

The Unchangeable God

And Inheriting the Promises

- 13 For when God made a **promise** to Abraham, since he had no
one greater by whom to **swear**, he **swore** by himself,
14 saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you."
15 And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the **promise**.
16 For people **swear** by something greater than themselves, and in all
their disputes an **oath** is final for confirmation.
17 So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the
promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he **guaranteed**
it with an **oath**,
18 so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for
God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong
encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.
19 We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope
that enters into the inner place behind the curtain,
20 where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having
become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."

Hebrews 6:13-20

"so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those
who through faith and patience inherit the **promises**."
(Heb 6:12)

Doing Theology

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD IS OF immeasurable importance to each of us, *if* that doctrine has as its ultimate authority the Scripture, and *if* that doctrine is being used the right way (the way Scripture uses it). First, what do we mean by the “**doctrine of God?**” In a single word, this is “**theology.**” In this narrow sense, theology is **the study or science of God in his character and in relation to his creation.** It comes from two words: *theos* = “God”; and *logia* = “speech,” “saying,” “to speak.” These two words appear together on a number of occasions in the Bible.¹ Peter says, “**Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the logia Theou [the utterances of God]” (1Pe 4:11). It says of Balaam that this is “**the oracle of him who hears logia theou [God’s words/speech]” (Num 24:4). In other words, theology is literally our speech about God.****

But both of these verses tell us **the proper way to do theology.** We have to hear from God himself. When we hear from God we call this a “**revelation.**” The Bible speaks of **two kinds of revelation:** general or natural and special.

¹ Num 24:4, 16; Ps 11:7; 17:31; 106:11; Rom 3:2; 1Pe 4:11.

Natural revelation is learning about God through nature. It tells us general things about God such as his “eternal power and divine nature” (Rom 1:20). “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork” (Ps 19:1). All men know these kinds of basic things about God through nature, though they suppress this truth in their unrighteousness (Rom 1:19-20). That means you don’t have to have a philosophy degree or live in an Ivory Tower in order to know these kinds of things about God.

The other kind of revelation is special. Special revelation is the stuff we can’t know about God through nature, but which we do know about God because he has told it to men via personal encounters with the Triune Persons of the Godhead. This would include things like the gospel. You can’t look up to the stars and know that God so loved the world that he sent his only-begotten Son. He has to tell you this. While you can know the law because God wrote its requirements on your heart (Rom 2:16) and that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all kinds of

godlessness (**Rom 1:18**) in nature, we can't know that God might show grace and mercy to us unless he tells us this.²

But it isn't just these kinds of things that we need special revelation to tell us about. While we can see some things about God in nature, we can't see them all. And when we start doing theology about *those* things *first* by looking at nature or by looking at ourselves and then concluding that God must or must not be like this, then we are doing theology exactly backwards. We are working from the creation to the Creator, and this is the opposite of what our passages are telling us. Theology must be God's speech about himself and nothing less. Otherwise, we end up in all kinds of trouble and our theology may not only be unhelpful, it might actually become pagan. Indeed, Van Til said this very thing about something called natural theology.

Natural theology is the opposite of revealed theology. We just talked about how God reveals himself. So **revealed theology** would be theology that is rooted in what God has revealed about himself. **Natural theology** would then be human reasoning about God that is rooted in speculation (be

² Today, special revelation is reserved for the Scripture, since Jesus has come and gone, giving us the full and final personal revelation of what God is like. The Scripture is the final and authoritative "God-speech" for all those who don't get to see Jesus in the flesh.

it philosophical, mystical, rationalistic, empirical, etc.) rather than revelation. Revelation only comes later. This is how the Greeks do theology. This is how the Buddhists do theology.

Natural theology can be helpful, but only when it is kept under natural revelation. This is exactly why our Confession begins as it does with 10 paragraphs about the *Scripture* including the last which says, “The supreme judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Scripture delivered by the Spirit, into which Scripture so delivered, our faith is finally resolved” (LBC 1.10). If this doesn’t happen, then as Van Til put it, when Christians engage in this they end up merging the iron of Christianity with the clay or cement of paganism. This is not the god you want to be telling people they must worship, much less is it a god that you yourself want to worship.

