



The Doctrine of God's Immutability: A Literary Investigation

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Abstract

In recent years the doctrine of God's Immutability has come under attack within Evangelicalism from the proponents of process theology and open theism, who claim that the doctrine of immutability is based on an Aristotelian philosophy concerning God. This article engages a literary investigation to prove that the doctrine of God's immutability as understood within Evangelicalism finds its tradition within Christian orthodoxy. In an endeavour to take the attribute of God's immutability seriously, an investigation from early Church Fathers to later Reformers is undertaken to posit that the Evangelical understanding of the doctrine of God's immutability is Orthodox, namely that God is both independent and self-sufficient and hence immutable in respect of his supreme existence. Therefore, the doctrine of God's immutability brings hope and comfort to present Christians as it did in the past.

Keywords: God, Doctrine, Immutability, unchangeableness, simplicity, Orthodox, evangelical, open theism

Introduction

In a rapidly changing world, the constancy of God is a comfort. When the Bible states God as being the same yesterday, it reflects that God is unchanging in his will, character and promises. a God who does not change today and forever. This divine immutability involves several aspects. Erickson (1998:35) states that first, there is no quantitative change. God cannot increase in anything because God is already perfection and if God decreased in anything, God would cease to be God. Second, there is no qualitative change. The nature of God does not undergo modification. God does not change his mind or modifies actions that rest on his nature which remains unchanged no matter what happens. Kierkegaard (1958: 256), in articulating a defence for the immutability of God, states that while the world is a constant flux, God remains unchanged, and no change touches God, not even the shadow of change. For Kierkegaard, God remains eternally unchanged. Grudem (1994:163), defines the immutability or constancy of God as follows as "God is unchanging in *his/her* being, perfection, purpose and promise, yet God acts and feels emotion, and *God* acts and feels differently in response to different situations" (*italics added*). Edward (1978:305-306) states:

The doctrine of the utter unchangeableness of God set severe limits upon understanding other divine attributes such as God's activity, omniscience and eternity in classical supernaturalism. God was required to know a changing world in an utterly unchanging way, to act upon a temporally developing world of nature and human history in a totally a temporal way, rather than successively.

However, Pinnock (1994:120), following Edward's footsteps, asks how God can know a changing world if God is unchangeable. Pinnock believes that God cannot be immutable in a



changing world. For open theists like Boyd, God's knowledge grows with a changing world. According to open theists, this changing knowledge develops a God who changes. As Nash (1983:99) observes: "Of all the current debates about the divine attributes, the disagreement over the property of immutability is the most heated. However, Seeberg (1964:114-115) observes that among the early apologists, the true Christian doctrines included: "There is One God, the Creator, Adorner, and Preserver of the world ... The invisible God is unbegotten, nameless, eternal, incomprehensible, and unchangeable Being".

Ware (1986:434-437) reflects on the immutability of God in the following ways:

- Ontological immutability: God is unchangeable in the supreme excellence of his nature, i.e. the immutability of God's eternal and self-sufficient being. Thus, in affirming God's ontological immutability, God is attributed with changelessness because of his independent existence, essence or attribute, which qualities of being have been his alone and to which no future quality or value can be added.
- Ethical immutability: God is also unchangeable in his unconditional promise and moral obligations to which he has freely pledged himself. This is referred to as the faithfulness and reliability of God by which he is true to his word and unfailing in accomplishing that which he has promised.

The following section reflects how the early Church Fathers understood God's immutability.

1. Historical Evidence Concerning the Doctrine of Immutability- The Church Fathers to Reformers

The early Church Fathers maintained that the true God was unchangeable in character, while they did not deny that God altered his actions in time so that humans might see God ostensibly as changing his mind. The Early Church fathers accepted that, from all eternity, these supposed changes were settled. Changes within time are for the benefit of the successions of events to be understood by finite beings.

