

Balaam: Oracle #2 Part I: God does not Change

Good morning.

SLIDE: Malachi

On January 7, 1855 (that's my birthday – January 7th, not 1855), a 20-year old preacher delivered his very first sermon at the New Park Street Chapel, Southwark, England. His name was Charles Haddon Spurgeon. He would later become known as the "Prince of Preachers" and deliver over 3,500 sermons. The title of this first effort was The Immutability of Yehovah.

His text was Malachi 3:6 : **"For I am the Lord, I do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed."**

Here is how he began this first sermon: "It has been said by someone that "the proper study of mankind is man." I will not oppose the idea, but I believe it is equally true that the proper study of God's elect is God; the proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, **is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity.** It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can compass and grapple with; in them we feel a kind of self-content, and go our way with the thought, "Behold I am wise." But

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when we come to this master-science, finding that our plumb-line cannot sound its depth, and that our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn away with the thought, that vain man would be wise but he is like a wild ass's colt; and with the solemn exclamation, "I am but of yesterday, and know nothing." - - end quote -

That was Spurgeon's opening to his very first sermon. What he said was that if we want to know who we are as Christians, we must seek to know God Himself

- we must seek to know Who He is if we wish to understand who we are.

And then, Spurgeon begins this quest for understanding Who He is by examining something called God's *Immutability*. Note that the text Spurgeon chose was from the prophet Malachi: "I am Jehovah, I do not change: therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed."

Slide: Immutable

'**IMMUTABILITY**' – this is just a 50¢ word meaning “unchanging” – something is immutable when it never changes.

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I want to look at the topic of God's immutability today because it comes up in the 2nd Oracle of Balaam. As you may remember, Balaam pronounces a total of seven oracles, and today, we are on Oracle #2.

In this 2nd oracle, God proclaims two specific attributes about Himself that have profound implications for us: He states that He does not lie and He does not change.

Today, we're going to consider His statement that He does not change. "*Hope and change*" – the last presidential election cycle promised us "hope and change" – well, most Americans are now merely *hoping* that they have some *change* left in their pocket after their taxes are paid.

The thing that marks every creature, every human being, every rock, every tree, every leaf – everything that is *creaturely* – is that everything *changes*. Should Our Lord linger in His return, we are all going to change so much so that we'll eventually die.

- I can remember hearing Kenneth Hagin, one of the patriarchs of the Word of Faith camp, brag on TV that when he was a pastor in a local church – "none of my congregation died while I was the pastor because I exercised faith." Was he being 100% accurate? I can't say, but after a very successful career, he himself died of a heart attack in 2003 in Tulsa, Oklahoma

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So, it appears that the Reverend Hagin has since changed.
But, God does not.

- The other day, someone asked me *how old I was* – perhaps they were wondering *if I could still remember*. When I told them, they said: ‘*You don’t look that old.*’ This is an example of the truth of one of my favorite texts: Psalm 116 verse 11: “All men are liars”

We all have different opinions about the benefits of change:

- Newlywed husband thinks – she laughs at my stupid jokes, she never criticizes my choice of clothes, likes to watch football and she probably is not the kind of person who gets upset with socks on the floor – *I hope she never changes.*
- Newlywed wife thinks: *he is good raw material – ripe for improvement. I definitely will have to help him make some adjustments so that he is neater and more color coordinated than the typical bachelor. He needs a lot of sprucing up, but he’s a keeper.*

“Change” – We grow and try to better ourselves, and that is change. Sometimes, our sense of well-being collapses around us; we lose our health, our loved ones, our money, and that also is change. Our bodies begin to wear out; we can no

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longer do the things we used to do – it is all unsettling and unnerving, but it is inevitable.

Unlike us, God is unchanging and therefore He is completely reliable. We, on the other hand, are only intermittently reliable. We often break under pressure or temptation. He does not.

Before we get into the text of Balaam's 2nd oracle, I'd like to take a minute and address a frustration that has been expressed to me several times before – people sometimes find it difficult to understand the OT text and relate it to their life. Actually, this is a very common but unspoken frustration among Christians.

SLIDE: The Link

- (Notion taken from Knowing God (J.I.Packer))
- The Bible says that it is the Word of God and it is a lamp unto onto feet and a light unto our path." And this is true. However, it's not unusual to wonder "where is the light for me" in what I'm reading? The Bible is a bridge, but we can't see the far bank – it's like we in a fog.

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- The Biblical stories are fascinating, but our reading is not helping us; all-too-often, it is difficult to connect ourselves to what's going on in a story. What is our problem? Well – it's twofold.
- The first problem is that the Bible takes us into what is quite a different world than what we're use to – namely, it takes us to the Near Eastern world as it was thousands of years ago – primitive and barbaric, agricultural and non-mechanized, people with customs we don't understand.
 - It is in that world that we meet 90-year old Abraham and read about God promising him children as numerous as the stars and possession of a land he doesn't have;
 - We read of Moses climbing Mt. Sinai and receiving the 10 commandments directly from God,
 - Of David fighting Goliath the Philistine – *the Philistines*, a people who no longer exist.
 - We read about the Israelites following the cloud thru the wilderness, manna appearing out of nowhere, flights of quail and water from a rock.
 - We see Isaiah and Jeremiah prophesizing against idolatry and Daniel surviving in a den of lions.

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- It is all interesting, but it all seems so far away. It all belongs to THAT world, not THIS world – as if we're spectators on the outside looking in. We think to ourselves: "God did all those wonderful things THEN, but how does this touch my life now?" We don't live in that type of world – we live in a world with Facebook, iphones, supermarkets, TV and – thankfully – indoor plumbing and electricity.
- How do I make the connection between the two worlds? More specifically – how can **I** relate to Moses? He was a prophet leading a rag-tag group of complainers thru the desert for 40 years, primarily on foot. I am a retired US Government worker who sat almost his whole career behind a desk. I'm no prophet, I'm no leader of a nation, I don't possess a staff that turns into a snake, I don't hear God speak in an audible voice – How can I possibly relate to Moses?
 - Well – there was a song back in the 1980's entitled "*Looking for Love in all the wrong places*". And, that's the problem here – we're trying to find the **link** between them and us in the **wrong place**.

