

The Unvarying God

by John R. Rice

God is an unvarying God who gives and loves to give and never quits giving, and His providence is unchanging and unvarying.

Topics: "Gods Providence", "Divine Goodness"

Description

John R. Rice preaches about the unchanging and unfailing nature of God's goodness and providence, emphasizing that every good and perfect gift comes from above, from the Father of lights. He highlights that God's blessings are not accidental or human-made but are poured out by a loving and unvarying Father. Rice discusses how God's goodness is not affected by our ingratitude, unprofitableness, or hard times, and how His care and mercy remain constant despite our shortcomings. He stresses the importance of accepting and embracing all the blessings God offers, urging believers to take freely and abundantly from the unchanging God.

Transcript

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."-Jas. 1:17.

In the matter of good providence and kind provision, God is an unfailing God. There is not a shadow of turning in the continual pouring out of His blessings. He is the unvarying God.

All Gifts Are From Above and From Our Father

The Scripture says that "every good gift...is from above." People say, "We received from our forefathers great blessings in America." I beg to differ. We received these great blessings from above. Our forefathers only preserved them, then passed on only what they got.

Some people say, "I like the American way." If you mean the "horse-and-buggy constitution" and "the nine old men" of the Supreme Court, then I too like the American way. But don't be fooled into believing we got what we have by human wisdom.

Don't think it just a happy accident that there is an Atlantic Ocean on the east side to keep us from Europe. Somebody put it there and put us here. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

We take entirely too many things for granted.

One mark, one proof that there is a God is the pouring out of goodness that could not be an accident.

To prove a man a fool who does not believe in God doesn't take much knowledge because the Bible says, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God."

Then about creation: We are here-who made us? That does not take much knowledge, for the Bible declares in Psalm 19:1--4:

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world."

As I think of all the arguments I can give proving from the Bible that a man is a fool who does not believe there is a God, I am amazed that I had not before used this argument of the manifest goodness of God: THERE IS A BENEVOLENCE IN THIS WORLD THAT PROVES THERE IS AN EVER-WATCHING AND UNFAILING GOD WHO GIVES AND LOVES TO GIVE AND NEVER QUILTS GIVING!

Yes, every good gift is from above. Blessings do not happen accidentally. We do not make them; others do not give them; they are here. Our Scripture text states that everything good "cometh down from the Father of lights."

It is not often that I go to the Father like a child goes to his father, though the Lord said, "When ye pray, say, Our Father...." We may mouth it, but in our hearts we think this way: Thou art a strange God a million miles away.

But it is different when we are filled with the Spirit: "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15). That means Daddy or Papa, not an austere stranger, but my Father, my beloved, intimate, heavenly Daddy.

I do not always feel like a child of God, but I am whether or not I feel like it. God is always my Father, whether or not I feel like His son. He never varies. Every gift comes from the love of a Father.

You may feel sorry for the birds out in the snow and take some crumbs and scatter them or put some seed on the windowsill, but that is not the way God pours out His blessings. He pours out on us His heart, wrapped up in food or daily care.

You may send old clothes to missionaries and give a little money to the Red Cross. You may feel, Oh, the poor heathen in China! If I could send to them clothes and money-and maybe you will.

But that is not the way God poured down His blessings on me yesterday and today and will pour tomorrow and the next day and all these coming years. He does it as my Father! I am His own child and dear to His heart.

And when God blesses me, He must think, I knew John before he was born, when his mother gave him to Me to make a preacher of him. I have too much invested in him to leave him!

God looks at me as a father looks on a son. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" (Ps. 103:13,14).

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." That is the introduction to the theme that is in the rest of the verse: "With whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

I. The Unchanging God

Many Scriptures tell us that God is unchanging. The Bible speaks again and again about the everlasting God. Many other things are changing. One of these days an earthquake will cause the cities of the nations to fall (Rev. 16). The governments of the world will not stand. The Roman Empire, that nation of iron, lasted only five hundred years. America is not likely to last that long as an independent government. Nations do not stand; institutions do not stand; leaders die.