This leads me invariably to my second point, my more pastoral point, which is *how we use our theology* of God? How we use it can be just as bad as where we get it from. In

the greater Christian circles which we find ourselves among, we often hear people saying things like this after a long, doctrinal sermon: “I want to know God, I don’t want to know about God.” This disparages theology and mocks Peter (above). Imagine saying to your husband, “I want to know you, honey. I don’t want to know *about* you.” That is ridiculous. We truly get to know someone when we know about them: what kinds of things do they like, where are they from, what are their dreams. You can’t actually know someone if you don’t know about them. This is why our Reformed tradition has put such a premium on doctrine.

And yet, sadly, there is an opposite error that, because we love doctrine as we do, we can sometimes fall into which is this. We can know all kinds of things about God and yet never actually know God. I know all kinds of things about Ronald Reagan. But I never actually knew Ronald Reagan. Tabloid magazines and television shows are great at telling you things about celebrities, but they don’t actually introduce you to the celebrity. In its worst, speculative form it can end up becoming a kind of voyeuristic Christianity, where we want to peek into the heavens and see God “in the nude” as Luther crassly put it (talking about the “ladders” of

mysticism, merit, and speculation). It wants to see, not know. Or it can become (for those of us in Colorado), Pot-Head Christianity, where the theology becomes a kind of head-trip for people. In these cases, the theology becomes an end to itself, rather than seeking God who is The End.

But theology can actual be used for a worse purpose than this. In the wrong hands—and these are usually the hands that have just committed the previous error in one form or another—theology can become a sword that is used to cut and maim and hack and stab. People can do this by using it abstractly and thus it becomes of little use to people in the church. Some times, this kind of person puff himself up in the eyes of others, as he desperately wants people to see how smart he is. But this is also to tear down others. Other times, people actually use different doctrines to split the church in two and to tear asunder what God has joined together.

Now, if this is over revealed theology—and particularly essential theology—(i.e. the Ecumenical Creeds of the Church), this isn't a bad thing. The Bible warns us to **contend earnestly for the Faith once for all entrusted to the saints** (Jude 5). It even tells us to hold fast to the traditions that were taught by the Apostles. In this case, the goal is to

keep wolves from devouring the sheep. Undoubtedly there are gray areas here. If it is a gray area, it means we need to exercise great caution, because we may be forcing a theology onto people that isn't actually as important as we think it is, even though it may be true (think of forms of millennialism for example, where people split over the timing of the Rapture or over whether we are in the millennium now or it is still fully future). But if it is over speculative theology that we are doing this, then God help us for destroying the unity for which Christ prayed in his High Priestly Prayer in John 17. Not all doctrine is worth fighting and splitting and maiming and mauling over.

Returning to the Warning

My point in all of this is again that we must derive our theology from the right source and we must use our theology in the right, moral ways. This is not a recommendation or a suggestion. It is mandatory. And I believe that when Christian exercise mature judgment in this area, it is of great and wonderful benefit to God's people.

So why do I bring all this up? [Hebrews 5:11-6:13](#) has been a long [digression](#) in a longer argument about [Christ as the High Priest](#). This digression has helped us see that immaturity as Christians is something that we must all fight against, lest we lose many rewards on earth and in heaven. This discussion I have just brought up is actually in a low orbit around the immaturity discussion in the passage, as it has talked about what elementary doctrines are (and they are not speculative!), and about how our behavior when we drink this milk of God's word must line up with God's commandments towards our brothers. Basically, the best we can say those who treat doctrine in these ways is that they are immature babies in the faith.

Now, the central thrust of this digression was [a warning](#). This warning is a [continuation of the warning in Heb 3-4](#). You must not be like the children of Israel who in their sins failed to believe in God and so were punished with not being allowed to enter the Promised Land. You must not be like Moses—a true believer who nevertheless struck the Rock and was essentially “crucifying Christ” to himself and subjecting him up to public shame. It was impossible for him to be “brought to repentance,” not in terms of eternal life,

but in this instance, for God had sworn in his wrath that he would not enter the Promised Land.

