

Does God Change His Mind in
response to human actions?

Motivation for the Journey

Great are the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them.

Psalms 111:2

- ◆ They require study.
- ◆ Because they are great.

Say what?

- ◆ 1Samuel 15:10 “**I regret** that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments.”
- ◆ 1Samuel 15:28 the Glory of Israel **will not** lie or **have regret**, for he is not a man, that he should have regret.”
- ◆ 1Samuel 15:35b And **the LORD regretted** that he had made Saul king over Israel.

Say what?

- ◆ We can be confused.
- ◆ Did God regret making Saul king?
- ◆ And yet God will not regret anything?
- ◆ There appears to be a way of considering the plans of God where He has regret and yet another where He does not.

A Christian Approach

- ◆ Humility before God. God is not silly. He did not make a mistake. He is not confused. Confusion, where it exists, is within me, not within Him.
- ◆ Trust in His Word. Scripture does not contradict Scripture.
- ◆ Rightly handling His Word. Scripture interprets Scripture.

A word about “repenting”

- ◆ “Human beings repent of moral evil; God never does, since he performs no evil of which to repent. That is why most modern translations (of the Bible) use words such as ‘regret’, ‘relent’, ‘grieve over’, ‘retract’, or the like.”

How Long, O Lord?, D. A. Carson, p197.

God's Plans: Weather

- ◆ For to the snow he says, 'Fall on the earth,' likewise to the downpour, his mighty downpour. By the breath of God ice is given, and the broad waters are frozen fast. He loads the thick cloud with moisture; the clouds scatter his lightning. They turn around and around by his guidance, to accomplish all that he commands them on the face of the habitable world.

Job 36:6,10-11

God's Plans: Animals

- ◆ Look at the birds of the air... your heavenly Father feeds them. Matthew 6:26
- ◆ Not one sparrow will “fall to the ground apart from your Father.” Matthew 10:29

God's Plans: From dice to nations

- ◆ The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD. Proverbs 16:33
- ◆ his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?" Daniel 4:34-35

God's Plans: Our lives

- ◆ Give us this day our daily bread. Matthew 6:11
- ◆ In your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.
Psalm 139:16
- ◆ Before I formed you in the womb I knew you Jeremiah 1:5
- ◆ A man's steps are from the Lord. Proverbs 20:24

God's Plans: All things

- ◆ God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that he... directs them to fulfill his purposes.

Systematic Theology, Wayne Grudem, p194.

- ◆ God's plans are his "eternal purpose according to the counsel of His will, whereby, for His own glory, He hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.

Westminster Shorter Catechism

Texts indicating God “changing His mind”

- ◆ And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. Genesis 6:6
- ◆ And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people. Exodus 33:14
- ◆ When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it. Jonah 3:10

Texts indicating God “changing His mind”

- ◆ If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, **I will relent** of the disaster that I intended to do to it.

And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then **I will relent** of the good that I had intended to do to it. Jeremiah 18:7-10

- ◆ There are about 35 texts in Scripture which speak of God relenting / regretting / altering his actions.

A Dangerous Solution: Open Theism

- ◆ God does not have plans for all things. God does not control the future.
- ◆ God changes according to what humans do.
- ◆ God cannot even know the future, because he cannot know what his creatures will choose to do.
- ◆ This is foreign to the God of Scripture.
- ◆ This god is no God at all! The un-god-ing of God!

God's Plans are Unchanging

- ◆ Because God Himself cannot change.

I the Lord do not change. Malachi 3:6

God “with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” James 1:17

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

God Himself cannot change

God cannot change because He would either become

- better (meaning He was not perfect to start with) or
- worse (meaning He is no longer perfect)

and both of these are impossible for God.

God's Plans are Unchanging

- ◆ Because God is not like us.

God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it? Numbers 23:19

God's Plans are Unchanging

- ◆ Because there is none like God.

I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,' Isaiah 46:9-10

God's Plans are Unchanging

- ◆ Because He is God.

“The only way God could alter his plan is “(1) if He lacked the necessary foresight or knowledge to anticipate any and all contingencies; or, (2) assuming he Had the needed foresight, He lacked the power or ability to effect what He had planned.””

Systematic Theology, Stephen J Wellum, p608. Quoting *Grandeur of God*, Sam Storms, p110-111.

God's Plans are Unchanging

- ◆ “Once God has determined that he will assuredly bring something about, his purpose is unchanging and it will be achieved.”

Systematic Theology, Wayne Grudem, p194.

What has God revealed of Himself?

- ◆ God reveals that He is sovereign over all things, at all times.
- ◆ God reveals that His eternal plans cannot and do not change.
- ◆ God reveals that He will respond to humans in specific ways.

God reveals He will respond

- ◆ When people repent, He will respond in mercy.
- ◆ When people sin, He will respond in judgment.
- ◆ When people pray, He will respond through answering - and sometime through changing the situation.
- ◆ His responses involve not just His action, but His disposition: He takes joy when one repents and is angry in the face of rebellion.

Putting it all together

- ◆ When God responds to people, He is doing exactly what He said He would do.
- ◆ God's responses - *from the perspective of time* - are changes in what it appeared He was about to do.
- ◆ God's responses - *from the perspective of God's unchanging plans* - are the fulfillment of what He planned to do.

Back to 1 Samuel

- ◆ 1Samuel 15:10 “**I regret** that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments.”
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Back to 1 Samuel

- ◆ “I regret”.

1. God grieves over Saul’s sin and
2. God responds by taking the kingdom from Saul.

- ◆ I do not “have regret”

1. God chose this short term grief for a long term good.
2. God need make no changes to His eternal plans.

Back to 1 Samuel

- ◆ But did this change the plan?

Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin.

But God had already decreed that the king would come from the tribe of Judah.

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. Genesis 49:10

Back to 1 Samuel

- ◆ So God dealt with (responded to) Saul in accordance with Saul's sin. And at the same time God's response to Saul was in keeping with the plan God had all along: to raise up a king from the tribe of Judah (King David & eventually King Jesus).

Summary of the doctrine: Compatible

- ◆ God's sovereign plans and human's freely chosen actions are **compatible** with each other.
- ◆ It is not that human actions change God's eternal plans.
- ◆ God has decided *to use human actions to fulfill His unchanging plans.*

How then shall we live?

- ◆ Trusting that God's eternal purposes will come to pass.
 - ◆ His promises cannot fail.
 - ◆ His plans cannot be thwarted.
 - ◆ His purposes cannot be changed.
 - ◆ His enemies cannot win.

How then shall we live?

- ◆ Living like what we do matters.
 - ◆ He has ordained to respond to human activity.
 - ◆ And so He has ordained that human activity matters!
 - ◆ God has decided *to use human actions to fulfill His unchanging plans.*

How then shall we live?

- ◆ Trust His Promises by turning to Jesus.
- ◆ Live like prayer matters
 - ◆ He has ordained to respond to human activity. —> Prayer
 - ◆ And so He has ordained that human activity matters! —> Prayer matters.
 - ◆ God has decided *to use **prayer** to fulfill His unchanging plans.*

From our Statement of Faith

From all eternity, God sovereignly ordained all that exists and all that occurs in his creation, in order to display the fullness of his glory. God's plans are efficacious, always coming to pass, and they are universal, encompassing all the affairs of nature, history, and individual lives. These decrees are an exercise of his free, unchangeable, wise, and holy will.

From our Statement of Faith

Yet God, in his foreordination, is not the author of sin, nor do his decrees negate the will of his creatures, who act with the power of willing choice in accord with their nature. His ordaining and governing all things is compatible with his creatures' moral accountability such that God never condemns a person unjustly. Therefore, all persons are responsible for their actions, which have real and eternal consequences.