

Is Divine Foreknowledge Like A Box Of Chocolates ?

An Ebook That Takes A Biblical Look At
The Novel Doctrine Of
Open Theism

Clayton Diltz

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www.TrinityTheology.Org | www.IndusTheology.Org | www.PhilipSchool.info

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the words of the great philosopher Forrest Gump, “life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you’re gonna get.” Forrest, like many of us, learned from our parents that life is full of surprises and we do not know with certainty what the future holds. Surprises in life can be fun. My parents would often tell me, “Wait till you see what we got you for your birthday. You are going to be so surprised.” That kind of anticipation was great! I would get so excited about the unknown present that I could hardly contain myself. Now my parents knew what the present was all along, which is one of the key elements that makes surprises so much fun: one person knows what another is going to receive. As a little boy I assumed that this incredible ability to know the unknown was an innate ability of my parents that permeated all aspects of knowledge in their lives, and that when I became a grown-up, I would have this ability too. Why did I think this way? Because my parents (and many other adults) could tell me so many things that I did not know. For example, they could tell me exactly on what day my birthday or Christmas would occur (they had a calendar), or how far we had driven in the car (the car had an odometer), and most of all they knew when I was bad at school (the teachers called them). At that time I did not know that my parents used a calendar or an odometer and regularly talked with my teachers. I just thought they *knew* because they were parents and parents seemed to know everything.

As I got older, I had to come to grips with my own faulty logic. Because I assumed that my parents knew everything, I had started asking them questions like: Will I get on the honor roll this semester? Will I pass the DMV test to get my driver’s license? Will the Dallas Cowboys win the Superbowl this year? What will I do when I grow up? Who will I marry? Will I have kids? Will Grandpa and Grandma live through their illnesses? My parents had fewer and fewer certain answers. I guess I learned long before Forrest Gump said it so eloquently, “life *is* like a box of chocolates.” In other words, life is full of surprises. “*Que sera sera*,” my mother use to say, “whatever will be will be. The future is not ours to see.” My mother is a wise philosopher (and I thought she was just my mom), for it is a logical truism: what will be will be, just like what is, is.

Now I am fine with surprises. It is logical that since human beings are finite creatures, our knowledge must also be limited in some way. I cannot know all the details of tomorrow for “tomorrow” has not yet arrived. The choices that I make today effect not only today, but also the choices that I will make tomorrow. And these are just the choices that I make. What about those choices made by other people that affect me. When my brother was a teenager he often rode his bicycle to his friends’ houses. To get to one of his friend’s houses he had to cross a very busy intersection; one that we had crossed hundreds of times before. Well, this particular day a truck driver decided to run the red light, and as a result, he hit my brother on his bicycle. My brother flipped off the bike and landed on the asphalt breaking his collar bone. Now my brother had decided to cross the street safely, but regardless of his personal decision, the truck driver’s independent decision took my brother by surprise. Had my brother known that if he were to cross that intersection on his bike at that particular hour would result in injury, he would have chosen a different route. And I suspect the truck driver, had he known his carelessness would result in personal bodily injury to a teenager, he would have chosen to be more careful.

Humans are limited in knowledge because we cannot know the future with absolute certainty and in full detail. Therefore, we are at times, surprised by the future. For example, when I joined the

Army, I had expected to work hard physically, spiritually, mentally, and emotionally to be the best soldier that I could be. It was beyond my wildest dreams that after being on active duty for only nine months that I would find myself standing before the Commander of the U.S. Army Europe, General Eric Shinseki, as the newly selected 1997-98 Soldier of the Year USAREUR/7A. This was truly a surprise.

But just because my brother did not know that he would be hit by a truck, and I did not know that I would be selected for such a high honor, is it true to say that God was also surprised by these events? Is God limited in knowledge just as we are? Is He unable to know what will happen moment by moment, day by day, or year by year? Part of the dream in the concept of human freedom – in the sense that humans make real choices in life – is that the world of tomorrow is full of possibilities. For example, humans operate as if making choices from the simple and mundane (e.g., clothes to wear, foods to eat, routes to work) to the complicated and unique (e.g., spouse, career, retirement) are real choices to be made. That is why when I asked my parents what I would be when I became an adult, they responded that I could be anyone I wanted. If I wanted to be a fireman, pilot, soldier, or a singer, I could choose to pursue any of those careers. Well, I am not any of those save for putting out an occasional fire in the kitchen or singing in the shower. And even though I am no longer a soldier, it is fun to envision a day to pursue a private pilot's license. Yes, I believe the future is full of possibilities – possibilities that I know about and some that are not even on my personal radar – but I do not believe that these possibilities are unknown to God. This is contrary to the assertions of open theism. Open theists, like Forrest Gump, believe that life is like a box of chocolates, and even the God who created that box of chocolates does not know what He is going to get.

II. THE CAUSE FOR CONCERN

To be a Christian is the most exciting life there is; and to be a Christian at the dawn of the third millennium of the Messianic Age is certainly no exception for there seems to be endless challenges (some of which could rightfully be called “surprises”) amongst God's people. In pace with church history, we have a stirring among serious minded evangelicals who are grappling with some of the most delicate and intimate issues of life: the personal relationship between man and his Creator. Over the past twenty years there has been much ink poured over the hotly debated topic commonly known as open theism, the openness of God, or free-will theism. On the one hand, traditional theists (also known as classical theists) are quite concerned over the innovative theology because, in their estimation, it seems to impugn – among other things – God's attributes, namely His omniscience (the doctrine that God knows all things past, present, and future) and omnipotence (the doctrine that God is all powerful and sovereignly in control). Open theists, on the other hand, assert that their position is a long-held view in the history of the church and that it exalts, not impugns, God's attributes.

Even though the Christian faith has been delivered to the saints once for all (Jude 3), is built upon the apostolic foundation (Eph 2:20), and the first disciples committed themselves to their teachings (Acts 2:42), numerous challenges to sacred doctrines have continuously assailed the church since its birth. Among the most notable and early doctrinal challenges¹ is justification by

¹ The listing of the major doctrinal challenges follows the development laid down by H. Wayne House, “The Partially Infinite God: An Exegetical Response to Greg Boyd's *The God of the Possible* n.p. [cited 28 January

faith (Legalism),² the Trinity (Modalism),³ the deity of Christ (Arianism),⁴ the humanity of Christ (Gnosticism, Nestorianism, Eutychianism),⁵ and the sinfulness of Christ (Pelagianism).⁶ These once settled controversies have arisen again in the doctrines of Christian cults like Mormonism, Christian Science, and Jehovah Witnesses.

More recently, at the November 2000 national annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society the Executive Committee issued the following statement:

The Executive Committee, in response to requests from a group of charter members and others, to address the compatibility of the view commonly referred to as "Open Theism" with biblical inerrancy, wishes to state the following: We believe the Bible clearly teaches that God has complete, accurate and infallible knowledge of all events past, present and future including all future decisions and actions of free moral agents. However, in order to insure fairness to members of the society who differ with this view, we propose the issue of such incompatibility be taken up as part of our discussion in next year's conference "Defining Evangelicalism's Boundaries."

2006]. Online: http://www.conservativeonline.org/articles/partially_infinite_god_part_1.htm. For good definitions of the following heresies see *New Dictionary of Theology*, eds. Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1988) and Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

² The issue is a matter of legalism. At the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, the question was whether or not Gentiles were subject to the requirements of Mosaic Law in order to participate in the promises to Abraham. In other words, are believers justified by placing their faith in Messiah Jesus and His vicarious atonement on the Cross, or are there additional obligatory (Jewish) requirements? Although the final victory for justification by faith alone in Christ alone was secured at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-31), Paul had already addressed this issue in his letters to the Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians.

³ Otherwise known as Monarchianism, Sabellianism, and patripassianism, modalists deny the tri-unity or tri-persons of the Godhead. Instead of three distinct persons in the Godhead, modalists believe there is one divine being who successively revealed himself in three different persons: Father (OT), Son (NT), Holy Spirit (post-NT). A modern-day modalist is T.D. Jakes, the Bishop of the Potter's House. The belief statement reads: "**God**--There is one God, Creator of all things, infinitely perfect, and eternally existing in three *Manifestations*: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (italics mine) n.p. [cited 3 February 2006]. Online: http://www.thepottershouse.org/PH_beliefs.html.

⁴ Arianism (named after its leader Arius) taught that Jesus was created by the Father and therefore ontologically subordinate to the Father. Thus, Arius denied that Jesus was equally divine as the Father. The Council of Nicea in A.D. 325 denounced this teaching as heretical. The decision was upheld at the Council of Constantinople (aka Nicea II) in A.D. 451, declaring that the Son, though distinct in person, was the same essence (*homoousia*) with the Father.

⁵ Technically Gnostics espoused salvation through special knowledge of the Logos. Stemming from this belief came Docetic (Gk. *dokein*, 'to seem') Gnosticism which taught that Jesus only *appeared* to be human. Nestorianism and Eutychianism (each named after their leaders) both denied the humanity of Christ, just in different ways. Nestorius' view that the two natures of Christ were juxtaposed (i.e., put side by side) was condemned at the Council of Ephesus in A.D. 431; Eutyches' view that the two natures became so commingled that in essence they became only one was condemned at the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451. Eutyches' view was a reaction from Nestorianism to Apollinarianism.

⁶ Pelagianism (named after Pelagius) taught that Adam's sin only affected himself; that is, original sin did not affect the progeny ('offspring') and therefore mankind has the same sinless state as Adam and Eve. Although I do not know if Pelagius believed this, but since mankind is unimpaired by the fall, he has freedom in the libertarian sense. God raised up Augustine to counter this false teaching. Whereas at the heart of Pelagianism is human freedom, at the heart of Augustinianism is divine grace. Pelagius begins with the view of man in his natural state who, in his own intellect, might, good works, and righteousness could exert himself through proper choice, and following the example of Christ, attain to perfection. Augustine begins with the view of man as fallen, desperate, and wicked, and except for the magnanimous work of Christ's atoning sacrifice and imputed righteousness that comes through personal faith in Jesus, man could never be saved.

While the open view of God has captured only a small minority of professing evangelicals, there are a number of theologians and pastors propounding this novel understanding of theology proper (the doctrine of God). The major proponents are Clark Pinnock,⁷ Richard Rice,⁸ John Sanders,⁹ William Hasker,¹⁰ David Basinger,¹¹ and Gregory Boyd.¹² Pastor Gary Gilley sees strands of open theism theology in the writings of popular authors like Philip Yancey and Gilbert Bilezikian who is the resident theologian at Willow Creek Community Church.¹³

Proponents assert that the open view can be found throughout church history though it has been rare.¹⁴ Indeed, a classical theist would agree that the open view is found in church history from a source which is anything but stellar. One of the most telling statements comes from Greg Boyd who attempts to distance the open view from that of Socinianism,¹⁵ “[Calling] the Open View ‘Socinian’ is like calling Calvinists ‘Muslim’ because the Koran teaches absolute predestination.”¹⁶ On God’s omniscience Socinus wrote, “Since, then there is no reason, no passage of Scripture from which it can be clearly gathered that God knew all things which happened before they happened, we must conclude that we are by no means to assent such a foreknowledge of God . . .”¹⁷ This statement is exceedingly similar to Boyd’s: “If God does not foreknow future free actions, it is not because his knowledge of the future is in any sense incomplete. It’s because there is, in this view, *nothing definite there for God to know!*”¹⁸

Elsewhere Boyd gives what seems to be disclaimers: “Next to the central doctrines of the Christian faith, the issue of whether the future is exhaustively settled or partially open is relatively unimportant”¹⁹ and “We are not addressing anything central to the traditional

⁷ Clark Pinnock, “Systematic Theology” in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1994), 101-25.

⁸ Richard Rice, “Biblical Support for a New Perspective” in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1994), 11-58.

⁹ John Sanders, “Historical Considerations” in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1994), 59-100; *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1998).

¹⁰ William Hasker, “A Philosophical Perspective” in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1994), 126-54.

¹¹ David Basinger, “Practical Implications” in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1994), 155-76; *The Case for Freewill Theism: A Philosophical Assessment* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1996).

¹² Gregory Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

¹³ Gary E. Gilley, “Think on These Things” n.p. [cited 21 February 2006]. Online: <http://www.ondctrine.com/2gly0001.htm>. Dr. Mike Stallard has also identified the overlap of open theism with postliberalism, post-conservatism, and postmodernism. See Mike Stallard, “The Open View of God: Does He Change?” in *The Journal of Ministry and Theology* 5 (2001), 6.

¹⁴ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 114-118.

¹⁵ Faustus Socinus (A.D. 1539-1604) denied the trinity of God, the deity of Christ, and a substitutionary atonement, among other essentials of the faith. The theological tradition of Socinianism later manifested in Unitarianism. See John MacArthur, “Open Theism’s Attack on the Atonement,” *TMSJ* 12/1 (Spring 2001), 3-13.

¹⁶ Greg Boyd, “The ‘Open’ View of the Future,” n.p. [cited 28 January 2006]. Online: www.opentheism.info/pages/information/boyd/open_future.php.

¹⁷ See *Praelectionis Theologicae* 11 (1627): 38, as quoted by Francis Turetin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (reprint; Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992) 1:2008.

¹⁸ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 16 (emphasis in original).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

definitions of orthodoxy, so it seems some flexibility might be warranted.”²⁰ Even if these statements are not disclaimers, they nonetheless grossly misrepresent the nature and impact of the doctrine of openness theology.

III. THE BASIC TENETS OF CLASSICAL THEISM VS. OPEN THEISM

1. *Traditional or Classical Theism.* Traditional or classical theism has, for the most part, dominated both Jewish and Christian history. Richard Rice, although an open theist, sets forth an excellent understanding of the classical view of God:

This traditional, or conventional, view emphasizes God’s sovereignty, majesty and glory. God’s will is the final explanation for all that happens; God’s glory is the ultimate purpose that all creation serves. In his infinite power, God brought the world into existence in order to fulfill his purposes and display his glory. Since his sovereign will is irresistible, whatever he dictates comes to pass and every event plays its role in his grand design. Nothing can thwart or hinder the accomplishment of his purposes. God’s relation to the world is thus one of mastery and control.²¹

Traditionally, orthodox Christianity affirms that God is infinite in His attributes, and in reference to His knowledge, He knows all things actual and contingent. In other words, God knows exhaustively all things past, present, and future, to include the free choices of moral agents.