This warning is very **hard to hear and to understand**, and perhaps none of us understand it to the full extent that the preacher of Hebrews did. Because we have such troubles, it becomes easy to internalize the warning to such an extent that it actually begins to hinder, rather than help, our growth in Christ. Perhaps the Apostle knew this, and maybe it explains his final words of encouragement in the warning section. **“Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things-- things that belong to salvation” (Heb 6:9)**. This encouragement is followed up with a reminder that not everything they have been doing is bad works, **“For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do” (10)**.

This he then said in order to help move them out of that potential difficulty they may have by internalizing the warning in the wrong way, and thus move them on to maturity, which was the point all along. **“And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be**

sluggish...” (11-12). He concludes with the words to be “imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

At this point, he could have just moved right back into his discussion about Jesus as the High Priest. He doesn't. Instead, we get **eight more verses of digression**. This is our passage today. Importantly, these verses put **the finishing touches on the whole warning**. They do so with theology. This is some of the most direct language about the doctrine of God in the New Testament. As such, it hits directly upon the way we began the sermon. We will look at what it tells us in a moment.

First, I want to point out two things. The first is that the origin of Hebrews' theology here is **not speculative**. If anyone could get away with speculative, natural theology it would be an Apostle of God. But they never do this. Instead, Hebrews' own theology of God is **rooted in revelation**, specially in God's word (even as this whole book has been). Second, this theology is **not an end to itself**. Neither is it used here as sword to cut slices through the congregation, to tear out those tares from the wheat, and to purify the true church from the heretics in her midst. No, he has assumed that these

are Christians, even if they are immature Christians. And he is going to use his theology to help these Christians move on to maturity.

How Not to Do Theology

As we move into a passage, notice the first word, “**For.**” This connects it to what he has just said. If you were to read the verse without the “for,” you would probably not understand what he was saying this “for.” “**When God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, ‘Surely I will bless you and multiply you’**” (13-14). Read this way, it seems to come out of the blue. Why is he talking about this? Why is he even bringing it up?

The answer includes the “for.” He is that he is explaining something he raised in **vs. 12**. We will look at this near the end, because it really provides a good application on how we are to use Scripture properly with other Christians. But first, I want to use portions of Heb 6:13-18 in order to see the kind of context this passage usually has in modern theology. Though this does not need to become a kind of opposite

example to what Hebrews itself does with the passage and therefore how we are to use it properly, sadly, it sometimes is exactly that.

The way most people use this passage today is by abstracting it out of its moral, ethical, pastoral context and simply using it as a proof-text to support a theological doctrine. Like I said, this does not need to be a bad thing, though it is even when it is acceptable, still not taking it in context. Let me explain what I mean by abstracting it out.

Let's return to the doctrine of God. In theology proper—that is when we are doing theology about the being, attributes, and works of God—we organize our thoughts about God in some kind of logical, reasonable way. We do this in order to build upon what we have just said, in order to say the most foundational things first, and in order to be understood as best we can. This is a fine and even necessary thing. Unlike God, we can't think about everything at once.

Let's say that we are thinking though or writing out or studying someone else's thoughts on the doctrine of God. Let's say that we are in [a class on Systematic Theology](#) and

we are using Berkhof's classic volume on the topic.³ We see that he opens his entire book with “**The Being of God.**” He saves everything else in his systematic (God's works, the doctrine of man, the doctrine of Christ,⁴ the application of redemption, the doctrine of the church, and the doctrine of the last things) for later.

So we want to know what this God is like. First, he talks about God's existence, including proofs for God's existence. Then, he talks about whether God can be known. This includes a discussion of Scripture. Next, he talks about how God's being relates to his attributes. (Now, I would not start my own systematic the way Berkhof does, but we'll go along with it for illustration). This early in his systematic, we come to the place where our passage would be (and is) used.

The key text is **vs. 18**, “... so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie.” When you are talking about the attributes of God, the goal is to derive these attributes from the Scripture and thus do revealed

³ We could use just about any Systematic here as most are laid out the same way. I'm not saying anything good or bad about him in particular. I do think it is a fine book.