CLICK: God Himself

- The link is God Himself, not the people. For the God with whom THEY had to do is the same God with whom

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WE have to do. The EXACT same God, for God does not change in the least tiny bit.

- Our mistake is in concentrating more on trying to understand THEM rather than UNDERSTANDING HIM.
- The link between them and us is that we are both dealing with the same God. **AND THE SAME GOD IS DEALING WITH US!**
- So, if we want to cross that bridge between the men and women of the Bible and us today, one of the basic truths for our Christian walk that we must grasp is the fact that *God does not change.*

2nd Oracle from God: 23:13–19

Let's set the scene for Oracle #2 – as you may remember, Balaam is a sorcerer that has been hired by King Balak of Moab. Balaam's assignment is to get God to change His mind about the promises He made to the Israelites; Balaam could then put a curse on Israel, and outnumbered Moab would stand a chance of being victorious in battle. Not only was

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Balaam's 1st attempt to curse Israel a disaster, God states that Israel is a special people, set apart from the rest of the nations for Him.

Before I read the 2nd Oracle, I want to do something that I haven't done in a long time. Take a guess at who wrote the following words:

➤ “In the morning, when you rise, you shall make the sign of the holy cross, and you shall say: *‘In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.’*”

Then, kneeling or standing, you shall say the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer.”

Answer: Martin Luther in 1529 in his The Small Catechism.

Someone asked about why Protestants seldom make the sign of the cross like the Catholics. Well, it was mainly a reaction against the Catholic Church after the reformation, but as we just read, Luther still recommended it for Christians. And, Lutherans still do it, as do Episcopalians and several other denominations. I know it can become a superstition – (blessing yourself as you come up to bat at a baseball game). But, it's use was very widespread in the first four centuries of the church.

For example, in the opening of the 3rd century AD, Tertullian was the bishop in Carthage. He was the 1st to coin the terms

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Old and New Testaments in reference to the 39 books comprising the Old Testament, and the 27 books comprising the New. He also was the one who gave us the theological term 'Trinity' for what is described as such in Scripture. Regarding the practice of making the sign of the cross, He wrote: "In all our travels and movements, in all our coming in and going out, in putting on our shoes, at the bath, at the table, in lighting our candles, in lying down, in sitting down, whatever employment occupies us, *we mark our foreheads with the sign of the cross.*" In the fourth century, **St. John Chrysostom** (who apparently anticipated an American Express slogan) wrote, "**never leave home without** making the sign of the cross."

Going to Catholic High School, the Christian Brothers encouraged us to make the sign of the cross in two different ways... (1) regular – (2) sign of cross on forehead, lips, heart – it was a paraphrase of Psalm 19 verse 14: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, My Rock and My Redeemer."

I say all this because I'm reviving that practice for myself. I'm not asking anyone else to do it – anyone who does it purely as tradition or superstition or sense of obligation is making a mistake. Paul said that we should let our consciences be clear about what we eat and do, and *do it all*

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for the Lord. I've prayed about it and it feels right for me.
So...

<May the Lord be on my mind, on my lips, and in my heart – that I may proclaim His Word both earnestly and in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ – as instructed in Philippians chapter 1 (1:27). >

SLIDE – NUMBERS chapter 23:beginning with verses 13:

13 And Balak said to him, "Please come with me to another place, from which you may see them. You shall see only a fraction of them and shall not see them all. Then curse them for me from there." And he took him to the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars and offered a bull and a ram on each altar. Balaam said to Balak, "Stand here beside your burnt offering, while I meet the Lord over there." And the Lord met Balaam and put a word in his mouth and said, "Return to Balak, and thus shall you speak." And he came to him, and behold, he was standing beside his burnt offering, and the princes of Moab with him. And Balak said to him, "What has the Lord spoken?" And Balaam took up his discourse and said,

"Rise, Balak, and hear;

give ear to me, O son of Zippor:

19 God is not man, that he should lie,

or a son of man, that he should change his mind.

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Has he said, and will he not do it?

Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?

20 Behold, I received a command to bless:

he has blessed, and I cannot revoke it. ---

21 He has not beheld misfortune in Jacob,
nor has he seen trouble in Israel.

The Lord their God is with them,
and the shout of a king is among them.

22 God brings them out of Egypt
and is for them like the horns of the wild ox.

23 For there is no enchantment against Jacob,
no divination against Israel;

now it shall be said of Jacob and Israel,
'What has God wrought!'

24 Behold, a people! As a lioness it rises up
and as a lion it lifts itself; it does not lie down until it has
devoured the prey
and drunk the blood of the slain."

25 And Balak said to Balaam, "Do not curse them at all, and do
not bless them at all." 26 But Balaam answered Balak, "Did I
not tell you, 'All that the Lord says, that I must do?'"

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SLIDE: Outline for oracle 2 discussion

- God does not lie
- God keeps His promises to Israel
- God does not Change His mind

Here is a general summary of what's contained in Oracle #2. As I have mentioned earlier, the words of the Oracle are God's words out of Balaam's mouth. The oracle could rightly be put in red letters, because we hear what God is saying about Himself and about His relationship to Israel.

Click: Today I want to concentrate on the great truth *that God does not change*. He is Immutable. In the next session, we get into the implications for us of the fact that God does not lie.

OK – After the 1st failure to curse Israel, Balak thinks maybe A CHANGE OF LOCATION is what is needed. Balak is STILL thinking that Balaam is the *composer* of the message rather than just the *messenger*.

Balak totally ignores Balaam's statement that he can speak only what God says to speak. Instead, he suspects that Balaam may have been intimidated by the vast number of Israelites that were visible from his vantage point on the mountain.

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- So, he takes Balaam to another high place where he will be able to see only a *small* portion of the Israelites and perhaps not be so intimidated
- So, they go to the top of **Pisgah**, and once again, they built seven altars and offered a bull and a ram on each altar – trying to bribe God into cursing Israel. {“And Moshe went up from the plains of Moab unto Mt Nevo to the top of Pisgah, that is, over against Yericho.” Deut 34 – if so, Moses could see what Balaam saw and then into Canaan.}
- But, as we just read, this second attempt at cursing was also a miserable failure for him.