When I was four years old, we lived in a little country community called Vilot in Cooke County, Texas. My father was pastor of the church that met in a little building down at the crossroads. The blacksmith shop was on the other corner.

I remember where the washpot was, where the cow pen was, where I would sit on the fence with a tin cup in my hand; and my dad would milk the cup full of foaming milk, and I would drink it down.

One day a young cow that Dad was milking ran around sideways and knocked me over.

I remember the old cellar where I went down to see the goose and the eggs she had down there. The old gander came down, got me by the palm of my hand with his bill and led me out, with me yelling bloody murder!

After I was a grown man, I went back to the place. Our old house had burned, and a new one had been built in its place. I went out to the old cellar: it had fallen in. I went out to the old cow pen: it was gone. I went over the little hill to see the tank where my father used to drive the team to slake their thirst: it was now filled with dirt.

Things change, but God is unchanging. Many verses in the Bible tell us that.

In Malachi 3:6 the Lord says, "For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." They were not sent on to Hell because God said, "I change not." When He promises, He keeps His word.

Another Scripture says, "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom. 11:29).

A cowboy preacher who preached on that subject said, "When God saved me, I have never repented of it. When He called me to preach, I have never been sorry."

But that Scripture is not talking about whether you will be sorry; it is saying that God will not be sorry-He is never going to quit. God does not repent of His gifts and callings; He never rues back on a trade.

Hebrews 13:8 reads, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever." Blessed be God!

Now listen to this: This unchanging God never varies in His giving. God never changes on His providential care and His pouring out of the cornucopia of Heaven every day. There is not a shadow of turning of His mercy-and never will be.

The unchanging providence of God! Cherish the thought that God in His mercy is an unvarying God and never changes in His providence!

II. Our Ingratitude Does Not Cause God's Goodness to Vary Toward Us

Notice that God does not vary with our thankfulness or unthankfulness, but we do. I give my three-year-old something; after awhile she thinks to say please. When she says, "Pass the bacon," she must say, "Please," or do without.

But God does not vary whether we are grateful or ungrateful. I do not mean God does not punish His children and that ingratitude is not a sin which God hates, but He does not quit giving because we are not thankful, because we do not say please.

God says, "Love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil" (Luke 6:35).

A companion passage, Matthew 5:45, says, "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

God sends rain on people who deserve it and on those who do not. I know God has particular variations of His providence. The details change, but the providence does not. He does not change with our goodness or our wickedness.

I used to pick up hitchhikers. (This was before there was so much crime.) I have won a good many to Christ that way. But nobody would ever thank me. They would spit tobacco juice on the carpet, scratch matches on the paint of the back seat, and become insolent when I tried to win them.

That went on for some time. I would talk to each about the Lord, but nobody was ever grateful. They would denounce the churches and take God's name in vain.

Once when a fellow had cursed after I had warned him, I had to reach down and get the crank of my car and say, "You get out! Don't argue; get out and then you can argue!" There was no sense of gratitude at all among these men.

Finally I quit picking up hitchhikers. But God hasn't quit picking up hitchhikers. He doesn't vary.

I remember that preacher for whom I paid a hotel bill of \$67 in Fort Worth to keep him from going to jail. He came back a second time, and I gave him a little more. He came back the third time, and I didn't give him any more. I vary, but God-never. He is still good to that preacher.

I was at the Grand Opera House in Chicago in noonday meetings when a fellow came up and said, "I am from Texas, from Galveston."

"Fine. I'm glad to meet a fellow from Texas."

"I am a Christian," he said.

I asked him where he went to church. He didn't go anywhere in particular. I found he had no money for food and no job. "All right, here is a little money," I said. He told me he had the promise of a job in a few

days.

He came back in another night or two, and I gave him a little more money. Then he came over to the Grand Opera House another day or so later and said, "My mother lives in St. Louis. She is sick and would like to see me. I can get a bus ticket for six dollars."

I said, "I'm sorry, but I don't have six dollars," and I quit helping him.