⁴ That is, thinking specifically about the Person of Christ and moving into his incarnation. He does talk about the Trinity at the end of the Being of God in Part One, so Christ is discussed here as well.

theology. This is why you always find proof-texts in books like these or in catechisms or confessions of faith. Berkhof cites this verse under the “Veracity [or truthfulness] of God.” Others cite it under a doctrine called immutability. Immutability says that God does not “change” in his essence/nature/being.⁵ We confess immutability in the first paragraph of our Confession after it ends its discussion on Scripture alone (LBC 2.1).

Now, all of this is fine and good. There is absolutely nothing wrong with using the text in this way, nor in what the Confession says about God at this point. But again, it must be recognized that this kind of a proof-text is not taking the context or the reason for why the discussion arises in Hebrews into consideration. Thus, it is abstracting the doctrine, keeping it out of its original context in order to make a point about theology proper and leave it at that. It

⁵ **Technical Note:** Hebrews usually calls him “the God,” using the definite article. However, there is a question whether the article is used of God in this verse. Lane says, “The writer ordinarily uses the noun θεός with the article (cf. vv 10, 13, 17), and the article τόν is attested in P⁴⁶ & A c P 33 1739 and in citations in Eus, Did, Chr, and Cyr. The presence of the article would call for the translation “our God.” Zuntz (*Text of the Epistles*, 130) urged that the absence of the article in B, D, and the majority of later authorities was correct and that the anarthrous θεόν functions in practice as a participial clause: “It is impossible for *one who is God* to lie.” (William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, vol. 47A, Word Biblical Commentary [Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998], 148). It may or may not be true that the article would change the meaning here.

leaves our heads up in the sky as we fly along thinking about lofty things. But there is no application here on earth. The Bible has many doctrines like this in it, but the Bible is not a systematic theology book of abstract doctrines. This is not at all what Hebrews is doing.

So the problem comes when we let this kind of abstraction take us off trail into dark, speculative forests. In our own day in our own circles, this doctrine of **immutability**—a great doctrine in and of itself—along with its daughter doctrine **impassibility** (where God in his essence is said to not have “passions”; also in LBC 2.1), are being used both speculatively and unethically to divide Christians who all agree on the basic statements in the Confession. It isn't like you have one group who denies what the Confession says, and the other feels this denial is so important that they must get rid of wolves (their language, though even if that were true, these doctrines—especially “ontological impassibility”—are difficult to prove exegetically). No. Rather, everyone agrees with the words!

I realize that this is a terribly church-specific point to make about a text, and a rarely do this in sermons as I'm not fond of hobby-horses, but frankly, with the never-ending

incessant drum beat day after day, this needs to be said publicly. It is one thing to have a doctrine like immutability that is derived from Scripture and simply stops where revelation stops, refusing to go further. This is both wise and good to do in our theology. But what happens when you start trying to explain what God must be like because you look at what man is like and you say God is the opposite of that (this is starting your theology of God with man). Or what happens when you start telling people that in order to believe in this attribute of God, you must also believe in prior philosophical ideas such as a oneness view of divine simplicity or an apophatic *via negativa* understanding that we can only describe God by what he is not, or a view that presupposes that God is atemporal?

If you are saying, “Huh?” then good! I’m putting it this way on purpose, in order to make you say that, in order that you can see how silly (or worse) such divisions are among brothers. And I do so, because this is stuff that is dividing our own churches, continues to divide them, is much worse than what I’m saying here, and most people can’t understand a word of it. [This is how not to do theology](#). It is built on philosophy, on man centered speculations about God, on

pagan views of God, on revisionist history, and on treating your brother like an enemy of the gospel. Over what? Because he doesn't believe that "God does not change" or "God is without passions" means exactly what you believe it means? This kind of stuff makes me angry, and it returns me right back to the immaturity of milk-drinking Christians, except in this case, we aren't even talking about the kinds of basics mentioned in Hebrews, but in things that are hundreds of year old deer trails through dark woods—at best. Beloved, this is how you use theology to hurt people.

But more to the point, it serves me as a great illustration of what not to do in light of what Hebrews is doing with this very doctrine. It is opposite of how Hebrews does theology. In fact, I think that *what Hebrews is doing is just as important as the doctrine it is using to do it with*. In other words, the point of Hebrews bringing this up is *exactly not* speculative nor abstract. It is concrete and rooted in revelation. It is for the personal benefit of Christians who are struggling with immaturity in the faith.

