

The Unchanging Nature of God

(Assorted Scriptures)

7/8/15; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

Two mechanics are working at the local Ford dealership.

12 o'clock comes and they head to eat lunch.

They both pull out their sandwiches and chips, but Ted notices that Earl pulls out a bottle of brake fluid as well.

The two begin eating their sandwiches and then Earl takes the bottle of brake fluid, opens it and takes a big drink.

Ted screams at him, "Hey what are you doing, Earl? That's brake fluid. You can't drink that!"

Earl says, "Sure I can. I don't have a problem with it."

Ted tells him, "But it's poison Earl. It's not good for you. You going to get addicted to it."

Earl replies, "There's no way I will get hooked on this stuff. Besides, I can STOP any time I want to."

Well tonight, we are putting on the brakes for 1 Samuel for a week to address a question that came up from 1 Samuel 15 last week.

And at times, it is good to stop and take a longer look at things in the Bible that may be difficult to understand.

Though most things in the Bible are pretty easy to get a hold on, there are things that require a little more investigation to help us settle in our minds.

Last week, one of those questions arose from the 15th chapter of 1 Samuel.

Here are the verses that lead to our short discussion...

10 Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel, saying, 11 “I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from [f]following Me and has not carried out My commands.”

35 And the Lord regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.

And the question that we have is “Does God Repent? Does God Regret? Did God make a mistake that he needed to repent from or show regret over?”

And I offered in a short answer that the Bible often uses human language to help us understand God.

And since human language has its limitations in describing God who has no limitations, we often find verses that cause questions in our mind.

The fancy term for this is called anthropomorphism, which means....

“attributing human forms or characteristics to God “

Here are some examples of this idea up here on the screen...

Psalms 34:15, "The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry."

Num. 6:24, "The Lord make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you."

Gen. 2:2, "And by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done."

Gen. 9:16, "When the bow is in the cloud, then I will look upon it, to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth."

Psalms 57:1, "Be gracious to me, O God, be gracious to me, for my soul takes refuge in Thee; and in the shadow of Thy wings I will take refuge, until destruction passes by."

And so you see that the Bible often uses human language to describe God as a man, but we know also from the Bible is God is not a man...

Here are a few verses that teach that God is not a man...

Hosea 11:9 “I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I devastate Ephraim again. For I am God, and not a man-- the Holy One among you. I will not come against their cities.”

Numbers 23:19 “God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good.”

John 4:24 “God is[e]spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

1 Samuel 15:29 “Also the [m]Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind.”

And that is certainly what is going on here in 1 Samuel 15 to an extent, and that would still be a short answer to that question...

But what I want to do tonight is take that answer and build on it a little bit...

Because this is an opportunity to teach about one aspect of who God is....

And anytime we can learn more about who God is, I think it is very important that we take advantage of that situation..

Now, the big question is how do we go about determining who God is...

Well, the best and only option is to get a picture of God from his Word.

People may have their own ideas of who God is, but if it not based upon how the Bible describes God, it is simply an opinion.

Now, how do we go about learning who God is from the Scriptures?

Here is a couple of options...

Option 1, we simply read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation as an unfolding story, and you will know all that you need to know about who God is...

From simply reading the Bible from cover to cover...

Option 2 is to benefit from others who had read the Bible and then categorized what they learned about God from their study...

When it comes to learning about God's character, option 2 is often best...

And here is why...

There is no chapter in the Bible that is totally about who God is...

And so the full picture of God must come from all the chapters between Genesis 1 and Revelation 22..

That can be time consuming, so people have come before you and me and did all the hard work...

They have separated the Bible into all kinds of categories...

The term for this is called systematic theology...

The term for reading the Bible from beginning to end in order to learn about God is called biblical theology...

And I don't want to get in too deep with a discussion here, but know that both ways are very helpful in giving us a proper view of God.

I have put a slide up here to help you get a picture of this...

But let me give you a real world example....

Let's say that your mom gives you her recipe book that she has had for 50 years..

It is notebook that she began with the first recipe that she got 50 years ago and it ends with the last recipe that she got last week...

To you, it is precious because she put it together...

And it is her handwriting.

But often times, you find yourself in a pinch needing a meatloaf recipe and though you know that she about 5 or 6 in this book....

She always have a hard time finding them.

So one day, you sit down with your moms recipe book and you organize it all into neat categories...

Appetizers, soups, salads, entrees, desserts...

And you make your own recipe book by collecting all of hers and grouping them together..

But you don't throw away hers even though you have the same information in yours...

You keep it and read it and cherish it...

That is a comparison of what systematic theology does....

It goes through the Bible and puts every verse or passage into a category so that you can find what you need in a hurry...

So, tonight we are going to learn who God is by taking a systematic approach to the Bible...

Now, there is no way to get a complete view of God in one night...

But I do want to take a look at who God is in relation to the question that came up in 1 Samuel last week....

And I want to offer a little more explanation into why I don't believe the Bible teaches that God repented or regretted in the way that we think...

So, let's begin by looking at a simple outline of what we are going to do tonight....

Let's begin with....

I. What the Bible Teaches

God can be defined in a number of ways...

