

Series: God Is Unchangeable #1715

Title: Various Scriptures

God's Eternal Decree

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. This reminder off the top. Our current series reveals that God is unchangeable. After an introduction we have taken up some ways in which God is unchangeable. First, He is unchanging in His being. Second, He is unchanging in His perfections. And third, He is unchanging in His counsel, will, and decree. Counsel. Will. Decree. These are three words used to say essentially the same thing. I will focus us, using the word decree.

We began that last time by defining what is meant by decree. Our definition comes from Louis Berkhof who says, “[God’s] eternal purpose according to the counsel of His will, whereby, for His own glory, [God foreordains] whatsoever comes to pass (*Systematic Theology*, 102).” In order to understand the decree better, we looked at the first two of eight characteristics of the divine decree. Before we continue with these, it is important I remind you what we are doing so we stay on track. I am telling you about God’s decree *so that* we can then see how His decree does not change, which reveals this third way in which God is unchangeable. Do you follow the logic?

In order to talk about the divine decree I feel it valuable to tell you more about it, *then* we will see God does not ever change His decree. Stay tuned. Do not miss an episode. So, the first characteristic of God’s decree is that it is single. Ephesians 1, verse 11 speaks of the, “**the counsel of His will.**” God has one will.

Listen to theologian Herman Bavinck, quote, “The one and only eternal decree of God is gradually and little by little unfolded before the eye of the creature, unfurling itself in many events and happenings, each of which in turn points back to a definite moment in the single decree of God, so that in our human language we speak of the decrees of God in the plural. This manner of speech should not be condemned as long as we maintain and recognize the close relation that obtains between the several decrees and the fact that God in the decree is one (*The Doctrine of God*, 372).”

You see, in our very human experience we receive the decree of God (singular) as decrees (plural), because only little by little is God’s one decree unfolded before us. But each one of these decrees points us always back to the *one* decree in the *One* God. We may experience the will of God in many different ways, but He has only one prevailing will. It is *the* counsel of His *will*.

Second, the decree of God is comprehensive. God’s decree covers everything and everyone. We had several examples from the Word of God. I will not repeat those. Let’s move onto this third characteristic of God’s decree. The decree of God is *unconditional* and not based on outside influences, says Larry Pettegrew, whose work we follow. The Lord, operating solitary and by Himself, within Himself decrees, “according to the counsel of His will,” as Ephesians 1 says. The decree of God is *not* based on how we act in response to Him. The decree of God is *not* based on influence from Satan or a false god or an angel or events in the creation.

Fourth, God’s decree is eternal. The decree comes from before the ages began. *Before, yes, before* God set in place the foundations of this earth, before the creation (Genesis 1.1), He made His decree. He set His will. Listen to 2 Timothy chapter 1 and verse 9. Paul the Apostle writes concerning God, “**Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity...**” *Not* according to our works. There is the lack of an outside influence. It is according to *God’s* purpose and grace – and listen – *when* was that granted to us in Christ? When? “From all eternity,” or in some translations, “**before the ages began.**”

When God foreordained all that comes to pass throughout all of history, He did that *before* time began. He did that from all eternity. Any suggestion that God adjusts His decree or His will or re-works His counsel in real time is *unbiblical* and a false teaching of the highest order. Beware of those suggestions, which are offered by some. Understand: God’s decree is eternal.

We are looking at eight characteristics to the decree of God and we come to the fifth. God's decree is effectual. Let me define effectual this way to keep this simple. Effectual means God's will produces the desired result. Friends, what God wants, God always gets. No exceptions. If God so wills A, then A *will* happen. We have already had one key Scripture here. As God Himself said in Isaiah 46, verse 10, "**My counsel shall stand**" or "**My purpose will be established.**" Hear also Psalm 33, verse 11, "**The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart from generation to generation.**" And Proverbs 19, verse 21, "**Many plans are in a man's heart, but the counsel of the Lord will stand.**"

This is very practical. As people we spend quite a bit of time planning. Those of you working in the corporate world are doing this all the time, as are many of you in teaching, administration, recreation, and in the church and various ministries. Certainly parents are almost always planning. I happen to be of the opinion that praying, thinking, and planning ahead is both a good idea and a godly one. I do not think these verses and ones like them mean, "do not plan."

But why do our best laid plans often not come to fruition? It is because they do not align with the counsel of God's will. They do not fit in the divine decree. So, we should hold our plans lightly. As Christians we should be prepared to have God change our plans. Remember: it is only the counsel of the Lord that stands forever, the plans of *His* heart from generation to generation. That truth should make the over-planners, the obsessed planners among us far less stressed, as well.

With an eye on the clock, let me get in here at least one more of the eight characteristics of God's eternal decree. First, a warning. What follows is a *big one* and I do not have time to explore this in any kind of detail. We really ought to have a whole standalone series on God's decree and when we do we can cover this next one then. Although we have discussed elements of this before, as long time listeners with good memories will realize. Cognizant I do not have time to delve into the details, still I want to share this. God's decree ordains sin and controls its effects.

In order to be consistent *and biblical*, we must say that sin *is* a part of God's eternal plan. We must say this because we have said that God's decree is comprehensive. It includes everyone and everything. Sin *is* included. At the same time, we must also say this: God is not to blame for our sin or for the evil deeds that people commit against one another and against the Lord. God does *not* directly cause any evil. Men and women are directly responsible for our wickedness and we will be judged accordingly. There is no sin in God. But He is in sovereign control over the actions of sinful people and He directs even our sin for His purposes.

Think of the sin committed against Joseph when his brothers banded together and sold him into slavery and he was shipped down to Egypt. When he re-connected with his evil siblings what did Joseph say? "**As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.**" (That's Genesis 50, verse 20.) Joseph did not dismiss the evil done against him. He holds the brothers accountable. *They sinned*. But God did not sin. Nevertheless, God brought much good out of their sin. God used their sin to get Joseph to Egypt, while God maintained His righteousness. And if you know the story, getting Joe to Egypt was crucial to the development of Israel as the people of God. Read the end of Genesis and Exodus.

OK, I need to leave off here. When you come back next time, we will finish these characteristics of the divine decree and we'll see how these do *not* ever change. Join us then because God Is.

---END---