1.1. Novatian (200-258 CE)

Novatian (in *Treatise Concerning the Trinity*, 4 in *AFN* Vol. V: 614-615) affirms that God is immutable in his essential being. In discussing his view of the Trinity, Novatian embraces the notion that God does not change in essential Being. He argues that the nature of God does not allow God to change. Thus, God cannot be both good and evil or the originator of good and evil. Thus, for Novatian, there is no increase or decrease in any part of God: to do so, God would have to be mortal, thus making God imperfect. This immutability, according to Novatian, means that whatever God is, God always is; whoever God is, he is always Himself; and whatever character God has, God always has. Therefore, God says: "I am God, I change not." Malachi 3:6. Novatian argues that anything not born cannot change, holding his condition always. For whatever is in God constitutes divinity and must always exist, maintaining itself by its power, so that God should always be God.

Thus, the attribute of simplicity is directly related to immutability. God's attributes are not independent of each other, and they interact without causing any change to the perfect Being. Novatian argues that any change in God's perfect being would make God less than divinity, for if God were to experience change, then God would cease to be God. Novatian (in *Treatise Concerning the Trinity*, 4 in *AFN* Vol. V: 614-615) uses the immutability of God as a criterion to establish and validate the nature of God:

God is incorruptible, he is, therefore, both immortal, and because God is immortal, he is incorruptible – each being involved by turns in each other, with itself and in itself, by a mutual connection and prolonged by a vicarious concatenation to the condition of eternity.



1.2. *Aristides (125 CE)*

Aristides, renowned for his faith and wisdom, presented books on Christian religion to prince Hadrian to prove that he was the only God. He (in *Apology 4* in *AFN* Vol. X: 265) uses immutability as evidence for the prince Hadrian that someone is truly God. Those that are subject to change and decay, Aristides calls created things. However, Aristides understands God as being immortal, indivisible and immutable. While interacting with the world, God sees, overrules and transforms everything. Aristides (1978) states:

Let us turn now, O King, to the elements in themselves, that we may make clear in regard to them, that they are not gods, but a created thing, liable to ruin and change, which is of the same nature as a man. In contrast, God is imperishable and unvarying and invisible, yet he sees, overrules, and transforms everything.

1.3. *Melito of Sardis (160 CE)*

In articulating a response to the discourse in the presence of Marcus Antoninus to reveal God to him, Melito states that sin is when a person abandons that which exists and serves that which does not, in contrast to the true God. Melito uses the attribute of God's immutability to argue his point. Melito (in *Remains of the Second and Third Centuries* in *ANF* Vol.VIII: 751) states:

There 'is', that which exists by his power, and it is called God. He I say really exists, and by his power doth everything subsists. This being is in no sense made, nor did God ever come into being, but always existed from eternity and will continue to exist forever and ever. *God changeth not, while everything else changes (italics added).*

1.4. *Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria (250-328 CE)*

While little is known of Alexander's early life, he led the church as the thirteenth Pope in 313 CE. Arius was a fourth-century Alexandrian presbyter condemned as a heretic by the First Ecumenical Council at Nicaea. Because of his teaching that he Christ, the Son of God was not co-eternal co-substantial with God the Father, but was instead a created being subordinate to the Father. To this, Alexander responds (in *Epistle on Arian Heresy 12* in *ANF* Vol. VI: 295):

Concerning who we thus believe even as the Apostolic Church believes, in one Father unbegotten, who has from no one the cause of His being, who is unchangeable and immutable, who is always the same and admits of no increase or diminution.

He goes on to state that Jesus Christ, being of the essence of the Father, is also immutable: "He is equally with the Father unchangeable and immutable, wanting in nothing". This again affirms that the immutability of God was the belief of the early church.

1.5. *St. Augustine Of Hippo (354- 430 CE)*

According to Gilson (1983:22), the question of God's immutability was for St. Augustine not simply one aspect of his doctrine, but was "perhaps, the most profound and most constant element in his metaphysical thought".



