



Where Was God?

Issue 46

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The Founders Journal



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[Tom Ascol](#)

Where was God September 11, 2001? That's the question. Packed into it are numerous other questions, like "Why didn't God stop this from happening?" "Could God have stopped it?" "What is God really like?" "How can we trust God anymore?"

The answers depend on which deity is in mind. We have been told by the radical Muslims who celebrate the mass murder in New York City and Washington D.C. that Allah, whom they claim to be the true God, was smiling with great approval at the brilliantly executed attack in the jihad against the Great Satan, America. Others of the Islamic faith decry such portrayals of Allah. But their answers in defense of a sovereign, detached, despotic ruler offer no comfort, either.

Allah is conceived as one who rules over but has never come among people. He is equally the author of good and evil. One Muslim creedal statement declares:

God's one possible quality is His power to create good or evil at any time he wishes, that is His decree.... Both good things and evil things are the result of God's decree. It is the duty of every Muslim to believe this.... It is He who causes harm and good. Rather the good works of some and the evil of others are signs that God wishes to punish some and to reward others. If God wishes to draw someone close to Himself, then He will give him the grace which will make that person do good works. If He wishes to reject someone and put that person to shame, then He will create sin in him. God creates all things, good and evil. God creates people as well as their actions: *He created you as well as what you do.*^[1]

Allah simply wanted to kill thousands of Americans that day. It is his right to do so. Deal with it.

The Bible teaches the absolute sovereignty of God but gives no room for the rationalistic fatalism of Islam. God is not the author of sin. "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone" (James 1:13). People are responsible for their actions and thus are held fully accountable for their thoughts, words and deeds. God's judgment at the end of history will not be a sham but an execution of exact justice (Matthew 25:31-46).

Islam's answer to the questions--whether spoken from "moderate" or "radical" Muslims--offer no lasting comfort and cannot be reconciled with the Holy Word of God. Sadly, many of the answers coming from the Christian community are equally unhelpful and unbiblical. Granted, they don't assault our modern sensibilities as much as Islam's portrayal of Allah, but at best they offer cold comfort and tenuous hope to those who stare honestly into the face of evil as it was portrayed in the latest terrorist attack on the USA.

"God had nothing to do with this." "He wanted to stop it be He couldn't." "In order to be fair to the free will of the terrorists, God had to let this happen." These answers, born out of real sorrow and desire to protect the reputation of God as good and loving (which He most certainly is) unwittingly line up with a relatively new and disastrous teaching within evangelicalism known as "open theism."

Open theists read the Bible to portray God as in some ways contingent on His creation. His omniscience is redefined to allow the claim that "God knows all that there is to know, but the future by definition is

unknowable." Therefore, for the open theist, God was caught off-guard by the terrorist attack. He was as surprised when the airplanes crashed into the buildings as the men and women who went to work that day in the World Trade Center. Thus, the god of open theism is able to feel our shock and pain and commiserate with us. This view, which gets God "off the hook" in the face of evil is the polar opposite of Islam. However, it is no more satisfying to those who are committed to living out a biblical worldview east of Eden.

Some truth is beyond our abilities to rationalize. That does not mean that it is irrational, but rather that it is supra-rational. It is above reason. We can know it because it has been revealed. We cannot explain it because our minds are affected by the fall.

The incarnation is one such truth. Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. A committed rationalist will never accept this. To him it is as speaking of a shape that is fully circular and fully square. Since his mind cannot rationalize it, he will not accept it. The Christian accepts it because God has revealed it in His Word. This does not mean that we check our minds at the door of the church but rather that we reason from faith. In Anselm's famous phrase, our faith seeks understanding.

This is similarly true with the doctrine of the Trinity. Any well-trained Jehovah's Witness can marshal impressive logical arguments against this doctrine if his rationalistic presuppositions are granted. But if we start not from what our minds can conceive but from what God has revealed in His Word, we will find ourselves bowing to the God who, in ways that we cannot fully explain, has revealed Himself as Father, Son and Spirit. Furthermore, we will love to sing with Charles Wesley,

'Tis mystery all, the Immortal dies:
Who can explore this strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine.

Providence is another revealed mystery. How can God sovereignly rule over a world of truly responsible creatures? How can He be both good and sovereign when terrorists murder thousands of innocent people? No answer will satisfy the demands of rationalism. Nevertheless, faith directs the heart to the sovereignty and goodness of God that blazes across eternity in the death of Jesus Christ.