2. *Open Theism.* Open theism is a theological position that attempts to resolve the tension between man’s free will, God’s omniscience, and the nature of the future. Open theism is a model that insists that true human freedom requires that God cannot know in advance human choices and actions. Since the future does not yet exist then logically God cannot even know it. Choices made by human beings work with God to bring about future realities. Before going any further, let us look at the seven basic tenets of open theism:

1. God’s greatest attribute is love

- This interpretive hermeneutical center elevates love above all other divine attributes
- Since God loves everyone and wants everyone to be saved, He mourns over their loss

2. Man’s free will is truly free in the libertarian sense

- Man’s free will is not restricted by his sinful nature; he is equally able to make choices between different options
- Compatibilist free will states that a person is restricted and affected by his nature, and this fallen nature not only affects his free will choices, but also limits his ability to equally choose among different options

3. God does not know the future

- According to Clark Pinnock – God limits Himself (His sovereignty and knowledge) because if God knew the future choices of man, those choices would no longer be free
- According to Gregory Boyd – part of the future can be known because God has settled it as such, and part of the future is unknown because God has left that part open to possibilities

²⁰ Ibid., 116.

²¹ Richard Rice, “Biblical Support for a New Perspective” in *The Openness of God*, 11.

4. God takes risks

- *(It follows that since God does not know the future exhaustively)* God must take risks with people whose future free will choices are unknowable
- The future is shaped by human choices

5. God learns

- *(It follows that since God does not know the future exhaustively)* God learns as the realities of the future occur
- Pinnock states, “We should try to learn as God learns.”²²

6. God makes mistakes

- *(It follows that since God does not know the future exhaustively)* God makes mistakes because He is dealing with creatures who make free choices that are unknown to Him
- God can be mistaken in His learning just like any risk-taker; thus, God can make future mistakes just like any human being

7. God changes His mind

- *(It follows that since God does not know the future exhaustively)* God changes His mind on issues depending on what He learns and what He discovers people do
- God changes His mind because something surprises Him or catches Him off guard that He did not plan for or expect

We will not be able to address every tenet raised here. Rather, we will need to restrict our focus to the nature of God’s knowledge (past, present, and future) and man’s freedom.

Open theists claim that God does not know future contingents²³ because it is logically impossible to know events which do not yet exist. Clark Pinnock offers a succinct summary of the key principles, doctrinal commitments, and values of open theism:

In this book we are advancing the . . . open view of God. Our understanding of the Scriptures leads us to depict God, the sovereign Creator, as voluntarily bringing into existence a world with significantly free personal agents in it, agents who can respond positively to God or reject his plans for them. In line with the decision to make this kind of world, God rules in such a way as to uphold the created structures and, because he gives liberty to his creatures, is happy to accept the future as open, not closed, and a relationship with the world that is dynamic, not static. We believe that the Bible presents an open view of God as living and active, involved in history, relating to us and changing in relation to us. We see the universe as a context in which there are real choices, alternatives and surprises. God’s openness means that God is open to the changing realities of history, that God cares about us and lets what we do impact him. Our lives make a difference to God—they are truly significant. God is delighted when we trust him and saddened when we rebel against him. God made us significant creatures and treats us as such.²⁴

The “open view of God” terminology intends to set forth the idea that God is open to the possibilities of the future. In other words, God’s understanding (just like human understanding) is contingent upon future human *and* divine choices and actions. God does not know all future events with certainty because they have not yet happened. Greg Boyd puts it this way:

²² Pinnock, “Systematic Theology” in *The Openness of God*, 124.

²³ “Future contingents” are events that are not causally determined by present events. In other words, these are future free human decisions.

²⁴ Pinnock, “Systematic Theology” in *The Openness of God*, 103-4.

In any event, the distinctive aspect of my approach is that I regard both motifs [future determinism and future openness] to be equally descriptive of the way God and the future actually are. On this basis, I arrive at the conclusion that the future is to some degree *settled* and known by God as such, and to some degree *open* and known by God as such. To some extent, God knows the future as *definitely* this way and *definitely* not that way. Some extent, however, he knows it as *possibly* this way and *possibly* not that way.

This is the “open view of God” or, as I prefer, the “open view of the future.” It does not hold that the future is wide open. Much of it, open theists concede, is settled ahead of time, either by God’s predestining will or by existing earthly causes, but it is not *exhaustively* settled ahead of time. To whatever degree the future is yet open to be decided, it is unsettled. To this extent, God knows it as a realm of possibilities, not certainties.²⁵

According to Boyd, open theists affirm God’s omniscience, but they object to the notion that the divine omniscience includes comprehensive knowledge of the future. Generally speaking, omniscience is the doctrine that God knows all that can be known or is knowable. Open theists, however, define omniscience as God’s comprehensive knowledge of the past and present only. All future events that are not determined by God (to include *all* future free choices and actions) have not happened, and hence, are unreal, and therefore are not objects of knowledge. An undetermined future is logically unknowable even by God, and therefore such an unknowable future does not count against God’s omniscience. “If God does not foreknow future free actions, it is not because his knowledge of the future is in any sense incomplete. It’s because there is, in this view, *nothing definite there for God to know!*”²⁶

In an attempt to resolve the ongoing Calvinism/Arminianism debate and the practical implications of the Christian life (e.g., the existence of good and evil, suffering, prayer), open theists have opted for a third view called open theism. Unfortunately, unlike Calvinism and Arminianism, open theism attacks the very nature of God, namely His omniscience and omnipotence. We will address these issues more fully below when we look at the various passages claimed to support the open view position. But before going on to the biblical basis for refuting open theism, I want to take a look at the required road one must journey in order to get to open theism. The voyage is entitled “The ‘Possible’ Journey to an ‘Unknowable’ Future.”²⁷ Along this journey, there are three forks that must be successfully negotiated in order to arrive at an unknowable future full of possibilities, a future that is determined by the cooperation between the human and divine will.

IV. THE ‘POSSIBLE’ JOURNEY TO AN ‘UNKNOWABLE’ FUTURE

A careful reading of what has already been said above by openness theologians reveals that there are four crucial background assumptions in the areas of philosophy and philosophical theology which are made in the standard argument for open theism. Each assumption must be true in order for the argument to be sound: (1) Time is dynamic, not static; (2) God is temporal, not timeless; (3) Human free will is libertarian, not compatibilist, in nature; (4) God’s complete

²⁵ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 15. (emphasis in original).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 16 (emphasis in original).

²⁷ I am indebted to my professor Dr. Garry DeWeese, Talbot School of Theology, for his class *God, Time, and Foreknowledge*, and for sharing his paper with me, “Forks on the Road to Openness.” I will be closely following his development of this journey.

foreknowledge makes libertarian freedom impossible. Each fork must be positively affirmed for the argument for open theism to advance. In this paper, I will argue that even if one grants that the first three assumptions are true, open theology is not established. I will further argue that the fourth assumption is false, and so the standard argument for openness is unsound.

1. *Time is dynamic, not static.* With the significant advancements in physics, mathematics, and space technologies, considerable attention has been given to the nature of time in the last century, particularly the development of the Special Theory of Relativity and Quantum Mechanics. With scholastic specialization being what it is, these disciplines remain relatively unknown and unexplored by theologians and biblical scholars. Even more rare is the pastor who is familiar with recent developments in philosophy of time. Therefore, I have laid out some key distinctions.

First, let us distinguish between three kinds of time: psychological, physical, and metaphysical. *Psychological* time refers to the individual conscious experience of the passage of time. Sometimes it seems that different individuals, or even an individual himself, experiences the passage of time at different rates. For example, while someone in church is soaking up the sermon wishing it would go on for hours, another person thinks it already has gone on for hours. Despite their individual *experiences* of time, they both arrive at the end of the sermon at the same *time!* Thus, the subjective experience of time is of no help to the nature of time.

Physical time, otherwise known as *measured* or *clock* time, is the most familiar to us because it refers to the time in any temporal world where the laws of nature allow for the measurement of time by means of a physical clock. The measurement of time requires a clock appropriate to the laws of nature of that particular world. Einstein's STR predicts that a particular clock would be affected by acceleration and gravity according to the laws of nature that govern the actual universe. This means that measurements of time would be relative to a local reference frame, and observations of these temporal processes might differ from one local reference to another. Einstein's STR has been thoroughly tested and the predictions have been confirmed empirically.

So how does the measurement of time advance our understanding of the nature of time? Stated differently, is time an operational concept? This is a controversial question and is often rejected outright. Philosophers generally argue for the concept of metaphysical time.

Metaphysical time consists in the succession of moments (events) through which concrete objects persist. Since metaphysical time grounds all other kinds of time we must ask two questions. First, does God experience succession (at least in His mental states)? If He does, then it is fair to say that metaphysical time is equivalent to God's time? Second, does this time have a metric? The answer to the second question is not necessary to our discussion so it will be left unanswered.

Observing these distinctions would alleviate much confusion that surrounds God's relation to time. Much needless and erroneous conclusions result from not observing the distinctions between physical and metaphysical time, and from assuming the deductions made from the measurements of physical time according to STR necessarily reflect the nature of metaphysical time also.

Around 500 B.C. Heraclitus wrote the following:

Everything flows and nothing abides; everything gives way and nothing stays fixed.
 You cannot step twice into the same river, for other waters and yet others, go flowing on.
 Time is a child, moving counters in a game; the royal power is a child's.²⁸

Heraclitus held to a temporal view. In other words, time flows and is not static. The basis of life is transience because the things that exist in the present do not abide but eventually slip into the past and non-existence. Just a generation or so later the Greek Philosopher Parmenides wrote in direct opposition:

There remains, then, but one word by which to express the [true] road: Is. And on this road there are many signs that What Is has no beginning and never will be destroyed: it is whole, still, and without end. It neither was nor will be, it simply is—now, altogether, one, continuous...²⁹

Contrary to Heraclitus, Parmenides held to a static view of time. The basis of life is permanence in which distinct terms like past, present, and future are indissoluble. For Parmenides, the phenomena of movement and change are simply appearances of a static, eternal reality.

J.M.E. McTaggart categorizes the two theories of time: “A-Theory” and “B-Theory.” A-theory states that time is called *dynamic* or *tensed* time; it is ordered by the succession of moments or determinations of past, present, and future. Essentially, time flows. B-theory states that time is *static*, *block*, or *tenseless*; it is ordered in relations of earlier than, simultaneous with, and later than. The line of demarcation between these two theories can be understood ontologically or semantically. Semantically, A-theorists believe that statements about time are essentially tensed while B-theorists believe they are essentially tenseless. Ontologically, A-theorists assert that God has divine relations with His temporal creation.³⁰ Because God is dynamically related to a changing world, God goes through an extrinsic (external) change called temporal becoming³¹ which B-theorists deny.³²

Here is the first fork in the road to openness: Is time A-theoretic (dynamic and tensed), or is it B-theoretic (static and tenseless)? If time is static, then the future exists with the same ontological status as the present and past and open theism must be immediately denied. If time is static, then

²⁸ Heraclitus; n.p. [cited 25 February 2006]. Online: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/spacetime-bebecome/>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ This is clearly seen in the Creation account when God brought the cosmos into being, set forth the lights to govern the day and night, and commanded man to rule over the earthly creatures and vegetation (Gen 1-2). Through salvation history God engaged with His people (Adam, Abraham, Moses, the Hebrew nation, David, the Prophets), and ultimately became flesh in Messiah Jesus (John 1:1, 14), and commissioned His disciples to become disciple-makers until His return (Mt 28:18-20).

³¹ Temporal becoming can be thought to consist in the occurring now of formerly future events, and the subsequent belonging to the past of these events.

³² A timeless God could have no idea of tensed facts. That time flows and is not static is evidenced by the fact that the present world is far different than the Garden of Eden, or from the time when the Egyptians and the Romans ruled the world before Columbus had yet to set sail for the West Indies. Given that we live in a temporal world where today is different than yesterday and tomorrow different still, it is difficult to conceive of a personal God having real relations with temporal creatures if this God does not distinguish, for example, the occurrence of the first Olympiad in Olympia, Greece (c. 8th century B.C.) from the occurrence of the Winter Olympics in Torino, Italy (2006).

the future is “there” to know both for God and for man. This inherently implies some form of fatalism or determinism. Therefore, time must be dynamic and tensed for openness to be possible.³³

Which fork do evangelicals take? The arguments on both sides of the issue are sophisticated, subtle, and beyond the scope of this paper. The lexical stock of Hebrew and Greek words for time and the corresponding passages do not yield with any certainty *the* biblical view. James Barr concludes his study of the biblical words for time (and various attempts to derive philosophical and theological conclusions from them) by observing, “The position here developed means in effect that if such a thing as a Christian doctrine of time has to be developed, the work of discussing and developing it must belong not to biblical but to philosophical theology.”³⁴ I concur with Barr that there is no univocal biblical view of time and eternity so there is legitimate room for disagreement.

2. *God is temporal, not timeless.* Over the past two millennia the idea that God is timeless has been the dominant view of the church. In this classical Christian view God exists timelessly eternally. Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354-430) clearly articulated this view:

How could these countless ages have elapsed when you, the Creator, in whom all ages have their origin, had not yet created them? What time could there have been that was not created by you? How could time elapse if it never was? . . . Furthermore, although you are before time, it is not in time that you precede it. If this were so, you would not be before all time. It is in eternity, which is supreme over time because it is a never-ending present, that you are at once before all past time and after all future time. . . . Your years are completely present to you all at once, because they are at a permanent standstill. They do not move on, forced to give way before the advance of others, because they never pass at all (*Conf.* XI.13).

The essence of the timeless view is that God possesses the whole of His life together. As Creator God is separate from His creation and is not subject to the vicissitudes of temporal passage. The most famous expression of divine immutability comes from Boethius (c. 480-524):

It is the common judgment, then, of all creatures that live by reason that God is eternal. So let us consider the nature of eternity, for this will make clear to us both the nature of God and his manner of knowing. Eternity, then, is the complete, simultaneous and perfect possession of everlasting life (*The Consolation of Philosophy*, V, 5.6.).

The appeal of viewing God as timeless is that God does not change. It is generally recognized that these assumptions stem largely from Neoplatonic metaphysics rather than theological and exegetical argument.³⁵

But if God does not change,³⁶ how does mankind have a real relationship with Him? Does not the personhood of God – if personhood is in any sense analogous to our understanding – imply

³³ However, just because time is dynamic (A-theoretic) does not mean that the future cannot be known.