For Augustine, God is unchanging because his immutability follows his supremacy. The intrinsic nature of God's immutability is the evidence of divinity. St. Augustine (in *City of God* in *NPNF* Vol. II 12.2: 277) states that since God is a Supreme Being, he cannot change and being God, he created all things. Augustine (in *City of God* in *NPNF* Vol. II 11.1: 203) affirms that only God is immutable, for no created thing can be immutable. Thus, there can be only one true unchangeable good, the blessed God.

According to St. Augustine, anything that is open to change is mutable; thus, St. Augustine (in *Confessions* in *NPNF* Vol. I 12:15: 181) concludes that even God's will is immutable and eternal:

Truth tells me in my inner ear, concerning the very eternity of the Creator, that his substance is in no wise changed by time, nor that God's will is separate from his substance? God willeth, not one thing now, another anon, but once and forever God willeth all things that he willeth; not again and again, nor now this, now that; nor willeth afterwards what he willeth not before... Such a will is mutable and no mutable thing is eternal; but our God is eternal.

God's mind cannot change, for to change means that God is created and therefore not divine. For St. Augustine (*ibid*) God does not operate in our three-dimensional understanding of time but operates in a manner different and profoundly unlike our way of thinking. St. Augustine (in *City of God* in *NPNF* Vol. II 11.21: 216) states:

God's mind does not pass from one thought to another. God's vision is utterly unchangeable. Thus, God comprehends all that takes place in time – the not yet existing future, the existing present and the no-longer-existing past in an immutable and eternal present... [Neither] is there any then, now or afterwards in his knowledge, for unlike ours, it suffers no change with triple time present, past and future. With God there is no change, no shadow of alteration (*italics added*).

The divine mind and will cannot change because they are identical with his essence. If God's will is part of his substance and God's substance cannot change then, it remains true for St. Augustine that the will and mind of God cannot change. To change his will or mind means that God cannot be eternal or divine because God is forever identical with himself.

1.6. Anselm (1033-1109 CE)

Anselm found grounds for the immutability of God in God's perfection, simplicity, supremacy and unique immateriality. One of Anselm's proofs (1962:2) for God's existence is the argument from degrees of perfection in the world:

- Some beings are more nearly perfect than others.
- But things cannot be more or less perfect unless there is something wholly perfect by which they can be compared and judged to be less perfect than it.
- Therefore, there must be a perfect Being, which we call God. But if God is perfect, he cannot change since any change would be for the worst, and God would then not be perfect.

Anselm also based God's immutability on his simplicity, with the basic idea that God cannot be analysed or divided. For Anselm (1962), God is ontologically one being without dimensions, poles or divisions. God is, therefore, the "ultimate reality of himself".

Like other early church fathers, Anselm argues that the understanding of the immutability of God is evidence for divinity and eternity. However, for Anselm (1962:87), God's



immutability follows from his unique immateriality: that is, God being spirit has no parts, and so there cannot be more than one spirit of this kind. And this spirit must be an indivisible spirit. With regards to eternity, Anselm uses the immutability of God to argue for God's eternity. Thus Anselm (1962: 83) understands that God must be eternal without beginning or end. God cannot be temporal or transient but is immutable and indivisible.

Anselm (1962:161) sees God's immutability as a basis for his infallible knowledge. For Anselm, even the free choices of men are fully known by God even before they come to pass. Because God's attributes are identical to himself, his knowledge does not change due to the free action of human will. For Anselm, God cannot change in his nature since he is perfect, unique, spiritual and supreme and he maintains that God has an infallible ability to "foresee the future".