Was the crucifixion of Jesus the will of God? He was the only righteous man who has ever lived. He was innocent not only before His murderers but also before God. His death was the most heinous crime in human history. Did God have anything to do with it? Where was God when His Son was hanging on the cross? Could He have stopped it? Why didn't He?

God was there, and not merely as a casual bystander. He was the Master of Ceremonies at the crucifixion. Jesus Himself told His disciples as much as He prepared them for His coming death. After the fact, the Apostle Peter spelled it out clearly in his sermon at Pentecost. Of Jesus he said, "Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death;" (Acts 2:23). God was sovereign: they were responsible.

In that wicked, tragic death, God was doing His deepest work of love and mercy. He was reconciling the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19). The crucifixion reveals to us the depth of both the wisdom and power of God. It shows us His love and goodness. It reassures those who have come to know Him through faith in Jesus that He is God and is "for us." It guarantees us that He will work all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

In times of sorrow and when confronted with horrific evil, God's children should resist the temptation to rest in rationalizations, whether on the right (Islam) or the left (open theism). Rather, we should run to the crucified, risen Savior. Let faith be renewed at the foot of the cross. The certainties revealed there give strength to face the mysteries of life without despair.

Notes:

¹ *Qur'an* 37:94, cited by Normal Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 374.



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¹ *Qur'an* 37:94, cited by Normal Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 374.



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The Omniscience of God: Does the Lord Really Know Everything?

[Joe Nesom](#)

Several months past found the popular "evangelical" magazines giving some prominence to the latest doctrinal controversy. At issue was the question of how much the Lord knows. A number of "evangelicals" had begun to oppose the historic doctrine of the omniscience of God. The most prominent of these was Greg Boyd of Bethel College and Seminary in St. Paul. His disbelief in the historic Christian doctrine created a whirlwind of activity in the Baptist General Conference.^[1]

In what appeared to be an effort to solve, or at least soften the "problem of evil," Boyd and others had begun to teach that God creates people, but the people create their own decisions, and therefore God cannot know what they will be, until they come to pass. Reactions have included the strange and novel as well as the orthodox. Some of Boyd's defenders concluded that he was merely being "Arminian" and therefore within the pale of evangelical acceptability. Others, who proved themselves better historians, pointed out that Arminians, along with Calvinists, have always affirmed the doctrine of God's omniscience. The Baptist General Conference (Swedish Baptists) affirmed Boyd's "orthodoxy" by a close vote of 270-251. The controversy goes on.^[2]

Theological treatment of the doctrine

The word *omniscience* is not, strictly speaking, a biblical term. The word itself is not found in the Bible. It is a philosophical/theological word that has come into wide usage because, like the word *trinity*, it correctly describes the biblical evidence. The word means to *see* or *know* all things. For God, if this doctrine is true, everything is eternally "present." I have recently been going through a box of old newspaper clippings from earlier years. To my astonishment, I had forgotten, not only many things that happened to me, but many of the people involved. Time dims our remembrance of much that has happened. God is not like that. He always knows what is past, present, and future, if he is omniscient.

Many theologians, past and present, perhaps the great majority of them, have either made a short affirmative statement that God is all-knowing, or they have treated the doctrine as a "given," something which is so obvious in the Scriptures as to be commonly received. I agree with that position.

However, down through the years, particularly in times when there was a greater tendency to reflect on the whole counsel of God than is often the case today, a number of theologians took pens in hand to set forth a systematic presentation of this and related truths. We will begin by examining the work of one of the best representatives of reformed theology, Francis Turretin.