Doing Theology the Hebrews Way

Instead of that, Hebrews uses its doctrine of God as an ointment to sooth, to cover, to protect, and to heal. Rather than abstracting us into oblivion, leaving us feeling the theological equivalent of going into a black hole, Hebrews uses it concretely to lead us to the God that is revealed in Scripture so that we might be more settled in waiting for the promises. So, **what is the reason Hebrews 6:13ff exists?** It is that word “**for.**” “**For when God made a promise...**”

Why does he talk this way? Because he has just spoken to the people about these promises. Notice **verse 12**, “**... so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.**” Sluggish and acting imbecilic? Dull of hearing and lacking faith? What are we supposed to have faith in again? The promises? What promises?

This line of questioning shows us that the reason for the following discussion about God’s attributes has to do with moving us on to maturity, not through abstracting theology from life, living in ivory towers with our heads in the sky, but precisely by attaching it to a very concrete, specific

example of growing up into maturity. This is real life. This is what good doctrine is supposed to do. But this does not *usually* happen all by itself, again in isolation from anything other than pure theology, though I suppose sometimes it might. No, **the attributes of God come in the context here of the promises of God.** And those promises come in the context of **the covenants** God made with man. Though he isn't ready *just yet* to bring up the word "covenant," that will come soon enough. But let me also say that Reformed Theology has always been covenantal theology, as this is a much more biblical as opposed to systematic approach to helping us learn the doctrines of God.

Hebrews starts telling us that **the promises in mind are those that were given to Abraham.** It does not elaborate on what those promises were specifically, but when we go back to **Genesis 12, 15, and 17** it is easy to find out. God promised Abraham that he would make him **the father of many nations.** This has salvation in mind. He promised him **land.** This has the kingdom of God in the already/not yet in mind. He promised him a **Seed.** This has Isaac, but eventually Jesus Christ in mind! These are the promises given to Abraham

that it says **we also inherit**, and the rest of the letter will say more about them.

But the Apostle believes there is a more urgent need to address first. These people are in real danger of **not imitating the faith and patience of the Fathers**. They are growing sluggish and dull. They are not moving on to maturity. What can he tell them that will help them press on? The answer is the gospel rooted in the majestic, unchangeable attributes of God. When you know what God is like, and when you know what God has promised, then—*if you know God*—it moves you into a deeper relationship with him. It can't help but do this, but especially when this is its stated point. This is the power of actually knowing God, rather than pretending that you know him or just wanting to know him without knowing anything about him. There is real heavenly power here, and Hebrews is tapping into it.

God's Character

Rather than launch into a list of those promises (which may already be implied in the “milk” discussed in **6:1-2** and the elementary doctrines of Christ), **he talks about God's character**. This is an important word. When we talk about

“character,” we are talking about more than just a set of attributes that describe an individual. We are talking about [moral excellence](#). Sadly, this is lost on our youth. In what used to be America, character was seen as a virtue. In fact, in all of Western culture going back to the Greeks, character was the highest, most important thing you could talk about. Sure, America has always been full of scoundrels. But once upon a time, those scoundrels were actually viewed as scoundrels. Even our politicians who were scoundrels hid from their character flaws. Today, in Trump-Clinton America (and make no mistake, with the Clintons, everything changed on the national level, as this was the discussion we had in the 1990s and we came away as a civilization saying that character no longer matters)—these character flaws are considered virtues to be embraced, because we want leaders who are just as cruddy, scummy, and crass as we are. We want womanizing, lying, cheating, stealing, murdering, adulterous leaders. We wouldn’t want to feel guilty about ourselves by someone that actually has virtue.

Oh, but what hope is there in that? How can any nation stand with leadership like this? What glory is there is being

greedy, unfaithful, and narcissistic? What trust can you put in people who lie to you about anything, who swear and break their promises. None.

Behold, God is the opposite of man. I say this not because I start with man, but because I've read what God has to say about himself in his word. I read it right here. The reason why you should have faith and patiently await the promises of God is because **God has sworn by himself that these promises are good**. So the promises are rooted in God's character, his moral perfection. He has backed those promises up for thousands of years of recorded redemptive history.

