

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Theology Proper: God, Session 13, Incommunicable Attributes, Part 4 Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Peterson, Theology Proper: God, Session 13, Incommunicable Attributes, Part 4, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This audio transcript captures Dr. Robert Peterson's theological lecture, the thirteenth session on Theology Proper, focusing on the **incommunicable attributes of God**, specifically **immutability and greatness**. Peterson explains that God's **unchanging nature** provides security and is foundational to his covenantal faithfulness, contrasting it with his responsive interactions with humanity. He addresses potential misunderstandings regarding God's "repentance" in scripture, clarifying that God's character remains constant while his actions towards people vary. The lecture concludes by emphasizing God's **unparalleled greatness**, inspiring worship, reverence, submission, trust, and the call to share his glory.

**2. 13 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Peterson, Theology Proper: God, Session 13 – Double click
icon to play in Windows media player or go to the
Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link
there (Theology → Theology, Peterson → Theology Proper:
God).**



**Peterson_TheoProp
er_Session13.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Peterson, Theology Proper: God, Session 13, Incommunicable Attributes, Part 4

Briefing Document: Theology Proper - God is Immutable and Great

Overview:

This session, the fourth part on God's incommunicable attributes, focuses on two key characteristics: immutability (unchanging nature) and greatness (utmost significance and beyond comparison). Dr. Peterson defines these attributes, supports them with scriptural references and contextual analysis, addresses potential theological challenges (specifically God's "repentance"), and highlights the practical implications of these attributes for believers. The session concludes by introducing the next topic: God's communicable attributes.

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

1. God is Immutable (Unchanging):

- **Definition:** Immutability means that "God does not change in his character or nature unlike God's changing creation."
- **Scriptural Support: Psalm 102:27:** "you are the same and your years will never end." This verse, initially about God, is also applied to Jesus in Hebrews 1, emphasizing Christ's divinity.
- **Psalm 102:28:** As a consequence of God's immutability, believers can "dwell securely amid a changing world." God is a "steady, rock steady" foundation.
- **Malachi 3:6:** "because I the Lord have not changed, you descendants of Jacob have not been destroyed." This is identified as a "key text for immutability." Dr. Peterson emphasizes the importance of literary context using G.R. Osborne's "Hermeneutical Spiral" to properly understand this verse, highlighting God's covenantal faithfulness as the reason for Israel's continued existence despite their disobedience.
- **James 1:17:** God is described as the "Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." This contrasts God with the moving heavenly bodies that produce shadows, emphasizing His constant nature.
- **Implications:** God's immutability provides believers with security and the assurance of His steadfast love and commitment, even when they rebel. "Though we rebel against him, God remains our steadfast rock."

2. Addressing the "Problem" of God's Repentance:

- **Reconciling Immutability with Scriptural Accounts of God's "Repentance":** Dr. Peterson acknowledges passages in the King James Version that suggest God repents (e.g., Genesis 6:6-7, Exodus 32:14, Jonah 3:10). He argues that these should be understood in light of Scripture's clear affirmation of God's unchanging character.
- **Key Passages Denying God's Repentance:** Numbers 23:19 ("God is not a man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind.") and 1 Samuel 15:29 ("And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man that he should have regret.").
- **Understanding the "Repentance" Passages:** Modern translations often use words like "regretted," "relented," or "was moved to pity" to better convey the idea that God is genuinely responsive to human beings and their actions without implying a change in His essential character or nature. "In each of these passages, it is not God's character or nature that changes. In each case, who God is remains the same. The passages stress that God is genuinely responsive to human beings."
- **Francis Schaeffer's Insight:** God is the "infinite personal God." In His infinity, He doesn't change, but in His being personal, He relates to His people by covenant, which involves response and interaction.
- **Christ's Immutability:** Hebrews 13:8 ("Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever") reinforces the doctrine of immutability and highlights Christ's divinity.