1.7. *Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 CE)*

In articulating a defense against the question that God is not immutable, Aquinas (in *Summa Theologica* 1. 9 1)¹ offers three primary arguments in favour of God's immutability. He first argues that a God of pure actuality has no potentiality to be other than what he is, while change can only come from potentiality to be something other than what one is. The second argument of Aquinas that confirms God's immutability relates to simplicity. He uses arguments (*Summa Theologica* 3.1.7)² that draw on St. Augustine's conclusion that God is a truly and simple being; and that God is without parts and therefore cannot change. The reasoning is that only something that does not change attaches itself to self-identity. If God changes, then God would not be God. Because, according to Aquinas, this would not be a change but annihilation of that being. The third argument for the immutability of God extends from absolute perfection. Whatever changes require something new. But a complete Being cannot acquire anything new. God is perfect. Therefore, God cannot change.

1.8. *Martin Luther (1483–1546 CE)*

Luther understanding of God's immutability can also be derived from his argument on the *Bondage of the Will*. Althaus (1966:105) reflects that central to all of Luther's theology is his understanding of God that can be summarised as *Gottes Gottheit*, which means "God is God." In the deepest sense, Luther believes that God is above all and in all. God, through his creative power, reveals that he is free and immutable. He alone can bring life into existence. He alone sustains life. He alone freely wills.

Moreover, what God wills cannot be impeded or resisted by a mere creature. God is all-powerful, and therefore, God's will is alone immutable. Luther (1957:113-114) acknowledges that God and his knowledge is one. God's will cannot be changed, altered or impeded. The immutability of God's will is the logical conclusion to the freedom of God's will. God's sovereignty and almighty power demand that whatever God wills happens by necessity. Nothing occurs contingently. God's will does not act independently of reality, as the human will does, but rather, God's will creates reality. In Luther's theology, the will of God is not contingent, so likewise, the foreknowledge of God is also not contingent. For whatever God wills, he foreknows, and so, whatever he foreknows must, by necessity, happen. For if it did not happen, then God would be fallible and his will contingent, which Luther (1957:105) declares "is not to be found in God!" It is the immutable will of God, acting freely, that provides the Christian with "the assurance of things hoped for" (Heb. 11:1), namely that the promises of God will be fulfilled. As Luther (1957: 81) suggests, "the

¹ See <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1009.htm>.

² See <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1003.htm>.



Christian's chief and only comfort in every adversity lies in knowing that God does not lie but brings all things to pass immutably and that His will cannot be resisted, altered or impeded. Therefore, to change his will, God must also change his plan and purposes, making God mutable. Luther (1961:178), in discussing God's wrath against falsehood instead of those who live on the "immutable truth of God" causes us to be comforted if believed because God does not change. Luther (1961:117) declares that God is unchangeable; however, God is magnified in our knowledge and experience when we greatly esteem and highly regard God. God nature does not change based on how humanity views him or how God interacts with humanity.

1.9. *John Calvin (1509–1564 CE)*

Calvin considered it settled in Christian theology that God is immutable. The immutability of the Word God is inherent and is the very essence or nature of God. Calvin (as cited in McNeill: I.13.7:129) asserts: "John at once attributes to the word of God a solid abiding presence and ascribes something uniquely his own, and shows how God, by speaking, was the creator of the universe. Unchangeable, the Word abides everlasting one and the same with God and is God himself."

Because God is immutable any attempts made to thwart the purposes or promises of God will fail. In discussing Psalm 110:1, Calvin (as cited in McNeill: 2:15:497-498) states: "The Psalmist declares that no matter how many strong enemies plot against the church, they do not have the power to prevail against/over God's immutable decrees, which God appointed to Jesus Christ. Hence it follows that the devil, with all the world's resources, can never destroy that which is eternally decreed."

Calvin (as cited in McNeill: 3.20.43:906) drawing on St. Augustine the perspective and understanding of prayer directs Christians to pray according to the will of God. A will that is not hidden and unchangeable. Calvin, therefore, understands that there is no tension between the will and the very nature of God. For God to change his plan must include a change in his very nature.