But God decided it wasn't enough for him to make a promise ... not enough *for us* that is. It was perfectly enough. But he knew that we were infants and needed more assurance. He decided to swear it with an oath. **“For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself” (Heb 6:13)**. This actually refers to the covenant making process of Genesis. The covenant is the oath (cf. **Gen 21:30; 26:28; Dt 7:8-9; 2Ki 11:4; Ezek 17:13-19**; etc.). God said, **“Surely I will bless you and multiply you” (Heb 6:14)**.

This is a quote from Genesis 22. It comes just after the Angel of the LORD stops Abraham from killing Isaac. It says, “And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, ‘By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring...’” (Gen 22:15-17). Therefore, curiously, if Hebrews is taking Genesis consistently, it has not merely the One Being God in mind, but specifically the Second Person—the Son. This verse in Hebrews is calling the Angel of the LORD—God. This would surely fit with the overall thrust of Hebrews which is all about the superiority of God’s Son.

Even more curiously, if we follow this line of thinking, consider what it says just before the quote again. “He had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself.” He says, “I” will bless you. If Hebrews is taking Genesis in context, it would mean that he is using the term “God” the way Genesis 22 does—for the Son. And this would mean that the Son of God is equal with the Father, who of course is also God. Indeed, as Jesus says, they are One.

This may be related to the taking of oaths that we hear

about in the Gospels. Some think that Jesus overthrew oath taking in the Sermon on the Mount (**Matt 5:33-34**). But of course, if that were true (never mind that “letting your yes be yes” is in fact an oath), then we would never find him taking an oath after this. Yet, that is exactly what find Jesus doing at the crucifixion. Jesus refused to answer Pilates questions. He remained silent, like a lamb lead to the slaughter. *Until* he was put under oath. “**I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven**” (**Mark 14:62**; cf. **Matt 26:63-64**). Jesus not only swears by taking the divine name upon himself, he then solidifies his “blasphemy” by claiming that he is the OT rider of the clouds. How interesting that Jesus did not swear by the Father, but by himself. He and the Father are one.

We will skip **vs. 15** for the moment. The theological point Hebrews is making is that people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation (**Heb 6:16**). Even little kids on the playground know this is true, which is why they swear on their momma’s grave or cross their heart and hope to die, and so on. Jesus’ point in the Sermon on the Mount was that

you shouldn't have to swear by other things. If you are a person of character, your word is good enough. Nevertheless, men do swear by other things, including the Bible in a court of law.

But not Jesus. Not God. There is nothing higher than God can swear by than himself. If he were to swear by something else, then that thing would be higher than him, and would thus be God. God can only swear by himself.

Again, though, this is not abstract. Rather, “God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise” (Heb 6:17) that something was absolutely sure and certain. God is swearing for Abraham's sake, for Jacob's sake, for your sake. He wants you to know that you can believe him. When he makes a promise, it is absolutely certain. But it says more about why this is true.

It now reveals to us something deeper about God's character. “He guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie...” (17-18). In actuality, the word “unchangeable” (immutable) isn't said about God's “nature.” It is said about two things. These are, almost certainly, his promise (vv. 12, 13, 15, 17) and his oath (13, 16, 17). These things are

unchangeable. That is, he will not go back on his word. And the reason? “It is impossible for God to lie” (18). This does speak about God’s immutable, unchangeable character. God is morally perfect and unchanging. He never sins. Never commits evil. He never lies.

This is also rooted in revelation from the Old Testament. It isn’t speculation on the part of the Apostle. In Numbers 22, the prophet Balaam is met on the road by—guess who? The Angel of the LORD (Num 22:16-35). He meets him again in the next chapter (23:16) where he is simply called Yahweh. He puts a prophecy in Balaam’s mouth who immediately tells Balak, “God is not a man (*ish*) that he should lie, or a son of man (*adam*) that he should change his mind” (Num 23:19). This is what the Angel told Balaam about, presumably, himself, since he is the God talking to Balaam at the moment—though it would also be true of the Father and the Spirit.⁶ This is where Hebrews gets it from, and again it seems to be a reference to the Son of God. It isn’t speculative. It is exactly what God told us about himself.

