

## Coram Deo

### Lesson 3—God is Eternal and Unchangeable

#### TRUTH

In this lesson we will explore two of God's unique attributes: *eternal* and *unchangeable*.

When we seek to understand God as eternal, it is helpful to investigate the biblical concept of covenants. As Puritan theologian Stephen Charnock wrote, "The eternity of God is the foundation of the stability of the covenant, the great comfort of a Christian. The design of God in Scripture is to set forth his dealing with men in the way of a covenant" (*Discourses Upon the Existence and Attributes of God*, 279).

God is a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God. But what do we mean by "covenant"? In Scripture, the goal of all covenants between God and humankind is summed up in these words: "I will be your God, and you will be my people, and I will dwell among you" (Exodus 6:7, 29:45; Ezekiel 11:20; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Revelation 21:3).

The third chapter of the book of Exodus gives us a deeper understanding of God's covenantal love for His people. The overarching theme is the fulfillment of God's promises to the patriarchs: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3:6).

The story of Israel's deliverance and sustenance in the story of the Exodus must be credited to the power and purpose of God, who remembers His promises. He established His covenant with Abraham by swearing on His own character. Accordingly, the events and instructions in Exodus are described as the Lord remembering his covenant promises to Abraham (2:24; 3:6, 14–17; 6:2–8). These promises extend to both Abraham's descendants and to all the nations of the world (Genesis 12:1–3). The fulfillment of these promises is rooted in Israel's covenant relationship with a God who is both eternal and unchangeable (Genesis 17:7–8).

In fact, God's *eternal* nature is also explicitly addressed in Exodus 3, when Moses is drawn to the burning bush and encounters God (v. 2-4). The place where Moses stood was called holy ground because of the presence of God. During God's exchange with Moses (v. 7-15), we learn God's proper name, which points to the fact that He is eternal:

But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say

this to the people of Israel: 'I am has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. (Exodus 3:11-15)

God's eternity is unmistakable by the name He gives Himself: "I AM WHO I AM." The word LORD in English translations represents the word *Yahweh* in Hebrew. And *Yahweh* is derived, evidently, from a form of the verb "to be." This is how God wants to be known from generation to generation.

Theologian J.I. Packer helps explain the relationship between God's eternal nature and His self-given name of I AM WHO I AM:

The name in all its forms proclaims his eternal, self-sustaining, self-determining, sovereign reality—that supernatural mode of existence that the sign of the burning bush has signified. The bush, we might say, was God's three-dimensional illustration of his own inexhaustible life. 'This is my name forever,' he said—that is, God's people should always think of him as the living, reigning, the potent, unfettered and undiminished king that the burning bush showed him to be" (*Concise Theology*, 24).

Puritan theologian Stephen Charnock writes:

...This description being in the present tense, shows that his essence knows no past, nor future... It signifies his eternity, as well as his perfection and immutability... it signifies his unchangeable being from eternity to eternity; as it respects the creature, it signifies his constancy in his counsels and promises, which spring from no other cause but the unchangeableness of his nature (*Discourses Upon the Existence and Attributes of God*, 287,330).

God is both eternal and unchangeable. Therefore, we can trust His purposes in our lives and rely on the promises in His Word. Louis Berkhof reminds us, "Immutability is that perfection of God by which He is devoid of all change, not only in His being, but also in His perfections, and His purposes and promises" (*Systematic Theology*, 58). And A.W. Pink states, "God is unchanging in his being, perfections, purposes, and promises, yet God does act and feel emotions, and He acts and feels differently in response to different situations" (*The Attributes of God*, 163).

Just like God Himself, His covenant promises to us are also eternal and unchangeable. This makes all the difference! We have hope and comfort in this life and the life to come because those covenant promises were sealed for us by the blood of Jesus. As the writer of Hebrews reminds us, "*May the God of peace, who through the blood of the **eternal covenant** brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep...*" (Hebrews 13:20; emphasis added).

**EQUIP**

1. Read the following verses focused on God's eternity to complete the statement.

**God is eternal in His...**

- Genesis 21:33 \_\_\_\_\_
- Deuteronomy 33:27 \_\_\_\_\_
- Psalms 93:2 \_\_\_\_\_
- Jeremiah 10:10 \_\_\_\_\_
- 1 Timothy 1:17 \_\_\_\_\_
- Lamentations 5:19 \_\_\_\_\_
- Isaiah 48:12-13 \_\_\_\_\_
- Psalms 119:89 \_\_\_\_\_
- Ephesians 3:11 \_\_\_\_\_
- Psalms 33:11 \_\_\_\_\_
- Jeremiah 31:3 \_\_\_\_\_
- Isaiah 54:10 \_\_\_\_\_

2. Read the two definitions provided for God's immutability. Circle or underline the areas that speak to the fact that He is unchangeable.

*Immutability is that perfection of God by which He is devoid of all change, not only in His being, but also in His perfections, and His purposes and promises (Berkhof).*

*God is unchanging in his being, perfections, purposes, and promises, yet God does act and feel emotions, and He acts and feels differently in response to different situations (Pink).*

3. Read the following verses and list the ways God's immutability is described.

- Psalms 102:24-27 \_\_\_\_\_
- Hebrews 1:10-12 \_\_\_\_\_
- Malachi 3:6 \_\_\_\_\_
- James 1:17 \_\_\_\_\_

Hebrews 6:16-18

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Numbers 23:19

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4. God is both eternal and unchangeable. This makes all the difference. Or does it? What are the ways God's eternity and immutability make a difference in your faith and life?
  
5. What gets in the way of truly believing and living as though these two attributes are true?
  
6. Search the Scriptures and list some of the promises of God that comfort you the most. Why are they important to you at this time?

### **A Prayer**

*THOU ETERNAL GOD,  
Thine is surpassing greatness, unspeakable goodness, super-abundant grace,  
I can soon count the sands of the ocean's lips as number thy favors towards me;  
I know but a part, but that part exceeds all praise. (Bennett, *The Valley of Vision: A  
Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions*, 10)*

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

Before your group study, review the questions in the EQUIP section. Are there specific truths or principles that God impresses upon you? It might be a knowledge issue (head), a belief issue (heart), or an application issue (hand). Write your reflections below:



Head/knowledge:



Heart/belief:



Hand/application:

**MISSION**

1. God is eternal and unchangeable. How can these truths be used to point people to Jesus?

2. Who are the three people (non-believers) you are praying for?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

3. List the steps you have taken—or will take—to connect with them:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

## **SUPPLICATION**

As you conclude study time, share your prayer requests with one another. Space is provided below to write them down. Use spaces 1-2 to write down requests you'd like to share with the group and use space 3 to record requests from others. Use these notes as you pray for each other during the week.

1. What are your prayer requests regarding this week's lesson?
  
2. What are your prayer requests regarding your life this week?
  
3. Prayer requests from others in the group this week: