

## The Purpose Of Prayer Is To Change God's Mind (Part 3)

*By Bruce Riding*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This article addresses the third question about God's repentance: "How can God's changing His mind be reconciled with God having an eternal plan, decided and settled in eternity past?"

### 2. THE OBJECTION

Christians, especially Calvinists, strongly adhere to God's having an eternal plan (Acts 2:23; 4:27–28). Before the creation of the universe, He planned or determined everything (Job 14:5). This is why God can make predictions, occasionally revealing portions of what He has planned to do in great detail to the prophets (Dan 9:24–29) and others (Gen 41:25). Therefore, it is argued, to change His mind would prove that His original plans were so inadequate in the first place, that they needed to be changed. One scholar opined that in the Bible, there is nothing foreordained that God, the Lord of history and nature, cannot change. The sacred history is really one long dialogue between God and human beings in which there is constant action and reaction.

### 3. RESOLVING THIS OBJECTION

How can God have an eternal plan for the World and its people and change both His mind and His course of action? At the level of abstract logic, here is how:

First premise: God has an eternal plan, minute in all its details, fixed, predetermined, foreordained, or predestined from all eternity, and unfolding over time (Dan 2:22, 28–30).

Second premise: In some circumstances, God changes His mind (Exod 32:14; Jer 15:6; Amos 7:3, 6).

Therefore the logical deduction must be that from all eternity, God planned, predetermined, foreordained, and predestined that He would change His mind at certain points in history. Furthermore, He decided or predestined to change His mind at those times in answer to His people's prayers, like those of Moses and Amos. That naturally leads to the next question: how can anyone, God included, plan to change their mind? Once again, abstract logic fails to give an explanation.

At the level of relational logic, however, let me tell you another story. One day, I saw two of my sons fighting. One had his elder brother pinned down and was trying to poke him in the eye with a pencil. As soon as I saw it, I immediately shouted at them to stop, ran over to sort out the altercation, and formulated this plan as I went. I would continue to be angry, very angry, with my younger son until he admitted he was doing something wrong, and promised to never do it again, i.e. he repented. Then I would change my mind and attitude towards him from anger to forgiveness, from berating to reconciling. When I started implementing this plan, my younger son came up with all the usual excuses: his brother started it; he really hadn't done anything wrong; it was his brother's fault; etc., etc., etc. At times I was tempted to give up—abandon my plan, just give him a good hard smack, and get on with other things. However, I decided it was worth all the trouble and effort, so I stuck to my plan until he finally admitted his wrongdoing, repented, asked for forgiveness, and was reconciled to his brother. This is what Hosea and Jeremiah realized about God too. He stuck to His plans for the ultimate salvation of Israel (Hos 11:5–9; Lam 3:22–23). The following five parallels should be obvious:

PLAN	I had formulated a plan before I put it into action. God devised a plan in eternity, is unfolding it in time, and will continue to implement it throughout human history.
AIMS	My plan was to lead my son to repentance and reconciliation with his brother. God's plan is to save His people by leading them to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, thus reconciling them with Himself and with one another.
CHANGE MIND	Part of my plan was to change my mind when my son repented. Part of God's plan was to change His mind at particular points in history in response to His people's faith, repentance, and prayers.
ADHERE TO	I persisted with my plan until it achieved the desired results, despite the fact that it would have been much easier to scrap it. Had I done so, my sons would have not received important lessons. God adhered to His plan, and did not just abandon His sinful people as they deserved.

I hope this illustration shows how someone, human or Divine, can plan to change his mind. Has it thereby completely explained God's repentance, removed all the difficulties, and resolved all the paradoxes? Of course not! My plan involved only two other people. God's plan involves everyone and everything, the whole human race, indeed the whole universe. My plan was uncertain

and could have failed. God's plans are sure and certain. They have never failed, they are not failing now, and they never will fail. However, I hope that it gives some insights into the compatibility of God's repentance with God's having an eternal plan and always sticking to it.

#### **4. CONCLUSION AND APPLICATIONS**

The first application is a solution to the logical problem of how God can have an immutable plan and yet change His mind or repent. He planned in eternity to repent, relent, or change His mind at those times. Incidentally, did you notice the comma at the end of the title to these articles? It is deliberate, not a misprint. The full title should read: "The purpose of prayer is to change God's mind, just as God, in eternity, had planned, predetermined, foreordained, and predestined that He would do in due time."

Secondly, God's relenting is not a means to "getting what we want" from God. If God does change His mind, He changes it to what He had ultimately planned for us, not to what we want. Our prayers must always have attached, explicitly or implicitly, the "Nevertheless, Your will, not mine, be done!" (Matt 26:39,42; Mark 14:36; Luk 22:42; Jas 4:15).

However, my overwhelming purpose is to encourage Christians to pray more, as God has planned for us to do, for He has planned to answer them. So, Pray! Pray! Pray!

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