But God hasn't quit me after I have treated Him worse than that. God never varies with our unthankfulness. He ought to. We ought to get stripe for stripe, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, burning for burning; but we don't because God never changes.

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

One day Jesus healed ten lepers. Only one turned and fell down at Jesus' feet when he saw he was healed and poured out praises and thanksgiving to God. Jesus asked, "Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?" It surely must have hurt His heart, but He didn't quit healing lepers. There is not a shadow, not a hairsbreadth of turning from the benevolent, providing love of God!

III. Our Unprofitableness Does Not Cause God to Vary

God's unfailing love does not depend on returns, on how much He is going to get out of us. He is not going to get much out of me, yet He has already invested so much in me that He will not throw me away.

God's mercy does not depend on the returns He gets out of us. When we do our best, we still must say, "We are unprofitable servants."

IV. Hard Times Cannot Affect God's Abundant, Unvarying Care

This unvarying, unchanging goodness of God ought to settle all your worry.

"But I tell you, Brother Rice, there are dark clouds now." There always have been dark clouds, a dark future, for anybody out of the will of God. Christians have no business talking about a financial depression. Has the bank in Heaven gone broke? Or are you depending on banks down here?

Down in Egypt's darkness in Moses' time—a picture of the Great Tribulation—in that darkness and shadow and blackness, "the children of Israel had light in their dwellings" (Exod. 10:23). God was the difference between Israel's light and the Egyptians' darkness. It was so dark, the Egyptians did not move out of their places—so dark it could be felt, with not a glimmer of light. Yet among the children of Israel, their children took to play, Mother washed the dishes and helped gather the meals; all went about their duties, for there was "light in their dwellings."

There is no darkness for a Christian in this world. We know part of what is coming. All things are working together. Everything God ever made or will ever let happen will be for good.

How foolish for a child of God not to be praising Him! We ought to shout out our thanksgiving as if every war were over; as if there were no more big taxes; as if there were no sickness, no crime. With thanksgiving we should remember that our Father is running the world's affairs, and He never varies.

You who have a God only for good times, the kind of Christianity that is fine when everybody is well, when you have a good job, when the crowd likes you-shame! Shame! Our God is good in trouble and in heartbreak. "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me" (Ps. 50:15).

We have plenty for which to be thankful, plenty for which to rejoice. The unfailing God is the secret of peace for all needed blessings all the time. That has not, and will not, change-not a shadow.

V. The Unchanging God Must Keep All He Saves

Wherever I go, I hear, "Pray for me that I will hold out faithful." First you will have to get faithful. Friends, salvation is not a matter of holding out.

I am here in a Baptist church, and I am a Baptist preacher, but one article in the old New Hampshire Statement of Faith I do not believe: "We believe in the perseverance of the saints." That old-fashioned language perhaps meant something else, but none of us persevere.

An old fellow said the other day at the noonday meetings, "I have been on the Lord's side fifty-eight years, and in that time I have never turned aside; I have never backslidden. I have been right on the firing line all that time."

I said to myself what perhaps I did not have the nerve to say aloud, Hypocrite! I don't believe a word of it! I don't believe anybody has been saved fifty-eight years nor fifty-eight minutes who never turned aside.

You say, "I am determined to go through for God." Well, in my case, I have turned that over to Jesus, and He is determined to do it for me.

You say, "I am striving to make Heaven my home." You butt your head against a stone wall. People do not get to Heaven by striving; they get to Heaven by turning their lives over to Jesus Christ who does the striving. It is the unvarying goodness of God that keeps us, not our unvarying goodness.

You may ask me, "Can one who professes faith in Christ fall away and be lost?"

That depends. If you are keeping yourself, then the first wobble you make, you are gone. But if you believe God does the saving and the keeping, when you wobble, you are still saved.

Brother, here is one man who is going to Heaven sitting down! As far as getting to Heaven is concerned, I am riding and the Lord is pulling. He has paid for my ticket. I am riding on a pass. All the people who take their wages go to Hell, for "the wages of sin is death," but I am going to Heaven on a pass.

