

*“Winds from
every quarter are
stilled by ‘peace’
from His lips.”*

“WHAT MANNER
OF MAN IS THIS?”
LUKE 8:25



Be still.

the SERVICE of the SHADOW

from SINGING IN THE SHADOWS by J. B. Chapman

Dr. Jowett calls attention to the fact that while flowers require sunshine, ferns grow in the shade. And in their place, ferns are quite as beautiful as flowers. Sunshine and flowers need no champions. They stand in the order of universal favourites. Usually, those who say they can see God in nature mean only that they can see Him in the sunshine and the flowers; for the shade and the ferns have no appeal for them. But sun and shadow are complements, and often the brighter the sun the sharper the shadow. It is useless to ask people to live always in the sunshine. No one could do that unless he were able to travel from east to west at the same incredible speed that enables the earth to turn on its axis within the twenty-four hours. No, we must live part of the time in the shadow, whether we will or not. Every man is in reality a little universe, and within the sphere of his experience there are both sun and shadow. There are the beautiful and pleasant to be enjoyed, and there are the sordid and painful to be endured. The first of these forms a proper atmosphere for the growth of flowers, the other is the correct habitat for ferns.

But what are the flowers of grace? Undoubtedly their list includes joy and gladness and victory and praise. And how sweet the odour and how beautiful the hue of these denizens of God's garden! They are symbols of abounding life and favourable environment.

And what are the ferns of holiness? Surely these must include long-suffering, gentleness, patience and meekness among the



others. The bare mention of these inspires visions of prison cells where saints have languished, unpleasant domestic situations which Christians have endured, bodily afflictions which living martyrs have borne, and ostracism from loved ones, persecution from peers, and jeers from inferiors which righteous men have taken in love for the Lord's sake. And like the ferns, these graces are quiet and unobtrusive. Nevertheless they have utilised the shadow for the production of beauty, and without them the flowers themselves would not be complete.

There is not much here for exhortation. It is unnecessary for anyone to seek the shadow — **if it is a real shadow, it must come unbidden.** Self-pity is no means of grace. Seeking pity from others is an occupation

that pays but a poor fee. No, the shadow will come—you have but to wait. Do not invite persecution. Live naturally, and live right. Persecution must take care of itself; for it to bring blessing it must be for righteousness' sake, and not in recompense for folly.

But when the shadow comes, remember you are not expected to grow flowers then — be content with ferns. Do not expect to shout when your loved ones die. Trust God for grace to bear uncomplainingly. At such a time, patience is in better taste than ecstasy. When any sort of reverses come, “take it patiently,” for this is well pleasing to God. And when the full bouquet of grace is made up, it will be found that the red and crimson of the flowers exhibit to better advantage on the green background of the gentle ferns. ❀

THE IMMUTABILITY OF GOD

by C. H. SPURGEON • *Delivered on Sunday Morning, January 7th, 1855*



"I AM THE LORD, I CHANGE NOT; THEREFORE YE SONS OF JACOB ARE NOT CONSUMED."

— MALACHI 3:6

It has been said by someone that "the proper study of mankind is man." I will not oppose the idea, but I believe it is equally true that the proper study of God's elect is God; the proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can compass and grapple with; in them we feel a kind of self-content, and go our way with the thought, "Behold I am wise." But when we come to this master-science, finding that our plumb-line cannot sound its depth, and that our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn away with the thought that vain man would be wise, but he is like a wild ass's colt; and with the solemn exclamation, "I am but of yesterday, and know nothing."

No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind than thoughts of God. We shall be obliged to feel—

*"Great God, how infinite art thou,
What worthless worms are we!"*

But while the subject humbles the mind it also expands it. He who often thinks of God will have a larger mind than the man who simply plods around this narrow globe. He may be a naturalist, boasting of his ability to dissect a

beetle, anatomise a fly, or arrange insects and animals in classes with well nigh unutterable names; he may be a geologist, able to discourse of the megatherium and the plesiosaurus, and all kinds of extinct animals. He may imagine that his science, whatever it is, ennobles and enlarges his mind. I dare say it does, but after all, the most excellent study for expanding the soul is the science of Christ, and him crucified, and the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity. Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity. And, whilst humbling and expanding, this subject is eminently consolatory. Oh, there is, in contemplating Christ, a balm for every wound; in musing on the Father, there is a quietus for every grief; and in the influence of the Holy Ghost, there is a balsam for every sore. Would you lose your sorrows? Would you drown your cares? Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea; be lost in his immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul; so calm the swelling billows of grief and sorrow; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead. It is to that subject that I invite you this morning. We shall present you with one view of it—that is, the immutability of the glorious Jehovah. "I am," says my text, "Jehovah," (for so it should be translated) "I am Jehovah, I change not: therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed."