³⁴ James Barr, *Biblical Words for Time* (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1962), 149.

³⁵ Immutability is the doctrine that God does not change (1 Sam 15:29; Num 23:19; Mal 3:6; Jas 3:17), but this does not mean the biblical authors were not speaking of God’s unchangeableness in the Aristotelian sense. Rather, they were speaking of God’s unchanging character.

³⁶ “Change” does not impugn God’s perfection or His immutable attributes. Let us grant for a moment that God existed timelessly before creation. The question becomes, “At the moment of creation, can God remain unchanged by the creation of a temporal world?” To say “yes” is highly problematic for at the moment of creation, God now stands in relation to something he did not stand *sans* (“before”) creation. Does God remain unchanged?

that God has dynamic relationships with His temporal creatures?³⁷ And dynamic relationships mean that persons experience real emotions, and real emotions consist of a succession of moments from one state of being to another. The argument is as follows:

1. God is creatively active in the temporal world.
2. If God is creatively active in the temporal world, God is really related to the temporal world.
3. If God is really related to the temporal world, God is temporal.
4. Therefore, God is temporal.

The objection that God experiences emotions and enters into real relationships with His temporal creatures is that this somehow places God “in time.” This begs the question for the static B-theory of time because on the dynamic A-theory, time is not spatialized. That is, since God is Spirit, He does not have properties of spatial dimension yet He is spatially present at every point. God is not constrained by spatial locution because a spirit does not occupy space. God can be present at every point because He is not limited by the occupation of spatial points which define the surface of an object.³⁸ Time is not something that God can be “in” like humans. A way of looking at God’s relationship to time is to view Him as omnitemporal.

Omnitemporality defines God’s temporal existence in reference to metaphysical time not physical time. Since time flows dynamically, there must be an intersection between the ‘now’ of God’s metaphysical time and the present moment of any and all possible physical time experienced by finite creatures. Garrett DeWeese explains the concept of an omnitemporal God:

- An omnispatial being is one that is present to every actual point in space, without thereby being located in physical space
- An omnitemporal being is one that is present to every actual moment of time, without thereby being located in physical time³⁹

To say that since God dynamically relates to His temporal creatures somehow makes God “subject to” or “a prisoner of time” misunderstands the claim. We might as well also assert that since God is Spirit, He is somehow “a prisoner of spirit.” Just as being a spirit is a mode of God’s being, so too is God being temporal a mode of His being.

We can distinguish between two different kinds of change: intrinsic and extrinsic. An *intrinsic* change is a non-relational change involving only the subject. For example a chameleon changes its skin from green to brown. An *extrinsic* change is a relational change involving something else to which the subject changes. For example, there was a time when I was shorter than my mom and she was taller than me. Now she is shorter than me, but she has not undergone any intrinsic change. I have gone through a change: I grew taller. Divine timelessness or simplicity requires that God undergoes neither intrinsic nor extrinsic change. Temporal relationships do not necessitate an internal (vertical) change in God, but God at least undergoes an external (horizontal) change with the temporal events that occur in a world of tensed-facts that measures time dynamically (or flowing) and not statically (or unchanging).

³⁷ Even before creation the Godhead had dynamic interrelations in their very subsistence (*emperichoresis*).

³⁸ For a thorough discussion of God and time, see Garrett J. DeWeese, *God and the Nature of Time* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004), or William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001).

³⁹ DeWeese, *God and the Nature of Time*, 240.

Here is the second fork in the road to openness: Is God timeless or temporal? If God is timeless – He does not experience succession in His life – then there can be no change at all in God. According to B-theory time is static and God is timeless. Therefore all eternity is before God in one ‘timeless now.’ Only if God is temporal can time be regarded as dynamic. To opt for a timeless God and static time rules out openness theology because then there would be no future for God not to know about, and therefore God does not take risks, learn, or make mistakes regarding a possible future.

3. *Human free will is libertarian, not compatibilist.* Libertarianism is the concept of free will that the future is not determined by any antecedent causes (e.g., God’s foreknowledge or foreordination). A moral agent is free as long as, for whatever choice he makes, he could have chosen differently. That is, in any given identical situation, the agent is free so long as he could have chosen options A, B, C, . . . *ad infinitum*. In other words, creatures are only truly free if they make choices without any internal or external influence.

Compatibilism is the concept that moral agents make free choices but only according to their nature and are not free to choose otherwise (in the libertarian sense). Every human action (e.g., raising your hand, yawning, snapping your fingers) is causally necessitated by events that obtained prior to the actions, even prior to the person’s own existence. In other words, all human actions are mere “happenings” because they are parts of causal chains of events that led up to them in a deterministic fashion. The compatibilist maintains that humans have free will because they make choices according to their beliefs, desires, and character. For the compatibilist, genuine freedom is compatible with certain kinds of determinism so long as the deterministic causal chain runs through the agent’s conscious mind.

Open theists assert that genuine freedom is incompatible with foreknowledge because they assume that foreknowledge entails determinism: if God knows the decision or action before it is actually made, then the person making the choice or action is not truly free. If Christians are to be genuine worshipers of God, then we must be free in the libertarian sense to freely choose to worship God or to reject Him.

Here is the third fork in the road to openness: Is freedom in the libertarian or compatibilist sense? Openness mandates the libertarian sense. The first three forks are logically successive: time must be dynamic if God is to be temporal, and human freedom can be libertarian only if both time is dynamic and God is temporal. These three are necessary choices to arrive at the fourth fork: the question of foreknowledge and human freedom.

4. *God’s complete foreknowledge makes libertarian freedom impossible.* One of the main tenets of openness theology is the rejection that God’s knowledge includes future free actions. Since the future does not yet exist, God cannot logically know it.⁴⁰ If God knows the future, moral agents are not free in the libertarian sense. This assumption is known as the “Fatalist Dilemma”:

1. What God infallibly knows is unalterable.

⁴⁰ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 16. He continues, “If God does not foreknow future free actions, it is not because his knowledge of the future is in any sense incomplete. It’s because there is, in this view, *nothing definite there for God to know!*” (emphasis in original).

2. God's foreknowledge of my actions tomorrow is infallible.
3. Therefore, my actions tomorrow are unalterable.
4. What is unalterable is not free (in the libertarian sense).
5. Therefore, my actions tomorrow are not free (in the libertarian sense).

What the doctrine of fatalism teaches is that everything we do we do necessarily. For example:

1. Necessarily if God foreknows x , then x will happen.
2. God foreknows x .
3. Therefore, x will necessarily happen.

This is a fallacious argument because what follows from (1) and (2) is not (3) but (3'):

- 3.' Therefore, x will happen.

It is unjustified to assert that x will *necessarily* (or must) happen.⁴¹ Rather, it is the case that x will happen. The fallacy is transferring the necessity of the inference to the conclusion. This point is easily illustrated:⁴²

1. Necessarily if Jones is a bachelor, Jones is unmarried.
2. Jones is a bachelor.
3. Therefore, Jones is necessarily unmarried.

Clearly Jones is not *necessarily* (that is, he *must be*) unmarried. He just *is* unmarried, but he is also perfectly free to be married. The valid form of the argument is as follows:

1. Necessarily if Jones is a bachelor, Jones is unmarried.
2. Jones is a bachelor.
3. Therefore, Jones is unmarried.

This valid form of the argument shows that Jones is free to remain a bachelor or to be married. Just because God foreknows x , it does not follow that x *must* happen, only that it *will* happen. A simple definition of God's omniscience is "for any person S, S is omniscient if and only if S knows every true proposition and believes no false proposition."⁴³ Furthermore, it is possible that event x would fail to happen. If this were true – that x would fail to happen – then God would know this too because God knows all true propositions (i.e., it is true that x *will fail to happen*). Agents are free to either act or refrain; whichever they choose, God will have foreknown that choice.

Since open theologians recognize the fallaciousness of the argument, they have reformulated the argument as follows:

⁴¹ Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 73.

⁴² I am grateful to Garry DeWeese for this helpful illustration.

⁴³ J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2003), 517.

1. Necessarily, if God foreknows x , then x will happen.
- 2.* Necessarily, God foreknows x .
3. Therefore, x will necessarily happen.

From two necessary premises, a necessary conclusion follows. However, 2* seems to be obviously false. Christian theology has always maintained that God freely created the world.⁴⁴ That is, God could have created a different world or not created any world at all. By mandating that God *necessarily* foreknows any event x implies that God could have created only one possible world;⁴⁵ in other words, the premise denies divine freedom. The second premise restricts God's knowledge (and therefore His power and freedom) to only one possible world that He had to create.

V. THE BASIS FOR DIVINE FOREKNOWLEDGE OF FUTURE CONTINGENTS

Open theists assert that since future events do not yet exist, they cannot be known by God. The argument looks like this:

1. Only events which actually exist can be known by God.
2. Future events do not exist.
3. Therefore, future events cannot be known by God.

For our purposes, we will assume that premise (2) is true and not address the serious theological and philosophical objections to the view that God transcends the four-dimensional space-time continuum. Again, according to the A-theoretic, time is constituted by the causal succession of states of affairs, time is dynamic and flowing, and God is omnitemporal and experiences succession of mental states.

There are two models for understanding divine cognition (i.e., "how God knows"): the *perceptualist* model and the *conceptualist* (or rationalist) model.⁴⁶ On the perceptualist model, divine knowledge of the future is analogous to our human sense of perception. That is, God "looks" and "sees" what lies in the future. Yet this divine "foreseeing" is seriously flawed since there is nothing there [in the future] to perceive.

On the other hand, on the conceptualist model, God's knowledge is not acquired. Rather, His knowledge is innate, or is self-contained as part of God's mind. "As an omniscient being, God has essentially the property of knowing all truths; there are truths about future events; therefore, God knows all truths concerning future events."⁴⁷ It would be false to think that a perfect being *acquires* information the way an ordinary human being does. The greatest conceivable perfect being simply possesses essential knowledge of all truths which entails future contingent propositions. Fatalism, which is logically fallacious, is the root underlying openness theology.

⁴⁴ Pinnock, "Systematic Theology" in *The Openness of God*, 103.

⁴⁵ William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001), 259.

⁴⁶ Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 521.

⁴⁷ Craig, *What Does God Know?*, 39.

Since time is dynamic and God is temporal, this standard account entails that if there are future tensed truths, God must know these propositions. In the Ontological Argument for God's existence, Anselm (1033-1109) argued that the notion of the "greatest conceivable being" necessitates that that person actually exist since if it did not, it would not be the greatest conceivable being (*Proslogium* 2-3). Alvin Plantinga's conception of God is a being that is "maximally excellent" where "maximal excellence" entails such excellent-making properties as omniscience, omnipotence, and moral perfection.⁴⁸

Anselm's argument of the "greatest conceivable being" implies omniscience, for a perfect being must be all-knowing since it is obvious that ignorance is an imperfection. For example, the fact that I know less than Drs. DeWeese, Moreland, and Craig emphasizes their *greater* knowledge over my *lesser* knowledge. However, regardless of how great the minds of these doctors are, they are still finite human beings and therefore limited in knowledge. On the other hand, God is infinite, the "greatest conceivable being" who is perfect in knowledge and power. In "perfection" there are no degrees of measurement; that is, there are no "more perfect" measures or "less perfect" measures. To be "perfect" is that which nothing greater exists or can be conceived. If God is the perfect being then it follows that if there are truth propositions about future contingents, God must know them. The premises are as follows:⁴⁹

1. God is a perfect being.
2. Any being which is perfect is omniscient.
3. An omniscient being knows all truths.
4. There are truths about future contingents.
5. Therefore, God is omniscient. (from 1, 2)
6. Therefore, God knows all truths. (from 3, 5)
7. Therefore, God knows all truths about future contingents. (from 4, 6)

Prima facie premises (1) and (2) seem to be indisputable because an imperfect being is not worthy of worship and adoration. Therefore openness theologians marshal their attacks on premise (3) or (4). Regarding premise (3), to be omniscient simply means to know only and all truths. Denial of (3) requires a different definition of omniscience (as stipulated above). Openness theology says that God has perfect or exhaustive knowledge of the *past* and *present*, but since the future does not yet exist, logically even God does not have knowledge of it. Since open theists like Greg Boyd affirm divine omniscience but deny that God knows future contingents, they must hold that such [future] propositions are not true. If such propositions are true, then the openness view undermines omniscience.

A *proposition* is the information content of a declarative statement. The information conveyed by a sentence is its *truth value*, and a truth value can be either *true* or *false*. According to the Principle of Bivalence, for any proposition *p*, *p* is either true or false. Propositions can either be true or false depending on whether they express true information or not. Propositions have their truth value either necessarily or contingently. If a proposition has its truth value necessarily, then it is impossible for it to have the opposite truth value. For example, "human beings breathe

⁴⁸ Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 496

⁴⁹ William Lane Craig, *What Does God Know? Reconciling Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Norcross, Georgia: Ravi Zacharias Ministries, 2002), 18-19.

oxygen” seems to be necessarily true, and “the sun is both hot and cold” is necessarily false. On the other hand, propositions which can have opposite truth values have their truth values only contingently. For example, “George W. Bush *won* the 2004 Presidential election” is only contingently true. He could have lost. But since the proposition is in the past tense, the proposition is only true *after* the 2004 election. What was true prior to the election was the future tense proposition “George W. Bush *will win* the 2004 Presidential election.” When he won the election, the propositions switched truth values. The future tense [“he will win”] switched from true to false, and the past tense [“he won”] switched from false to true. Thus, the passage of time affects the truth value of tensed propositions.

Propositions are the objects of belief and knowledge. Christians *believe* in Christ as the risen Savior because the Bible avers that the *knowledge* of the Resurrection is true (Ac 2:22-24; 1 Cor 15:1-8; cf. Jn 20:24-31). While not all beliefs are true, false propositions and true propositions can both be believed. Sometimes people believe false propositions (e.g., the world is flat), but knowledge entails true belief. Therefore, “to know something” means that what you “know” is *true* not false. It follows that only true propositions can be objects of knowledge.

Regarding premise (4), openness theologians must deny that any future-tense, contingent propositions have the truth value of *true*. They argue that since the future does not yet exist, any proposition regarding the future is neither true nor false; rather, all future propositions are undetermined. Because the future is open, it is logically impossible for God to know the future decisions of free agents. Thus, open theologians have redefined God’s omniscience as such that God knows all propositions that are logically possible to know.⁵⁰

In looking at these claims, William Lane Craig says that there is no good reason to deny the truth or falsity of future-tense statements.

Why should we accept the view that future-tense statements about free acts, statements which we use all the time in ordinary conversation, are in fact neither true nor false? . . . About the only answer given to this question goes something like this: Future events, unlike present events, do not exist. That is to say, the future is not “out there,” somewhere.⁵¹

Craig answers this charge by showing that statements dealing in past-tense events can be and are considered true or false even though those events of the past, like those of the future, do not exist in our present reality.

For example, [the statement] “Reagan won the 1980 presidential election” is true if and only if Reagan won the 1980 presidential election. For this statement to be true, the election cannot be happening now; the tense of the statement requires that the event described happened before the statement became true. Long after the election is over, indeed long after Reagan has ceased to exist, this past-tense statement will still be true. For the statement to be true it is not required that what it describes exist, but only that it *have* existed. All that is necessary is that in 1980 the present-tense statement “Reagan wins the presidential election” was true.⁵²

⁵⁰ William Hasker, “A Philosophical Perspective,” in *The Openness of God*, 136.

⁵¹ Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 55-56.

⁵² *Ibid*, 56-57.

Similarly, the future-tense statement “a woman will win the 2008 presidential election” is true if and only if a woman will win the 2008 presidential election. For the statement to be true it is not required that the election somehow exist, but that it *will* exist. The concept of truth as correspondence requiring that events described (whether past or future) must exist at the time the statement is made is a misunderstanding. Future-tense statements are true if the matters described turn out to be true, and false if the matters described fail to turn out as predicted.

The same facts that make present and past tense propositions true or false also guarantee the truth or falsity of future tense propositions. Let me give a personal example regarding this paper. There is no reason why the following propositions should be given a different truth status merely based on their temporal perspective:

1. [stated on February 24th]: “I *will* finish this paper *tomorrow*” (this is an undetermined truth value for the open theist).
2. [stated on February 26th]: “I *finished* my paper *yesterday*” (this statement is true based on the *fact* that I did turn in my paper on February 25th).

The *same fact* that I finished my paper on February 25th grounds both the future-tensed statement (1) “I *will* finish my paper *tomorrow*” and the past-tensed statement (2) “I *finished* my paper *yesterday*.” Accordingly, the fact that the paper would be finished on February 25th should not be regarded as any less true because the statement is made *before* the event than the statement made *after* the event. Thus, there is no good reason to think that future-tense propositions about free acts cannot have the truth value: *true* or *false*.

Moreover, what has the openness definition gained? What is the difference between *a truth* and *a truth which is logically possible to know*? Can adherents of open theism give an example of a proposition that could be true but logically impossible to know? There are some statements that come to mind, like “Nothing exists” or “All persons have ceased to exist.” But even if these statements were true, they could not possibly be known to be true. However, as Craig notes, according to traditional theism these propositions are necessarily false since God is a personal being whose non-existence is impossible.⁵³ Moreover, revisionists claim that if God knows future contingents, then they are necessarily true and not contingently true. This is an assertion of theological fatalism – a doctrine which holds that if God knows future-tense proposition *m*, then *m* is necessarily true. Even if this argument is true, it does not follow that future contingents are logically impossible for God to know.

Conclusion

My own conclusions to the first two forks are obvious: I believe that time is dynamic and that God is temporal (or more aptly, God is omnitemporal). The third fork is tricky because before I became a Christian, I assumed that I was free in the libertarian sense. But the Bible tells me that I was a slave to sin (Rom 6:17-18) and that my freedom was bought at a price. By God’s grace and mercy, He did something for me that I could not freely choose to do for myself (1 Cor 6:19-20; Eph 2:8-10). It seems that the Bible puts forth a robust case for compatibilism because as a slave to sin I was not free (in the libertarian sense) to even seek God (Rom 3:10-12).

⁵³ Craig, *What Does God Know?*, 23.

Becoming a Christian entails some type of emancipation from bondage (Jn 8:31-36). Philosophical theology presents sufficient and satisfying reasons to maintain that divine foreknowledge (the fourth fork) does not nullify libertarian freedom (the third fork). This position is known as Molinism or Middle knowledge.⁵⁴

VI. MOLINISM: THE DOCTRINE OF MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE

Christian theologians who hold to divine foreknowledge affirm that God possesses hypothetical knowledge of future contingents. Hypothetical knowledge is otherwise known as counterfactuals (conditional statements in the subjunctive mood). For example, “If I were rich, I would buy a Lamborghini Countach.” Generally the counterfactual antecedent (“if...”) is false (I am not rich) therefore the consequent (“then...”) is false (I do not buy my dream car). But sometimes the antecedent and consequent are true. For example, my friend told me, “If you were to ask her [Stephanie] to marry you, she would say ‘yes’.” (Well, I did ask Stephanie and she accepted and now we have two children.) Counterfactuals comprise a significant amount of our daily expressions: If I were to work-out this morning, then...; If my baby were to cry in the middle of the night, then...; If I didn’t get this paper done, then... Life and death situations are made like this everyday: If I were to pull out into traffic then I would crash.

Christian philosophers and theologians have historically affirmed that God possesses true counterfactual knowledge.⁵⁵ The question here is *when* did God possess this hypothetical knowledge? Contrary to open theology, an omniscient God never exists in a state of ignorance. Therefore, the “when” of middle knowledge refers to the logical order at which God had hypothetical knowledge concerning the divine decree to create.⁵⁶

Proponents of middle knowledge maintain that there are three logical moments to God’s knowledge. This needs explaining. Temporarily speaking (in physical or metric time), there are no distinct moments in God’s knowledge for divine knowledge is perfect and known together all at once. In other words, everything that God knows He knows simultaneously. For our understanding however, it helps to see the structure of God’s knowledge. Logically, there are some aspects of God’s omniscience that occur prior to others. However, in saying that something is logically prior to something else does not mean that it happens prior in temporal time. Rather, logical priority means that something serves to explain something else. In other words, one grounds or provides the basis for the other. This is clearly demonstrated by the structure of a syllogism whereby the two premises precede the conclusion. Although the premises come before the conclusion, all are simultaneously true. This understanding informs the distinction between logical priority and temporal priority. While God’s foreknowledge is chronologically prior to future events, nonetheless the future events are logically prior to divine foreknowledge. That means chronologically, certain future-tense statements are true from the beginning of time and

⁵⁴ While it is not my intention to argue for any particular strand of Calvinism or Arminianism, it is clear that open theology and Molinism fall into the camp of Arminianism.

⁵⁵ Counterfactuals are statements in the subjunctive mood (e.g., “If you were honest you would tell the truth.”). Everyday language consists of *might-counterfactuals* (e.g., “If you were to offer me a job, I *might* take it.”) and *would-counterfactuals* (e.g., “If you were to offer me one million dollars, I *would* take it.”). If there are true counterfactuals (i.e., counterfactual knowledge) then necessarily an omniscient God would know them.

⁵⁶ Craig, *What Does God Know?*, 42.

are simultaneously known by God. Eventually, the occurrence of these events will serve to validate the veracity of such antecedents. God foreknows these events because He declared them to be true in His future-tense statements. Thus, these statements are true because the events asserted will occur.

Regarding middle knowledge, the first (1) logical moment is God's *natural knowledge* – God's knowledge of everything that *could* happen. This is God's knowledge of all (metaphysically) necessary truths, including all the possible worlds that He might create. This is the knowledge of what *could* be. This natural knowledge is pre-volitional, meaning it is logically prior to God's decision to create, and is essential to God. The statements made here are true not because God wills them to be true (indeed, this first logical moment precedes any divine decision or decree), but these statements are true by virtue of the nature of God and are independent of His will. By His natural knowledge God knows all possible creatures and situations He could create, and all their possible actions and reactions to any possible situation. God could not lack this knowledge by virtue of being divine; therefore this knowledge is essential to God.

For our purposes, it is easier to see the structure of God's knowledge if we skip ahead to the third (3) logical moment of God's knowledge which is His *free knowledge* – God's knowledge of everything that *will* happen. This is the knowledge of the actual world He created. God's free knowledge follows subsequently to His decree to create one particular world. God's free knowledge of this actual world includes all past, present, and future contingent truths and is post-volitional. Therefore, God has control over which statements are true and which are false in this moment. Now if God had willed to create another world (for example a world in which Alexander the Great did not Hellenize the ancient world, or George Washington was not the first President of the United States), then all true statements would be false, and all false statements true. Therefore, the truthfulness or falsity of any statement is determined by God's sovereign act to create any possible world, an act which occurs prior to His free knowledge. Thus, free knowledge is not essential to God as is His natural knowledge.⁵⁷

Now, between God's (1) *natural knowledge* and (3) *free knowledge* is God's (2) *middle knowledge* – God's knowledge of everything that *would* happen in any appropriately specified set of circumstances. At this logical order or moment of God's divine knowledge, God knows what every possible creature would freely choose (not just *could* choose) in any possible world. For example, in His natural knowledge, God knows what Peter *could* do in any possible situation, but now the second logical moment of His omniscience, God knows what Peter *would* freely choose to do under any given circumstance. This is called "counterfactuals of freedom." Like God's natural knowledge, the content of middle knowledge is pre-volitional; but unlike natural knowledge, middle knowledge is not essential to God.

The Dominican order held that God's hypothetical knowledge is logically *subsequent* to His decree to create a certain world since prior to the decree to create there would be no counterfactual truths to be known. At that logical moment, all God has is His natural knowledge. At this logically prior moment, God knows all possible worlds (e.g., a world where Peter denies Christ only once, or twice, or actually affirms Him; or where Paul was a member of the Twelve). God knows this truth because of what He has decreed; and thus, by creating a certain world, God

⁵⁷ Ibid, 43.

has decreed which counterfactuals are true. Thus, God’s hypothetical knowledge, like His foreknowledge, is subsequent to the divine creative decree. The logical moments are depicted as follows:

Moment 1: Natural Knowledge

Divine Creative Decree

Moment 2: Middle (Hypothetical) Knowledge

Moment 3: Free Knowledge

Charging that the Dominicans had obliterated human freedom, the Jesuit Luis Molina placed God’s hypothetical knowledge prior to the divine decree to create. In so doing, true creaturely freedom is possible because counterfactual truths are exempt from God’s decree. Craig offers an example. The mathematical equation $2+2=4$ is a necessary truth that is prior to and independent of God’s decree to create. In the same way that mathematics is a necessary truth, so are “counterfactual truths about how creatures would freely choose under various circumstances are prior to and independent of God’s decree.”⁵⁸ Thus, on the Molinist scheme we have the following logical order:

Moment 1: ... ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ...

Natural Knowledge: God knows the range of **possible** worlds (what *could* be). The content of this knowledge is essential to God.

Moment 2: ... ○ ○ ○ ○ ...

Middle Knowledge: God knows the range of **feasible** worlds (what *would* be). God’s [hypothetical] knowledge of what every possible free creature would do under any possible set of circumstances and, hence, knowledge of those possible worlds which God can make actual. The content of this knowledge is not essential to God.

Divine Creative Decree – God’s Free Decision to Create a World

Moment 3: ○

Free Knowledge: God knows the **actual** world (what *will* be). The content of this knowledge is not essential to God.

Source: Adapted from Craig’s, *The Only Wise God and What Does God Know?*

The Molinist view does two things: 1) it accounts for human freedom (i.e., free will); 2) it maintains God’s sovereignty over a world in which human beings make real free choices. In other words, fatalism is avoided because human beings are not automatons, and God’s dynamic personal and yet sovereign relationship over His creation is maintained because He engages with mankind as free moral agents. Thus, by God knowing how free agents would freely choose in any circumstance they might be in, God can, by decreeing a certain *possible* world to become the *actual* world, sovereignly bring about His purposes through free creaturely decisions. Thus, God can plan His will to the finest detail without annihilating human freedom because creaturely free choices are already factored into the equation.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 44.

The Defense of Middle Knowledge

The doctrine of middle knowledge serves to explain the basis for the compatibility between divine foreknowledge and human freedom. By His middle knowledge, God has exhaustive knowledge of what each creature will freely do in any and all circumstances. From this knowledge of free creaturely acts, God chooses to actualize a particular world. Thus, middle knowledge provides a plausible way out of the foreknowledge dilemma. Middle knowledge is defended along two lines of reasoning: biblical and theological. After I address these issues, we will look at the philosophical arguments against middle knowledge.

1. *Biblical Arguments for Middle Knowledge.* Craig argues that until modern times, all theologians agreed that God possesses hypothetical knowledge.⁵⁹ One of the biblical passages often cited to support [middle] knowledge of counterfactual truths is First Samuel 23:6-13:

Now it came about, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David at Keilah, that he came down with an ephod in his hand. When it was told Saul that David had come to Keilah, Saul said, "God has delivered him into my hand, for he shut himself in by entering a city with double gates and bars." So Saul summoned all the people for war, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men. Now David knew that Saul was plotting evil against him; so he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here." Then David said, "O Lord God of Israel, Your servant has heard for certain that Saul is seeking to come to Keilah to destroy the city on my account. "Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down just as Your servant has heard? O Lord God of Israel, I pray, tell Your servant." And the Lord said, "He will come down." Then David said, "Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?" And the Lord said, "They will surrender you." Then David and his men, about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah, and they went wherever they could go. When it was told Saul that David had escaped from Keilah, he gave up the pursuit.

For our purposes, this story tells us two things that God knew: 1) that if David *were* to remain in Keilah, then Saul *would* come to get him; and 2) that if Saul *were* to come get David, then the men of the city *would* hand him over. But David, after seeking the knowledge of God, did not stay in the city; subsequently, Saul gave up his pursuit so the men of the city did not deliver up David. Clearly God's answer from the ephod could not be simple foreknowledge, otherwise His predictions would be false. However, if God's answers are based on what *would* happen under certain circumstances, then God's responses were true and evidence the existence of middle [hypothetical] knowledge: what *would* have happened as opposed to what *did* happen.

Another passage comes from Acts 27:21-32 where Paul was aboard a ship during a great storm. Paul gave a prophetic word from the Lord saying "there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship." However, some of the sailors sought to escape. Paul then warned them that "*Unless* these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved" (italics mine). Paul knew that if all things remained the same, all men aboard would be saved. However, if the events were different – i.e., some men tried to escape – then the outcome would be different.⁶⁰ Again, if this was simple foreknowledge, a different outcome would mean the prophecy was false. But if Paul

⁵⁹ Craig, *What Does God Know?*, 45.

⁶⁰ Lenny Esposito, "Predestination and Free Will – Part 6 Middle Knowledge" n.p. [cited 25 May 2004]. Online: <http://www.comereason.org/>.

was declaring what *would* happen under certain circumstances, then this passage also affirms counterfactual knowledge.

2. *Theological Arguments for Middle Knowledge*. Not only does middle knowledge help us understand how God knows what *will* happen, but how God knows what *would* happen under different circumstances. Even more provocative is the Molinist account of *divine providence* – *how an omniscient mind can direct a world of free creatures toward His sovereignly-established ends*.⁶¹ Take a look at the following passages:

“This Man [Jesus], delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death” (Acts 2:23).

“For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur” (Acts 4:27-28).

These two passages overwhelm the reader with the staggering assertion of God’s divine sovereignty over human affairs. The conspiracy of the Jews, the council of the Sanhedrin, the questioning by Pontius Pilate and Herod, etc. are just a few of the things that happened according to God’s foreknowledge and divine plan. Again, if foreknowledge is more than just simple knowledge of the future, then God is able to exercise sovereign control over free agents (e.g., which members of the Sanhedrin and the Jews would conspire against Jesus; that Pilate would release Barabbas instead of Jesus). Knowing all the possible arrangements and scenarios, God actualized a particular possible world so that specific events unfolded according to His sovereignly-established ends.

For openness theologians the above passages are at best quite difficult, and at worst impossible to reconcile with any notion of divine providence. Consider the death of Saul, Israel’s first King, as recorded in First Samuel 31:1-6 and First Chronicles 10:8-12. While both writers recount that Saul took his own life in favor of surrendering to the Philistines, the author of Chronicles adds a stunning and seemingly contradictory statement: “Therefore, the Lord put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse” (1 Chron 10:14b). What possibly can the open theologian say since suicide is a sinful act *against* God and therefore could not be causally determined *by* God.

Consider also the treacherous and deceitful acts of Jacob’s sons against Joseph. How do open theologians explain Joseph’s response: “Do not be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. . . . You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result” (Gen 45:5; 50:20)? Again, evil acts (e.g., treachery and deceit) could not have been caused by God; yet clearly God exercised sovereignty to save Israel from the famine. Apart from the explanation provided by Molinism, the coalescence of human freedom and divine sovereignty is forced to revert to theological determinism, subsequently destroying human freedom, the very thing the open view seeks to preserve.

Philosophical Objections Against Middle Knowledge

⁶¹ Craig, *What Does God Know?*, 47.

There are many objections mounted against Molinism. For example: God cannot know future free actions; middle knowledge reduces to fatalism; counterfactual statements about what a person would have freely done under different circumstances cannot be true. Most of these have already been addressed. The following section focuses on the objection: why would a loving God create people only to damn them to hell?

1. *God's Plan for Salvation.* Christian theism holds that God is all powerful, all knowing, and infinitely loving. Yet the Scriptures teach that salvation is exclusively through Jesus Christ (Ac 4:12) and that God "is not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9). Then why would God create a world in which people reject Him? Should not a loving God create a world in which everyone accepts the original relationship with Himself (i.e., the Garden of Eden where an Adam and Eve would not rebel/sin against God but would forever be faithful to Him)? Or, if rebellion occurs, could God not create a world in which everyone would accept the forgiveness in Jesus Christ? So the assertion should not be stated "*Why does God send anyone to hell?*" but rather "*Why does God not create a world where all people choose Him and are saved?*"

Another way at looking at divine banishment is to understand that God is not *causally* sending anyone to hell. Rather, God ultimately gives people what they always wanted: separation from Him. Therefore, "to be in hell" is to be in a place absolutely removed from God's presence. Simply stated then, hell is the place reserved for people who want absolutely nothing to do with God. People in hell are also free moral agents who consciously chose to reject the righteousness of God and refused to come to Jesus for the forgiveness of sin (Jn 1:12; Mt 7:14; Rom 3:12). Therefore, when God "banishes" someone to hell, He is really just giving them up to their life-long choices of rejecting Him; something overtly demonstrated through their free choices.⁶²

2. *Logical Limitations of God.* The above assertion entails a more sublime assumption: namely that there could exist such a world in which everyone is saved and this world would suit God's purposes.⁶³ However, this is not necessarily so.

A logical fallacy occurs when we misunderstand omnipotence. Omnipotence does not include that which is logically contradictory. For example, to ask if God can make a rock so big that He cannot lift it, or if God can create a square-circle is nonsense. Similarly, omniscience is not impugned for God to not be able to spatially locate a unicorn since a unicorn is not a real creature.

In the same way, it may not be logically possible for God to create a world in which agents who have true creaturely freedom would all choose to be saved (or to remain in harmony with God and not rebel like Adam and Eve). Craig writes, "For God's ability to actualize worlds

⁶² The emphasis of the doctrine of hell is not so much on a physical space as it is a spiritual separation. While the Scriptures do speak of an eternal fire (Mt 25:41), eternal punishment (v.46), conscious punishment (Lk 16:22-24), and a place where the worshipers of the beast find no rest day or night (Rev 14:9-11), the overall tenor of Scripture is that man does not repent from their wickedness and are enemies of God (Rom 1:18-2:16; 5:8; cf. Ac 2:36-41). Enemies of God do not repent, and such unrepentance prevents entrance into the Kingdom of God (Mk 1:15; Ac 2:38; Rev 16:11).

⁶³ Moreland and Craig. *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 622.

containing free creatures will be limited by which counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are true in the moment logically prior to the divine decree.”⁶⁴ Since truly free people have the ability to accept or reject God, there may be no possible world in which everyone freely remains in relationship with God (i.e., the Garden of Eden) or, in the case of rebellion, accepts Christ’s payment for their sin. If this is true, then it is illogical to demand that God make such a world that cannot exist.

Conclusion

It has been shown that the doctrine of divine foreknowledge is biblically supported and philosophically sound. God’s knowledge encompasses both future contingents and conditional future contingents. As the greatest conceivable being, God must know all truths to include future-tense propositions and counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. Any re-definition of omniscience is seriously flawed and actually fails to sustain God’s omniscience and sovereignty. In short, there are no good grounds for rejecting God’s hypothetical knowledge, His knowledge of future free acts of men.

VII. OPEN THEISM’S DENIAL OF DIVINE EXHAUSTIVE FOREKNOWLEDGE, A.K.A.: “DIVINE EXHAUSTIVE IGNORANCE”

In this section we will examine the logical conclusion that stems from openness theology which denies that God has exhaustive foreknowledge. Open theologians assert that God only exhaustively knows the past and present, but not the future; that is, God has no certitude with regard to the future actions of free moral agents. Rather, as open theologians put it, God is like the very best chess player⁶⁵ and the best learner, but He is still apt to make mistakes because the free choices of human beings can surprise Him and contradict His best prognoses.

We need a picture of the magnitude of God’s ignorance as postulated by the view of open theism. The ignorance of God is not something small but gargantuan; it is not something periodic but incessant; it is not narrow in scope but universal; and it is not confined to particulars because it relates to *all* unknown choices made by *all* free moral agents. Let us briefly examine the diversity, universality, and perpetuity of God’s ignorance.

1. *The Diversity of God’s Ignorance.* The totality of man’s existence consisting of his desires, thoughts, or behavior inclines toward a certain course of behavior that, up until the very moment of execution, is something totally unknown to God. In other words, until a woman volitionally chooses to behave a certain way, God is completely ignorant of her acts of mind, emotion, and body. Not one second before does God know the free volitional acts of human beings. But since every free choice of one human being effects the free choices of other human beings, the diversity of ignorance does not end within a single individual, but extends to all humanity. We will look at that in the next.

⁶⁴ William Lane Craig, “‘No Other Name’: A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation through Christ.” *Faith and Philosophy* 6. (1989): 172-88.

⁶⁵ Greg Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 152, writes, “He knows the thoughts and intentions of all individuals perfectly and can play them out in his mind like an infinitely wise chess master anticipating every possible combination of moves his opponent could ever make.”

Now what are the effects of these choices on my personal being? Is it not true that my thoughts, emotions, and attitudes affect the way I live, my free will choices? Thus, from the internal myriad of thoughts, emotions, and attitudes stem the external behavior. And once I behave in a certain way, are not my internal states of affairs now affected?⁶⁶ This potentially endless spiral of internal attitudes continuously affects external behaviors which in-turn affects internal attitudes. Every volitional choice or action either directly or indirectly produces or shapes thoughts and emotions which lead to words and deeds – countless actions about which God is ignorant until they actually happen.

2. *The Universality of God's Ignorance.* The diversity of God's ignorance expounds exponentially when one considers that what is true regarding one human being is true of every human being. If God is ignorant of the thoughts, emotions, attitudes, and actions of one person, He is therefore ignorant of all human choices of all people groups – regardless of race, religion, culture, age, sex, or education – throughout all time.

3. *The Perpetuity of God's Ignorance.* Now, let us recap what we have learned. God is ignorant of all future volitions not only of the individual, but of the whole human race. But God is not just ignorant to the action itself. No, since actions affect thoughts, God cannot know any future action that we might take as a result of a future thought affected by a yet unexecuted action. In other words, God's ignorance of my thoughts, attitudes, emotions, words, and deeds – up to the instant I choose to act – is followed by a continual ignorance of the very next instant of whatever thoughts, attitudes, emotions, words, and deeds may be brought to pass or shaped in-tow of the thoughts or acts just performed. Contrary to open theists, God does not acquire new information that makes Him wise to the moment. Rather, He is barraged moment-by-moment with uncertain and useless information which in no way enlightens Him to the actual choices that free-will creatures will make the very next moment.

For example, take the everyday scenario of driving on a two-lane road. A man driving his car, in order to avoid something in the road, decides to swerve into the next lane of oncoming traffic. Now God did not know for certain that this would happen; He only knew that it was possible. According to open theism, unless God determined this swerve, God only discovered or learned that the man would swerve the instant he turned his car into oncoming traffic. Here are some of the dilemmas in this situation. There is an oncoming car in the lane the man swerved into. Will the man swerve back into his own lane in time to avoid the oncoming car? Will the oncoming car swerve onto the shoulder or into the now open lane (left by the first driver) and then swerve back? What if God causes the oncoming car to swerve into the open lane and the man in the first car decides to swerve back? All of these decisions are unknown to God up until the point they are made. This is the tremendous ignorance of God. The question is: is this the God of the Bible? Next we will take a look at the biblical evidence for and against God's divine foreknowledge.

VIII. A CRITIQUE OF OPEN THEISM'S "DIVINE EXHAUSTIVE IGNORANCE":

⁶⁶ Think on this for a moment. As a child I was taught that lying is wrong; therefore my own thoughts, emotions, and attitudes were conditioned to believe that lying is wrong. But once I lie, are my internal states of affairs confirmed or denied? If confirmed, I most likely will not lie again. But if denied, I might lie again and thus effectually change how I once thought about lying. Now what if something serious happens to change the way I think about lying (say I get arrested)? The point is: along this journey, God is ignorant of all these choices.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE BIBLICAL EVIDENCE FOR DIVINE EXHAUSTIVE FOREKNOWLEDGE

In this section we will further investigate the major tenet that separates open theism from classical theism: the denial of exhaustive divine foreknowledge. Greg Boyd resolves the problem of foreknowledge by asserting that God *can* know the events that *he has determined*, but all that He *does not determine*, however, *cannot be known* by Him.⁶⁷ Open theists insist that when the Scriptures speak about God's interactions with mankind, *the language about His interactions should be taken literally, not anthropomorphically*, for this is how classical theists understand the Scriptures that speak of God's sovereignty. However, when the Scriptures speak of God's possible knowledge of the future, these texts are rejected as literal by classical theists in favor of a figurative interpretation:

The classical view of divine foreknowledge interprets the first motif as speaking about God *as he truly is* and the second motif as speaking about God only as he *appears to be* or as *figures of speech*. In other words, whenever the Bible suggests that God knows and/or controls the future, this is taken literally. Whenever it suggests that God knows the future in terms of possibilities, however, this is not taken literally.⁶⁸

According to Boyd, the mistake of classical theism is the assumption that the future is already settled: "If we don't assume that the future is entirely settled, there is an easy way to integrate the motif of future determinism with the motif of future openness."⁶⁹ Boyd contends that the issue is not about the nature of God, but the nature of the future:

Though open theists are often accused of denying God's omniscience because they deny the classical view of foreknowledge, this criticism is unfounded. Open theists affirm God's omniscience as emphatically as anybody does. The issue is not whether God's knowledge is perfect. It is. The issue is about the nature of reality that God perfectly knows. More specifically, what is the content of the reality of the future? Whatever it is, we all agree that God perfectly knows it.⁷⁰

Boyd uses the word "reality" peculiarly. The dictionary gives the following definition of reality: the quality or state of being real, a real event, entity, or state of affairs; the totality of real things and events; that which exists objectively and in fact; (*Philosophy*) something that is neither derivative nor dependent but exists necessarily.⁷¹ By definition if something is unsettled, it is only a possibility, whereas anything that is reality is settled or certain. In other words, there cannot be a "settled reality" and an "unsettled reality" if we are to consistently apply the definition of what constitutes reality. This confusion of definitions undergirds the open view of God: a deity with finite abilities and limited understanding.

What follows is an examination of seven key verses used by open theists to demonstrate that God is a learner like human beings. We will let the text speak for itself to understand its

⁶⁷ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 15-17.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 14-15. (italics in original.)

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

⁷¹ Merriam-Webster's, I. "Reality," n.p., *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary on CD-ROM*. Version 2.1c. 1993, 1996.

straightforward, literal interpretation. Then we will test this interpretation against authorial intent and other Scripture.

1. *The Testing of Abraham's Faith Through The Sacrifice of His Son Isaac*
(Genesis: 22:9-12)

⁹ Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ¹² He said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me."

Allowing these verses to speak plainly in a normal straightforward manner, an open theist would make the following observations:

- God did not know if Abraham would remain faithful to the covenant and that the words "now I know" would disingenuous if in fact God did know.
- This was a real test and God learned of the results only when Abraham acted.⁷²

Generally speaking, sound hermeneutics require the straightforward grammatical-historical meaning of the text as the intended meaning, even if it is not culturally acceptable, unless there is compelling reason to think that the straightforward meaning is not the intended meaning at all. Without question, the literal straightforward reading of this passage requires us to see Abraham as having experienced a real test by God, the results of which were not even known by God until the test was completed, for the text says, "for *now* I know." But let us reconsider this interpretation in light of the context of the passage. There are at least three problems raised by the openness interpretation since, according to open theism, God has exhaustive knowledge of the past and present.