The omniscience of God and Turretin: a biblical and logical defense of the doctrine

One of the best treatments of the orthodox doctrine, in the face of opposition (both contemporary and

historical), is that of Francis Turretin. In his discussion of the doctrine of God, he addresses the question of God's knowledge under the heading of God's intellect, will, and power. The historical and theological context is the denial of Socinus that both "singulars" and "future contingencies" are known to God. Against that position Turretin wrote,

Concerning the intellect of God and the disquisition of his knowledge, two things must be attended to above all others: the mode and the object. The mode consists in his knowing all things perfectly, undividedly, distinctly and immutably. It is thus distinguished from human and angelic knowledge: perfectly because he knows all things by himself or by his essence (not by forms abstracted from things--as is the case with creatures--both because these are only in time with the things themselves, but the knowledge of God is eternal, and because he can have no cause out of himself).[3]

Turretin then proceeded to affirm that God's knowledge is *undivided* because it is not something acquired by "ratiocination" but is intuitive. Anthropomorphic language may appear in the Scriptures representing God as questioning or reasoning, but this is clearly the *lisp*ing of the Scriptures for our benefit. It may be described as *distinct* because it is not a gathered collection of *diverse predicates of things* which has been brought together by God's *diverse conception*. No, God sees all things *at a glance* and the smallest thing does not escape him. Finally, the Lord's knowledge is *immutable* because God never changes.[4]

Turretin was aware that among the "fathers" there were those who thought it beneath the dignity of the Deity to concern himself with such lowly questions as *how many gnats are born or die every moment* (singulars). Nevertheless, the testimony of God's Word *leaves no room for doubt*. If the Savior taught that the hairs of our head are all numbered and that God knows and wills the fall of the sparrow, then surely he knows all such things. Such knowledge in no way demeans our glorious Creator.[5]

The question that looms largest is that of future contingent things. The Socinians sometimes talked as if they believed in the full knowledge of God still many often also denied foreknowledge of future contingent events. In this way, they thought to make a strong argument for the freedom of the will from all things necessary. The Socinians denied that all things, which will take place, come under the sovereignty of God. The relationship of this viewpoint to that held by those who deny the omniscience of God, in our day, seems clear.[6]

Turretin denied this Socinian error by appealing to the words of Scripture. Does not the Word of God say, "Lord, thou knowest all things? (John 21:17) and "God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things" (1 John 3:20).[7] Did not the writer of Hebrews teach us that "All things are naked and open unto his eyes" (Hebrews 4:13)? Did not the Lord tell Jeremiah "Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee" (Jeremiah. 1:5)?[8]

A further appeal was made to the reality of *prediction* as an indication of the true deity. The idols were challenged by the Lord to, "Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods" (Is. 41:23). The prophet Isaiah in another passage confesses that "He declares the end from the beginning and from ancient times the things that are not yet done" (Isaiah 46:10).[9]

Turretin also appealed to the perfection of God and the doctrine of providence. If God is to be regarded as the perfect being, then surely he must know all things past and present, and those things that are future, whether contingent or necessary. The doctrine of providence teaches us that he, as the omnipresent Lord, is guiding and shaping the decisions of his creatures "before they move or direct

themselves." Moreover, if God "immutably decreed either to effect or to permit" he must surely know all things that will happen.[\[10\]](#)

Shorter theological treatments from the reformers and their heirs fall into the same sort of pattern. For example, William Ames (1576-1633) taught that God's understanding is without "composition, argument, or classification." This is the same as Turretin's description of God's knowledge as "undivided." Ames also affirmed the unchangeable nature of God's understanding, and that the Lord's knowledge is infinite and eternal.[\[11\]](#)

The test of these things, for those who believe in the authority of the Word of God, is still an appeal to the perspicuous teaching of Holy Scripture. What does the Bible teach us about God's knowledge of all things? Many years ago, I was warned by a teacher of theology, that to appeal to the direct statements of Scripture as the foundation of a theological treatise was to be less than modern. He named a well-known evangelical theologian and said, "Only a man like that does theology that way!" But how else can one "do theology" if one is committed to the truthfulness, authority, and sufficiency of the Scriptures?

Omniscience, the Word of God, and our experience

O Lord, you have searched me and you know me, You know when I sit and when I rise... You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways (Ps. 139:1-2a & 3).

The assertion is that God, having brought us under his omnipotent gaze, knows everything we do. In verse one, David speaks to the Lord and acknowledges that God has looked deep into his heart, and discovered the truth of all that is there. When the Psalmist moves from place to place, and even when he takes his seat or rises from it, God is not caught unaware. He knows everything we do.

There is a very good example of this in the New Testament. Was not the Lord most surely aware of every circumstance in the life of the apostle Paul when he sent an angel to tell his apostle that not one person's life on board the ship would be lost? (Acts 27:21-25). How could God have his messenger say such a thing if he did not know all that would take place?

Did he not also know that Paul would do the responsible thing and tell the soldiers that if the sailors did not stay with the ship, they could not be saved? Surely, the Lord knew that the soldiers would make the right decision. The Lord was not waiting to find out what they would do. Though there are passages that indicate that the Lord tests us, and "awaits" our obedience, these are certainly anthropomorphic. There are far too many affirmations in Scripture that God knows all things, from the beginning, to think otherwise.

You perceive my thoughts from afar (Ps. 139:2b).

Does God know everything that we are thinking and can he "read our minds" without being present with us to observe our mood, or our visage? Indeed the Lord can do such a thing, and that is part of David's confession of faith. He knows everything we think. Does not this aspect of the knowledge of God undergird the teaching of our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount? We cannot be content with a show of outward obedience to the law, because there is a God above who sees into the very heart of man. This is the view of the writer of Hebrews. "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13).

Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord (Ps. 139:4).

As I write, I do not know precisely what I will say in the next sentence or paragraph. In fact, thanks to word processing I will no doubt easily revise my words repeatedly, hopefully for the better each time. I do not know what I shall say, but the Lord knows each statement, each change, and the outcome, though I do not. This is the testimony of the Word of God. God knows everything that we will say before we say it.

For practical purposes, is this not the definition of the omniscience of God? He knows all things, past, present, and future, and therefore he knows all that we do (which includes the remembrance of all that we have done), all that we think (and the record of those thoughts), and all that we say.

The omniscience of God and the incarnation

To deny the omniscience of God is also to play havoc with the central verities of the faith. The clear testimony of Scripture is surely enough to convince us of the truth that God is all-knowing, but it is the incarnation and the cross of Christ that reveal this attribute in its most wondrous demonstration.

God did not await the decisions of men before announcing the specifics of his future purpose. Isaiah, for example, tells us that the Lord had revealed to him that the servant of God would be "smitten" "pierced" and "crushed." Isaiah, long before the coming of the Messiah, knew that, following his humiliation, he would "see the light of life and be satisfied" and that "by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many and he will bear their iniquities" (Isaiah 53).

The omniscient God sent an angel to the mother of our Lord to reveal a specific program. "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the son of the Most High. The Lord will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end" (Luke 1:30b-33).

The Lord could make such assertions because he knew all his holy will that he had purposed to do. None of the angelic language suggests that God might have been waiting to see what angels or men would do, before announcing a course of action.

The omniscience of God and the doctrine of salvation

If the omniscience of God is denied, the biblical revelation of God's sovereign work in saving undeserving sinners makes no sense. Paul told the Ephesians that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:3-4). The Lord could not have done this if he was under the constraint of waiting and watching to see who would decide to choose him.

In addition, according to Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost Christ was handed over to wicked men by God's set purpose and foreknowledge. There is every indication in this early Christian sermon that the Lord knew that the cross would be the destiny of the son, and that he would be raised in power on the third day. The Father clearly knew the outcome of the great battle that was joined with the forces of evil at Calvary.

In the same way, the Lord was able to reveal what had been a mystery concerning the people of God.

That the church would be composed of both Jew and Gentile and that the gospel would be preached to all the nations was something that the Lord foreknew, but only revealed in fullness at the coming of Christ. These things were known by God, from all eternity, but only given partial and shadowy announcement in the words of Old Testament prophets.

The infinity of God and omniscience

The Baptist Confession of 1689 gives us one of the most profound summaries of the doctrine of God. That summary contains two very important observations about the infinity of God.

Beginning with these words: "The Lord our God is but one only living and true God; whose subsistence is in and of himself, infinite in being and perfection..." the confession goes on to say that (1) God is in "every way infinite" and that (2) his knowledge is "infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature, so as nothing is to him contingent or uncertain."

To speak of God as in *every way infinite*, is to confess what the whole testimony of Scripture assumes from Genesis to Revelation. When Sarah doubted that she would bear a son, the Lord reminded Abraham, "Is anything too hard for Jehovah?" (Genesis 18:13-14).

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was the eternally existing God who, by his being, defines what infinite attributes are. This is assumed repeatedly by the writers of Holy Scripture. Jeremiah prayed, "Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you" (Jeremiah 32:17).