One of those ways is to look at his attributes, or his characteristics...

Think of the 7 dwarfs, you have sneezy, dopey, grumpy, etc...

They are all known by their overriding trait in their life...

God also has traits that describe him...

And the one that we are going to focus on tonight is that God is Immutable...

In other words, God never changes...

Now why do I begin here?

Because the problem that we think we see in 1 Samuel 15 is that God regrets or repents...

And if he repents or regrets, then that must mean that he made a mistake...

We assume that means that God wanted to do one thing but now he must change and do something else.

However the Bible teaches that God never changes...

Psalm 102:25-27...

²⁵ ***“Of old You founded the earth,
And the heavens are the work of Your hands.
²⁶ ^[d]Even they will perish, but You endure;
And all of them will wear out like a garment;
Like clothing You will change them and they will
be changed.
²⁷ “But You are ^[z]the same,
And Your years will not come to an end.***

***Malachi 3:6 “For I, the Lord, do not change;
therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.***

***James 1:17 “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.”***

***Numbers 23:19 “God is not a man, that He should
lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent;
Has He said, and will He not do it?
Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?”***

***1 Samuel 15:29 “Also the ^[m]Glory of Israel will
not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man
that He should change His mind.”***

And so there are some very from throughout the Bible that clearly teach that God does not change...

Now, before we move on, we need to soak in that truth for a moment...

Because you may already believe that, but let's consider why that is so important to each of us here tonight...

First, let me say this, this is what sets God apart from everything else in the world.

Everything in this universe changes but God.

He is constant.

He is sure.

He can be trusted.

Here is what that means for me and you....

God established his Son as the way of salvation.

The fact that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life and that no one will come to the Father but through him is something that you can take the bank...

Well, don't take it to the bank because banks fail...

But don't worry that the rug is going to be pulled out from under you regarding your salvation.

God is unchanging in his promises.

If he has forgiven you, you are forgiven forever.

If he has saved you, you are saved forever.

If he has promised you something, that promise is forever.

You can't say that about anyone else in this world that the God of the Bible.

There is a second truth that we need to understand about God being unchangeable, and it is this...

God can't change because he is already perfect...

He can't get any better by changing and He won't get any worse by changing...

Number 1, he can be trusted because He is unchangeable..

Number 2, his unchanging nature proves that He is perfect.

On top of that, we know that Jesus is God because he is unchanging as well...

Hebrews 13:8...

⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

So, God's unchanging nature is important for us to see in the Bible...

Not only because it helps us find an answer to our questions in 1 Samuel 15...

No, God's unchanging nature is another aspect that we worship about Him...

Do you think Him in your prayers by saying, "God you are the only one I can truly trust because you never change."

"God I am grateful for your forgiveness of my sin, and the fact that I am forgiven forever."

You should.

God's unchangeable is something that you should praise Him for.

He is the only One in the world who can and should be praised because He never changes....

Now, that leads us to outline point #2....

We have seen what the Bible teaches about God's unchangeable....

But #2....

II. What the Bible Says

So, now let's look at some passages that seem to contradict the idea that God never changes...

Exodus 32....

11 Then Moses entreated the Lord his God, and said, "O Lord, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? 12 Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, 'With evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about doing harm to Your people. 13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'" 14 So the Lord changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people.

Jonah 3

4 Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown." 5 Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called

a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them.....

10 When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.

Genesis 6...

⁵ Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶ The Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved ^[e] in His heart.

1 Samuel 15

¹⁰ Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel, saying, ¹¹ "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from ^[f] following Me and has not carried out My commands."

³⁵ Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death; for Samuel grieved over Saul. And the Lord regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.

So, now we look at these verses and there appears to be a problem...

God doesn't change...

But then we see that God does change...

God can't repent...

But then we see that God does repent...

And before I offer a solution, I want to bring before you some options when we find what we think are problems in the Bible...

The first option is reject the Bible...

IF it says here that God can't change, and then it says here that God changed....

Then we can't trust the Bible....

So, there must be errors in it..

And many people have taken that road to their own demise...

Because if you reject the Bible, then you eventually reject the God of the Bible....

And you then must reject His Son as well....

So that is a scary path to take, and one that I hope no one takes in here....

Option 2 is to make God less than what He is...

By robbing him of his perfect power and knowledge...

IF you say that God does in fact change based upon what he sees in the world, you end up with a weak God...

A god who doesn't know the future...

Has no control over this universe..

But simply sits in heaven and waits to see what happens before acts...

That becomes a helpless god who is a servant to man.

And that god does not resemble the God of the Bible...

If you want a god like that, you need to re-interpret the rest of the Bible to fit your view of him...

Many people have also taken this road...

There is a group of people today known as open theologians...

Who see God as not knowing what will happen tomorrow...

Instead, he waits to see what will happen and then makes decisions based upon what man does....

Again, that is not the God of the Bible....

But that is an option to solving this “problem.”

There is one more option and I think this is the wisest option when we find what we think are problems in the Bible...

And it is this...

Refuse options 1 and 2...

We believe the Bible.

We believe in the God of the Bible..

So we resolve to get help to figure it out.