First, *it questions God's knowledge of the present*, for it asks the present question: Is Abraham faithful? If God must test Abraham in order to know his inner spiritual, emotional, psychological, and mental state, then does God really have omniscience over the present and past? The Scriptures say that "the Lord searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts" (1 Chron 28:9), and that He "[God] sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Sam 16:7). These texts clearly assert that God knows man better than he knows himself. Specifically then, did God not know all the conditions of Abraham – his thoughts, reasons, inclinations, desires, feelings, emotions, doubts, hopes, dreams, worries, anxieties, patterns, tendencies, etc. – at the time of the test? According to the open view this was "real test." Therefore, God's present knowledge was at least a little compromised for He had to *learn* whether Abraham feared God. This leads to the more interesting point.

Second, *it questions God's need for a test in order to learn about the specific content of the present*, for it asks the question: Does Abraham fear God? That is, not until Abraham raised the knife in preparation to slay his son did God *learn* [absolutely] that Abraham "fears God." The

⁷² See Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 64.

first point makes it clear that, contrary to the openness assertion that God has exhaustive knowledge of the present and past, God's present knowledge is indeed questioned in regards to Abraham faithfulness. The second point emphasizes that God does not know the *content* of the present: whether Abraham fears God. In reference to God's knowledge of predictable characters Boyd writes:

Sometimes we may understand the Lord's foreknowledge of a person's behavior simply by supposing that the person's character, combined with the Lord's perfect knowledge of all future variables, makes the person's future behavior certain. As we all know, character becomes more predictable over time. The longer we persist in a chosen path, the more that path becomes part of who we are. Hence, generally speaking, the range of viable options we are capable of choosing diminishes over time.

Our omniscient Creator knows us perfectly, far better than we even know ourselves. Hence, we can assume that he is able to predict our behavior far more extensively and accurately than we could predict it ourselves.⁷³

The question remains: if God knows each person perfectly, understands and can even predict predictable behavior, and knows all future variables, of what use was the test? It is interesting that in his treatment of 2 Chronicles 32:31 ("God left him *alone only* to test him, that He might know all that was in his heart"), Boyd interprets this to mean that God sought to know "how Hezekiah would respond."⁷⁴ He comments, "If God eternally knew how Hezekiah would respond to him, God couldn't have sought to know *how Hezekiah would respond.*"⁷⁵ As we have seen, Scripture teaches that God already knows the heart of man. For this reason, Boyd changes the argument from God "knowing what is in his hearts" to "knowing how Hezekiah would respond."

Again, is it a valid assertion that God must test Abraham in order *to know* his heart? Consider how the other biblical authors portray the heart condition of Abraham. In Romans 4:18-22, Paul uses Abraham as a supreme illustration of faith, as a man who fears God:

¹⁸ In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, "SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE."¹⁹ Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb;²⁰ yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,²¹ and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.²² Therefore IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Now when did Abraham exercise such magnanimous faith: *before* or *after* God told him to sacrifice Isaac? It was *before* Genesis 22 that Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness (Gen 15:6). Therefore we must recognize that God knew Abraham's heart and his developing predictable behavior long before the "testing" in Genesis 22. Moreover, the author of Hebrews emphasizes the consistent faith and steadfast heart of Abraham from his call out of Ur to the almost-sacrifice of his son Isaac (Heb 11:8-12, 17-19).

What is most interesting is the author of Hebrews states, "He [Abraham] considered that God is able to raise *people* even from the dead, from which he also received him [Isaac] back as a type" (Heb 11:19). Again, when did this happen, *before* or *after* the attempted-sacrifice? It was *before*.

⁷³ Ibid., 35.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 64.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Abraham had already declared that he and the lad would return (Gen 22:5). If Abraham had already developed this steadfast heart of trust, obedience, and fear of the Lord over the many years before God called him to sacrifice Isaac – a heart that God knows completely and is manifested in a predictable pattern of faithfully obeying God – then how is it that God had *to learn that Abraham now fears Him*? The openness position seems untenable by witness of the other biblical authors and unwarranted because it fails the very premises of openness theology: possessing perfect knowledge of the present and past, and the ability to accurately predict predictable behavior.

Third, *it questions the validity of the test in light of libertarian freedom and limited foreknowledge*, for it asks the questions: Can Abraham freely choose? And, does God know this choice? Boyd states that divine testing is not a game for God for “God is seeking to *find out* whether or not the people he calls will lovingly choose him above all else.”⁷⁶ If God was not already convinced that Abraham was and would be a faithful person to the covenant, what could this test ultimately accomplish? Since Abraham possesses libertarian freedom – and God can be surprised at the possibilities of an open future full of free unknowable choices and actions – there is no guarantee that Abraham will continue to be faithful.⁷⁷ According to the open view, it seems that as soon as one test is over another would be required. Moreover, the biblical record (Gen 15:6; 22:5; Rom 4; Heb 11) presents compelling evidence that Abraham already had a faithful heart known to God. Therefore it is untenable to assert that God did know that Abraham feared Him until he raised the knife.

2. *The Search and Interrogation of Adam and Eve* (Genesis 3:8-13)

⁸ They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” ¹⁰ He said, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.” ¹¹ And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” ¹² The man said, “The woman whom You gave *to be* with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.” ¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” And the woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

Following the same line of reasoning as above, a straightforward reading of the text yields four points germane to our discussion:

- God makes an audible sound that humans hear (God’s physical nature can be heard)
- Man is able to hide from the presence of God (God is spatially located and delimited)
- God does not know where the man is (God is ignorant of the present)
- God does not know what has happened (God is ignorant of the past)

⁷⁶ Ibid. (italics in original.)

⁷⁷ Notice that the knife had not been thrust into Isaac. In reality, Abraham had not really executed the action – he merely lifted the knife. At the last moment before plunging the knife into Isaac’s chest, Abraham’s heart could have rebelled. Then what would have become of this so-called “test”? If Abraham proceeded to kill his son, it would only confirm his past behavior of obedience – so this is not really a test but a confirmation exercise. But if Abraham refrained from killing Isaac, then he would be disobedient – a striking contrast to his previous behavior. In both situations, according to openness, God did not know the outcome. So what does open theology accomplish?

Is this passage to be read in a straightforward manner? If not, when is a straightforward reading legitimate? But the problem gets worse. While Adam and Eve were hiding God calls out, “Where are you?” (v.9). On a straightforward reading: 1) God does not *presently know* where Adam is, and 2) God is *spatially located* (i.e., He is not omnipresent). Worse still is God’s second question: “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” (v.10). The straightforward reading implies that God does not know what has happened in the past (cf. v.13, God asks the woman, “What is this you have done?”). According to the hermeneutic of openness – consistent with their interpretation of Genesis 22:12 – we must deny God’s: 1) exhaustive knowledge of the past; 2) exhaustive knowledge of the present; and 3) omnipresence.⁷⁸

3. *The Investigation of Sodom and Gomorrah for Anyone Righteous (Genesis 18:21-33)*

²¹ “I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know.” ²² Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the LORD. ²³ Abraham came near and said, “Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴ “Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed sweep *it* away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? ²⁵ “Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are *treated* alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?” ²⁶ So the LORD said, “If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account.” ²⁷ And Abraham replied, “Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am *but* dust and ashes. ²⁸ “Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, will You destroy the whole city because of five?” And He said, “I will not destroy *it* if I find forty-five there.” ²⁹ He spoke to Him yet again and said, “Suppose forty are found there?” And He said, “I will not do *it* on account of the forty.” ³⁰ Then he said, “Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak; suppose thirty are found there?” And He said, “I will not do *it* if I find thirty there.” ³¹ And he said, “Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord; suppose twenty are found there?” And He said, “I will not destroy *it* on account of the twenty.” ³² Then he said, “Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once; suppose ten are found there?” And He said, “I will not destroy *it* on account of the ten.” ³³ As soon as He had finished speaking to Abraham the LORD departed, and Abraham returned to his place.

Like the other passages, a straightforward reading of this text displays a severely deficient God. To be consistent with openness hermeneutics we must conclude:

- God is not omnipresent (“I will go down now, and see”)
- God does not know the present state of wickedness in the cities (“I will know”)
- God does not know how many righteous people are in the cities (“If I [God] find in Sodom fifty righteous . . . then”, and finally, “I will not destroy *it* on account of ten”)

The God of open theism is severely limited and void of knowledge not only in regards to individuals, but also of entire cities. The consequences are the same as stated before. If God is ignorant of one person’s state of affairs, He is ignorant of all persons’ states of affairs, which skyrockets exponentially to an unimaginable number of ever changing variables.

4. *God’s False Beliefs and Utter Surprise (Jeremiah 3:6-7)*

⁷⁸ The same conclusions can be drawn from Genesis 18:9-21.

⁶ Then the LORD said to me in the days of Josiah the king, “Have you seen what faithless Israel did? She went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and she was a harlot there. ⁷ “I thought, ‘After she has done all these things she will return to Me’; but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it.

Boyd insists that unless we read this passage in a straightforward manner God would be a liar:

If God tells us he thought something was going to occur while being eternally certain it would not occur, is he not lying to us? If God cannot lie (Heb 6:18), and yet tells us he thought something would occur that did not occur, doesn't this imply that the future contains possibilities as well as certainties?⁷⁹

Commenting further on this passage in conjunction with Jeremiah 3:19-20, Boyd concludes that God is surprised by what occurs:

Since God is omniscient, he always knew that it was remotely possible for his people to be this stubborn, for example. But he genuinely did to expect them to actualize this remote possibility. He authentically expected that they'd be won over by his grace.⁸⁰

Can God make mistakes? Did God hold a falsehood that He thought was true? Contrary to open theology, classical theism asserts that God did know what the people would do. Therefore, included in this statement (“she [Israel] will return”) is the implicit qualification: “given the ordinary expectations under these conditions.” As stated earlier, if the open view is correct, then the assurance that God is able to manage the world is hopeless because ultimately it is the essence of human self-determinism that can make the most unexpected choices that surprise God.

5. Hezekiah's Repentance and the Added 15 Years (Isaiah 38:1-5)

¹ In those days Hezekiah became mortally ill. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, “Thus says the LORD, ‘Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.’ ” ² Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, ³ and said, “Remember now, O LORD, I beseech You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in Your sight.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly. ⁴ Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah, saying, ⁵ “Go and say to Hezekiah, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of your father David, “I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will add fifteen years to your life.

From this passage, I think both sides would agree that God did not express an explicit exception when He said, “You shall die and not live.” Is it not possible then to agree that there is an *implied exception*, “You shall die, unless you repent and pray”? For in fact, that is precisely what happened: Hezekiah repented and prayed; consequently his life was spared. Historic exegesis affirms that God knew that Hezekiah would fulfill the implicit exception of repenting while openness denies such divine knowledge. Is God then not duplicitous for telling Hezekiah that he would not recover? And if God knew that Hezekiah would live for fifteen more years, is God not disingenuous by saying that He will add fifteen years to Hezekiah's life?⁸¹ Before we answer the question, let us ask another: Is not the open view guilty by the same reasoning? Is God telling the

⁷⁹ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 60.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

truth when He says, “You shall die and not live,” when He really means, “You might die, but you will not if you repent.” Strictly speaking, the open view is guilty of its own charge against classical theism that God is disingenuous.

Let us address this passage sociologically by asking: is it true that one must always express the exceptions to threats or prophecies in order to be honest. The answer is objectively “no.” One reason is that there are general understandings within family and group dynamics that certain kinds of threats or warnings always imply that genuine repentance will be met with mercy and forgiveness. For example, in his first epistle John writes, “The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 Jn 4:8), and “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death” (3:14). Taken in isolation these verses could imply that there is no exception or escape if a Christian fails to love. But this is not the implicit threat because in the community John wrote to there existed a general understanding that these words referred to unconfessed sin and an obstinate refusal to love. This is made clear in chapter one, “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1:8-9). Therefore, it is not necessary to assume that exceptions to every warning need to be expressed when there is an understanding that genuine repentance and confession will be met with mercy and forgiveness. This seems to have been Hezekiah’s understanding of his personal circumstances evinced by his actions.

To understand how God can be sincere in His warning, even though He knows that the warning will be heeded and threatened punishment averted, is illustrated in the book of Jonah.

6. *The Averted Destruction of Nineveh* (Jonah 3:4, 10)

⁴ Then Jonah began to go through the city one day’s walk; and he cried out and said, “Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.”

¹⁰ When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do *it*.

The plain reading of this passage is that God changed His mind;⁸² He relented from destroying Nineveh which is contrary to Jonah’s message.

Is God insincere in His threat to destroy Nineveh if He knew that the Ninevites would repent? Boyd believes that, if God knew with certainty that Nineveh would repent, then the prophecy of impending destruction was disingenuous. To accuse God of being disingenuous, however, would be warranted only if the threat or condition of repentance was not true. The following chart makes this clear. If either one of the following statements are true, then God is a liar:

- [Condition] If Nineveh **does not** repent AND
[Threat] God **does not** destroy them; **OR**
- [Condition] If Nineveh **does** repent AND

⁸² Ibid., 85.

[*Threat*] God *does* destroy them.

As illustrated, both the condition and the threat were true. God would have destroyed Nineveh if they had not repented. They repented so He did not destroy them. Again, the implicit condition is missed by open theologians: “If you [Ninevites] do not repent, I [God] will destroy you.” Reciprocally, “If you [Ninevites] repent, I [God] will not destroy you.”

Boyd seems to rule out the possibility that a God who knows all that will come to pass can sincerely warn against consequences that He knows will not occur. It appears, however, that Jonah does not share Boyd’s point of view because Jonah himself gives us insight into the nature of the circumstances. Jonah tells us that the reason he did not want to go to Nineveh in the first place was due to his fear that God would be merciful to the Ninevites (Jonah 4:2). Since Jonah wanted calamity to come on the city he should have been anxious to get to Nineveh and delighted to declare “Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” But this is not the case. Instead of running *to* Nineveh, Jonah actually runs *away from* Nineveh. Why? It seems that Jonah must have suspected that “God had a *secret* intention that was different from his *stated* intention.”⁸³ The collective evidence – of Jonah’s unwillingness to prophetically warn the Ninevites of impending destruction and the subsequent forty days to repent – indicates that God’s *real* intention was *to save* the Ninevites and *not destroy* them according to Jonah’s message. In the narrow sense, then, God did change: contrary to Jonah’s message, God did not destroy Nineveh. However, in the broad sense, as indicated by Jonah’s reluctance to go to Nineveh in the first place, it appears that God’s real intention all along was not to destroy Nineveh but to save it. Therefore, God accomplished His eternal will using His prophetic warning *through* Jonah His servant to save the Ninevites because He knew that the Ninevites would repent.