There was a dear old man, I am told, who drove an oxcart. Those old oxcarts were made with solid wooden wheels, and they had a wooden axle that would wear down, causing the wheels to wobble. But this good man was driving this team with the wheels wobbling this way and that.

A friend who loved to tease said to him, "Where are you going with that old broken-down cart?"

"I'm going to town, Mister George."

"You'll never get there. Look at those wheels. The only time they are ever in the ruts is when they cross them. They wobble this way, and they wobble back that way. You will never make it!"

But he said, "Mister George, I ain't depending on these wobbling wheels to get me to town. Old Buck and Jerry are hitched onto this thing, and they are going right on down the road. Buck and Jerry are going to get me to town."

And Somebody is hitched onto John Rice, and I am going right on down the road. The unvarying God will get me to Heaven. "Whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Rom. 8:30). Brother, the unvarying God, the unfailing God, has this thing in hand! Salvation is settled because He settled it, and what He settled will never be unsettled.

Too many people say, "Brother Rice, you've got to live it." Well, if it takes living it, I can't; and neither can you.

The trouble is, you don't have God's idea about sin. Oh, if you only knew! You are already a hopeless case. It takes the mercy of God to keep you out of Hell. Everybody here ought to be in Hell, and would be, but He loved us when He saved us, and He loves us now. I did not deserve it then; I do not deserve it now.

I grew up in West Texas. In that rough cow country I backslid. One night I went to a little country church. Young friends of mine were being saved, and many others were getting blessed. That night when they sang:

Pass me not, O gentle Saviour,

Hear my humble cry;

While on others Thou art calling,

Do not pass me by,

someway my heart cried out, "O Lord, don't leave me out of this blessing! Don't pass me by." My drifting was gone, and I had peace.

I walked home over the prairie of West Texas and looked up. The stars seemed so near, and God was as near as my breath. I told the Lord, "Lord, I will never grieve You again. I will never again go against You. I will never again neglect to pray and read my Bible." I meant it from my heart, or I thought I meant it.

I was happy for two or three weeks, but then I lost my joy, my blessing. But I had not lost the Lord, and He had not lost me. I had a heart-searching time, then I went back to the Lord and said, "Lord, I told You I would never again do wrong. I said I would never again drift away. I thought I meant it, but I made a mistake. One more chance is all I ask. And I promise You now, I will never grieve You again."

The Lord in His mercy-He must have smiled when He did it-gave me back the joy, and I started out again happy in the Lord.

I went along awhile busy here and there; then my joy was gone again. It happened to me as it did to Samson when he had his head in Delilah's lap: I "wist not that the Lord was departed" from me. I woke up one day, as he did, to take a sweet drink, and instead found bitterness and gall. God was not there as far as my feelings were concerned.

At first I was uneasy, then overwhelmed with a sense of guilt. I had made promises to the Lord before; now I was afraid He would never again believe me.

After more time of heart-searching and prayer, I finally got faith to say, "Lord, I will try again."

But then I failed again. Disconsolate, I did not know what to do. Finally it dawned on me that what God wanted was for me not to depend on how well I kept my promise but on how well He kept His. What God wanted was not taking more from me so much as giving me more-more believing and not so much working.

He was not surprised at my sin. He knew my darkened heart better than I.

The dear Lord again gave me back my joy, and I learned the unvarying Saviour does not vary in forgiveness nor in keeping His faithless children.

People sometimes say, "If you treat God right, He will treat you right. If you do your part, God will do His."

Brother, a God about your size would be all right in that case, but that size God would do us no good. The Lord wants us to turn our lives over to Him.

Blessed be God for His unfailing, unvarying grace!

In Dallas one day a little bit of a kitten came to our door, bony and covered with fleas. My little daughter Elizabeth said, "Oh, isn't he cute? Isn't he cute, Mother? Oh, listen to him purr. Isn't he cute? Oh, Mother, may I keep him?"

