



Openness Theology

Part 1: God Under Attack!

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Acts 20:28-30 - "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them."

God is under attack. It is not from the usual corners. We expect atheists, agnostics, new-agers and cultists to attack the God of the Bible.

However, today we are facing an attack on God being leveled not from atheists, agnostics and pagans in the world, but teachers, professors, and even pastors in the church.

Paul told us it would be so. He warned the Ephesian church in **Acts 20** that **"savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them."**

It is now past tense. Men from inside the church have risen up and are teaching **"perverse things."** Their talk is like gangrene (**2 Tim 2:17**). They have fallen away from the faith which is once for all delivered to the saints (**Jude 3**), and have paid attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons (**1 Tim. 4:1**). The time has come when **"men do not endure sound doctrine, but wanting to have their ears tickled, they accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires" and "turn away from the truth" and "turn aside to myths"** (**2 Tim 4:3-4**).

The demonic doctrines of which I speak are those advocated under the banner of what is popularly called openness theology.

I wish I could say that this was some small teaching on a nonessential issue advocated by a fringe group of "Christians" out of the mainstream of evangelicalism. I can't. As you will see in a few moments, what is at stake is far from a side issue and the people involved are far from the fringe.

Having observed the growth of this movement for the last 6 years, I am convinced that it is not going away any time soon. You are going to be hearing more and more about openness theology as it is embraced within supposedly orthodox circles.

I am also convinced that as elders of the Church, we have the responsibility to warn **"each of you night and day with tears"** and to declare the "whole counsel of God" (**Acts 20:31**).

For that reason, I have dedicated this article, as well as the next six, to explaining this issue and equipping you to stand against it.

Here is a preview of what is to come. The remainder of this article will serve to familiarize you with what openness theology is and with those who teach it.

Next month I'll take up the subject of whether Scripture teaches that God is omniscient (has exhaustive knowledge of the future). In November I'll look at openness theology's attack on the atonement. In December I'll look at God's omniscience and how it relates to suffering. In January I will take up the subject of God's omniscience and prayer. In February I will address the subject of human free will, and in March I will write about living with God as He has revealed Himself in Scripture.

What is Openness Theology?

To put it simply, openness theology teaches that God does **not** have exhaustive and comprehensive knowledge of

future events. The term “openness” comes from the fact that its proponents view much of the future as “open” rather than “closed” even to God Himself. In other words, the future has not been determined, and thus God does not know it.

The openness view of God says that God is not omniscient (knowing perfectly all things past, present, and future).

The openness proponent is quick to assure us that God knows all that can be known. However, the future cannot be known by God since the future does not exist yet. According to the openness view of God, the future consists of free choices and actions of free creatures and has not happened yet. If it has not happened, it does not now exist and therefore God does not now know it.

According to openness theology, the future is “open” in the sense that it is not even created yet. Until free moral creatures make choices, the future does not exist. We create the future moment by moment as the future becomes the present. Since choices are not yet made, the future does not yet exist, and God has no way of knowing what does not exist. God knows that which exists (the past and present) and cannot know that which does not exist (the future).

According to openness theology we work with God in our decision making process to plan, create, and direct the future. God cannot see what is coming, thus He constantly changes His plans on the fly and reacts to the “future” we are creating as we make our choices.

As Bruce Ware states in his critique of Openness Theology, *“More specifically, He cannot know, in advance, the large portion of the future which will come about as free creatures choose and do as they please. Accordingly, God learns moment-by-moment what we do, and His plans must constantly be adjusted to what actually happens, insofar as this is different than what He anticipated.”*¹

Does that sound like the God you see revealed on the pages of Scripture? Does God know perfectly all things which will come to pass? Does He know those things perfectly, that is to say, without error in His knowledge? Or is God simply rolling the dice and hoping that even with all the free will decisions of people all over the world, things will still work out o.k.?

Openness theologians believe that God does not know in advance all the future free actions of his moral creatures.

Likewise, God cannot control the future free actions of his moral creatures. Tragic events occur over which God has no control, and when they occur, God cannot be blamed, because He is unable to prevent them from happening.² After all, He didn’t see it coming.

So for the openness proponent, God knows the past and present perfectly (because the events of the past and present exist and have existed) but He does not and cannot know the future perfectly.

Who Teaches This?

You are not likely to be familiar with these names, although you will be seeing them, I am sure, in the months and years ahead. Just as Paul mentioned the false teachers of his day by name in order that the church may be warned (**1 Tim. 1:18-20; 2 Tim. 2:17-18; 4:14-15**), I offer to you this list of openness proponents. As Paul told Timothy, “Avoid such men as these” (**2 Tim. 3:5**) and their writings!