God is Jehovah, and he changes not in his essence.

We cannot tell you what Godhead is. We do not know what substance that is which we call God. It is an existence, it is a being; but what that is, we know not. However, whatever it is, we call it his essence, and that essence never changes. The substance of mortal things is ever changing. The mountains with their snow-white crowns doff their old diadems in summer, in rivers trickling down their sides, while the storm cloud gives them another coronation; the ocean, with its mighty floods, loses its water when the sunbeams kiss the waves, and snatch them in mists to heaven; even the sun himself requires fresh fuel from the hand of the Infinite Almighty, to replenish his ever burning furnace. All creatures change. Man, especially as to his body, is always undergoing revolution. Very probably there is not a single particle in my body which was in it a few years ago. This frame has been worn away by activity, its atoms have been removed by friction, fresh particles of matter have in the mean time constantly accrued to my body, and so it has been

replenished; but its substance is altered. The fabric of which this world is made is ever passing away; like a stream of water, drops are running away and others are following after, keeping the river still full, but always changing in its elements. But God is perpetually the same. He is not composed of any substance or material, but is spirit—pure, essential, and ethereal spirit—and therefore he is immutable. He remains everlastingly the same. There are no furrows on his eternal brow. No age hath passed him; no years have marked him with the mementoes of their flight; he sees ages pass, but with him it is ever now. He is the great I AM—the Great Unchangeable. Mark you, his essence did not undergo a change when it became united with the manhood. When Christ in past years did gird himself with mortal clay, the essence of his divinity was not changed; flesh did not become God, nor did God become flesh by a real actual change of nature; the two were united in hypostatical union, but the Godhead was still the same. It was the same when he was a babe in the manger, as it was when he stretched the curtains of heaven; it was the same God that hung upon the cross, and whose blood flowed down in a purple river, the self-same God that holds the world upon his everlasting shoulders, and bears in his hands the keys of death and hell. He never has been changed in his essence, not even by his incarnation; he remains everlastingly, eternally, the one unchanging God, the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither the shadow of a change.

He changes not in his attributes.

Whatever the attributes of God were of old, that they are now; and of each of them we may sing "As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end, Amen." Was he powerful? Was he the mighty God when he spake the world out of the womb of nonexistence? Was he the Omnipotent when he piled the mountains and scooped out the hollow places for the rolling deep? Yes, he was powerful then, and his arm is unpalsied now, he is the same giant in his might; the sap of his nourishment is undried, and the strength of his soul stands the same for ever. Was he wise when he constituted this mighty globe, when he laid the foundations of the universe? Had he wisdom when he planned the way of our salvation, and when from all eternity he marked out his awful plans? Yes, and he is wise now; he is not less skillful, he has not less knowledge; his eye which sees all things is undimmed; his ear which hears all the cries, sighs, sobs, and groans of his people is not rendered heavy by the years which he has heard their prayers. He is unchanged in his wisdom, he knows as much

now as ever, neither more nor less; he has the same consummate skill, and the same infinite forecastings. He is unchanged, blessed be his name, in his justice. Just and holy was he in the past; just and holy is he now. He is unchanged in his truth, he has promised, and he brings it to pass; he hath said it, and it shall be done. He varies not in the goodness, and generosity, and benevolence of his nature. He is not become an Almighty tyrant, whereas he was once an Almighty Father; but his strong love stands like a granite rock, unmoved by the hurricanes of our iniquity. And blessed be his dear name, he is unchanged in his love. When he first wrote the covenant, how full his heart was with affection to his people. He knew that his Son must die to ratify the articles of that agreement. He knew right well that he must rend his best beloved from his heart, and send him down to earth to bleed and die. He did not hesitate to sign that mighty covenant; nor did he shun its fulfillment.