⁶ The same thing is said again of “The Glory of Israel” in 1Sa 15:29. In this chapter, God says that he “regrets” (*nacham*) making Saul king (15:11, 35) and yet he will not regret (*nacham*). See the discussion in Bruce Ware, *God’s Lesser Glory*, 87-98.

Why would he bring this up here? It is so that you might have “strong encouragement,” beloved. Of all the gods, our God alone is truthful. Ours alone will not lie. Ours alone will not renege on his promises. Ours alone covenants with man and then guarantees it with his human own blood when he became one of us. How interesting that this is how Hebrews now moves to a conclusion.

Christ Who Swears, Christ Who Dies, We Who Have Hope

When Christ swore to Abraham there on Mt. Morah as the Angel of the LORD, it tells us that Abraham, waited patiently to obtain the promise (**Heb 6:15**). This is what he has encouraged us to do, we who are having troubles in our own faith. We must go to the end and patiently await the same promises made by the same God. In this way, Abraham is a model for what we should do. Thus, we have learned about how God will not change his mind and will not lie. His oath that he swears is good and this is to be a strong encouragement to you to continue on, against what you sometimes see or feel to what you know is true because of God’s word. This strong encouragement is to help you

“hold fast to the hope set before” you (6:18).

But he is a model not only in his patience, but in whom he is placing his trust. Notice the smooth transition to explicitly talking about the Lord Jesus. “We who have fled for refuge” (18). Who is this Refuge in the OT? The LORD mocked the Israelites and said, “Where are their gods, the rock in which they took refuge” (Deut 32:37). Notice that rocks are the refuge. “God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge, my savior; you save me from violence” (2Sa 22:3; etc.). These things are said about Jesus in the NT. He is the horn of salvation (Luke 1:69). He is the savior (Acts 13:23). The Rock was Christ (1 Cor 10:4).

Hebrews continues. “We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into into the inner place behind the curtain” (Heb 6:19). He suddenly turns back to the tabernacle illustration that he has already spoken about. Why? Because this is “where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (20). You see? The God, indeed the very Person who swore the promise to our forefather in the Faith, Abraham, this Person has made good

on his promise by dying on the cross and going before us as a man, as a forerunner on our behalf. And I should mention here that **vv. 16-20** are all one sentence in the Greek, and thus it helps us see that he isn't changing subjects. This is all one grand thought.

He is a forerunner because he has gone first. He has gone before us. He has gone before us into heaven itself, into the heavenly tabernacle and has become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (yet another possible OT reference to Christ, as we will look at next time). Dearly loved child of God, do you see how God has made his promises certain? Do you see why you may wait patiently with hope, why you can persevere to the end and know that the promises are yours?

It is not merely an abstraction about God as unchangeable, which is obviously something that all by itself can give us some confidence. It is that God's promise in Christ is unchangeable. Indeed, God in Christ who made the promise is unchangeable and will not lie. Not only did he make those promises, but he swore by himself to our fathers that he would deliver those promises. Not only did he swear that he would deliver them, he swore upon his own

name, and there is no one higher upon which he could swear. Not only did he do this swearing in the OT, he swore it in the NT at his crucifixion. And not only was this moment of swearing the moment they finally put him to death for blasphemy, but it was the moment that he finally delivered on his promises by crucifying our sin to his body, by defeating Satan and the powers of hell, and by dying as a substitute in our place as a high priest. And not only that, but he has, as a high priest, now gone before us into heaven where he stays day and night always interceding for the saints in just their moment of greatest need.

Therefore, God is not asking too much of you to move on to maturity. He is showing you that if you will, you will lay hold of the all the promises that are in Christ, because Christ has laid hold of those very promises given to men by becoming one of us. God has given him dominion. God has put all things in subjection to him. Nothing in heaven or earth is greater than our Lord Jesus Christ. May God our Father by his Holy Spirit move you to understand and to see all of the glorious treasures of promises that our yours in Jesus Christ. For in him are all the treasures of God Yes! And Amen!