SLIDE: PINK PANTHER slide

Once again, Adonai puts a word in Balaam’s mouth, which he then announces to Balak, who is waiting impatiently next to his sacrifices along with his princes. Not only does this 2nd attempt fizzle, but God’s 2nd blessing on Israel this time is even MORE powerful and pointed than the 1st. And the obviously flustered Balak blurts out to Balaam, **“if you're not going to curse them for me, the least you can do is not bless them!”** Balaam repeats that he really has no choice in the matter.

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I am amazed that this man Balak never gives up, and that he never seems to get the message. This is in spite of the fact that it is God Who is speaking, and the message has been repeated several times.

- Ironically, here is a man who is willing to pay well for Balaam's insight into the spirit world and his connections of the gods, **and yet, HE does not pay any attention to what Balaam is telling him about his own situation – the fact that Balaam cannot curse Israel and that** anyone who tries to curse them will themselves be cursed by God. Balak has understood absolutely nothing about the God of Israel.

I find it interesting that when Balaam returned to the campfire, the text says Balak was standing next to the sacrifices along with the princes of Moab. Even so, Balaam says to him: “Arise, Balak: Stand on your feet.” Evidently, Balaam wanted to make sure that he had Balak's full attention – in other words, Balaam was saying: *“stand on your feet because you're going to be in the presence of the words of Yehovah!”*

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SLIDE: GOD IS NOT A MAN

The Oracle starts in verse 19 by Balaam saying: "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a human being, that He should change His mind."

Q: why doesn't God lie or change His mind? After all, He's God and Who is going to stop Him?

I remember back in catechism class, some smart-aleck kid (I don't think it was me but it might have been) asked the nun: *Can God build a rock so heavy that He cannot lift it?*

A: **No.** God can't build a rock so heavy that he can't lift it because He cannot do anything that is contrary to His nature, else He would not remain God. So there are things that He *cannot* do

- He cannot build a rock so heavy He can't lift it because He is All-Mighty. He cannot sin for He is Holy.
- He is infinite in his wisdom; therefore He can never do anything that is unwise. He is infinite in His justice; therefore He can never do anything that is unjust. He is infinite in His goodness; therefore He can never do anything that is not good. He is Truth; therefore it is *impossible* that He should lie.

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He cannot do anything contrary to His nature....

SLIDE: GOD IS NOT A MAN. THAT HE SHOULD REPENT

Your Bible may translate verse 19 as “God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a human being, that He should **repent**. - Instead of “that He should *change* His mind”.

In the Hebrew, both words are accurate but the word ‘*repent*’ is somewhat misleading for us today. When the Bible speaks of my repenting or your repenting, it means that we are called to change our minds or our outlook with respect to sin—that we are to turn away from evil. Since God’s nature is Holy, He cannot have any evil in Him, and thus there is never anything of which He needs to repent in the way the word applies to us. So, I believe the translation that God does not “change His mind” is more understandable.

But, is that *completely* accurate to say that God *never* changes His mind? What about the instances when the Bible does *appear* to say that just that?

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SLIDE: Genesis 6 –

For example, Genesis 6, speaking about the reason for the Flood, it states: “The Lord was **sorry** that He had made man on the earth, and He was **grieved in His heart**.⁷ The Lord said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them.”

So, what is this saying about God – that He repented of creating man and that His heart was grieved? We know that this text can't be taken *entirely* literally, otherwise we'd have to say that God – Who is Spirit – has a physical heart. So something else is going on here – but what?

- Since the attribute of God that we're discussing is that *He does not change*, we need to look at this a bit further, because if He does sometimes change, then He *would have been lying* when, in Numbers 23, He told us that He *doesn't* change His mind.

Let's look at another incident where God seems to change His mind, similar to Genesis 6. I believe that this 2nd incident better illustrates what's going on.

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SLIDE: As you might remember, in the Book of Numbers, chapter 14, the Israelites refuse to go into Canaan because they didn't trust God's promises. God then says to Moses – quote: "I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they." (verse 12) Moses pleads with God not to do it, saying that, if He did that, the Egyptians and surrounding nations will assume that He (God) was just not powerful enough to deliver them into Canaan. Moses in effect was saying: "*Think of your reputation, God.*"

- Moses intercedes on the part of the people, saying: "Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now."

CLICK : Then in Verse 20: we read: " So the Lord said, "I have pardoned them according to your word..."

God here indicates that He will not strike them with pestilence & not disinherit them *because of Moses'* intercession.

- But – isn't this saying that God changed His mind about a proposed action? Sure sounds like it, but did He?

OK – here we go. When we interpret Scripture, we must do so **literally** – it means what it *says*. So, we read the Bible similar to

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the way we read other non-fiction books. In the Bible, a noun is a noun and a verb is a verb. But, that being said, we interpret it in a way that takes into account various literary forms, such as *slang idioms*:

- for example, if Jack asked me to help him pick out a new Duck Dynasty camouflage jacket for hunting season, I might reply 'OK', or I might tell him to "*Go fly a kite.*" Someone who is unfamiliar with that expression might wonder "what does kite flying have to do clothing selection?" Of course, it has nothing to do with Jack maintaining his sartorial splendor. It's just an expression by which I told Jack "No way, Jose".

So, even though we interpret Scripture *literally*, we need to take different *literary forms* into account in order to understand what the people are really saying. (deaconate – fundamentalist versus extreme literalist – rain cats & dogs?)

SLIDE: The Bible uses many basic literary forms, but I want to highlight two right now:

- #1. **Anthropomorphic Language.** This is language that assigns human characteristics to God. A text that reads "the finger of God" is an example of this. When the Bible

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describes things in this way, it is not really asserting that God has physical parts like human beings. It is only describing things in ways that we can relate to. We saw that Genesis 6 state that God was grieved in His heart – that's an example of anthropomorphic language.

