

God Is Unchangeable

Malachi 3:1–7, James 1:9–18

This is the fourth in a series of messages on Shorter Catechism 4, “What is God?” The answer is useful and worthy of committing to memory: “God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.” We have considered “God Is a Spirit,” “God Is Infinite” and “God Is Eternal.” Today’s message is “God Is Unchangeable.” *Unchangeable* means incapable of being changed or of changing.

We live in a changing world. Who would have thought:

- That CDs and DVDs would become obsolete
- That anyone would question that there are two sexes
- That the government would ban gas stoves
- That corporations would be more committed to “wokeness” than to making a profit for their shareholders
- That a man living as a woman would win a huge monetary settlement after being “misgendered” at a county jail
- That law enforcement would be overtly weaponized against political opponents
- That evangelical churches would cancel Sunday worship—and upon reopening, require face masks and limit the number of attendees

We live in a world where things are constantly changing, where the only constant is change! Yet, as we shall see, God is unchangeable! God is the only constant in a changing world. His nature is unchangeable; his character is unchangeable; his word is unchangeable; his promises are unchangeable. It is vital for God’s people to understand and remember this as we see so many things that used to be constants crumble and fall apart all around us.

Our text for exposition and application is from the last book of the Old Testament: “I am the LORD, *I change not*; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed” (Mal. 3:6). This text clearly and unambiguously declares that God does not change. He is unchangeable. Let’s look at this in its context.

Malachi 3:1 uses the word “messenger” twice: “Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts.” There is a play on words here. The Hebrew word for *messenger* is מַלְאָכִי. The author of the book is מַלְאָכִי, Malachi, *my messenger*. In the New King James Version the first occurrence of “messenger” begins with a small “m”; the second begins with a capital “M.” The LORD of Hosts—that is, the God of heaven—is speaking. He promises that he is going to send “My messenger” (that is, John the Baptist) before the coming of “the Messenger of the covenant” (that is, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ). There are

thus three individuals called מַלְאָךְ (messenger): the prophet Malachi, the human author of this last book of the Old Testament, who writes of “My messenger” (John the Baptist), who will introduce “the Messenger of the covenant” (the Lord Jesus Christ) when he comes to his temple.

Of the identity of “My messenger” there can be no doubt, for Jesus clearly identifies him in Luke 7:27–28, where he says, “This is he of whom it is written: ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You.’ For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist.” Jesus cites Malachi 3:1 and identifies the man called “My messenger” as John the Baptist. John was six months older than Jesus and was called to be the forerunner to Jesus. He is the one who, when preaching that the people of Judea should prepare for the coming of the Messiah, saw him on the edge of the crowd and announced, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Not only are there two messengers in Malachi 3:1, there are also two lords. The first is “the Lord, whom you seek,” who “will suddenly come to his temple”—that is, the Lord Jesus Christ. The second is mentioned at the end of the verse: “says the LORD of hosts.” Notice that the first Lord is spelled with an initial capital, the second with all capitals. The first is הָאֲדֹנָי, Lord, master, the Lord of the whole earth—referring to the Lord Jesus, to whom all power and authority in heaven and on earth is committed. The second is יהוה, the proper name of the God of Israel. Two persons of the Holy Trinity are thus referred to in this verse: the Lord who will suddenly come to his temple—that is, the second temple in Jerusalem, which had been built when the covenant people returned after the Babylonian captivity (Ezra 3). Luke’s gospel records that when the days of Mary’s purification were completed, Jesus’ parents brought him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord and to offer the required sacrifice. This happened at the temple, where Simeon and Anna saw the infant Jesus and bore witness of him. One commentator helpfully observes: “Christ came to the temple, first as a baby to be dedicated, then at least yearly for the festivals. Most notably he came the last week of his life.”¹

Malachi 3:2 asks, “But who can endure the day of His coming?”—the coming of the Lord of heaven to this earth. God’s Messiah would “purify the sons of Levi”—a reference to a cleansed and sanctified church. Writing of the church, Peter declares, “you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a *holy priesthood*, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”²

In verse 5 the LORD declares, “I will come near you for judgment.” The Lord will judge violators of his holy law. Various sins are mentioned—a representative,

¹ Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Pocket Bible)

² 1 Pet. 2:5

not exhaustive list. The reason why people sin is given: “‘Because they do not fear Me,’ says the LORD of hosts.” A proper fear of the Lord brings obedience. If I fear the Lord, that is, respect and honor him for who he is—the undisputed Lord and master of my life—then I will gladly obey him; after all, he’s the boss! If I do not submit to him, then that is evidence that I do not really fear the Lord.

