



Openness Theology

Part 2: How Smart Is Your God?

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Isaiah 46:8-11 - “. . . Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; *I am* God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure’; calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned *it*, *surely* I will do it.”

What does God know and when does He know it? That is the issue at stake in the debate over the foreknowledge and omniscience of God taking place within “evangelical” circles.

Can God possibly know the future? How much of the future does God know and how does He know it? Does God know what you and I will choose? Does he know all things, possible and actual? Is God’s knowledge limited? Is God’s knowledge complete and without error?

There is a new theology on the scene vying for the hearts and minds of Christians. It is called “openness theology.”^{1 & 2}

1 Actually, there is nothing new about it. It is a repackaged version of the 16th century heresy called socinianism which was categorically rejected by the church for the heresy that it was. Although open theists do not hold to all of the heretical doctrines of the socinians, they do hold to the socinian notion that God is finite in His knowledge and does not know the future choices of His free creatures. Embracing the rest of the socinian heresy will likely come with time for the open theists. False teaching has a way of blooming and developing. We will see that, indeed, there is nothing new under the sun.

2 See last month’s article *God under Attack!!!* for an overview of the

Openness theology is nothing short of a denial of classic theism regarding God’s omniscience. Openness theology teaches that God does not have comprehensive and unfailing knowledge of all future events. The future is “open” to God and not “closed.”

According to the open theist, God cannot possibly know the future since the future consists of millions of choices made by millions of free moral creatures with free will. Until these creatures make the decision (which God does not know in advance) the decision does not exist and therefore the future they create does not exist. In open theism, God only knows what has existed or does exist, but not what *will* exist. In short, since the future does not exist (it has not been created or determined by the free moral choices of men) God cannot and does not now know it.

As open theist Richard Rice writes, “*God knows a great deal about what will happen. He knows everything that will ever happen as the direct result of factors that already exist. He knows infallibly the content of his own future actions, to the extent that they are not related to human choices. Since God knows all possibilities, he knows everything that could happen and what he can do in response to each eventuality. And he knows the ultimate outcome to which he is guiding the course of history. All that God does not know is the content of future free decisions, and this is because decisions are not there to know until they occur.*”³

proponents and books that advocate the openness of God theology. Past issues of this column are archived on our website at www.kootenaichurch.org.

3 Richard Rice, “Divine Freewill Theism” in *The Grace of God and the*

To get a handle on this, you might want to slowly read that again. Notice, God knows the content of His “own future actions” but only to the extent that “they are not related to human choices.” You see, in open theism, God does not know what He will do in response to what I will do tomorrow, since tomorrow does not exist and I have not made tomorrow’s choices yet. So, God knows what I could choose, but not what I will choose. It’s all an unknown to Him.

To say that God does not know the content of future free decisions is to admit that God does not know billions of things that happen every single day. Just think, according to the open theist, there are billions of things that will happen tomorrow all over this planet that God does not know are going to happen.

So do open theists deny that God is omniscient? They will be quick to say that they believe in the omniscience of God. But for them, “omniscience” means that God knows everything that is *knowable*. Although for the openness theist, God does not know billions of things, they still say He is “omniscient” because He knows all that **can** be known. It’s a nice little semantic shell game.

How Do They Get There from Here?

One might ask, how do they concoct such a theological pretzel? It is the result of trying to reconcile the apparent contradiction between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man.

The open theist reasons that if man is truly a free moral creature, then he must be able to choose freely without any restrictions.

Track with me for a second. How can man be totally free if God knows what he will choose? In other words, if God knows perfectly what choice I will make, then there is no possibility that I will not make that choice. If the possibility exists that I might not make that choice, then God’s knowledge is shown to be inaccurate, incomplete, and in error. So if we are going to say that man is really completely free (and going to hold that as our “sacred cow”), then we are driven to the conclusion that God does not know the decisions of

Will of Man, ed. Clark Pinnock (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1989) 134.

free moral creatures. Thus we arrive at the doctrines of open theism.

Here is an illustration. If God knows that on Tuesday of next week at 1:32 p.m. Pacific Standard Time, you will be struck dead by a drunk driver while crossing First Avenue in Sandpoint, then He knew it would happen from eternity past. If God knows that, then it is going to happen and there is no possibility that it will not happen. If God intervenes to stop the event from happening, then He truly did not foreknow the event.

If God knows that tomorrow I will go to lunch with a friend and order a double burger with cheese, fries, and a Coke and it will cost me \$6.53, then is there any chance that the owners of the restaurant will raise the price between now and then? Is there any choice which can be made by any party which might prevent that from happening and show God to be in error? The reality is that if God knows it is going to happen, then there is no possibility that what God foreknows will not come to pass.

Since God’s knowledge is infallible, then it follows that the drunk driver will do exactly what God knows He will do. Since there is no error in what God knows will come to pass, then God knows that I will do (and choose to do) exactly what God knows I will. Can I really choose to do differently if God knows what I will do, and He knows it infallibly? I am really not “free” (in the libertarian/open theist sense) to do otherwise. Do you see the dilemma?