The Bible speaks of God of coming down to earth to see what's going on – does an Omnipresent God really need to do this? It says that His eyes are running to and fro across the earth – image that sight if it were literal! That's all anthropomorphic language. The Bible uses these types of literary language because the only language God has by which to speak to us about Himself is our human language

If we don't recognize when these forms are used, we can get into bad theology. The Mormons teach that God has a *literal body* because their founder Joseph Smith – who knew neither Hebrew nor Greek – did not understand the anthropomorphic literary form.

Even though this type of imagery is used in the Bible, Scripture clearly contains multitude biblical reminders and warnings that God is not a man – as he states in the 2nd oracle. The prophet Samuel repeats the statement: God “is not a man that He should relent

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[change His mind]” in chapter 15 of his book. (1 Sam. 15:29).

Now the 2nd type of literary form I want to briefly mention is the type that is used in the texts where God appears to change His mind. It is called:

#2. **Phenomenological Language.** (mouthful)– 50¢ word

This is the use of language that describes the way things **appear to the naked eye – what the phenomenon looks like.** It describes the ways things look *from our perspective* but it is not necessarily a true scientific fact. An example of this is the description of “*the sun rising*”. Unless we understand the use of phenomenological language, we might think that the Bible teaches that the earth is at the center of the universe – this is how the church went down the wrong road in the dispute with Galileo.

The Bible is not really saying that the sun revolves around the earth. Rather, it is merely saying that the sun rises because, to our naked eye, it *looks like* the sun moves and the earth does not. Actually, this statement is still current. Turn on Channel 10 and you’ll hear Steve Caporizzo (the meteorologist) give you the times of sunrise and sunset, but

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nobody assumes he is teaching that the sun revolves around the earth.

In the case of Moses pleading with God, the literary form being used is **Phenomenological Language**. It *appears from our standpoint* that God changed His mind – and I'll explain how we know that this is what's going on in a minute.

Admittedly, it does seem to be a contradiction, but the scriptural commentators maintain it isn't. But – we're not Hebrew scholars – what do we do when we come across something that seems to us to be a contradiction? Well, we can research this issue in other parts of the Bible – we hold onto the truth that what God says about Himself is the baseline for resolving these types of questions.

There's another way, admittedly less reliable, but I like it. When I'm faced with what appears to be a contraction in Scripture or just outright odd, I've found it beneficial to ask myself the question:

– “What if this was actually true?”

Take this incident between Moses pleading with God & God appearing to change His mind about disinheriting the Israelites.

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If God actually **did** change His mind based on a persuasive argument from Moses, what would it teach us about God?

- It would be saying that God relented because Moses showed Him a *more brilliant way*.
- This would mean that God obviously *overlooked* the consequence of His proposed action on His reputation. Therefore, His reasoning was obviously flawed. His decision was impulsive and rash.
- Fortunately, Moses – the wise consigliere – saw the folly of God’s thinking and persuaded the shortsighted Deity to come up with a better plan.
- Now – does that make any sense? Would God have put forth a flawed idea that needed to be corrected by one of His fallible creatures?

Of course not. It would be like me having some terrible situation arise in my life and saying to God... *“I really didn’t see this coming.”* What would we think if He answered *“Neither did I”*?

The truth is that God does not change His mind – in fact, He does not change at all.

Let’s come at this issue from another angle – prayer. If God *doesn’t* change, **“What sense is there in praying to an**

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unchangeable God? If He has already made up His mind what He is going to do, how can our prayers change anything?”
Good question!

We know that prayer changes things because God told us that it does – but it doesn't change Him. Before the world began, God's Plan was that He would take certain actions, provide certain benefits, and bestow certain blessings when we come to Him in prayer.

- He's not changing His mind when He grants a prayer request – He saying, in effect, He will *withhold* certain things until we ask for them.

Maybe we can understand what difference prayer makes by the example of how **a mother cares for her sick child**. Before she tucks him in bed for the night, she gives him his medicine and quietly reassures him of her presence. She knows he's going to cry out to her during the night, and when the cry comes – it does not change her mind about anything. She responds exactly as she planned to respond and does precisely what she knew would be best for him. But her help comes in answer to his request. That is the way she planned it.

- God has good things prepared for us, but His plan is to give them to us in answer to our prayers. So ask and you will receive.

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All right? When faced with an apparent contradiction, use what God says about Himself as the criteria for decision.

Ok – I mentioned several sessions ago that one of the greatest benefits to me in preparing for these presentations is that I find myself knowing God better and *wanting* to know Him better. I'm doing that, by His grace.

- Lest anything think that I *think* I know God more than anyone else here, let me assure you *that I have no illusions on this*. I've been a Christian for about 35 years, and only recently has the desire to know Him overtaken my desire to know ABOUT Him. It's wonderful, but I'm about ½ inch into a billion mile journey, and I hope that, by the time I cross over the river, I'd make it up to one inch.
- Then, I'll inevitably realize that what I thought was a trip of a billion miles is just the first step. I'll have all the time in eternity to know Him more – never completely – but more and more.

SLIDE: I've come across a wonderful book entitled – appropriately – Knowing God. It is written by J. I. Packer – an Anglican theologian. He described the activity by which we can start to know God as involving four basic steps...

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- First, Listening to God's Word (Scripture) and receiving it as the Holy Spirit interprets it as it applies to you.
- Second, Noticing God's character and His nature as Scripture reveals it.
- Third, Accepting His invitations and doing what He commands.
- Fourth, Recognizing and rejoicing in the love that He has shown in approaching you and drawing you into His divine fellowship.

Click: It is this second activity that we're involved in today – looking at that characteristic of God that He doesn't change.

SLIDE: IMMUTABLE

So again, IMMUTABILITY is another fancy word that simply means that something does not change.

- While everyone else may decide to move to the other side of the church, God stays seated where He is.

I realize that the theological term 'IMMUTABLE' can seem strange, a bit too technical. No one uses the word in everyday conversations. But think about it. We may not be familiar with the term "Immutable" but we've all heard of the word "*mutate*" – right?