Do you claim the Lord Jesus Christ as your Lord and master? If so, do you self-consciously obey him? Jesus said, “If you love me, keep my commandments.” The born-again child of God says, “Yes, Lord, I love you, I fear you—I gladly obey.” This, then, is the context for our text, “I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.”

Here we have God’s name, his nature, his promise. First,

1. God’s name

Here is God’s self-declaration: “I am the LORD.” The word “LORD” is written in all caps. Since the time of the King James Version this literary convention has identified the translation of the proper name of the God of Israel: Yahweh. “God” is a description: *God*, not man, not a creature; Yahweh (יהוה) is his proper name. So it is with you: you are either a man or a woman; that is your description. But you also have a given name—the name given to you by your parents (unless it has been legally changed). I am a man, and my given name is Stephen; my wife is a woman, and her given name is Norma. So the supreme being who reveals himself in the Bible is God, and his name is Yahweh.

In the Mosaic law the phrase “I am the LORD” is appended to multiple laws for emphasis: “Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD.” “Ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.” “Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the LORD.” Why should we obey God’s commandments? Because he is the LORD, before whom every knee shall bow! You disobey the LORD at your own peril! You may like his laws, or you may not like them; you may agree with his laws, or you may not agree with them. The fact is, that is totally irrelevant. Whether you like them or agree with them or not will not change the fact that one day you will stand before the LORD to give account.

Fallen men and women by nature are haters of God. Only the born-again Christian can say, “O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day” (Ps. 119:97). The Christian discovers that God’s commandments are not burdensome but a delight. “This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3). A sprinter running a race does not carry burdens. Even the shoes worn by a sprinter are very light; the sprinter running a race does not wear leather work boots! If he does, he’s not going to win the race. The worldling may regard God’s commandments as burdensome, as

impediments to happiness. But if you love the Lord, his commandments are your delight: “I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD; and thy law is my delight” (Ps. 119:174). Do you “delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom. 7:22)? If you don’t, then cry out to God for mercy: “Lord, help me to love your law, to delight in your commandments, to long for them as the perfect expression of your heart; help me to live a life that is pleasing in your sight.” Secondly, consider

2. God’s nature

God speaks: “I am the LORD, I change not.” God is altogether different from man. He alone does not change. Man changes, but God does not change. Recently I saw a couple men I had not seen for some time. As I looked into their faces I could not help but notice that they had aged. There were more wrinkles in their faces; their hair had more tinges of gray. Man changes in so many ways—and not just physically. People change their minds. They go through phases. Things that once interested them interest them no more. Principles they once followed go out the window. Vows and promises that they once made are broken and forgotten. Friends they once loved are forsaken.

When Jacob, fleeing from his brother, arrived at Laban’s house, Laban received him eagerly. He gave him a job—at which he excelled. He gave him his two daughters for wives. Through Jacob’s hard work Laban became a rich man. But after 20 years “Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it was not toward him as before” (Gen. 31:2). Laban’s countenance had changed. He was no longer friendly toward Jacob; he regarded him as a competitor. Jacob saw the handwriting on the wall and made plans to flee.

When King Belshazzar of Babylon made a great feast, and used the holy vessels taken from the temple in Jerusalem to praise the false gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone; and there appeared fingers of a man’s hand and wrote on the plaster of the palace wall, we read that “the king’s countenance *changed*, and his thoughts troubled him. He sent for Daniel to read the writing and make known its interpretation. Daniel told Belshazzar that his kingdom had been divided and given to the Medes and the Persians. King Belshazzar promoted Daniel to third ruler over his kingdom, but that very night Belshazzar was slain.

The lesson is clear: *man* changes, but God does not change. “The goodness of God endureth *continually*” (Ps. 52:1). God says, “I AM THAT I AM” (Ex. 3:14). This denotes his immutability, constancy and faithfulness to fulfill his promises; moreover, it includes all time: past, present, and future.³ Believer, you can trust the God who saved you, not only in the present, but for eternity! Your Savior will infallibly bring many sons and daughters to glory. He says, “This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should

³ Adapted from Gill

raise it up at the last day.” Not only does the triune God declare, “I AM THAT I AM,” but Jesus claimed this for himself as well: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58). Here is God’s name and self-declaration: “I am the LORD.”