How does the open theist resolve the dilemma? Simple. They just say that God does not know the future choices of His creatures and thus does not know the future.

It is critical that we observe a couple of things. First, rather than living with the mystery of divine providence and human responsibility, open theism dives off the plank of orthodoxy into heresy by denying that God is who God is. This, in effect, eliminates the mystery that God expects us to live with and accept by faith.

Second, notice how it is the Deity of God Himself which gets minimized in order to preserve the “sacred cow” of human “free will.” Man so hates the idea of a

sovereign God, that he will redefine Him in order to maintain his independence and freedom from Him. In the end, man and his “free choice” is exalted and preserved to the degree that God is not even allowed the freedom to be the King of His creation, Ruler, Sovereign, and Almighty over all.

The result of openness theology is to deify man and humanize God.

What Saith the Lord?

Does the Bible teach that God knows all things infallibly including the free choices of his moral creatures? The resounding answer is yes.

Psalm 147:5, “**Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite.**” Certainly the open theist cannot be right in asserting that God’s knowledge, and, thus, His understanding, are limited and finite.

Hebrews 4:13, “**And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.**” All creatures, or just those that exist now and in the past? What about the creatures that will yet exist as a result of the freewill choices of men?

Jesus demonstrated that He had complete foreknowledge of the free choices of people. He predicted what would come to pass in order that those who saw these things come to pass would believe in Him (**John 13:19**). Jesus knew that Peter would deny Him (**John 13:38**) which was clearly a free choice. Jesus knew how Peter would die (**John 21:18-19**), knowledge that involved the free actions of numerous, perhaps hundreds, people. Jesus knew that Judas would choose to betray Him (**John 6:64, 70-71**).

Let us not forget **Psalm 139:1-4**, “**O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all**” (vv. 1-4). How could God know what I was going to say before I chose to say it? Does He really know all things,

including every word I speak before I speak it? Scripture affirms that He does.

Psalm 139:16, “**Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.**” The psalmist affirms that God knew your days and all that was ordained for you before there was even one day of your existence.

The God of open theism did not even know you would exist. After all, you are the result of the free choice between two people (your parents). They in turn are both the results of the free choices of their parents, and they theirs and so on. If God does not know in advance the free choices of His creatures, He could not have possibly known in advance that you would exist.

If God could not foresee and know your existence then He certainly could not know your days in advance or ordain their number and content. Yet David can affirm, “*In your book were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.*” Does it sound like David was an open theist?

The implications of the open view of God are staggering! If God could not have foreseen your existence then He could not choose you to be in Christ before the foundation of the world (**Eph. 1:3-4**); He could not have predestined you to adoption as sons (**Eph. 1:5**); He could not have predestined you to your inheritance (**Eph. 1:11**); and He could not predestine you to be conformed to the image of His Son (**Rom. 8:29**). Christ could not have died in your place as your substitute, because God had no way of knowing that you would even exist!

God’s comprehensive and infallible foreknowledge is the basis of every major doctrine in the Scriptures including election, predestination, adoption, redemption, the atonement, and many more. This is no secondary issue!

God’s complete knowledge of all things is intended to comfort us not confuse us! That is why David continues with, “**How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand**” (vv. 17-18).

For the sake of space I would ask you to read **Isaiah** chapters **40-48**. As you read, look for all the instances in which God affirms His complete knowledge of all things past, present, and future. Particularly note **Isaiah 46:9-11**.

In those 9 chapters of Isaiah, God argues that one of the evidences of His deity is His foreknowledge. One of the things that makes Him the true and living God, is His absolute knowledge of the future and His ability to predict beforehand exactly what will happen. What makes God different from the idols of the heathen nations? He demonstrates that He is the Sovereign Ruler over all by **“declaring from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, ‘My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure’ (Isa. 46:10).**

Can you or I understand that knowledge and how it works with our choices and decisions? No. We are not intended to. It is a divine mystery. We may not ever understand it, but let us not strip God of His sovereignty and His omniscience in order that we might have a more “manageable” deity. Rather, let us say with David, **“Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high, I cannot attain to it” (Psalm 139:6).**

Without Wax -



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Quotable Quotes

“God’s sovereignty is the attribute by which He rules His entire creation, and to be sovereign God must be all-knowing, all powerful, and absolutely free. . . . Were there even one datum of knowledge, however small, unknown to God, His rule would break down at that point. To be Lord over all the creation, He must possess all knowledge. And were God lacking one infinitesimal modicum of power, that lack would end His reign and undo His kingdom; that one stray atom of power would belong to someone else and God would be a limited ruler and hence not sovereign.”

- A.W. Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1961), 108.

“For it is an unworthy notion of God to ascribe to Him a conjectural knowledge; if there were only a conjectural knowledge, He could but conjecturally foretell anything; and then it is possible the events of things might be contrary to His predictions. It would appear then that God were deceived and mistaken, . . . If his knowledge of future things were not certain, there were no stability in this rule, it would fall to the ground: we never yet find God deceived in any prediction, but the event did answer His forerevelation; His foreknowledge, therefore, is certain and infallible.”

- Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1986), 436. Originally published in 1853.