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- Science Fiction movies –Godzilla mutates because of radiation, viruses mutate, etc. ... or X-Men, or
- Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles – Q: My son John loved these guys when he was younger. But I never understood how they actually got that way? *Was it from drinking too much Red Bull?*
- When things mutate, they change – they're mutable; if something can't change or doesn't change, it is IMMUTABLE.

Here are some terms that *mean the same* as immutable: Certain, constant, predictable, stable, steady, – unable to change

I like that – God is UNABLE to change; not only won't He change, He is unable to change. He is Predictable! (Greek & Roman gods were unpredictable, & Allah is unpredictable!)

When God spoke to Moses, He said that His name is “I AM”, not “I Was” or “I Will Be”. YAHWEH.

I AM = the same. Two things about Him that never change: Who He is and What He Wills.

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This attribute of God – that He doesn't change is probably is the most unnoticed, undervalued, and unexplored attribute of God – and I suspect that's the reason why Spurgeon chose to discuss it in his very first sermon.

Why is His immutability so vitally important? Because this is the attribute that enables us to depend on God to be God and Truth to be Truth.

Martin Luther said – *If God was not immutable, who could believe (any of) His promises?*

Not everyone likes this attribute of God. Jonathan Edwards pointed out that the fact that God *doesn't* change is one of the reasons nonbelievers hate Him so much. They may have other powerful enemies – but those enemies can grow weak. They have other adversaries who are angry at them – but they can usually be calmed or bribed (it was the intention of Balak and Balaam to bribe God). They may have other opponents who are wise – but they can be fooled. However, the God of heaven and earth will never cease to be all-powerful. His wrath will never turn from sin, He cannot be fooled or bribed and He keeps His promises. That's why His enemies hate Him.

And irritation with this attribute of God does not stop with unbelievers – throughout church history, false or misguided teachers have attempted (with some success, I might add) to

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introduce doctrines and revelations that mutates His true character into something inferior that better fits their own imaginations. Brothers & sisters, we have to be aware that this attack from *within* the churches continues today.

OK – let's look at some ways in which God unchanging nature impacts us...

SLIDE:

God's LIFE does not change

First – God's LIFE doesn't change. Although we cannot adequately describe God, we know that He is a Personal Being, He is Spirit and He never changes. He is eternal.

There is a Child's question, "Who made God?" – A: Nobody made God – He was always there. He doesn't change; He doesn't grow older. He doesn't gain new powers or lose powers He already has. He does not develop, He does not evolve. He does not grow stronger or weaker or wiser as time goes by. *God does not have wrinkles.*

Actually, the question "Who Made God?" is a line of reason that agnostics and atheists often put forward to justify their

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unbelief. For example, Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), a famous British philosopher, wrote an influential essay entitled Why I am not a Christian. In it, Russell put this question forward as his first objection. “If we ask, “Who made me?” then we should also ask, “Who made God?” Russell concludes: “If everything must have a cause, then God must have a cause.”

Today’s well-known atheists often repeat this objection, including Richard Dawkins (*The God Delusion*) and physicist Stephen Hawking (*A Brief History of Time*). They believe that the greatest beginning of all — the universe — had no outside cause whatsoever! Some atheists do admit this statement is a logical problem – because you just can’t keep going back and back forever – the universe has to start somewhere outside of itself. But they sure that however it came to be – GOD DIDN’T DO IT.

There are several ways to address this issue, because nothing could be more irrational than the idea that something comes from nothing. However, a line of reason that I find both hilarious – and devastating at the same time – was made by the great Walter Martin, who wrote the Kingdom of the Cults.

SLIDE: MARTIN AND RUSSELL

- I recall a debate that Dr. Martin had on a late-night TV show in California either with Russell himself or

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someone who voiced Russell's line of reasoning. The person who didn't believe in God posed the question: "Who made God" in defense of his unbelief.

- Dr. Martin, who majored in philosophy, adopted an unusual response so that the listening audience wouldn't become bored by philosophical arguments. Dr. Martin granted Russell's premise and explored where it would lead if it were true.
- This was a long time ago, so I'm paraphrasing what I remember of the debate.
- Dr. Martin said, *"OK – let's assume for the point of this debate that someone did make God."* Agreed? Agreed. OK..
- *"OK – you die and come before your Maker to be judged – and you are going to die eventually Mr. Russell. God says to you, 'why should I keep you out of hell when you fought against Me and spoke against My Son all thru your life?'"*
- Based on your argument, Mr. Russell, you would smugly reply to God – "I didn't believe in You because I reasoned that someone probably made You, and someone made the someone who made you, and so on and so on. So, I didn't regard your words as the final authority."

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- Here's the killer – what if God then replies: “Let's say, Mr. Russell, for argument sake, that it is true that someone made Me. And thus, I'm responsible to the someone who made Me. However, I made you and thus **you're responsible to Me**, so your argument is irrelevant. Now – what did you do with the Gospel of My Son which is the only thing that can keep your soul out of hell?”
- Russell paused a long time, looked into the camera, and finally said (again I paraphrase here), – “Well, I guess I would have to say that I did my best during life and tried to live a life that upheld the ethical principles of Jesus – so that's why You should not send me to hell.”

Sorry – wrong answer – thank you for playing. I would not want to stand before God and only have that for my answer.

The truth is that He is the Creator of all – period – and nobody created Him; He created us, and therefore we're responsible to Him.

- *God's life does not change.*

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God's CHARACTER *does not change*

God's character does not change. People change. One day we may be in a good mood, the next day in an ugly mood. Like Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi, who's original Hebrew name means "pleasantness", a person can become a Mara (bitterness) due to life's events.

We all change. That is the nature of creature-hood, and that is the nature of life. Some change is good – we get old enough to qualify for senior discounts in Applebee's. *But we find that sliding into the bench seats is a bit more challenging now.*

If things are going good, we're in a good mood; when we're not, routine things get more challenging and irritating.

But nothing of this sort can happen to God. The character of God is today – and always will be – exactly the same as in Bible times. He is not more loving today than He was in the Garden, and He will not be more loving 1,000 years from now. And He will hate sin no less in 1,000 years than He did at the flood.

