

What Is God Like?: Eternal & Immutable

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[0 : 00] So we're continuing in our series called What is God Like? And over the course of this series, we've been exploring 10 of the attributes or qualities of God that make him God.

And as we've explored each of these qualities, and as we continue to do that, we're going to be looking at a human understanding of those qualities, as well as what they mean in relation to the overall character of God.

And we're also going to look at what these unique qualities and characteristics of God mean for us personally, in our faith and in our lives.

Last week, we looked at what it means to recognize that God is self-existent and self-sufficient. Do you remember that? He is the eternal, independent, and personal cause of the universe.

God exists beyond our human ability to pin him down. God has no creator. He has always existed, and he always will.

[1 : 07] We also recognize that tied together intimately with the idea that God is self-existent, that he's always existed, is the idea that God is self-sufficient.

Do you remember that last week I also suggested that the infinite nature of God, God's infinity, is actually the foundation for or the connecting point between many of his qualities.

So as we're continuing in our exploration this morning, we're going to consider that God is eternal and immutable. I believe that many people, maybe this is true for you, use the terms infinite and infinity, and eternal or eternity somewhat interchangeably.

And do you perhaps view it that way? Before we dig into the idea of the eternal nature of God, I want to take a moment to try and clarify the difference, because there is a difference between these two concepts of infinity and eternity.

Infinity refers to something having no limit. So with that in mind, we can see how it could be viewed with all aspects of God's character or his qualities, right?

[2 : 27] Because God is infinite, therefore. So God's knowledge having no limit is known as omniscience, and we're going to look at that in our series in weeks ahead.

The idea that God is all-knowing. He has infinite knowledge without any limit. So we can recognize in that way that infinity, as I said before, is a broad aspect of God's nature.

And then, so eternity focuses on the existence, on God's existence, and on time specifically.

Eternity relates to time. So that would be a character that falls under the umbrella of God's infinity, God's infinite nature.

Eternity is his infinite nature within time. Does that make sense? So infinity, as I've said earlier in the series, is that umbrella.

[3 : 36] So existence, knowledge, presence, they all fall under that umbrella of infinity. And I hope that's helpful in clarifying some of those concepts, or not.

But if it's not, remember that we're able to know God more, but not necessarily understand him completely. Do you see that?

And so, welcome to being human. Welcome to being finite. Limited.

And then trying to apply, from that perspective, an understanding of God, who is infinite. It's challenging. And theologians have wrestled with it for hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years.

So we will not solve it. But that's the balance of our finiteness in relation to an infinite God. And another way to view the characteristics or the qualities of God and the nature of God is to recognize him as being other.

[4 : 51] Maybe you've heard that before. God is other than we are. God is other than we can relate to in many ways. His nature, his qualities, his characteristics are wholly unique to God alone.

So many of those qualities and characteristics simply cannot be reflected by or claimed by us as humans. We're not God. We're not infinite.

But in our next sermon series, yeah, I'm already way ahead. In our next sermon series in October, we're going to start to look at the ways that we can reflect God through our lives and our actions. So we're going to spin an understanding of God directly into how we can reflect him in our lives. All of creation, including humanity, is finite.

We exist within specific limits. I think we all recognize that. And all of the attributes of God that we've explored and will explore in this series transcend any limits that we might recognize.

[6:02] So this morning, the concept of eternity relates directly to something that shapes, defines, and ultimately limits us in many ways.

Time. We know that we are limited by the time we have on earth. We're limited by the number of years, months, weeks, days, hours, minutes, seconds that we have available to us.

They're limited. And that can cause so many challenges for us, can't it? We can become burdened with regrets of the past. Things that we wish we had or hadn't done.

Or choices we wish we had or hadn't made. Things we wish we hadn't said. Do you have those? I have those. As we live each day, we can also become caught up in laziness or procrastination.

Because we always think there's plenty of time to get to this later. Right? I don't want to do this.

[7:16] This is Brussels sprouts to a cheeseburger. I want the cheeseburger. I don't want the Brussels sprouts. I'll eat the Brussels sprouts later. But we procrastinate.

And we will run out of time. We know that. Or we can be equally bad on the other side as we can become wrapped up in a false sense of urgency.

Everything is important. We try to cram a schedule full or we feel like we're wasting time. We can try to cram as much as possible into every day recognizing that our time is short.

But friends, we can take comfort in knowing that God knows exactly how much time we have. We don't need to keep track.

And that if we let him, God will direct our steps to help us make the most of the time that we have.

Psalms 90 verse 12 is such a powerful reminder and perspective that we should ask God to teach us to number our days aright that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

[8:31] By realizing and recognizing that our time is short, we can rely on the perspective of our eternal God to help us use the little time that we have more wisely.

We can ask God to help us use our time to make a difference for others and ultimately for God's glory. I believe it's wise for us to ask ourselves every day, what do I want to see happen in my life before I die?

And I'm not talking about a bucket list, although that's a good thing. A bucket list of I want to climb Kilimanjaro or I want to eat Brussels sprouts or something.