3. God is Great:

- **Definition:** God is "of utmost significance and beyond comparison. His majesty is infinite. He alone is the High and Exalted One, and there's no one like him."
- **Scriptural Support: Exodus 15:11 (Song of Moses):** "Lord, who is like you among the gods? Who is like you, glorious in holiness, revered with praises, performing wonders?" This highlights God's uniqueness and incomparability.
- **Isaiah 40:21-24:** This passage depicts God as sovereign over the earth and its rulers, emphasizing His power and majesty. "It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers..."
- **Psalms 86:8-10:** "Lord, there is no one like you among the gods, and there are no works like yours. For you are great and perform wonders. You alone are God."

- **Psalms 135:5-6:** "For I know that the Lord is great, the Lord is greater than all gods. The Lord does whatever he pleases in heaven and on earth..." Emphasizes God's sovereignty stemming from His greatness.
- **Nehemiah 1:5:** Describes God as "the great and awe-inspiring God who keeps his gracious covenant..." Linking greatness with faithfulness.
- **Jeremiah 10:6-7:** "Lord, there's no one like you. You are great; your name is great in power. Who should not fear you, king of the nations? It is what you deserve..."
- **Psalms 145:3-6:** "The Lord is great and highly praised; his greatness is unsearchable... They will proclaim the power of your awe-inspiring acts, and I will declare your greatness." Emphasizes the incomprehensible nature of God's greatness.
- **Implications:** God's greatness should lead to:
 - **Worship:** "God's greatness leads us to worship him and him only." (Psalm 86:8-10, Psalm 96:3-5, Luke 1:46-48)
 - **Fear:** "God's greatness leads us to fear him." (Psalm 96:3-5, Jeremiah 10:6-7)
 - **Submission:** "God's greatness leads us to submit to his sovereign hand." (Psalm 135:5-6)
 - **Trust in Covenant Faithfulness:** "And it leads us to trust in his covenant faithfulness." (Nehemiah 1:5)
 - **Bearing Witness:** "God's greatness also inspires us to bear witness of him to others." (Psalm 145:3-6)

4. The Gospel and God's Immutability:

- God's unchanging character undergirds the gospel message. Because God is consistently loving and faithful to His promises, believers can have assurance of salvation.
- Hebrews 6:18-19 is quoted: "Through two unchangeable things, God's promise and oath, we have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure."
- The basis of salvation and being kept is not our faithfulness but "God's unchanging character which... is organically related to his faithfulness."

5. Introduction to Communicable Attributes:

- The next lecture will begin the study of God's "shared attributes," also known as His communicable attributes – those characteristics that He shares with His creatures.

Conclusion:

This session provides a foundational understanding of God's immutability and greatness, emphasizing their scriptural basis and practical significance for Christian faith and life. Dr. Peterson carefully navigates potentially challenging theological concepts, such as God's "repentance," by stressing the consistency and unchanging nature of God's character while acknowledging His genuine relationship and responsiveness to humanity within the framework of His covenants. The session concludes by setting the stage for the discussion of God's communicable attributes, further enriching the understanding of the divine nature.

4. Study Guide: Peterson, Theology Proper: God, Session 13, Incommunicable Attributes, Part 4

Study Guide: God's Immutability and Greatness

Key Concepts:

- **Incommunicable Attributes:** Divine attributes unique to God and not shared with creation.
- **Immutability:** God's unchanging nature, character, and being.
- **Covenantal Faithfulness:** God's steadfast commitment to his promises and his people within the framework of a covenant relationship.
- **Greatness:** God's utmost significance, infinite majesty, and incomparability.
- **Hermeneutical Spiral:** A method of biblical interpretation that emphasizes understanding a text within its immediate and broader literary contexts.
- **Regeneration:** The act of God giving new spiritual life to those who are dead in their trespasses and sins.
- **Progressive Revelation:** The understanding that God's self-disclosure in Scripture unfolds gradually over time.
- **Communicable Attributes:** Divine attributes that God shares in some measure with humanity (to be discussed in a subsequent session).

Quiz:

1. Define God's immutability and provide one scriptural reference used to support this attribute.
2. Explain the significance of Malachi 3:6 in relation to God's immutability, and briefly describe the "hermeneutical spiral" as it applies to understanding this verse.
3. How does James 1:17, which describes God as the "Father of lights," illustrate God's unchanging nature?
4. While God is immutable, the text discusses instances where Scripture seems to indicate God "repenting." Explain how these passages should be understood in light of God's unchanging character.