A lot of attention is placed on the thought that God is a personal Being – and He is – but the truth is so stated today as to leave the impression that God is a person *of the same sort as the rest of us* – somewhat limited in what He will do,

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oftentimes unsuccessful, continuing to evolve in the area of tolerance, and a little pathetic. However, the truth is that – like us, God is personal, but unlike us, He is great!

All too often, people want to exchange the truth picture God's character for something else. We wanted a more comfortable god in place of what the real One.

Scripture calls this 'idolatry' – it can take the primitive form of having gods made of stone or wood, or it can take today's more *sophisticated form of redefining God's character to suit our own tastes.*

- Today's culture likes to think only of a god of love and understanding – period – a god who doesn't act upon His attributes of holiness, justice and wrath toward sin. *This is today's form of idolatry.*
- This image is *as much an* idol as any statue of wood or stone in the jungle.
- We can see God's character being watered-down – being presented as less than it is – when we listen to what passes for the full gospel message in many churches today – even when done with good intentions. For example, it is a distortion of the Gospel to say God accepts us *just as we are* – He does NOT accept us just as we are – there is a condition for inclusion in the kingdom

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of the Sovereign God – there is a demand in both the OT and NT, again and again and again – God's demand is repentance. It's true that you don't have to first clean yourself up in order to come to Him, but you do need to *first repent* – He will clean you up after you come to Him.

-
- We are not being loving when we tell people that God accepts them *without repentance* – because we're exchanging the truth of God for a lie in doing so.
- God is perfectly holy, He has never been *less* holy than He is now and can never be more holy than He is God's character does not change over time – He is Who He says He is. *The character of God has not changed.*

The Book of James says: Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.¹⁸ In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of **truth**, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

'The Father of lights' – the stars and the moon vary in magnitude and are subject to phases, eclipses and shadows.

- We've seen Buffalo receive over 7 ½ feet of snow this past week – some people are saying it is the result of climate

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change. Laughable – it's really hard to sell your product when everyone is freezing. The fact is that the earth has not gotten warmer for the past 15 years because the earth's temperature is mostly subject to solar activity – the sun is now in a low activity cycle and is expected remain there for the next 20–30 years, so it's going to stay cold.

- James assures us that, even though the sun goes thru cycles of intensity and brightness, God is the Ultimate Author of Light, and In Him, there is no change in brightness and clarity. There is no fluctuation in His character.

James wrote: 'He brought us forth by the word of Truth' - that's a good lead-in to the next section:

God's TRUTH *does not change*

God's truth does not change. One of the most significant aspects of God's character was revealed when Jesus equated Himself with "the truth" John 14:6 – "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, You would have known my Father also. From now on you know him and have seen him'"

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Scripture repeatedly teaches the sanctity of truth in a variety of ways. Satan is called a “liar” and the “father of lies” (8:44), showing us that the opposite of what is true is not holy. Jesus affirms the sacredness of oaths and vows by telling us it is better not to swear an oath at all if we have no intent to keep it (Matt. 5:33–37; God made a vow to Abraham when He wanted to confirm the truthfulness of His promise (Heb. 6:13–18; Gen. 15).

Truth is that which conforms to reality as it is perceived by God. He knows all things *exhaustively*, and so we can trust anything He reveals in Scripture. Truth is not defined by our own subjective standards; it is determined by the Source of truth Himself.

I mentioned to the elders that I have been experiencing a pressing desire to have the sense of God’s majesty restored in my life and in the churches. I find in myself that it is all too easy to become complacent about Who He is and what He says about Himself. God says that He does not change.

It is the unwelcome flip side of that statement that society recoils from – the flip side is that since He does not change, therefore His Truth *also* does not change. Whatever God says about *anything* – either about Himself or about us – is Truth both then and now – else He is not the God of the Bible. This aspect of immutability – that His truth does not change – is the

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one with which people both *inside* and *outside* the churches have always had the most trouble. –

- *Just about all* Christian churches give lip-service to the proposition that Scriptures are the Word of God; *many* would say that the Scripture is inspired – at least in the certain areas that they agree with.
- But *only a minority* of churches today would agree that Scripture is *God's truth breathed by the Holy Spirit, that it is inerrant, and therefore this truth does not and cannot change.*

Why the reluctance to accept the idea that Truth does not change? Pride perhaps, that we oppose the very thought that our opinion isn't now the highest law in the land. It is a flaw with our sinful nature since the Garden.

With us, what we believe now is considered absolutely true, but that can change over time. Some of the facts that **I** once thought were absolutely true – I now know are not.

- ??? Example: devastated when I found out last year that Santa Claus was an imaginary person.
- I once hated Broccoli – Donna has convinced me that it's not so bad – especially with a lot of Soy Sauce.

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- Sometimes, people change because they are forced to change – e.g.; the southern plantation owners & slavery.
- Sometimes people change because new information become available – e.g.; danger of smoking.

Pilate recognized man's changing view of truth when he asked Jesus "What is truth?"

Given that our views of what's true changes over time, it's somewhat understandable that people might think that what God says is true also changes over time. Since the Bible describes people who were somewhat primitive in their society, what was true in Biblical times for them isn't necessarily true for us today – *or so the thinking goes*. Even our image of God Himself has evolved – from an OT version of an angry abolitionist John Brown to a NT Mr. Rogers.

And the media doesn't help. I can remember listening to some political commentators talk about President George Bush (43) just after he was first elected. – *they expressed surprise – "this is an interesting political strategy, he's actually doing what he said he would do"*. Truthfulness is optional in the political arena – as is demonstrated almost daily of late.

But – Jesus said "I am the way, the Truth and the life". He says the words "I tell you truth" 78 times in the New

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Testament. "I tell you the truth, whoever *hears my word* and *believes* him who sent me *has eternal life and will not be condemned*; he has crossed over from death to life." – John 5:24

- God doesn't suffer from a scarcity of information when He makes a statement about that is true – **He doesn't have to Google anything!** He never has to issue a retraction on what He said based on new information.

