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A Sure and Unchanging Word in a Changing World Psalm 119:89-96

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus taught that “The only thing certain in the universe is change”. This is certainly true as we all see great changes taking place all around us and in our own lives. Scientific and technological changes seem to make life ever more complicated. Changes on the world scene can cause us to fear and worry for the future. Change in politics becomes an issue when we see leaders change positions or even change parties. We face many changes in our own lives as our children grow up, we lose friends and loved ones, we age and our health starts to fail, or we see our life circumstances change dramatically.

In the midst of constant change there is something we can hold on to which is sure and never changes – God and His Word. This is our subject for this month’s study as we continue in Psalm 119. In the next section we find three verses which vividly teach us that we have a sure and changeless Word in a changing world.

Please take time to read Psalm 119:89-96

Many of the verses in Psalm 119 seem to “stand alone” in thought regarding the Scriptures. In three of today’s verses, 89-91, we see a single theme. There we find a stunning statement and a powerful picture describing the unchanging nature of God and His Word.

A STUNNING STATEMENT

Verse 89 gives us a stunning statement: “**Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven**”. Our writer tells us that God’s Word is ‘settled’. This means ‘to stand firm’ or ‘to be established’. God’s Word is firm, settled, established in heaven, indicating its permanence and unchanging character. We noted in a previous study how ancient laws would be engraved into metal or stone and set up in a public place indicating their permanent and unchanging nature. In an infinitely greater sense, God’s Word is settled in heaven, and revealed to us here on earth in the pages of God’s Word. This is a truth proclaimed throughout the Bible.

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever. Isaiah 40:8

“For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished”.

Matthew 5:18

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away”. Matthew 24:35

The clear teaching is that God’s Word will not ever change or pass away. This contradicts those who would say that the Bible is an ancient document no longer relevant in today’s complex and changing world. Others believe there is not even such a thing as absolute, unchanging truth. In such thought there is a rejection of the authority of the Word of God and ultimately of God Himself.

Our passage shows us that the unchanging nature of God’s Word rests on the unchanging nature of God. Most translations show verse 89 as a single proposition, “Forever, O Lord, Your Word is settled in heaven”. The verse could and perhaps should be translated as two separate statements asserting both the eternity of God as well as the constancy and permanence of His Word: “**You are forever, O Lord, Your Word is settled in Heaven.**” It is because God is eternal and unchangeable that His Word is as well. In the study of theology we call this attribute the *immutability* of God.

“Simply stated, immutability means God is unchangeable. He is neither capable of nor susceptible to change. And that makes sense. Any change would probably be for the better or for the worse. God cannot change for the better because He is already perfect. And He cannot change for the worse, for then He would be imperfect and would therefore no longer be God. Created things change; they run down or wear out. It is

part of their constitutional nature. But God has no beginning or end. Therefore, He cannot change”.

(Strauss, Richard. *I Change Not*.
<http://bible.org/seriespage/i-change-not>)

This too is a truth proclaimed throughout the Scriptures:

Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God. Ps. 90:2

But You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end. Ps. 102:27

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Heb. 13:8

Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. James 1:17

When we understand that God is eternal and unchanging, it only makes sense that His Word is eternal and unchanging as well.

A POWERFUL PICTURE

In verses 90-91 the writer uses a powerful picture or object lesson to help us understand his stunning statement. He compares the surety and unchangeableness of God's Word to the permanence and stability we see in the earth and the heavens. God **“established the earth, and it stands”** (vs. 90). By God's Word all things were created on the earth and in the heavens. Perhaps the most permanent and unchangeable things we can imagine, the sun, planets, and stars in their intricate orbits were ordained of God by His Word. The statement, “All things are Your servants” (vs. 91) reminds us that all creation serves God's purpose and glory and follows God's plan. Other psalms speak of the creative power of God's Word:

⁶By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And by the breath of His mouth all their host; ⁷He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deeps in storehouses. ⁸Let all the earth fear the LORD; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. ⁹For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast. Psalm 33:6-9

³Praise Him, sun and moon; Praise Him, all stars of light! ⁴Praise Him, highest heavens, And the waters that are above the heavens! ⁵Let them praise the name of the LORD, For He commanded and they were created. ⁶He has also established them forever and ever; He has made a decree which will not pass away. Psalm 148:3-6

Not only did God create all things by His word, He sustains them as well. The writer of Hebrews shares of Christ: **“He...upholds all things by the word of His power”**. Hebrews 1:3

The powerful lesson is that if God by His Word created and sustains all that we see in our universe, then we can know that His Word is firmly established, settled, and will not change. If we can count on the position and orbits of the sun and the earth, then we can count on the Word God as given to us in the Bible.

OUR RESPONSE TO THIS TRUTH

Grasping this truth of the unchanging nature of God and His Word should cause two responses in our hearts.

First, as we comprehend God's absolute holiness and perfection of moral character, we realize the holy moral standards found in Scripture based on that character never change, shift, or go out of style. This should result in a deep realization and conviction of our sinfulness before Him and a fear of the wrath under which we find ourselves because of our sinful rebellion.

Second, we rejoice as we read of the Good News of the mercy and grace of God and the promise of the redemption we can find through repentance and faith in Christ and His work as He suffered and died on the cross and rose again. This brings hope and joy as we realize we can have our sins forgiven and Christ's goodness given to us. We find assurance of a right relationship with God because of the promises we find in His Word. As believers we find great comfort and assurance in the promises God has given us in His Word. As sure as the sun will rise in the morning, we can be certain of God fulfilling His promises to save, keep, and care for us as His children.

CAPITOL BIBLE STUDY

Thursdays, 12:00 PM

Senate President's Conference Room