Consider some of the Confession’s proof texts for “God is unchangeable”:
Psalm 33:11, “The counsel of the LORD standeth *forever*, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.” **Hebrews 1:12** (regarding the earth and the heaven), “As a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but *thou art the same*, and thy years shall not fail. **Hebrews 6:17**, “Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the *immutability* of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath.” **Hebrews 13:8**, “Jesus Christ *the same* yesterday, and to day, and forever.” The apostle James concurs: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is *no variation* or shadow of turning” (Jas. 1:17). There is no variation or shadow of turning with God—not the slightest change with God!

To these we might add Psalm 111:9, “He sent redemption unto his people: *he hath commanded his covenant forever*: holy and reverend is his name.” In eternity past God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—entered into a covenant that theologians call the inter-trinitarian covenant. Out of all the mass of humanity that God would create, God the Father chose a people for himself that he gave to the Son. In this covenant the Son voluntarily took on the task of coming to this earth, taking upon himself our humanity, and offering up his life’s blood on the cross to save them. The Son, in turn, would send his Holy Spirit to regenerate them and draw them to himself. God has commanded his covenant *forever*: it is eternal, it can never be broken. God, who cannot lie, would cease to be God if he ever reneged on his eternal covenant. To change and to go back on his word would render God changeable, and that could never be! God’s nature is not to change: he is immutable, unchangeable. Third,

3. God’s promise

Consider the rest of the verse: “I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.” Because God is the LORD—the God who *is*, the only true and living God—he does not change, he cannot change, he is not subject to change. All around us we see change: the changing of the seasons, weather patterns, climate change. Life seems to begin anew in the spring, when the crocuses and daffodils poke their heads up through the snow. The growing season stretches through fall, when the harvest is brought in. Things lie fallow in winter. The sun and moon go through their phases. Heat and cold, storm and still, light and darkness—change is all around us. But God does not change, and when he makes a promise, he surely keeps it. The inspired Word teaches that God does not change, and that this is the reason that we, his covenant people, are not consumed. The

Hebrew word translated “consumed” (הִלָּחַם, a form of the word *all*) occurs 207 times and is translated *finished, ended* (of a work); *spent, used up* (of a bottle of water); *consumed, destroyed*. The word first occurs in Genesis 2:2, “And on the seventh day God *ended* his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.” Genesis 41:30 speaks of a famine that “shall *consume* the land.” When Israel worshiped the golden calf, God tells Moses, “Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may *consume* them” (Ex. 32:10). A short time later he tells Moses to take the Israelites up to the Promised Land himself, “for I will not go up in your midst,” God says, “lest I *consume* you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people” (Ex. 33:3).

In Leviticus 26, when God promises his covenant people blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience, he lists as one of the curses a “wasting disease and fever which shall *consume* the eyes” (Lev. 26:16). When Korah, Dathan and Abiram lead a rebellion against Moses and Aaron, the Lord tells Moses and Aaron: “Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may *consume* them in a moment” (Num. 16:21). In a later recitation of blessings and curses, Moses warns the people, “The LORD shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee, until he have *consumed* thee from off the land, whither thou goest to possess it” (Deut. 28:21). After Israel is in the Promised Land, Joshua tells the people, “If ye forsake the LORD, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and *consume* you, after that he hath done you good” (Josh. 24:20).

In the first chapter of Isaiah the prophet delivers the word the Lord’s verdict: “Therefore the Lord says, the LORD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel, ‘Ah, I will rid Myself of My adversaries, and take vengeance on My enemies. I will turn My hand against you, and thoroughly purge away your dross, and take away all your alloy. . . .’ The destruction of transgressors and of sinners shall be together, and those who forsake the LORD shall be *consumed*” (Isa. 1:24–28).

This is just a sampling of the many occurrences of the word. Clearly, the word used in Malachi 3:6 can mean *consume* in the sense of *completely destroy*. The threat of being consumed in judgment by a holy God should strike terror into the heart of man. As Jesus put it, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Luke 12:4).

To consume means to eat something completely, so that nothing at all is left. A young man might be so hungry that he consumes a large meal. But God says, “I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are *not* consumed.”

Brothers and sisters, do not miss the significance of this statement: God is unchangeable. That is the reason why his covenant promises will never fail. “While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and

winter, and day and night shall not cease.” “Thus says the Lord: ‘If you can break My covenant with the day and My covenant with the night, so that there will not be day and night in their season, then My covenant may also be broken with David My servant, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne’” (Jer. 33:20–21). Because God is unchangeable, the Lord Jesus Christ will reign eternally from the throne of David. He sealed it with his own blood: “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant” (Heb. 13:20).

Because God is unchangeable, we, his people, have a future. Evil will not triumph forever. Christ is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Our future is secure. God can no more change his mind than cease being God. He is unchangeable, and we are secure. Amen.