OK – how do we know what's true? Well, God says in Oracle #2 that He doesn't lie. This means that whatever He says in Scripture IS true. And since He doesn't change His mind, then His opinion on what is True also never changes. If He said something was true then, **it is also true now, period.** This applies to what He says about Himself, us, that no one comes to Him except thru Jesus, the Scriptural tests of a true apostle or a true prophet or whatever. God's Truth does not change. Jesus said: "Father, sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth." (John 17:17)

SLIDE: Truth

I like this quote from Stephen Lawson : "*Truth is reality. It is how things actually are. Theologically, truth is that which is consistent with the mind, will, character, glory, and being of God.* **Truth is the self-disclosure of God Himself.**

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Truth is truth ***because*** God declared it so and **made it so**. All truth must be defined in terms of God, whose very nature is truth.

When Pilate arrogantly asked Jesus the question *‘What is truth?’*, he voiced a worldview that is prevalent today. We, like Pilate, also live in a world in which absolute truth did not exist. Even though he was looking straight into the face of the incarnate Truth, Pilate could not discern it,

This is a historic problem with mankind – beginning in the Garden – **we all too often exchange the truth of God for a lie.**

- We like to do a makeover on God, we add and subtract characteristics that are a bit more pleasant to our liking.
 - **Scripture calls that idolatry.**
- Now – I’m going to touch on a topic that may make some a bit uneasy – please hear me out – OK?
- A prime example of the unholy exchange of man’s truth for God’s truth is how homosexual activity is being portrayed in a new light today. Both the Old and New Testaments say that homosexual activity is unnatural and sinful. It has been considered as such since the foundation of this country, but now it is portrayed and even championed as an ***Alternate lifestyle***.

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- As you know, I never focus on any sin in particular – other than idolatry. All sin is an offense against God. I am a sinner and so are all of you. I thank God for Christ's shed blood on our behalf, because all of us would otherwise be in the very same sinking boat as unbelievers are.
- I'm mentioning the various attitudes toward homosexuality and same-sex marriage because both are current topics in the news today.

OK – Scripture says again and again, NT and OT, that homosexual activity is an abomination to Yehovah. Since we don't live in Bible times today and are not under that form of theocratic government, we should expect that values and attitudes might change somewhat. But the growing contrast between Scriptural values and today's values is stark. In America, homosexual marriage is not only tolerated but even considered a legal right now.

- Here is a real danger – when a society crosses over some invisible spiritual red line and tries to convince us that an activity the Bible calls sin is not only not wrong, but it is actually *good and beautiful and source of pride and actually a reflection of God's love* – then it becomes very dangerous to the soul of a nation. We see throughout history. A nation cut from its Biblical roots,

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like a flower cut off from the soil, may look vibrant and alive for a while but eventually it will die.

But – what about love? You often hear the statement that if two homosexuals love each other, that must be OK with God. *Since God is love – they say – then all love is an expression of God's love.*

Such an assertion is a **lie** – first and foremost because God said such activity is an abomination to Him. According to Romans chapter 1, this claim stems from idolatry.

The type of love that characterizes God's love is called 'agape' love – and according to Scripture, it is a supernatural gift with a supernatural Origin.

It is found only in the reborn Christian, because only those who have the Holy Spirit can possess it. So, the claim that an *unregenerate* creature is able to possess – in himself or herself – the type of Love possessed only by the Creator constitutes worship of the creature, not the Creator – an idolatrous falsehood.

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SLIDE: EINSTEIN

The statement – *Since God is love, all love is God's love* – is also a type of logical fallacy that you learn to recognize in a basic logic 101 course.

God IS love – we all agree – but that does not mean that all love is God's love.

Click: That's like saying – All dogs are animals WITH 4 LEGS, therefore all animals WITH 4 LEGS are dogs. It is a logical fallacy.

What has happened is that highly skilled marketers, playing on our historic national values of fairness, generosity and tolerance, have persuaded educators and politicians – and some church leaders – to embrace as enlightened and noble that which Scripture describes as evil. And our legal system is reinforcing compliance.

SLIDE: LIBERTY HILL FARM

The State of New York legalized same-sex marriage in 2011. Just a few months ago (August 2014), Christian farm owners in Schaghticok NY (Rensselaer Co.) were fined \$10,000 for

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refusing to hold a lesbian couple's wedding ceremony on their property; they also had to pay each woman \$1,500 for mental anguish. Cynthia and Robert Gifford, who own and live at Liberty Ridge Farm, rent their facilities for birthday parties and about a dozen weddings each year. They were asked to hold the marriage ceremony on the property but, since same-sex marriage is against Giffords' religious beliefs, they refused to have the ceremony itself on their property. However, they did offer to host the wedding reception afterwards. The lesbian couple filed a formal complaint with the NY State Division of Human Rights. An administrative law judge ruled that the Giffords had violated state law by discriminating against the two women – thus the fines. The Giffords have decided to *discontinue* hosting weddings on their property; the financial losses from their decision have forced them to let go one full-time employee. They are appealing the ruling to the Appellate Court.

- Ironically, all of this is being done in the name of *human rights* – but, where do those rights come from? The Declaration of Independence reads: “*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.*”

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- Most people fail to recognize what the Declaration recognized – that the dignity of man *is not an intrinsic dignity* – it's a derived dignity, a dependent dignity; our dignity flows out of the fact that we are created in the image of God.
- If the image of God is stained and defaced, then the image of God in us inevitably becomes defaced.
- Call me crazy, but – I would suggest that when the all-wise God states what *is* an expression of His love and what *isn't* – what is harmful to a person's soul – it would be more prudent to heed His opinion rather than the latest survey of the American Psychological Association or the latest bill passed by the NYS Legislature.
- Is it *unchristian* to say that Truth does not change – that God's thinking on moral issues does **not** “evolve” like some politicians say theirs have.
- Truth is far more than facts. It's not just something we act upon. *It acts upon us.*
- We can't change the truth, but *the truth can change us*. It sanctifies (sets us apart) from the falsehoods woven into our sin natures.