The above historical review illustrates that the immutability of God was affirmed by the early church fathers and reformers, who stressed that God couldn't change for better or for worse. God cannot gain value since God eternally encompasses all such values in his intrinsic being. Because God is immutable, so too are his plans and promises.

2. An Evangelical Understanding of Divine Immutability

The doctrine of the immutability of God held by evangelicals is grounded firmly in biblical contexts from both the Old and New Testaments and through the writings of the early and medieval church. The definition of God's immutability having the attributes of being unchanging in nature, desire, purpose, and promises as espoused by evangelicals finds its roots in teaching the early church fathers and in scripture. Grudem (1994:163) states God is unchanging in being, perfection, purposes and promises. Yet God does act and feel emotion, and he acts differently in response to different situations. Grudem (1994:163) states that while God created a changing universe, in contrast to this change, God is "the same" referring to Malachi 3:6 and James 1:17. Bavinck (1977:149) notes that the fact that God is immutable is of the utmost importance in maintaining the Creator/creature distinction and for our worship of God:

The doctrine of God's immutability is of the highest significance in religion. The contrast between being and becoming marks the difference between Creator and the creature. Every creature is continually becoming. It is changeable,



constantly striving, seeks rest and satisfaction, and finds rest in God, in him alone, for only God is a pure being and no becoming. Hence, in Scripture, God is often called the Rock (*Italics added*).

Erickson (1988:304) speaks of God's constancy as involving several aspects:

There is first no quantitative change in God. God cannot increase in anything because he is already perfect. Nor can God decrease, for if God were to decrease, God would cease to be God. There is also no qualitative change. The nature of God does not undergo modifications. Therefore, God does not change his mind, plans or actions, for these rest on his nature (*Italics added*).

While Karl Barth's perspective concerning scripture is different from an Evangelical understanding that the Bible is the Word of God, Barth' understanding of God's attributes or perfection is worthy of our consideration here. For Barth (1957:491-493) God constancy (immutability) means that God remains who God is, a living immutable God. This perfection of God's constancy does not mean immobility, for this type of abstract immutability for Barth (1957:494) cannot be equated to the God of the Bible. Barth (1957:494) therefore describes God's perfection by stating that God is immutably the living God in his freedom and love. However, this love and freedom does not negate the constancy of God but rather affirms it. God is what God is in his/being and actuality, and therefore God cannot deny himself. Barth (1957: 494-495) states:

At every place, *God* is what *God* is continually and self-consistently. His love cannot cease to be his love nor his freedom. God alone could assail, alter, abolish, or destroy himself. But it is just at this point that he is the "immutable" God. For at no place or time can *God* or will *God* turn against himself or contradict himself, not even in virtue of his freedom or for the sake of His love (*italics added*).

Therefore, one can conclude that Barth's perspective of the immutability of God corresponds with an Evangelical understanding.

2.1. Arguments for the Immutability of God

Geisler (2001:108-110) presents arguments for the immutability of God that resonate within Evangelicalism:

□ The argument from Pure Actuality

God is Pure Actuality. God is being; everything else merely comes into being. Evangelicals understand that God is the great 'I Am', the 'Self-Existent One'. To speak of "pure actuality" does not only mean that God is completely determinate and without any residual indeterminacy or "potency" but that God is existence or "actuality" pure and simple, without any limitation. God exists in the fullest possible sense exhibiting all pure perfections to the highest degree. God's essence is therefore said to be identical with his existence. What God is, the very fullness of being guarantees that he is. However, creatures exist in a diminished sense and exhibit perfections only to a limited degree as constrained by their natures or essences. From this perspective, that which is created has the "potency" to change. God is essential a Pure Act who lacks no "potency". Therefore, what has no potentiality cannot change because change is passing from one state of potentiality to a change of actuality or from actuality to potentiality. Therefore, evangelicals understand that God cannot change. To change means that God is temporal, but God is atemporal and thus to deny God's non-



temporality is to deny who God is. This is inconsistent with evangelicalism and disastrous for the divine attributes under investigation.

