

BIBLE CHALLENGE 2019

Week 8: February 17-23

Does God Ever Change His Mind?

Read: Genesis 6:6; Exodus 32:14; **Numbers 23:19-20**; 1 Samuel 15:29; Job 9:12-13; 23:13; Psalm 33:11; 102:25-27; Proverbs 19:21; Ecclesiastes 3:14; Isaiah 14:24-27; 46:9-10; Jeremiah 18:1-11; Ezekiel 24:14; Joel 2:13; **Malachi 3:6**; Romans 11:29; Ephesians 1:9-11; 3:11; 2 Timothy 2:13; **Hebrews 1:12; 6:13-20; 13:8; James 1:17**; Revelation 1:8; 22:13. Read Jonah 3-4 in full.

Probably the fundamental starting place to answer this question would be Malachi 3:6 in the Old Testament or James 1:17 in the New Testament. The scriptures regularly present God as being unchanging and even without the ability to change. It is true, that there are a few times when God is recorded as saying that he relented from the judgment he had promised, but we will talk more about those passages in a moment.

Without the Ability to Change?

Why is it important to assert that God is not able to change even were he to want to do so? The simple answer is that God, by definition, is perfect. And, were he able to change (becoming either less perfect or more perfect), he would cease to fit the definition of being God. Maybe think of it this way, if God is the being "greater than which no greater being can be conceived," then if he could learn or change or become "more great" then a greater being can be conceived.

Why is it important that God cannot change?

There are a number of reasons for this, but the single-most important reason is that he has made a covenant with us through his Son, Jesus Christ. And we rest all of our hope on that promise. If it were possible for God to change his mind, we could have no assurance of salvation. We could not count on God's saving grace. Whose to say that God could not decide all of a sudden that we need to earn our way to glory or that he would capriciously withdraw his promises from us as God's people? Who's to say after a million years in glory he might not get tired of us and cast us out into the Lake of Fire? If God could change, we could have no eternal hope – hope that comes in the connection we have to God's Covenant, that all whom he draws to himself will never, ever be lost (John 6:44; 10:28-30).

What about when God "relents" of his actions?

There are several passages where the text seems to depict God as changing his mind. For example, the passage listed above in Genesis 6 where God laments that he has made mankind or the passage in Jonah where God says that he is going to destroy the Ninevites and then relents and does not destroy them after their repentance. So, how are we to understand this in light of God's unchanging nature?

The most common way to approach such texts is to argue that to help us understand the action of God, God's actions are described more or less in human terms. The fancy term for this is "anthropomorphism." That may seem like a kind of abstract philosophical idea, but it is something that we do all of the time. Often, we speak of things that are not human in human terms. Some people talk to their automobiles and even impart feelings into their vehicles. Others will do the same thing with their pets, again giving human attributes such as reasoning skills to animals. Doing so simply helps us to think about things that are outside of our personal experience. God is a Spirit and not a man, so it is natural that we would sometimes develop anthropomorphic

language to help us come to terms with his actions.

There is another idea that is sometimes thrown about and that has to do with our lack of ability to comprehend God's deeper plans, decrees, and design. We might call this an argument "from Degree." To illustrate, let's take something with which we are all familiar: prepositions.

From my childhood, I was always told that we are not to end our sentences with a preposition. Does that sound familiar? One of my favorite quotes about this comes from Winston Churchill, who said: "From now on ending a sentence with a preposition is something up with I shall not put." Believe it or not, Churchill's grammar is technically correct even though it sure is rather awkward to say. It is far more natural to say, "That is something I will not put up with." But oops, you just ended a sentence in a preposition.

What does this have to do with God? There are lots of rules of grammar that we are taught when we are young, but if you look at master authors like William Shakespeare, or Charles Dickens, or Lewis Carroll, one thing that they all have in common is that they break every one of those rules that we all learned in our youth. Why can they get away with breaking the rules? It is because they are not really breaking the rules. Huh?

