Edward Wierenga has recently defended a version of divine command theory against what he calls the "No Changes" objection.¹ The objection begins with the Changeability Thesis that the moral status of an action may change with the passage of time. According to Wierenga, divine command theory is incompatible with this thesis as:

God is often thought to be immutable, and his commands and prohibitions must on that view remain constant. Hence, according to our theory, the moral status of actions, which is dependent upon those commands and prohibitions, must also remain constant (p.229).

It appears that the No Changes objection amounts to this: (a1) Normative statuses can change through time. (b1) If (a1), then divine command theory is false. (c1) Therefore, divine command theory is false. To secure his rendition of divine command theory against this objection, Wierenga takes issue with the Changeability Thesis; he eschews line (a1).

In this paper I first argue that Wierenga has failed to provide conclusive grounds for rejecting the Changeability Thesis. In fact, the thesis seems to me to be true. So line (a1) of the argument is correct. I go on to argue that divine command theory can be interpreted in such a way that it is compatible with a form of changeability; Wierenga’s original problem then does not arise.
A number of ethical theorists have proposed that normative concepts are time-relativized: they claim, for example, that it is possible that a certain act that would be performed next month may be right for me now, but may not be right for me next week. Fred Feldman uses the following example to illustrate the point:

Suppose a patient is ill, and that his doctor can choose between two main courses of treatment. He can either give the patient medicine A today, and then give him medicine A again tomorrow, or he can give him medicine B today and again tomorrow. Suppose the course of treatment with B would cure the patient, but would produce some unpleasant side effects, while the course of treatment with A would cure the patient without any unpleasant side effects. Suppose, finally, that mixing the treatments would be fatal to the patient...[L]et us agree, prior to the time at which he gives any medicine, it is right for the doctor to give A on the first day, and it is right for the doctor to give A on the second day. Suppose, however, that the doctor fails to do what is best. For whatever reason, he gives the patient B on the first day. It seems clear that it is no longer right for him to give A on the second day – that would kill the patient. Once the doctor has failed to do his duty, and has given B on the first day, the rights and wrongs of the case seem to change.

To assess this case, Wierenga supposes that $t_0$ is a time before the treatment is begun, $t_1$ the time at which the first dose is to be given, and $t_2$ the time at which the second dose is to be administered. Feldman’s claims can then be summarized in this fashion:

1. At $t_0$ it is right to give medicine A at $t_1$.
2. At $t_0$ it is right to give medicine A at $t_2$.
3. At $t_2$ it is not right to give medicine A at $t_2$.