The Argument from Simplicity

God is infinite, and an infinite being cannot be divided because God cannot be divided into infinite parts. Therefore, to speak of the argument from simplicity is to state that nothing can be added or subtracted from God. Therefore, diminishing any attribute is to diminish God himself because God's attributes are what God is. Every attribute of God is identical to his essence.

Bavinck (1977:176) explains:

The simplicity is of great importance, nevertheless, for our understanding of God. It is not only taught in scripture (where God is called "light," "life," and "love") but also automatically follows from the idea of God and is necessarily implied in other attributes. Simplicity here is the antonym of "compounded." If God is composed of parts, like a body, or composed of genus (class) and differentiae (attributes of different species belonging to the same genus), substance and accidents, matter and form, potentiality and actuality, essence and existence, then his perfection, oneness, independence and immutability cannot be maintained.

God is not an abstract Absolute Idea who happens to have knowledge and power. Instead, God in his very essence, within himself and by himself, is omniscience, immutability and omnipotence. God is whatever he has, for he has nothing that he is not.

The Argument from Perfection

The third argument that Geisler (2001:108) uses for the immutability of God comes from God's absolute perfection. The perfection of God means that he is devoid of all change, in essence, attributes, consciousness, will, and promises. No change is possible in God because all change must be better or worse, and God is absolute perfection. No cause for change in God exists, either in himself or outside of him. Since God is perfect, he cannot be more complete or find improvement. Therefore, God cannot change.

The Argument from Infinity

Evangelicals affirm that God is infinite as his being has no limits. However, temporal beings have limitations and have a beginning because whatever is temporal must have a beginning and therefore must have a cause. As discussed in the argument from simplicity, an infinite being cannot be divided. Hence it is impossible for an infinite being to have parts. For change involves the loss or gain of parts; therefore, an infinite being cannot change.

The Argument from Necessity

Geisler (2001:267) holds to the view that God is a Necessary Being. If God is a Necessary Being, then he cannot change. That is to state that God has no potential in his being not to be. If God has no potentiality in his being, then God is a Pure Actuality and thus cannot change.

The Argument from an Unchanging Cause

Geisler (2001:72) asserts that the Bible declares, and logic demands, that God is the First, Uncaused Cause. This means that God existed before and beyond the space-time universe. Thus, to argue that God becomes temporal at creation makes no logical sense because God is non-temporal by nature before and after creation. Therefore, the act of creating beings with free will does not in any way make God finite or temporal. Creation brought about a difference in a relationship, not in essence. Before creation the Creator had no relationship with creation.



Based on Geisler's arguments, evangelicals understand that owing to God's constancy, his intentions are always consistent with his purposes, which are also always consistent because God's will does not change. Evangelicals, such as (Geisler, 2001; Erickson, 1988 Grudem 1994) therefore, understand that God's immutability can be applied in the following ways:

2.2. The Immutability of God's being

Immutability is a property that belongs to the divine essence in the sense that God can neither gain new attributes that he didn't have before nor lose those already his/hers. To put it simply, *God doesn't grow* because God is Spirit, therefore there can be no increase or decrease in the Divine Being. If God increases (either quantitatively or qualitatively), he was, necessarily, incomplete before the change. If God decreases, he is necessarily, incomplete after the change. The deity, then, is incapable of development either positively or negatively. God neither evolves nor devolves. His attributes, considered individually, can never be greater or less than what they are and have always been. God will never be wiser, more loving, more powerful, or holier than he ever has been and ever will be.