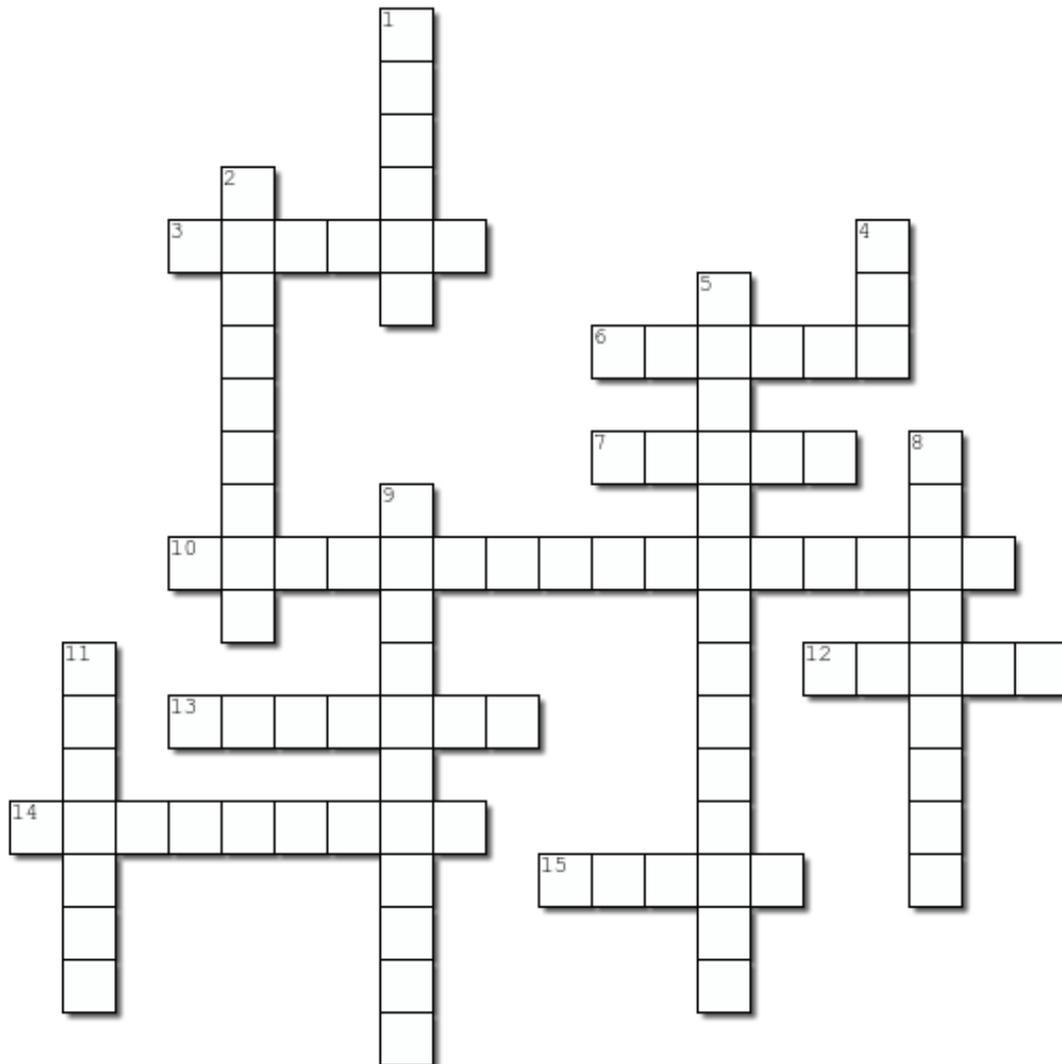
Think about it this way. The rules we were taught were basic rules of grammar, but there is another set of rules of English grammar that is deeper and far more nuanced than the basic rules. You really can begin a sentence with "and" or "because" and you really can end a sentence with a preposition...but only rarely and only under certain circumstances. These deeper and more nuanced rules would just confuse a student who is still trying to grasp the basics of the English language. And so, they are not taught. In fact, these are rules that are more or less discovered as you master the written language (as did people like Shakespeare, Dickens, and Carroll).

And so, there are aspects of God's decree and design, like the English language, that are more nuanced and may not fit our paradigms (at least on the surface level). Yet, they are perfectly consistent with the totality of God's character and perfection. And, in this case, while at times it seems to us that God has changed his mind, that is only a matter of our perception that is limited and finite and that cannot see or comprehend the whole.

So, does God change his mind? No, that is the clear testimony of the Scriptures. And thus, we can trust and be assured of his promises. But, does it sometimes seem to us that God is changing his mind? On occasion, there are conditional commands and promises that may seem to us like God is changing his mind, but that is our limitation and not God's. Do these conditional things that look to us like God is changing his mind tell us that we cannot be assured of our salvation? No. What God promises, he will bring about and he has promised eternal life to all who repent of their sins and believe in his Son.

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Complete the crossword below



Created using TheTeachersCorner.net [Crossword Puzzle Maker](#)

Across

3. The one who is the Glory of Israel will not lie nor _____.
6. 'For I the Lord do not _____.
7. 'I am God and there is no _____; I am God and there is none like me.'
10. What do you call it when people attribute human traits to non-human things?
12. 'I am the Alpha and the _____; the beginning and the end.
13. How long does the Council of the Lord stand?
14. The unchangeable character of God gives us _____ of our salvation.
15. 'I am the _____ and the Omega; the first and the last...'

Down

1. 'I am the Lord, I have _____, it shall come to pass...'
2. God declares the end from the _____.
4. 'God is not man that he should _____ ...'
5. Every good gifts comes from him (3 words).
8. 'Jesus Christ is the same _____, today, and forever.'
9. The gifts and calling of God is _____.
11. God cannot deny _____.