Jesus] was saying to test him, for [Jesus] Himself knew what He was intending to do.**"

Friends, anthropomorphic and anthropopathic language is how God communicates to us. This answers the objection – proffered by the use of certain biblical texts – that God *does* change. Apply this to your Bible reading whenever you see verses that lend you the impression God is changeable. Remember what He says, "I, the Lord, do not change." And let me encourage you, if this is not quite clear to you, please visit our website and next to today's podcast click the link "Read Along." This manuscript will appear on your screen and you can use it to listen again and follow along, slowly, at your own pace making notes along the way.

Make this truth yours. Visit godisministry.org, that's godisministry.o-r-g. Next time, Lord willing, we will finish this series asking this question, "Why pray if by praying we cannot change God's mind?" Join us, because God Is.

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