Therefore, let's get to outline point # 3...

We know what the Bible teaches...

We have seen what the Bible says....

Finally, let's figure out....

III. What We Conclude

Now, a number of problems can often be solved by looking at the original languages...

At times, the English word is not representative of what was originally written in Hebrew and Greek...

Someone even mentioned that last week...

So, let's explore that option..

When it comes to 1 Samuel...

You can look at the screen...

The word for regret/repent in 1 Samuel 15:11 is
נִחַמְתִּי

Which is pronounced ni-ham-ti..

The word for regret/repent in 1 Samuel 15:35 is
נִחַם

Which is pronounced ni-ham.

They both come from the same verb נָחַם

Which is pronounced naw-cham.

I have put the definition on the screen and how the word is translated in the Bible...

And it certainly can mean to repent.

In fact, when Job repents at the end of the book of Job, this is the word that is used to describe his repentance.

So, I would say that the word in 1 Samuel 15 is not a translation problem...

The word that God inspired the author of 1 Samuel to write is a word that can be translated repent or regret...

If it isn't a translation problem....

If it isn't a problem with the Bible...

If it isn't a problem with God...

Then what is it?

I think it is a problem with our understanding who exactly God is...

When we read about God as unchanging, we often leave out his compassion.

We see him setting the course of history, taking a seat on his throne and then being filled with joy as it all happens according to his will.

Now, it is true that history plays out exactly according to God's will.

The Bible clearly teaches that.

But it isn't true that God is some far removed God on a far away throne enjoying every moment of his plan playing out in the world..

No, he is a God who is close to his people...

He is a God that sees everything not from the back row but from the front row...

And sometimes He watches with sadness and anger and compassion and mercy.

Though everything goes according to His plan, it doesn't mean that God is always pleased by what he sees.

And in the case of Saul, he regretted or repented over Saul being made Israel's first king...

But not in the way that we would.

When God chose Saul and crowned Saul, he knew what the end of Saul would be...

But God still was sorry to see what happened to Saul...

He still regretted in a sense that Saul became king.

But that doesn't make him less of a God...

It my mind it makes Him a God even more deserving of worship...

Because He is a tender, compassionate God who is active in the world...

He's not a far removed God who doesn't care what happens in this world...

No, he is near and involved in the world that HE created and is often heartbroken over what HE sees...

God would not change making Saul king.

Even if he could go back and do it over, God would still install Saul as king.

That was His plan, and it was perfect even if it led to regret afterwards..

How do I illustrate this in our world....

Let's say a father sets down some clear rules for His son, and he tells the Son that breaking the rules will lead to him being grounded for a month.

Well, the son breaks the rules, the father grounds him for a month...

But in the night, the son escapes and leaves a note telling the Father that he has run away because he didn't want to be grounded for a month...

Well, that father may read the note, see his son's empty room and regret that the punishment led his son to run away.

But that doesn't mean that the grounding was a mistake...

And if the father were in the same situation again, he would give the same punishment...

That is how I like to look at this situation in 1 Samuel..

God regretted that he made Saul king, but in the sense that it was a mistake...

But in the sense that he was sorry to see the disobedience in Saul...

And let me add this...

What would you think of that father if he wasn't sorry that his son had run away?

Well, you would see him as an uncaring dad who really didn't care for his own child...

So, what if 1 Samuel 15 said that God never regretted making Saul king?

We would read that and assume that God is so far removed God who really doesn't care about disobedience and sin...

And we would see God as uncaring and unkind and someone who really doesn't care about what happens in this world...

But we know that God is not a God like that...

Conclusion

And so in one hand, we hold a God never changes....

And in the other hand, we hold a God who shows regret over what he sees in the world...

And when we put those two hands together we get a God of the Bible who has set a course for this world that will never change...

His will, plans, and purposes will be accomplished in his time now matter what...

But the balance to that is the fact that God cares about the people who are involved in those plans coming true...

Think of someone who has complete determination to get something done..

That person is focused and often hurts others in the process of accomplishing a goal...

They can be pushy and even mean...

Then think of the person who can get nothing done because they are so kind and never think of themselves...

They are always caring for others that nothing gets accomplished in their own life.

Now combine those two people and you would find someone who is going to get things done, but they are going to do it with care and compassion...

In my mind, that's the picture of God in 1 Samuel 15...

God has set his plan, and Saul has been a part of that plan.

And even though he would do things exactly the same...

God still feels regret and even sorrowful repentance for making Saul king...

That doesn't leave me shaking my head trying to understand...

That leaves me on my knees worshipping a God who knows and holds the future...

Who has a perfect plan and never makes a mistake..

But is not so removed from this world and above His world that he doesn't show regret as the plan comes to pass...

Here is a quick summary of what I would leave you with tonight...

1. Affirm in your heart that the Bible clearly teaches that God never changes.
2. Recognize that there are passages that seem to teach that God does change.
3. Understand that biblical writers often try to help us understand God by describing Him in human terms.
4. Worship a God who holds the past, present, and future in his hands, but is not so disconnected from this world that He doesn't care about how His plan comes to pass.

Let us pray.