He loves as much now as he did then, and when suns shall cease to shine, and moons to show their feeble light, he shall love on for ever and for ever. Take any one attribute of God, and I will write *semper idem* on it (always the same). Take any one thing you can say of God now, and it may be said not only in the dark past, but in the bright future it shall always remain the same: "I am Jehovah, I change not."

God changes not in his plans.

That man began to build, but was not able to finish, and therefore he changed his plan, as every wise man would do in such a case; he built upon a smaller foundation and commenced again. But has it ever been said that God began to build but was not able to finish? Nay. When he has boundless stores at his command, and when his own right hand would create worlds as numerous as drops of morning dew, shall he ever stay because he has not power? and reverse, or alter, or disarrange his plan, because he cannot carry it out? "But," say some, "perhaps God never had a plan." Do you think God is more foolish than yourself then, sir? Do you go to work without a plan? "No," say you, "I have always a scheme." So has God. Every man has his plan, and God has a plan too. God is a master-mind; he arranged everything in his gigantic intellect long before he did it; and once having settled it, mark you, he never alters it. "This shall be done," says he, and the iron hand of destiny marks it down, and it is brought to pass. "This is my purpose," and it stands, nor can earth or hell alter it. "This is my decree," says he, promulgate it angels; rend it down from the gate of heaven ye devils; but you cannot alter the decree; it shall be done. God alters not his plans; why should he? He is Almighty, and therefore can perform his pleasure. Why should he? He is the All-wise, and therefore cannot have planned wrongly. Why should he? He is the everlasting God, and therefore cannot die before his plan is accomplished. Why should he change? You worthless atoms of existence, ephemera of the day! You creeping insects upon

this bayleaf of existence! You may change your plans, but he shall never, never change his. Then has he told me that his plan is to save me? If so, I am safe.

*"My name from the palms of his hands
Eternity will not erase;
Impress'd on his heart it remains,
In marks of indelible grace."*

God is unchanging in his promises.

Ah! we love to speak about the sweet promises of God; but if we could ever suppose that one of them could be changed, we would not talk anything more about them. If I thought that the notes of the bank of England could not be cashed next week, I should decline to take them; and if I thought that God's promises would never be fulfilled—if I thought that God would see it right to alter some word in his promises—farewell Scriptures! I want immutable things: and I find that I have immutable promises when I turn to the Bible: for, "by two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie," he hath signed, confirmed, and sealed every promise of his. The gospel is not "yea and nay," it is not promising today, and denying tomorrow; but the gospel is "yea, yea,"

*What kind
of being
must He be?*

to the glory of God. Believer! there was a delightful promise which you had yesterday; and this morning when you turned to the Bible the promise was not sweet. Do you know why? Do you think the promise had changed? Ah, no! You changed; that is where the matter lies. You had been eating some of the grapes of Sodom, and your mouth was thereby put out of taste, and you could not detect the sweetness. But there was the same honey there, depend upon it, the same preciousness. "Oh!" says one child of God, "I had built my house firmly once upon some stable promises; there came a wind, and I said, O Lord, I am cast down and I shall be lost." Oh! the promises were not cast down; the foundations were not removed; it was your little "wood, hay, stubble" hut, that you had been building. It was that which fell down. You have been shaken on the rock, not the rock under you. But let me tell you what is the best way of living in the world. I have heard that a gentleman said to a slave, "I can't think how it is you are always so happy in the Lord and I am often downcast." "Why Master," said he, "I throw myself flat down on the promise—there I lie; you stand on the promise—you have a little to do with it, and down you go when the wind comes, and then you cry, 'Oh! I am down,' whereas I go flat on the promise at once, and that is why I fear no fall." Then let us always say,

"Lord there is the promise; it is thy business to fulfill it." Down I go on the promise: and remember, every promise is a rock, an unchanging thing. Therefore, at his feet cast yourself, and rest there forever.

But now comes one jarring note to spoil the theme.