But to have a bucket list is a good thing because you're setting yourself goals and you're looking towards the future. Right? But I'm talking about more than that.

I'm talking about if you want your life to be used by and for God, what would that look like? I never thought I would be a pastor of a church.

[9:42] I said, God, use me. And here I am. Watch what you say. Because God listens. I want to use me, but not as a pastor, Lord.

Surprise. Surprise. But if we ask ourselves, how do we want God to use us? How do we want God to help us make the most of our time? Then we can have the perspective of what little thing can I do today?

What little step can I take towards that goal? Does that make sense? God's point. And I'm not talking about you figuring it out. I'm talking about you staying connected with God to say, God, point me today in the direction you would have me go.

And we must never forget that God is always at work. And his timing is always perfect. Now, I debated about whether to use this illustration or not, but I'm a Lord of the Rings fan.

So, there's a line that Gandalf the wizard says in one of the movies. And he says, a wizard is never late. He arrives precisely when he means to.

[10:56] That, to me, is J.R.R. Tolkien's way of saying, here's part of the nature of God, folks.

Tolkien was a Christian. To me, there's a strong connection there between the timing of God being perfect.

He will show up. But we need to recognize it's according to his will, not ours. As the Apostle Peter reminds us in 2 Peter 3, verses 8 and 9.

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends. With the Lord, a day is like a thousand years. And a thousand years are like a day.

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as one understands slowness. See the human perspective there? He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

This is such a powerful reminder that our God is not bound by time. He's not in a rush. And while our time will eventually run out, we know that.

[12 : 14] God's plan continues forward into eternity. I have a dear, dear aunt who has said as long as I can remember.

She's often used the phrase, Lord willing. So whenever she's referred to plans for her future, or I say, oh, Auntie Doreen, it was so good to see you. I can't wait to see you again.

She brackets anything she plans with the words, Lord willing, or something to that effect. And over my lifetime, I can remember thinking of phrases like that as some kind of Christian cop-out.

So in some way, not taking responsibility for our own actions, right? But as I've gotten older, and hopefully somewhat wiser, I've come to see this as absolutely the correct perspective for us.

Lord willing. That perspective reflects a proper orientation. It's not up to us how long we have, what we should or shouldn't do.

[13 : 21] That's in God's hands. And we need to be reminded to seek God's leading in those things. Because our days are definitely numbered.

Absolutely they are. But they're also numbered by an eternally loving God who holds our future in his hands and who has plans for our lives.

Psalms 102, verses 25 to 27. I always feel bad because I can see people either flipping or taking notes. And Psalms 102, verses 25 to 27.

Reminds us of the eternal nature of God. Because we read there, In the beginning, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.

They will perish, but you remain. They will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing, you will change them. And they will be discarded.

[14 : 27] As I thought about that passage, as I reflected on it this week, I thought to myself of the mountains. I've said to you before how much our family loves the Rockies. So we love to go to Glacier National Park or Jasper or Banff.

And I was reflecting this week on the fact that I have been going to the mountains ever since I can remember. I remember being a small child in my parents' car going to the mountains.

And I can remember certain areas of those parks, particularly Jasper and Banff. And then I think of them being there this summer even.

And overall, nothing has changed. I can remember and reflect and recognize certain mountain range areas, certain valleys and lakes and hills and things and combinations of those things that date back in my head a long time.

And they really haven't changed. But in this passage, we read that to God, the mountains are that or less. The mountains, as permanent as they seem to us, are completely temporary to God, are just a blink in the reality of God's awareness.

[15 : 44] To me, there's another illustration I debated on sharing this morning, but I did it online, so I have to do it here too. I've always thought of humanity as a thread.

So our awareness of time is a thread. So we are very linear. We are yesterday, last year, last week, last month, very linear.

Next week, two months from now, in 10 years I plan to. So we're very, very linear. You can't go backwards in the thread. God is everything around that thread.

That's God's awareness. That's eternity in relation to humanity. Another way that I've seen in the last few years has kind of come into my head and my heart.

I think this is true, and God will probably correct me. But if you look at your life as a linear perspective, or humanity as a linear perspective, to me, God's view of all of that is to take this line and look at it all at once.

[16 : 54] Does that make sense? No. I don't see anybody's nose bleeding, so. Well, you're wearing masks. I wouldn't be able to tell. But do you see what I mean, though? That awareness, that thing

that has popped into my head and my heart, gives me chills when I mention that.

So to me, every moment is one moment to God. He sees eternity, all time, as an eternal now. Isn't that fascinating to think of it that way?

I'm probably partly wrong, because I'm not God. But to me, that resonates somehow, so I'll be interested to see how it plays out. Big sidetrack.

So there we go. But I think that passage, to say that everything that has been created, even the mountains, are temporary. They will perish. And God will cast them aside, not to say they're disposable, but ultimately will change them like they're a garment.

You know, you change your clothes, and it takes two minutes. So God can change anything in a moment. And I think this passage from Psalm 102 is a great transition between the concepts of God being eternal and then immutable.