7. Another Look at Hezekiah’s Additional 15 Years (II Kings 20:1-6)

¹ In those days Hezekiah became mortally ill. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, “Thus says the LORD, ‘Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.’”² Then he turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, saying,³ “Remember now, O LORD, I beseech You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a whole heart and have done what is good in Your sight.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly.⁴ Before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him, saying,⁵ “Return and say to Hezekiah the leader of My people, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of your father David, ‘I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD.’”⁶ “I will add fifteen years to your life, and I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake and for My servant David’s sake.” ’ ’

Although we have already looked at this same account above (Isaiah 38:1-5) regarding the Lord adding an additional fifteen years to the life of Hezekiah, it is important to revisit this passage in light of what we learned from the book of Jonah. First, this is one of the passages that have opened the eyes of open theists to an unknown, undetermined, and possible future,⁸⁴ and second,

⁸³ Bruce Ware, *God’s Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000), 94.

⁸⁴ Boyd clearly highlights this passage as being pivotal in his challenge to classical theism (*God of the Possible*, 7-8).

it serves as the bedrock upon which open theists construct openness theology. There are three elements that I want us to look at.

First, like in the book of Jonah, God could have acted unilaterally according to His *stated intention*. God did not need to warn Hezekiah through the prophet Isaiah, just as He did not need to warn the Ninevites through Jonah. So why did God issue a warning? What purpose does it serve? Is God insincere in His threat or is there an implied condition? Let us consider the condition and threat of the passage in chart form. If either one of the following statements are true, then God is a liar:

- [Condition] If Hezekiah *does not* repent AND
 [Threat] God *does not* destroy him; **OR**

- [Condition] If Hezekiah *does* repent AND
 [Threat] God *does* destroy him.

Could it not be the case that God's *real intention* ("I will heal you [and] add fifteen years to your life [if you repent]) was to elicit true brokenness and contrition from Hezekiah, and God chose to do accomplish this through His *stated intention* ("you shall die and not live") in Isaiah's warning? Surely it is the case upon hearing that their life is about to end that just about everyone would plea to God for His mercy, forgiveness, and the extension of their life? God would certainly know this about human nature.

Second, notice the exactitude of the number of years extended to Hezekiah – *fifteen years*. How do open theists account for such certainty? Think about it, the amount of time was not six months or thirty-four years, but it was exactly *fifteen years*. And what might not be so obvious is that God did not say, "Well, since I don't know exhaustively the future, and since I just changed my mind not to kill you, I'm really not sure how long you'll live. We'll just have to wait and see how your free decisions together with my divine will work together to determine the length of your life." The number of future free choices by Hezekiah – as well as every other free creature – is staggering; so how is it that God can now guarantee another fifteen years? But God does promise exactly that: another *fifteen years* – no more, no less. God's absolute confidence in making such a promise causes us to question the openness interpretation that God changed His mind because He was surprised. Rather, it seems more probable that God accomplished His *real intention* via His *stated intention*.

Third, for the sake of argument, let us grant the open view that God changed His mind. Is this a literal change? In the open view, God knows us better than we know ourselves, and like everyone else, it is most likely that Hezekiah would plea for his life if he had the ability to do so. So how does Hezekiah's plea *surprise* God so that God learned something new and changed His mind accordingly? But if the plea did not surprise God, then God did not really change His mind. The case for "reverse divine intentions"⁸⁵ is seriously undermined. John Piper offers a helpful explanation on passages that imply that God "changes His mind" or "repents." On First Samuel 15:11 John writes,

⁸⁵ Ibid., 81-85.

So my alternative way of thinking about these texts is: God foreknows the grievous and sorrowful effects of some of his own choices—for example, to create Adam and Eve, and to make Saul king. These effects are genuinely grievous to God as he sees them in themselves. Yet he does not regard his choices as mistakes that he would do differently if only he foreknew what was coming. Rather, he wills to do some things which he then genuinely grieves over in part when the grievous effect comes to pass.

Now if someone should say, This does not sound like what we ordinarily mean by “regret” or “repentance,” I would respond that this is exactly what Samuel said: God “will not lie or repent; for he is not a man, that he should repent” (1 Sam. 15:29). In other words, Samuel means something like this: when I say “[God] repented that he made Saul king” (or when Moses said that God repented that he created Adam and Eve), I do not mean that God experiences repentance precisely the way ordinary humans do. He is not a man to experience “repentance” this way. He experiences it his way—the way one experiences “repentance” when one is all-wise and foreknows the entire future perfectly. The experience is real, but it is not like finite man experiences it.⁸⁶

IX. SCRIPTURAL AFFIRMATION OF EXHAUSTIVE DIVINE FOREKNOWLEDGE

Christians believe that the God of the Old and New Testaments is not just a symbol of overarching truths or an impersonal being. Rather, orthodoxy maintains that God is a personal being that He freely chose to create the universe and sustains all there within. God is infinite in knowledge, power, and goodness, and is not encumbered by spatial or temporal limitations. That God is perfect is not a casual observation for He could not be any other way. That is, it could not be the case that God fails to possess any necessary perfection.

Salvation history is not a sequence of unknowable events randomly unfolding in time without purpose or direction. For the most part, all Christians affirm that a Sovereign God directs world history according to His own plan. Isaiah puts it this way:

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 ESV)

The departure of open theism from classical theism hinges on the pivotal question: what does God know and when does He know it? Open theists argue that God does not have exhaustive knowledge of the future, including all future contingents, and all the choices made by free moral agents. Boyd asserts that “the future is to some degree *settled* and known by God as such, and to some degree *open* and known by God as such. To some extent, God knows the future as *definitely* this way and *definitely* not that way. To some extent, however, he knows it as *possibly* this way and *possibly* not that way.”⁸⁷ Is this assertion true, or does the Bible (as I contend) teach that God does know the future completely – including, but not limited to every free volition act and contingency of moral agents?

⁸⁶ John Piper, “Why the Glory of God Is at Stake in the ‘Foreknowledge’ Debate,” *Modern Reformation* 8, no. 5 (September/October 1999), 43.

⁸⁷ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 15.

The New Testament employs a whole family of words associated with God's knowledge of the future, such as "foreknow" (*proginōskō*), "foreknowledge" (*prognōsis*), "foresee" (*prooraō*), "foreordain" (*proorizō*), and "foretell" (*promarturomai, prokatangellō*). In light of this vocabulary, it seems unreasonable to conclude that God's omniscience does not include exhaustive knowledge of the future. In this section we will limit the focus of our discussion primarily on nine texts from Isaiah 40-48. The purpose of these chapters was to set the God of Israel over and against all false idols who could not know nor declare the future. The sovereign knowledge and reign of God was challenged. It is as if Isaiah already anticipated the twentieth century's challenges to these divine perfections. We will look at the nine sections separately: Isaiah 41:21-29; 42:8-9; 43:8-13; 44:6-8; 44:24-28; 45:1-7; 45:18-25; 46:8-11; 48:3-8.

1. *YHWH's Exhaustive Foreknowledge is Linked to His Superiority Over False Gods (Isaiah 41:21-29)*

²¹ "Present your case," the LORD says. "Bring forward your strong *arguments*," The King of Jacob says.

²² Let them bring forth and declare to us what is going to take place; As for the former *events*, declare what they *were*, That we may consider them and know their outcome. Or announce to us what is coming;

²³ Declare the things that are going to come afterward, That we may know that you are gods; Indeed, do good or evil, that we may anxiously look about us and fear together. ²⁴ Behold, you are of no account, And your work amounts to nothing; He who chooses you is an abomination. ²⁵ "I have aroused one from the north, and he has come; From the rising of the sun he will call on My name; And he will come upon rulers as *upon* mortar, Even as the potter treads clay." ²⁶ Who has declared *this* from the beginning, that we might know? Or from former times, that we may say, "*He is right!*"? Surely there was no one who declared, Surely there was no one who proclaimed, Surely there was no one who heard your words. ²⁷ "Formerly *I said* to Zion, 'Behold, here they are.' And to Jerusalem, 'I will give a messenger of good news.'" ²⁸ "But when I look, there is no one, And there is no counselor among them Who, if I ask, can give an answer.

²⁹ "Behold, all of them are false; Their works are worthless, Their molten images are wind and emptiness.

The gauntlet is thrown down. The challenge is for the real deity to identify himself by this criterion alone: declare the future. Whichever god can do this is the true God. But notice that the nature of the challenge is general, not specific. In other words, the true God is not limited to specific situations (i.e., knowing only some things as "settled" while others as "open"). The challenge is to announce *what is coming* or *what the future holds all together*, and not just the mere predictions of certain isolated, particular events. Rather, specific events are entailed within the general unfolding whole of the future. While, as we will see, the texts of Isaiah do have specific predictions, it is the general knowledge of the entire temporally unrealized but fully eter

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able future that is at stake here. Stephen Charnock comments on this passage:

Such a fore-knowledge of things to come is here ascribed to God by God himself, as a distinction of him from all false gods; such a knowledge that, if any could prove that they were possessors of, he would acknowledge them as Gods as well as himself: “that we may know that you are gods.” He puts his Deity to stand or fall upon this account, and this should be the point which should decide the controversy, whether he or the heathen idols were the true God; the dispute is managed by this medium: he that knows things to come is God; I know things to come, *ergo* I am God; the idols know not things to come, therefore they are not gods. God submits the being of his Deity to this trial. If God knows things to come no more than the heathen idols, which were either devils or men, he would be, in his own account, no more a God than devils or men, no more a God than the pagan idols he doth scoff at for this defect. . . . It cannot be understood of future things in their causes, when the effects necessarily arise from such causes, as light from the sun and heat from fire: many of these men know; more of them angels and devils know: if God, therefore, had not a higher and farther knowledge than this, he would not by this be proved to be God, any more than angels and devils, who know necessary effects in their causes. The devils, indeed, did predict some things in the heathen oracles, but God is differenced from them here . . . in being able to predict things to come that they knew not, or things in their particularities, things that depended on the liberty of man’s will, which the devils could lay no claim to a certain knowledge of. Were it only a conjectural knowledge that is here meant, the devils might answer they can conjecture, and so their deity were as good as God’s; . . . God asserts his knowledge of things to come as a manifest evidence of his Godhead; those that deny, therefore, the argument that proves it, deny the conclusion, too; for this will necessarily follow, that if he be God because he knows future things, then he that doth not know future things is not God; and if God knows not future things but only by conjecture, then there is no God, because a certain knowledge, so as infallibly to predict things to come, is an inseparable perfection of Deity.⁸⁸

2. *YHWH’s Exhaustive Foreknowledge is Linked to His Glory to Declare New Things (Isaiah 42:8-9)*

⁸ “I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images.

⁹ “Behold, the former things have come to pass, Now I declare new things; Before they spring forth I proclaim *them* to you.”

The promise of this passage (vv.1-13) is that the Servant of YHWH, the Messiah, would come as a light to the nations. Now what are we to think of a God who makes such promises but does not know if He is able to actualize them? That God is able to ensure that Messiah would come is seen in vv.8-9 where God puts His very own glory on the line as the One who is able to declare “new things before they spring forth.” Unlike graven images, God alone is worthy of glory – a glory not to be shared with anyone or anything less than deity – because He has brought to pass what has happened *and* He declares what will happen. It is an unnatural restriction to insist that the “new things” refers only to particular future realities and not to reality as a whole. In other words, God directs the entire future, not just parts of it.

3. *YHWH’s Exhaustive Foreknowledge is Linked to His Sovereignty as Savior (Isaiah 43:8-13)*

⁸ Bring out the people who are blind, even though they have eyes, And the deaf, even though they have ears. ⁹ All the nations have gathered together So that the peoples may be assembled. Who among them can sdeclare this And proclaim to us the former things? Let them present their witnesses that they may be justified, Or let them hear and say, “It is true.” ¹⁰ “You are My witnesses,” declares the LORD, “And My

⁸⁸ Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, vol. 1 (1682; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 431-32.

servant whom I have chosen, So that you may know and believe Me And understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, And there will be none after Me. ¹¹ “I, even I, am the LORD, And there is no savior besides Me. ¹² “It is I who have declared and saved and proclaimed, And there was no strange *god* among you; So you are My witnesses,” declares the LORD, “And I am God. ¹³ “Even from eternity I am He, And there is none who can deliver out of My hand; I act and who can reverse it?”

As in previous passages, the identity challenge between false substitutes and true deity is the ability to declare the “former things.” But another element is also introduced: the actions of the true God are sovereign and irreversible. In regards to knowledge, false gods cannot proclaim the things of the past. Moreover, inherent in the assertion that “God is not formed” is the idea that the Creator is greater than that which is created. Finite man carves by hand his own idols. YHWH, however, is the uncreated Creator. Upon this claim, God asserts His exclusive ability to save. The logic is this: since the false gods are not able to declare the past, neither can they save. YHWH, however, can declare the past and is, therefore, able to save. Furthermore, YHWH identifies Himself as Savior – the Sovereign against whom no one can steal or reverse His will.

4. YHWH’s Exhaustive Foreknowledge is Linked to His Being the Only God and Redeemer (Isaiah 44:6-8)

⁶ “Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last, And there is no God besides Me. ⁷ ‘Who is like Me? Let him proclaim and declare it; Yes, let him recount it to Me in order, From the time that I established the ancient nation. And let them declare to them the things that are coming And the events that are going to take place. ⁸ ‘Do not tremble and do not be afraid; Have I not long since announced *it* to you and declared *it*? And you are My witnesses. Is there any God besides Me, Or is there any *other* Rock? I know of none.’ ”

YHWH declares that He is “the first and last and there is no God besides Me” (44:7). This absolute exclusive claim to be the only God is the foundation for challenging all false deities to recount in order the former things established. The firm establishment of the nation of Israel and their future assurance hinges on the certainty that there is no other God besides YHWH who can thwart His plan. Notice that this passage contains the same element as before, namely that deity is not based upon control over a select few future realities only, but over all events comprehensively. Sovereign control is exercised over all events that have already taken place *and* will take place (v.7).