To some of you God is unchanging in his threatenings. If every promise stands fast, and every oath of the covenant is fulfilled, hark thee, sinner!—mark the word—hear the death-knell of your carnal hopes; see the funeral of your fleshly trustings. Every threatening of God, as well as every promise shall be fulfilled. Talk of decrees! I will tell you of a decree: "He that believeth not shall be damned." That is a decree, and a statute that can never change. Be as good as you please, be as moral as you can, be as honest as you will, walk as uprightly as you may—there stands the unchangeable threatening: "He that believeth not shall be damned." What say you to that, moralist? Oh, you wish you could alter it, and say, "He that does not live a holy life shall be damned." That will be true; but it does not say so. It says, "He that believeth not." Here is the stone of stumbling, and the rock of offense; but you cannot alter it. You must believe or be damned, says the Bible; and mark, that threat of God is as unchangeable as God himself. And when a thousand years of hell's torments shall have passed away, you shall look on high, and see written in burning letters of fire, "He that believeth not shall be damned." "But, Lord, I am damned." Nevertheless it says "shall be" still. And when a million ages have rolled away, and you are exhausted by your pains and agonies, you shall turn up your eye and still read "SHALL BE DAMNED," unchanged, unaltered. And when you shall have thought that eternity must have spun out its last thread—that every particle of that which we call eternity, must have run out, you shall still see it written up there, "SHALL BE DAMNED." O terrific thought! How dare I utter it? But I must. You must be warned, sirs, "lest ye also come into this place of torment." You must be told rough things; for if God's gospel is not a rough thing, the law is a rough thing; Mount Sinai is a rough thing. Woe unto the watchman that warns not the ungodly! God is unchanging in his threatenings. Beware, O sinner, for "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

We must just hint at one thought before we pass away and that is—**God is unchanging in the objects of his love**—not only in his love, but in the objects of it.

*"If ever it should come to pass
That sheep of Christ might fall away,
My fickle, feeble soul, alas,
Would fall a thousand times a day."*

If one dear saint of God had perished, so might we all; if one of the covenant ones be lost, so may all be, and then there is no gospel promise true; but the Bible is a lie, and there is nothing in it worth my acceptance. I will be an infidel at once, when I can believe that a saint of God

can ever fall finally. If God has loved me once, then he will love me for ever.

*"Did Jesus once upon me shine,
Then Jesus is for ever mine."*

The objects of everlasting love never change. Those whom God has called, he will justify, whom he has justified, he will sanctify; and whom he sanctifies, he will glorify.

Thus having taken a great deal too much time, perhaps, in simply expanding the thought of an unchanging God, I will now try to prove that He is unchangeable. I am not much of an argumentative preacher, but one argument that I will mention is this: the very existence, and being of a God, seem to me to imply immutability. Let me think a moment. There is a God; this God rules and governs all things; this God fashioned the world: he upholds and maintains it. What kind of being must he be? It does strike me that you cannot think of a changeable God. I conceive that the thought is so repugnant to common sense, that if you for one moment think of a changing God, the words seem to dash, and you are obliged to say, "Then he must be a kind of man," and get a Mormonite idea of God. I imagine it is impossible to conceive of a changing God; it is so to me. Others may be capable of such an idea, but I could not entertain it. I could no more think of a changing God, than I could of a round square, or any other absurdity. The thing seems so contrary, that I am obliged, when once I say God, to include the idea of an unchanging being.

Well, I think that one argument will be enough, but another good argument may be found in the fact of **God's perfection**. I believe God to be a perfect being. Now, if he is a perfect being, he cannot change. Do you not see this? Suppose I am perfect tomorrow after the alteration? If I changed, I must either change from a good state to a better—and then if I could get better, I could not be perfect now—or else from a better state to a worse—and if I were worse, I should not be perfect then. If I am perfect, I cannot be altered without being imperfect. If I am perfect

today, I must keep the same tomorrow if I am to be perfect then. So, if God is perfect, he must be the same; for change would imply imperfection now, or imperfection then.