Greg Boyd is a theology professor at Bethel College and Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota and teaching pastor at the 3,000 strong Woodland Hills Church in St. Paul. Woodland Hills Church is part of the Baptist General Conference (140,000 members in 800 churches). Boyd has written, *“We create the reality of our decisions by making them. And until we make them, they don’t exist. . . There simply isn’t anything to know until we make it there to know. So God can’t foreknow the good or bad decisions of the people He creates until he creates these people and they in turn create their decisions.”*³

At the June 2000 convention of the Baptist General Conference held at the campus of Bethel College, delegates, by a standing vote overwhelmingly affirmed that “God’s knowledge of all past, present, and future events is exhaustive,” and that “the ‘openness’ view of God’s foreknowledge is contrary to our fellowship’s historic understanding of God’s omniscience.”

“Whew! The BGC was saved from apostasy,” you say. Well, not quite. Within an hour, the oversight body of Bethel voted 423-363 to permit Mr. Boyd to remain at his teaching post! **Although recognizing the heresy of his position, they agreed to keep him on staff and pay him to influence future generations of missionaries and pastors.** Do you see a problem with that?!

Greg Boyd has authored the following books: *God of the*

1 Bruce A. Ware, *Their God is Too Small: Open Theism and the Undermining of Confidence in God* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2003), 12-13.

2 Ibid., 67-68.

3 Edward E. Plowman, “What does God know?” *World Magazine*, 17, July 1999.

Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God, Letters From a Skeptic, Repenting of Religion: Turning from Judgment to the Love of God, and Is God to Blame?: Moving Beyond Pat Answers to the Problem of Evil.

John E. Sanders is Research Professor of Philosophy and Religion at Huntington College in Indiana. In a book he helped author titled *The Openness of God*, Sanders writes, "God works with human decisions, adapting his own plans to fit the changing situation. God does not control everything that happens. Rather, he is open to receiving input from his creatures. In loving dialog, God invites us to participate with him to bring the future into being."⁴

Books by John Sanders include: *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God, The God Who Risks*, and *No Other Name*.

In his book *No Other Name*, Sanders denies that knowing Jesus Christ is necessary for salvation! Sanders argues that people will be saved by Christ without ever believing in Him for salvation or knowing Who Christ is or what Christ did. When you believe error regarding the nature of God, it will affect every other area of your theology and practice.

David Basinger wrote *Case for Freewill Theism: A Philosophical Assessment*. Basinger is on faculty at Roberts Wesleyan College. He has authored nine books and more than 65 articles.

Other names to watch out for include **Clark H. Pinnock, Richard Rice, and William Hasker**. If someone gives you a book by one or more of these men, don't walk, but run to the nearest garbage can.

It has come about that from inside the Church, men have arisen teaching perverse things. They are not on a street corner waving signs ranting like lunatics. They are in pulpits in the nation's most prestigious denominations. They are in colleges teaching our sons and daughters heresy. They are in our "Christian Universities" denying the Master who bought them (**2 Peter 2:1**) and God says, they bring on themselves swift destruction.

Are we to believe that 2,000 years of scholars, Christians, teachers, and pastors have somehow missed the true nature of God only to have a handful of vocal and influential men rediscover Him in our licentious and postmodern age? The open theist says, "Yes." I say, "No."

These men present a very real danger to the Church. We need to be alert and aware lest we be deceived. However, we don't need to worry or fret because *God has always known that this was coming!*

⁴ As quoted at www.opentheism.info

Without Wax -



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Quotable Quotes:

"Having debated issues ranging from biblical inerrancy to the reality of hell, evangelicals are now openly debating the traditional doctrine of God represented by classical theism. My argument is that the integrity of evangelicalism as a theological movement, indeed the very coherence of evangelical theology is threatened by the rise of the various new "theisms" of the evangelical revisionist. Unless these trends are reversed and evangelicals return to an unapologetic embrace of biblical theism, evangelical theology will represent nothing less than the eclipse of God at century's end."

- R. Albert Mohler, Jr.
Southern Baptist Journal of Theology

"If anything be future, or to come to pass, it must be from itself or from God: not from itself, then it would be independent and absolute: if it hath its futurity from God, then God must know what He hath decreed to come to pass; those things that are future, in necessary causes, God must know, because He willed them to be causes of such effects; He, therefore, knows them, because He knows what He willed. The knowledge of God cannot arise from the things themselves, for then the knowledge of God would have a cause without Him; and knowledge, which is an eminent perfection, would be conferred upon Him by His creatures."

- Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1986), 433. Originally published in 1853.