The Jews of Israel were not only called to bear witness to God’s establishing them as a nation, but that this witness would serve as further comfort and confidence that the same God who established them as a people in the past would be able to declare to them what will take place in the future (v.8). God is the only Redeemer. Now, is there a confidence and hope in knowing that God is Redeemer of the past and present, but the future is risky, open, possible, and unknown? And that this Redeemer-God can make mistakes? Absolutely not! In fact, this is precisely why God declares Himself to be the Redeemer *of the past*, so that Israel would find confidence and comfort that as a sure foundation, God is also the Redeemer *of the future*.

5. YHWH’s Exhaustive Foreknowledge is Linked to His Specific Predictions (Isaiah 44:24-28)

²⁴ Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, and the one who formed you from the womb, “I, the LORD, am the maker of all things, Stretching out the heavens by Myself And spreading out the earth all alone, ²⁵ Causing

the omens of boasters to fail, Making fools out of diviners, Causing wise men to draw back And turning their knowledge into foolishness,²⁶ Confirming the word of His servant And performing the purpose of His messengers. *It is I* who says of Jerusalem, ‘She shall be inhabited!’ And of the cities of Judah, ‘They shall be built.’ And I will raise up her ruins *again*.²⁷ *“It is I* who says to the depth of the sea, ‘Be dried up!’ And I will make your rivers dry.²⁸ *“It is I* who says of Cyrus, ‘*He is My shepherd!* And he will perform all My desire.’ And he declares of Jerusalem, ‘She will be built,’ And of the temple, ‘Your foundation will be laid.’ ”

The contrast between false gods and YHWH continues. This time, however, it is not just in a general understanding and control over the future that is at stake; rather, this passage makes predictions about specific people and event yet to come. YHWH demonstrates that He alone is worthy of worship and adoration because He is able to sovereignly disclose the future and to accomplish all of His promises.

Beginning in v.26 God confirms the veracity of the message spoken by His servant Isaiah [specifically] that Jerusalem shall be inhabited again, and the cities of Judah will be built. To promise the rein-habitation and rebuilding of cities requires an enormous amount of foreknowledge and certainty over an innumerable number of future free human choices and actions (e.g., from all the actions of the peoples involved [the rulers and the ruled, families and individuals] and their free decisions) which are unknown to the God of openness. The fulfilling and exact accomplishment of God’s promises is what sets Him apart from gods of the false diviners in v.25. God’s reputation is on the line and it will not do to just get a few things right while failing on innumerable other points. The true God must know exactly *what* He will accomplish and *how* He will accomplish it (which includes all the necessary conditions of future events and free choices).

One of the most remarkable features comes in v.28 with the naming of the future king of Persia, King Cyrus.⁸⁹ God calls Cyrus, “My Shepherd” because He will use this pagan king to perform “all My desire” (44:28). To make such a prediction the true God must not only know the choices of the parents to name their son Cyrus, but God must also know about the rise and fall of Assyria, Babylon, and Medo-Persia. In his comment on the naming of Cyrus (and of Josiah in 1 Kings 13:2), Boyd writes, “This decree obviously set strict parameters around the freedom of the parents in naming these individuals. . . . It also restricted the scope of freedom these individuals could exercise *as it pertained to particular foreordained activities*.”⁹⁰

Commendably Boyd acknowledges that, at least in these two circumstances, for God to make such predictions, adherence to absolute libertarian freedom on behalf of the individual and ignorance of the choices of “self-determining agents” on behalf of God is not possible.⁹¹ However, Boyd does not address the innumerable choices that would have to be curtailed (in the libertarian sense) in order for just the naming of Cyrus (and Josiah) to occur exactly as predicted, not to mention their impact on the world according to God’s prophetic promises. And just as God exercises sovereignty over mankind, He also does so over nature causing the seas and the rivers

⁸⁹ Isaiah began his prophetic ministry in Jerusalem in 740 B.C. in the year that King Uzziah died. Cyrus, the son of Cambyses the prince of Persia, was born around 599 B.C. and was enthroned as the King of Persia in 559 B.C. Thus, Isaiah’s prophesy came approximately 200 years before Cyrus was born.

⁹⁰ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 34. (emphasis in original).

⁹¹ Ibid.

to be dry (v.27) at His discretion. God does not just exercise sovereignty over the human race, but over all living things.

6. YHWH's Exhaustive Foreknowledge is Linked to the Success of Cyrus (Isaiah 45:1-7)

¹ Thus says the LORD to Cyrus His anointed, Whom I have taken by the right hand, To subdue nations before him And to loose the loins of kings; To open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: ² "I will go before you and make the rough places smooth; I will shatter the doors of bronze and cut through their iron bars. ³ "I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden wealth of secret places, So that you may know that it is I, The LORD, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name. ⁴ "For the sake of Jacob My servant, And Israel My chosen *one*, I have also called you by your name; I have given you a title of honor Though you have not known Me. ⁵ "I am the LORD, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me; ⁶ That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun That there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, ⁷ The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.

Not only will Cyrus become a servant of God to accomplish His purposes, God will accomplish His purposes through Cyrus without him even knowing it ("though you have not known Me" [45:4b; 5b]). The passage emphasizes the true knowledge and sovereignty of YHWH to accomplish His will through calling and naming Cyrus, determining His victories, opening the gates before him, and making the rough places smooth. God's plan will be accomplished through Cyrus even though Cyrus has no knowledge of the God of Israel. So even though this passage does not explicitly say that God possesses divine exhaustive foreknowledge of every future event and free choice, it forthrightly asserts that God has knowledge over a vast amount of the future which is difficult to account for according to the openness model. Cyrus was just one of many free moral agents whom God used to accomplish His purposes.

7. YHWH's Exhaustive Foreknowledge is Linked to His Righteous Spoken Word (Isaiah 45:18-25)

¹⁸ For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (he is the God who formed the earth and made it, he established it *and* did not create it a waste place, *but* formed it to be inhabited), "I am the LORD, and there is none else. ¹⁹ "I have not spoken in secret, In some dark land; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, 'Seek Me in a waste place'; I, the LORD, speak righteousness, Declaring things that are upright. ²⁰ "Gather yourselves and come; Draw near together, you fugitives of the nations; They have no knowledge, Who carry about their wooden idol And pray to a god who cannot save. ²¹ "Declare and set forth *your case*; Indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, A righteous God and a Savior; There is none except Me. ²² "Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other. ²³ "I have sworn by Myself, The word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness And will not turn back, That to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear *allegiance*. ²⁴ "They will say of Me, 'Only in the LORD are righteousness and strength.' Men will come to Him, And all who were angry at Him will be put to shame. ²⁵ "In the LORD all the offspring of Israel Will be justified and will glory."

YHWH asserts Himself as the Creator of the heavens and earth, and as a result there is no other who retains the inherent right to be called "LORD" and worshiped as Creator. The pagans "have no knowledge" because they pray to wooden idols "who cannot save" (45:20) and have no voices to "set forth *your case*" (v.21). And if idols cannot declare from old, then they are not able to save either. Only YHWH can save (v.21) for there is no other God (v.22). And God is not

silent, but He has spoken. It is His Word that “has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back” (v.23). God did not have to speak, but He did speak, and He did so publicly. It is God’s public testimony, His Word, which proves Him to be all together righteous and holy. One day “every knee will bow, every tongue will swear *allegiance*” (v.23). In other words, the very character of God is tied to and revealed in the veracity of His Word. If God is true, faithful, upright, holy, blameless, and righteous, then so must be His Word. To say that God tried His best to get most things right, but that He makes mistakes and does not know all the possibilities of the future undermines His declarative Word that “has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness, and it will not turn back.” God does not ever get it wrong; God is never surprised.

8. YHWH’s Exhaustive Foreknowledge is Linked to His Declaring the End from the Beginning (Isaiah 46:8-11)

⁸ “Remember this, and be assured; Recall it to mind, you transgressors. ⁹ “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, ¹⁰ 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’; ¹¹ 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.

YHWH makes an all-encompassing pronouncement of the extent of His knowledge: I AM the One who declares “the end from the beginning” (46:10). It is God’s purpose that will be established and accomplished according to His good pleasure (v.11). It is an exercise in exegetical gymnastics to exclude future free volitional choices of moral agents from this treatise of God’s knowledge. The totality of God’s knowledge and divine superintendence indicates that it encompass both creature (“bird of prey”) and mankind (“man of My purpose”) regardless of origin or location (“from the east”, “from a far country”). And why is this? Because “Truly I [God] have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned *it, surely* I will do it” (v.11). In no way can this passage be correctly interpreted along the openness model: that God is ignorant of the future, and that He unilaterally controls only a portion of the future without affecting the free choices of other volitional agents.⁹² Boyd writes,

The Lord’s announcement that he declares “the end from the beginning” must be understood in light of this specification. He tells us that he is talking about *his own* will and *his own* plans. He declares that the future is settled to the extent that he is going to determine it, but nothing in the text requires that we believe that *everything* that will ever come to pass will do so according to his will and thus is settled ahead of time.⁹³

It is conceded that this passage does not say that “*everything* that will come to pass is foreknown by God,” but it is difficult to reconcile the general encompassing of all history within the openness model. So why does God want the former thing remembered (vv.8-9)? The reason, at least in part, is to build the confidence of those who trust in God regarding the future. That is, since God has already established a pattern of declaring and accomplishing His promises in the past, He will do the same in the future. The *accuracy* of God’s sovereign knowledge and control of the future is rooted in His *precision* over the past.

⁹² Richard Rice, “Biblical Support for a New Perspective,” in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1994), 51.

⁹³ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 30.

9. *YHWH's Exhaustive Foreknowledge is Linked to Accomplishing What He Prophecies*
(Isaiah 48:3-8)

³ “I declared the former things long ago And they went forth from My mouth, and I proclaimed them. Suddenly I acted, and they came to pass.” ⁴ “Because I know that you are obstinate, And your neck is an iron sinew And your forehead bronze,” ⁵ Therefore I declared *them* to you long ago, Before they took place I proclaimed *them* to you, So that you would not say, ‘My idol has done them, And my graven image and my molten image have commanded them.’ ⁶ “You have heard; look at all this. And you, will you not declare it? I proclaim to you new things from this time, Even hidden things which you have not known.” ⁷ “They are created now and not long ago; And before today you have not heard them, So that you will not say, ‘Behold, I knew them.’” ⁸ “You have not heard, you have not known. Even from long ago your ear has not been open, Because I knew that you would deal very treacherously; And you have been called a rebel from birth.

In concert with the aforementioned texts, this passage declares the identity of the Holy One of Israel, as opposed to false idols, as the God who declares “the former things long ago” (48:3), and everything that goes forth from His mouth comes about when He acts. In contrast to mute idols, YHWH proclaimed these things *before* they happened – even hidden things and unknown (v.6) – so that people would know that it was God who acted and caused these events to come about according to His *former* declarations. This passage is pregnant with absolute divine foreknowledge and accuracy. It is divine exhaustive foreknowledge that vindicates only YHWH as deity.

X. CONCLUSION

The criticism advanced against the theology of open theism is just that: against the theology, *not* against the theologians and adherents themselves. It is the estimation of this author that the advocates of open theism are genuine followers of Christ; this is why their quest to resolve the tension between divine sovereignty and human culpability is sincere. However, their solution is questionable and, according to some theologians, borders on heresy because it humanizes God and deifies man.⁹⁴ Commenting on the Messiah’s offer of the Kingdom of God at His first coming, Robert Saucy offers a balanced outlook that applies here also:

We suggest that the solution lies in the same realm as other problems related to the sovereign decree of God for history and the responsible actions of mankind. The idea that God could offer humankind a real choice and opportunity, knowing all the while that humankind would fail (and, in fact, having decreed a plan on the basis of that failure), is expressed in other passages of Scripture. In Eden, humankind was given a genuine opportunity to choose holiness, yet Scripture indicates that God’s plan already included the sacrifice of Christ ‘from the creation of the world’ (Rev 13:8; cf. 2:23; 4:28). Thus in this instance, a similar unanswerable question as that related to the offer of the kingdom might be posed: “What would have happened to the death of Christ if Adam and Eve had not sinned?”⁹⁵

⁹⁴ See Robert Thomas, “The Hermeneutics of “Open Theism,”” *TMSJ* 12/2 (2001), 179-202; Richard Mayhue, “The Impossibility of the God of the Possible,” *TMSJ* 12/2 (2001), 203-220. Michael Stallard, “The Open View of God: Does He Change?” *The Journal of Ministry and Theology* 5 (2001), 5-25. 12/1 (Spring 2001), 3-13.

⁹⁵ Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 92.

The Scriptures are replete with examples asserting the utter sovereignty of God and full culpability of man. Since the Bible teaches both we should accept them both. Any doctrine developed to reconcile the two at the expense of diminishing God and elevating man should be rejected.

The Scriptures declare that God is not a man, therefore He does not lie or change His mind (1 Sam 15:29; Num 23:19; Mal 3:6; Jas 3:17). Commenting on First Samuel 15:29 and Numbers 23:19, Boyd chides the literal interpretations: “Some defenders of the classical view of foreknowledge seize these two verses and insist that, unlike all the verses that describe God changing His mind, these *do not* speak figuratively or in terms of how things *appear*.”⁹⁶

This is a correct assessment of the classical view. Expanding it a little further the classical view asserts that it is incumbent upon the reader: 1) to not assume a literal meaning of the text if by doing so the attributes of God are placed on the same finite level as that of mankind; 2) to assume a literal meaning of the text if by doing so the attributes of God are placed on an infinite level above mankind. For example, concerning the first statement, God’s physicality—eyes, ears, hands, and back—are understood as metaphors. God is Spirit and does not possess a corporeal body⁹⁷ and therefore these statements should not be understood literally. Similarly, concerning the second statement, to literally interpret passages about God’s actions, capabilities, and mental limitations—repenting, forgetting, changing His mind—would put Him on the same level as mankind. The Scriptures say that mankind is made in the image of God (Gen 1:27), but open theism certainly returns the compliment for it contends that life is indeed like a box of chocolates, even the Creator of life does not know what He is going to get.

⁹⁶ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 79. (italics in original).

⁹⁷ In no way is this to be taken as impugning the resurrected and glorified body of Christ. I am merely reiterating the Scriptural truth, “God is Spirit and you must worship Him in Spirit and in truth” (Jn 4:24).