And then, dear friends, let us look at the past: and there we shall gather some proofs of God's immutable nature. "Hath he spoken, and hath he not done it? Hath he sworn, and hath it not come to pass?" Can it not be said of Jehovah, "He hath done all his will, and he hath accomplished all his purpose?" Turn ye to Philistia; ask where she is. God said, "Howl Ashdod, and ye gates of Gaza, for ye shall fall;" and where are they? Where is Edom? Ask Petra and its ruined walls. Will they not echo back the truth that God has said, "Edom shall be a prey, and shall be destroyed?" Where is Babel, and where Nineveh? Where Moab and where Ammon? Where are the nations God has said he would destroy? Has he not uprooted them and cast out the remembrance of them from the earth? And has God cast off his people? Has he once been unmindful of his promise? Has he once broken his oath and covenant, or once departed from his plan? Ah! No. Point to one instance in history where God has changed! You cannot sirs; for throughout all history there stands the fact that God has been immutable in his purposes. Methinks I hear someone say, "I can remember one passage in Scripture where God changed!" And so did I think once. The case I mean is that of the death of Hezekiah. Isaiah came in and said, 'Hezekiah, you must die, your disease is incurable, set your house in order.' He turned his face to the wall and began to pray; and before Isaiah was in the outer court, he was told to go back and say, "Thou shalt live fifteen years more." You may think that proves that God changes; but really I cannot see in it the slightest proof in the world. How do you know that God did not know that?

Oh! but God did know it; he knew that Hezekiah would live. Then he did not change, for if he knew that, how could he change? That is what I want to know. But do you know one

little thing?—that Hezekiah's son Manasseh, was not born at that time, and that had Hezekiah died, there would have been no Manasseh, and no Josiah and no Christ, because Christ came from that very line. You will find that Manasseh was twelve years old when his father died; so that he must have been born three years after this. And do you not believe that God decreed the birth of Manasseh, and foreknew it? Certainly. Then he decreed that Isaiah should go and tell Hezekiah that his disease was incurable, and then say also in the same breath, "But I will cure it, and thou shalt live." He said that to stir up Hezekiah to prayer. He spoke, in the first place as a man. "According to all human probability your disease is incurable, and you must die." Then he waited till Hezekiah prayed; then came a little "but" at the end of the sentence. Isaiah had not finished the sentence. He said, "You must put your house in order for there is no human cure; but" (and then he walked out. Hezekiah prayed a little, and then he came in again, and said) "But I will heal thee." Where is there any contradiction there, except in the brain of those who fight against the Lord, and wish to make him a changeable being.

Again, there is the fact of God's infinity, which puts change out of the question. God is an infinite being. What do you mean by that? There is no man who can tell you what he means by an infinite being. But there cannot be two infinities. If one thing is infinite, there is no room for anything else; for infinite means all. It means not bounded, not finite, having no end. Well, there cannot be two infinities. If God is infinite today, and then should change and be infinite tomorrow, there would be two infinities. But that cannot be. Suppose he is infinite and then changes, he must become finite, and could not be God—all of which suppositions are equally absurd. The fact of his being an infinite being at once quashes the thought of his being a changeable being. Infinity has written on its very brow the word "**immutability.**"

CHRISTIANITY IS CHRIST

"The catacombs are full of Christ. It was to Him that the Christians of the age of persecution ever turned: it was on Him they rested — in gladness and in sorrow; in sickness and in health; in the days of danger — and these were sadly numerous in the first two centuries and a half — and in the hour of death. It was from His words they drew their strength. In the consciousness of His ever-presence in their midst, they gladly suffered for His sake. With His name on their lips they died fearlessly, joyfully passing into the Valley of the veiled Shadow. On the tablet of marble or plaster which closed up the narrow shelf in the catacomb corridor where their poor remains were reverently, lovingly laid, the dear name of Jesus was often painted or carved."

The Dean of Gloucester's Early Christians in Rome

"Let us ask those who possess nothing but church membership, and yet want to be called Christians, how they can glory in the sacred name of Christ. For no one has any communion with Christ, but he who has received the true knowledge of Him from the word of the gospel. The apostle denies that anyone actually knows Christ who has not learned to put off the old man, corrupt with deceitful lusts, and to put on Christ. External knowledge of Christ is found to be only a false and dangerous make-believe, however eloquently and freely lip servants may talk about the gospel. Let nominal Christians cease from insulting God by boasting themselves to be what they are not. The gospel is not a doctrine of the tongue, but of the life. It cannot be grasped by reason and memory only, but it is fully understood when it possesses the whole soul, and penetrates to the inner recesses of the heart."

John Calvin's Golden Booklet of the True Christian Life