[18:10] Immutable is a big theological word. Or physics, chemistry. I'm looking at Danny. It's not a, it's like, so when I worked at Alberta Environment, I had a guy submit a report to me.

I was in communications. Submitted a report to me to review. Looked at the report, and I phoned him, and I said, deleterious. Seriously? And he said, yeah.

And I said, it means bad, doesn't it? And he said, yeah. And I said, say bad, say harmful to humans, but don't say deleterious. But immutable is a heavy word.

It's a \$50 word. And so maybe you've attended a long, boring meeting, or maybe you've got loud, rambunctious kids around, or grandkids, and you found those situations to be immutable.

Immutable. It's not what it means. It doesn't mean the inability to mute something. It's not quite what it means. But do you recognize another word that seems similar to immutable, or seems to have the same root?

[19:19] Everybody's looking at the screen now. How about mutate or mutation? Those words have come to have very strong negative connotations, really, haven't they?

Because they're often, in human language now, are related to disease, virus. We talk about COVID-19 mutating, potentially.

So that's how it's often used in human language. But it's really, at its core, it means changes in something, or something that is caused to change in its nature in some ways.

So the ability to change or be affected by something outside. So if the words mutate or mutation imply change, that something can be changed by external influence or external factors, immutable would suggest that something is what?

Unchangeable. Unchanging. Constant. So the idea that God is immutable, that God is unchanging, is reflected many places in Scripture.

[20:38] In Hebrews 13, verse 8. Hebrews 13, 8. This will be familiar. We read that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

In Hebrews. Hebrews. So written to Hebrew Christians, that passage, that entire book, in fact, was designed to encourage and remind them to hold to the truth of what they had been taught amidst false teaching.

They were being encouraged to follow the example of their leaders, who were themselves following the example of Jesus. So we're reminded here, in this example, that Jesus is constant.

He's reliable. He's unchanging. Immutable. So you may have heard people say that, given the uncertainty of our lives, the only constant, the only thing that we can count on, truly, in life, is what? Change. You've probably heard that expression. The only thing constant, the only thing stable, is change. Change. Change. Certainly feels like it now, doesn't it?

[22:00] So yes, the human existence is marked by change. And it's somewhat defined by its fleeting nature. Humanity is fleeting. But are you also able to see that change as a gift?

You may remember that in our series on stewardship, we took a look at James 1, verse 17. James 1, verse 17.

Because at that point, we were recognizing that all we have and all we are comes from God. And James 1, 17 reflects that. That verse also, though, we can look at this morning, because it affirms the immutable, unchanging nature of God.

James 1, 17 says, Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights.

Our gifts, our provision, are from God. But what does it say about God? Father of heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

[23 : 18] Rather than being mired in the regrets of your past, or constantly worrying about an uncertain future that may never come.

Do you recognize that? That the things you worry about today may never actually happen. That's where anxiety comes from. Worrying about things that are out of your control that may never actually happen.

Half the time when I wake up in the middle of the night, I'm worried about something that, A, may not be that important, B, is completely outside of my control, and C, may never happen at all. Are you a worrier? I know some of you are. I'm not going to name names. But I am. So do you see that, rather than being worried about the future, rather than being mired in regrets of an unchangeable past, can you focus on the here and now?

Because literally, it's not by chance, I don't think, that it's called the present. Because it's a gift. Staying in the moment right now, focusing on what's important, letting go of the past, not worrying about the future, next to Jesus, I think it's the greatest gift of all.

[24 : 43] The present. So just as our salvation, our eternal destiny, relies upon a God who does not change, could you imagine if Jesus was unreliable?

Changes things, doesn't it? God's acceptance for us does not change. I've said this before. You can't do any more to make him love you more than he already does.

You can't do anything to stop him from loving you. It's a little bit freeing, isn't it? God's promises to us never change.

The same God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, same God, folks, same promises are true today as they were all those years ago.

His grace towards us and his love for us never changes. And yet, here's the and yet, it's vital for us to recognize that our salvation and our sanctification as we grow to be more like Jesus, as we seek to be more like him in the example he gave us, the growth of our relationship with God, our goal of turning from, repenting from sin and selfish choices back to God, all of those things require that we must change.

[26 : 21] Can you recognize that? Repentance means saying I'm not gonna do that anymore. God, help me to do that instead. We need to recognize what's being given to us, accept it, and change.

But I also want you to recognize that this change, this transformation that must occur in us, it's not something that we're supposed to do on our own.

Breathe out. Jesus did not set an unattainable standard for living, for treating other people, for relating to God and then say, well, good luck with that because you don't have a chance.

He did not say that. Friends, we have people to support us on this journey. We have a God to ask for strength and encouragement.

And if we've accepted Jesus as the Lord of our lives and surrendered our lives to his will, then we also have the Holy Spirit living in us, literally, our comforter, our sustainer on this journey.

[27 : 41] And it's the sacrifice of Jesus Christ himself that echoes through all time, echoes through eternity, securing eternity for us, for relationship with our eternal, matchless, and loving Father.

Let's pray. Amen. Amen.