5. According to the lecture, why is it important for Christians to use contemporary evangelical translations of the Bible?
6. Define God's greatness as presented in the lecture, and explain why this attribute is considered an "incommunicable" attribute.
7. Provide one Old Testament example of a passage that highlights God's greatness and briefly explain how it does so.
8. How does the attribute of God's greatness relate to the concept of idolatry?
9. Describe at least two ways in which God's greatness should influence humanity's response to Him.
10. Explain the connection between God's immutability and the security of the believer's salvation, referencing Hebrews 6:18-19 if possible.

Answer Key:

1. God's immutability means that He does not change in His character, nature, or being, unlike His changing creation. Psalm 102:27 ("you are the same and your years will never end") is a key scriptural reference.
2. Malachi 3:6 ("For I the Lord do not change") is a crucial text for immutability, highlighting God's covenantal faithfulness and unchanging commitment to His people as the reason they were not destroyed. The hermeneutical spiral emphasizes understanding a verse by considering its immediate context (e.g., surrounding verses in Malachi), the broader context of the book, the Old Testament, and ultimately the entire Bible.
3. James 1:17 describes God as the "Father of lights" with whom "there is no variation or shadow due to change," contrasting His steadfast nature with the movement and shadows of celestial bodies, emphasizing His consistent and unwavering character.
4. Passages that seem to show God "repenting" are better understood as expressions of God's genuine responsiveness to human actions and attitudes, rather than a change in His character or nature. Modern translations often use terms like "relented" or "was moved to pity" to convey this responsive action while maintaining God's immutability.
5. The lecture provides two main reasons: first, the Reformation principle that Christians need the Word of God in their own current language, as the English of

the King James Version (400 years old) is no longer contemporary. Second, the discovery of older and better New Testament manuscripts in the early 20th century, which postdate the KJV.

6. God's greatness refers to His utmost significance, infinite majesty, and being beyond comparison; He alone is the High and Exalted One. This is an incommunicable attribute because no creature possesses this infinite level of majesty and incomparability; humans are finite beings distinct from God's transcendence.
7. Isaiah 40:21-24 portrays God sitting above the circle of the earth, with its inhabitants appearing as grasshoppers, and depicts Him effortlessly bringing princes and rulers to nothing. This illustrates God's unparalleled power and sovereignty, highlighting His greatness in contrast to human power.
8. God's greatness emphasizes His uniqueness and incomparability, directly contrasting with the nature of idols, which are presented as powerless and inferior "gods of the nations." Recognizing God's true greatness should lead to the rejection of idolatry and the worship of Him alone.
9. God's greatness should lead us to worship Him and Him only, acknowledging His infinite majesty and worthiness of praise. It should also lead us to fear Him, recognizing His power and awe-inspiring nature, and to submit to His sovereign hand, trusting in His ultimate authority and wisdom.
10. God's immutability provides a secure foundation for the believer's salvation because His promises and oath (Hebrews 6:18-19) are unchangeable. Since God does not go back on His word, those He saves are kept by His steadfast character, not solely by their own fluctuating faithfulness.

Essay Format Questions:

1. Discuss the implications of God's immutability for understanding His relationship with humanity, addressing both the consistency of His character and His responsiveness to human actions.
2. Analyze the concept of God's greatness as presented in the lecture, explaining why this attribute is essential for proper worship and understanding of God's place in the universe.

3. Explore the tension between biblical passages that depict God as unchanging and those that seem to describe Him as repenting or changing His mind. How can these seemingly contradictory statements be reconciled?
4. Evaluate the significance of understanding the literary context of biblical passages (as highlighted by the "hermeneutical spiral") for correctly interpreting attributes like God's immutability.
5. Explain how the attributes of God's immutability and greatness provide a firm foundation for the Christian gospel and the believer's assurance of salvation.