I heard her and said, "You don't want a cat like that around here."

But she said, "Mother, let's feed him."

I said again, "If you feed that cat, it will be under your feet the rest of the time."

But she begged, and Mrs. Rice could not refuse, so I said, "Well, if you are going to keep it, it ought to have some warm milk."

Elizabeth warmed the milk and put it in a saucer and gave it to the kitten. It got down and lapped up the milk and left its motor running all the time! Soon its little belly swelled out.

A day or two later when my wife started across the kitchen preparing the dinner, she stepped on the cat's tail. It let out a "Meow!" She said, "That cat is underfoot all the time! I won't have it in the house."

"Never mind," I said, "you have adopted a cat."

She would put it out, but it would go around to the front door, and somebody would open the door. As large a family as we had, we couldn't keep all the doors shut all the time.

That cat had adopted us. That cat just stayed there, underfoot or not. It was our cat. It decided so the first saucer of milk it got.

Once I was a poor, flea-bitten, bony sinner. God gave me salvation and warmed my heart. Since then, He has had a cat on His hands-one He cannot get rid of! God cannot change. If He ever starts to turn me down when I ask Him to restore my joy or cleanse me again from sins I have confessed, I will say, "Lord, look at that verse! What about that? 'With whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.'"

God cannot change regarding His mercy. We were blessed by God on Thanksgiving Day, and we will have another thanksgiving day tomorrow and the next day and the next! Do not be afraid of tragedy and heartbreak; the unfailing providence of God will supply whatever your need is.

God Wants You to Take All He Gives

What shall I do for the Lord, then, for all His blessings? The first thing, someone says, is to pay Him back. Yes, I can try to do that, but I can never succeed. That is not the main thing God wants.

Do good things-yes. Give tithes and offerings to show how you love Him-yes. Give your heart's love-yes. Serve Him-yes. Work your hands to the bone-yes. Go to Africa or anywhere He says. But after all, what God wants is for us to let Him fill us. It is not what we promise, but it is taking what He has.

When the prodigal boy got home, did the father say, "Look here, young man! Before I let you in, are you done with booze? Another thing, Will you never again run off? And what kind of companions and habits will you have?"

That boy promised nothing. He said to himself, I will go back and tell my father I am willing to be a hired servant.

But he never got those words out. Before he could say them, the father called to the servants; in no time the boy had a robe and a ring; the fatted calf was killed, and neighbors were called in to rejoice!

The father did it all. That boy didn't get back home because he promised anything; what he did was take what the father gave.

What shall we do with God's blessings? We honor Him by taking more blessings.

"Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities [but do not stop there]; who healeth all thy diseases [don't stop]; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies [now one more]; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's."-Ps. 103:1--5.

It is only a start when you get saved!

Will you today say, "Lord, I am going to be filled with the Spirit, be filled with all the fullness of God and know the riches of Your grace and the fellowship of Your sufferings. Lord, I will claim and take and have and be full"? That is what He wants of us.

Out on the Pacific Coast, a man was cooking for a lumber camp. He went out for a walk in the snow one day on the side of the Sierra Mountains. As he walked along, he heard a noise behind him. A few yards back was a big grizzly bear sniffing along at his tracks. The man said, "Well, you like my tracks? I'll make you some more!"

God has been good to us this year; let's ask for more next year. David said, 'What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation and then ask Him for some more.'

Oh, let's beg, "Lord, give me some more!" Let's let our hearts be grateful. Let's give our praises to Him. But let's take what God has. He will not be any poorer.

"Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels; borrow not a few."-II Kings 4:3.

A man in my church in Dallas prayed, "Now, Lord, it may seem like we are asking an awful lot, but we will try not to ask You so much anymore." I am sure others feel that God is overburdened. Rather, His burden is that you do not ask Him for enough, that you do not take all that He offers.

Is there anyone here who is not saved? Oh, open your heart, and by faith take and have salvation, forgiveness and blessing and go home happy. Take freely the bountiful blessings offered by an unvarying God.

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