This is at least implied in God's declaration to Moses: "I am who I am" (Exodus 3:14); and is explicit in other texts. For example: "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows" (Jam. 1:17). "I the Lord do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed" (Mal. 3:6). "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

2.3. The Immutability of God's Life

When Evangelicals talk about the immutability of God's life, they are very close to the notion of eternity or everlastingness, i.e. God never began to be nor will ever cease to be. God simply is. He did not come into existence (for to become existent is a change from nothing to something), nor will he go out of existence (for to cease existing is a change from something to nothing). God is not young or old: God is. Thus, one can read: "In the beginning, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they all wear out like a garment. Like clothing, you will change them, and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end" (Psalms 102:25-27). "Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God" (Psalms 90:2; cf. 93:2).

2.4. The Immutability of God's Character

Immutability may also be predicated on God's moral character by stating that God cannot become better (morally) than who he already is. If God could change (or become) regarding his moral character, it would indicate that he had been morally imperfect or incomplete antecedent to the time of change, and hence never God. If for the worse, it would indicate that he is now morally less perfect or complete, i.e., subsequent to the time of change, and hence no longer God. It will not do to say that God might conceivably change from one perfect being into another equally perfect being. For then, one has to specify in what sense God has changed. What constitutes God as different in the second mode of being from what he is in the first? Does God have more attributes, fewer attributes, better or worse attributes? If God in the second mode of being has the same attributes (both quantitatively and qualitatively), in what sense is he different from what he was in the first mode of being?

2.5. The Immutability of God's Plan



To deny immutability to God's purpose or plan would be no less an insult to the deity than predicate change of his being, life, and character. There are, as I understand, only two reasons why God would ever be forced to or need to alter his purpose:

- If God lacked the necessary foresight or knowledge to anticipate any or all contingencies (in which case God would not be omniscient, contrary to the claims of open theism); or
- If God had the needed foresight or knowledge but lacked the power or ability to affect what he had planned (in which case, he would not be omnipotent).

But since God is infinite in wisdom and knowledge, there can be no error or oversight in the conception of his purpose. Also, since God is infinite in power (omnipotent), there can be no failure or frustration in accomplishing his purpose. The many and varied changes in the relationship that God sustains with human beings and the more conspicuous events of redemptive history are not to be thought of as indicating a change in God's being or purpose. They are, instead, the execution in time of purposes eternally existing in the mind of God. For example, the abolition of the Mosaic Covenant was no change in God's will; it was, in fact, the fulfilment of his will, an eternal will which decreed change (i.e., change from the Mosaic to the New Covenant). Christ's coming, and work was thus no makeshift action to remedy unforeseen defects in the Old Testament scheme. It was but the realisation (historical and concrete) of what God had from eternity decreed.

Conclusion

In an endeavour to take the attribute of God's immutability seriously, an investigation from Church Fathers to Reformers was undertaken in this study. I have argued that Evangelical understanding of the doctrine of immutability is orthodox, namely that God is both independent and self-sufficient and hence immutable in respect of his supreme existence. Open theists like Boyd, in attempting to undermine this fundamental teaching about the immutability of God, state that those who hold to an unchanging God do so by understanding God in Aristotelian terms. This understanding of God lacks the vital energies of the biblical witness and reduces God to one who is unresponsive to human needs. However, I have argued that the Greek philosophical understanding of God has not permeated the classical/traditional proclamation of God's constancy because in scripture, we find clear teaching of God's immutability. The proposition that God is ignorant of the future and therefore changes his plans and purposes to accommodate human inconsistencies and circumstances must be rejected. This is because the open theistic understanding of God's immutability does not resonate with the evangelical understanding of God's immutability that is deeply rooted in Holy Scripture, Church history and sound reasoning.

Evangelicals do not obscure the meaning of God's immutability with the idea of immobility. The Greeks had this understanding of "the unmoved mover" that God cannot change, therefore; he must be disinterested in the creature he created. Thus the view provided of immobility is closer to Deism than to a loving God shown to us through Christ. While God's nature is settled with no possibility of change, his actions in the world are predetermined in accord with how humans relate to God's immutable nature. An unchangeable God must have changing relationships with changing people for a real relationship and yet remain constant in character and purpose.

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