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You know, it would be so much easier to just say to the sinner that you're OK, it's just like you're left-handed.

- Some people are vegetarians, some are not. No big deal. You say to-may-to, I say to-mat-to.

But, just as Jesus didn't win many popularity contests when He spoke the truth, neither will we when we speak the truth in love. He said (John 15): "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."

As Christians, we are to show the love of Christ toward all people, but we must do so without calling evil good. We must be like Jesus in our approach.

The world changes. Kingdoms rise and fall. But God's truth remains unchanging. We need to learn to set our course by the stars, not by the lights of every passing ship." Omar Nelson Bradley. U.S. general, 1893–1981.

Romans 8:31 says: 'Let God be true and every man a liar!'

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God's THREATENINGS do not change

SLIDE: *God's threatenings do not change.* Here is a topic that often spoils an upbeat church gathering. God's threats for unbelief remained unchanged.

Nobody likes to talk about this terrifying reality. We love to hear the promises of blessings, but nobody wants to hear the promises of woe.

- You may have seen the *Bayer Aspirin TV* commercial where a man is happily sitting at a table when he receives a note that says “*Your heart attack will happen in 2 hours.*” No one would want to receive that message of grief.
- But – if we affirm that every good *promise* from God remains valid today, and that every *oath* of the New Covenant remains rock solid today, then we also must accept that all of God's *threats for unbelief* also remain – if they don't, then He *has* changed. But, He says He *doesn't* change.

Jesus said: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but **the wrath of God remains** on him.”

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This is a reality that is almost entirely avoided today – certainly not discussed in public. Unsaved people can sit thru positive-thinking sermons and faith sermons by Joel Osteen all day long and come away smiling and feeling better about themselves, but they are unchanged because they never hear of the *need* to repent or of *the consequences* if they don't.

- The modern Gospel message is becoming more and more self-centered. It is about how our lives are just going to keep getting better and better if you declare your faith.
- Come to Christ and you'll have a better life.
- Sow a financial seed into this ministry and God will open the doors of heaven's storehouse for you.

Is it popular? Yes! Osteen and like messages are very popular. **Is it the message of Christ – No!** When you testify in court, you are required to swear that what you say is the truth, the WHOLE truth, nothing but the truth. Today's salvation message is usually not presented with the whole truth.

SLIDE: Suppose someone comes up to you and asks “Are you saved?” Have you ever had that happen? Next time that happens, ask them a return question:

CLICK: "Saved from what?"

How would we answer this question if someone asked us when we were sharing the gospel with them? Is it saved from hell? From a bad life? From an empty bank account? From poor

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self-image? From our sins? From not being in God's presence for all eternity?

This is not just a matter of semantics. All of these things are *consequences* of the true answer but none are not the true answer. The true answer holds critical importance for both believers and non-believers.

SLIDE: Jesus provided the true answer: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the **wrath of God** remains on him." John 3

So, according to Jesus, the real question is not "saved from *what*" – but – "*Saved from whom?*" The answer: from God Himself.

I know that this answer surprises many – even those who are saved and who love Christ deeply. The fact that it *may* be a surprise to many is an example of how we all – both you and I – **need to reconnect with the sense of God's majesty.**

- I don't want to count the times when, talking with an unbeliever at work, I tried to put a good spin on God's wrath in the OT – just like a politician's press secretary tries to put an embarrassing situation in a better light.

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But the reality is that God's wrath is not an *embarrassment to Him*.

- I've come to see that my avoidance of the truth actually undermines the importance of the Cross.
- We forget that the most severe instance of God's wrath against sin occurs *not* in the OT *but in the New* – at the cross. At least in the OT, the people were undeniably sinful; but *at the cross*, the wrath of God was poured out on an *innocent Person* – Jesus. And all for our sakes.

SLIDE: “The wrath of God is... the displeasure and indignation of Divine justice against evil. It is the holiness of God stirred into activity against sin.”

- God's anger never a morally shameful thing that human anger so often is.
- It is never motivated by the things our anger often is -- pride, cruelty, bad temper. God never "loses it". His motivations are *always* pure. His wrath is as much a part of His moral perfection as His love. His wrath is inseparably linked with His glory.

Now – It's not that we should *preach* condemnation. We don't – we are to preach as Jesus did – as Paul did – salvation is offered *from* the wrath of a Holy God *by a loving Savior*.

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The good news is that God has provided a way out for us thru His son.

God's SON does not change

SLIDE: Hebrews 13:8: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."

- Wrath remains on us as long as there is no faith in Jesus. Paul wrote: We "were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind" (Ephesians 2:3). My very nature made me worthy of wrath.
- There was only one hope for me—that the infinite wisdom of God might make a way for the love of God to satisfy the wrath of God so that I might become a son of God.
- This is exactly what happened. "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ" (Ephesians 2:4–5).
- The original audience of the letter to the Hebrews need to hear this because they were wavering under persecution and they began to doubt the faithfulness of the Lord, whom they had confessed. They needed to know that the Jesus Who did such mighty acts and accomplish their salvation would one day finally rescue them from the presence of sin (9:28).

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- They needed to know that His superiority over all things would last forever (7:28).
- We too need to know these things. When stressed by things in our lives, we are easily tempted to gaze upon strange teachings and “new” things and quick solutions (13:9).
- But the Scripture assures us that the Jesus who saved us yesterday is the same Jesus who saves us today and saves us forever. He alone is trustworthy because He alone is always faithful. His character, love, and power shall never be other than supreme.
- For I am confident of this very thing, that He who **began** a good work in you **will perfect it** until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:6
- Jesus is “the power of God and the wisdom of God” ([1 Corinthians 1:24](#)). The cross is the only way God could become our Father. Jesus was cursed on the cross in our place & God’s wrath against sin was satisfied for all who place their trust in Christ. His wrath no longer rests on us ([John 3:36](#)) and He has sent the Spirit of sonship flooding into our heart crying Abba Father ([Romans 8:15](#)).

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I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes... (Romans 1:16)

God does NOT change – and He remains GREAT!. Amen