Glossary of Key Terms:

- **Aseity:** The attribute of God by which He is self-existent and not dependent on anything outside of Himself for His being.
- **Communicable Attributes:** Characteristics of God that are reflected in humanity to a limited degree, such as love, wisdom, and justice.
- **Hermeneutics:** The theory and practice of interpretation, especially of biblical texts.
- **Immutable:** Unchanging or unalterable in nature, character, or being.
- **Incommunicable Attributes:** Characteristics of God that are unique to Him and not shared with His creation.
- **Omnipotence:** The attribute of God by which He is all-powerful and able to do anything consistent with His nature.
- **Omnipresence:** The attribute of God by which He is present everywhere at the same time.
- **Omniscience:** The attribute of God by which He knows everything, past, present, and future.
- **Regeneration:** The spiritual rebirth or renewal of a person's heart by the Holy Spirit, resulting in new life in Christ.
- **Theology Proper:** The branch of Christian theology that specifically studies the doctrine of God.

5. FAQs on Peterson, Theology Proper: God, Session 13, Incommunicable Attributes, Part 4, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: God's Immutability and Greatness

1. What does it mean for God to be immutable or unchanging? Immutability means that God does not change in his character or nature. Unlike the created world which is in constant flux, God remains the same. This is supported by scriptures like Psalm 102:27, which says, "you are the same, and your years will never end," a verse also applied to Jesus in Hebrews 1. This attribute highlights God's steadfastness and reliability.

2. How does God's immutability provide security for believers? Because God is unchanging, he is also rock steady and faithful to his promises. As Psalm 102:28 states, believers can dwell securely amidst a changing world because God remains the same. Even when we are disobedient, God's fundamental character and commitment to his covenant do not waver, as seen in Malachi 3:6 where God says, "For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed."

3. If God is immutable, how do we understand passages that speak of God "repenting" or changing his mind? Passages in older translations like the King James Version that describe God as "repenting" (e.g., Genesis 6:6-7, Exodus 32:14) should be understood in light of the clear scriptural affirmation of God's unchanging character (Numbers 23:19, 1 Samuel 15:29). Modern translations often use words like "relented" or "was moved to pity" to better convey that it is not God's nature that changes, but rather his actions in response to human actions. God genuinely relates to humanity, and these passages highlight his responsiveness, compassion, and disturbance in the face of sin, without implying a change in his intrinsic being.

4. In what ways does God relate to humanity if he is immutable? While God's character remains constant, he engages in genuine relationships with people through covenants. He answers prayers, desires praise, and is pleased by love and obedience. His immutability ensures the steadfastness of his covenantal promises (Genesis 17:7). God's actions toward us are historical and relational to our responses, demonstrating his personal involvement without contradicting his unchanging nature.

5. What does it mean that God is "great"? God's greatness signifies that he is of utmost significance, beyond comparison, and possesses infinite majesty. He alone is the High and Exalted One, and there is no one like him. This attribute emphasizes God's uniqueness and superiority over all creation and any so-called gods.

6. What are some scriptural images that illustrate God's greatness? Scripture uses various images to depict God's greatness, including:

- **King:** Emphasizing his royal authority and uniqueness among all powers (Isaiah 40:21-24, Psalm 86:8-10).
- **The one who sits above the circle of the earth:** Highlighting his transcendence and sovereignty over creation (Isaiah 40:22).
- **The Lord who does whatever he pleases:** Underscoring his absolute power and freedom (Psalm 135:5-6).

7. How does understanding God's greatness impact our response to him? Recognizing God's greatness should lead us to:

- **Worship him alone:** Acknowledging his incomparable worth and majesty (Psalm 86:8-10, Luke 1:46-48).
- **Fear him:** Reverencing his power and awe-inspiring nature (Psalm 96:3-5, Jeremiah 10:6-7).
- **Submit to his sovereign hand:** Trusting in his ultimate authority and will (Psalm 135:5-6).
- **Trust in his covenant faithfulness:** Relying on his unwavering commitment to his promises (Nehemiah 1:5).
- **Bear witness of him to others:** Sharing the knowledge of his magnificent works and character (Psalm 145:3-6).

8. How do the attributes of immutability and greatness relate to the gospel? God's unchangeable character undergirds the gospel message. Because God's love and promises are steadfast, we can have confidence in his offer of salvation through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 6:18-19). His greatness highlights the fact that he alone is the Savior, and our salvation ultimately rests on his sovereign grace and unchanging commitment to his people, not on our own fickle faithfulness.