If we are to love God with our minds, the logical route that we must take starts with the infinity of God, and moves to think of him as infinite in holiness, wisdom, freedom, and power. He is without the constraint of limitation. In this, he is unique; there are no angels or men who can say the same. That is the God of Scripture. If he is infinite in all things, this is true of his knowledge as well.

To speak of God as something less than omniscient, is to deny his God-ness, for his God-ness includes all things that God is, and infinitely so. Thus to speak of a "god," who does not *know* all things, is to substitute a false god for the true and living God as revealed in creation and in the Scriptures. It is the same error that the apostle Paul attributes to the pagan world (Romans 1:18-20). Men had denied the eternal power and divine nature of God and created for themselves "gods" of their own choosing.

These "invisible qualities" of our God (and that includes his knowledge) have been clearly seen since the creation of the world. We must have a verbal revelation to know the gospel. It must be proclaimed and is essential in the salvation of sinners. But creation, and God's stamp upon his creatures, as well as the Scriptures, teach us that God exists, and that he is infinite in knowledge, in presence, and in power.

Happily, Article II of *The Baptist Faith and Message, 2000 Edition* is very clear on the omniscience of God. "God is infinite in holiness and all other perfections. God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures." [12]

To deny these things is to do what the pagan world did long ago. It is to substitute a "god" of our making (a "god" after the likeness of man, who has limited knowledge) and thus become idolaters. "Evangelical" credentials, by the ballot of "evangelical" church bodies, mean nothing. To deny the omniscience of God is to depart from faith in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is to proclaim a "god" with

limitations who can never be the true and living God of the Scriptures. He knows all things, and knowing the beginning from the end, is able to accomplish all of his most holy will.

Notes:

¹ Edward E. Plowman, "What does God Know?" *WORLD*, 17 July 1999.

² Ibid.

³ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Philipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 1997), 1:207.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 210.

⁶ Ibid., 208.

⁷ Ibid., 209.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 210.

¹¹ William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1983), 87.

¹² *The Baptist Faith and Message, 2000 Edition* (Nashville, TN: LifeWay Press, 2000), Article II.



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The Omniscience of God: Does the Lord Really Know Everything?

[Joe Nesom](#)

Several months past found the popular "evangelical" magazines giving some prominence to the latest doctrinal controversy. At issue was the question of how much the Lord knows. A number of "evangelicals" had begun to oppose the historic doctrine of the omniscience of God. The most prominent of these was Greg Boyd of Bethel College and Seminary in St. Paul. His disbelief in the historic Christian doctrine created a whirlwind of activity in the Baptist General Conference.[\[1\]](#)

In what appeared to be an effort to solve, or at least soften the "problem of evil," Boyd and others had begun to teach that God creates people, but the people create their own decisions, and therefore God cannot know what they will be, until they come to pass. Reactions have included the strange and novel as well as the orthodox. Some of Boyd's defenders concluded that he was merely being "Arminian" and therefore within the pale of evangelical acceptability. Others, who proved themselves better historians, pointed out that Arminians, along with Calvinists, have always affirmed the doctrine of God's omniscience. The Baptist General Conference (Swedish Baptists) affirmed Boyd's "orthodoxy" by a close vote of 270-251. The controversy goes on.[\[2\]](#)

Theological treatment of the doctrine

The word *omniscience* is not, strictly speaking, a biblical term. The word itself is not found in the Bible. It is a philosophical/theological word that has come into wide usage because, like the word *trinity*, it correctly describes the biblical evidence. The word means to *see* or *know* all things. For God, if this doctrine is true, everything is eternally "present." I have recently been going through a box of old newspaper clippings from earlier years. To my astonishment, I had forgotten, not only many things that happened to me, but many of the people involved. Time dims our remembrance of much that has happened. God is not like that. He always knows what is past, present, and future, if he is omniscient.

Many theologians, past and present, perhaps the great majority of them, have either made a short affirmative statement that God is all-knowing, or they have treated the doctrine as a "given," something which is so obvious in the Scriptures as to be commonly received. I agree with that position.

However, down through the years, particularly in times when there was a greater tendency to reflect on the whole counsel of God than is often the case today, a number of theologians took pens in hand to set forth a systematic presentation of this and related truths. We will begin by examining the work of one of the best representatives of reformed theology, Francis Turretin.

The omniscience of God and Turretin: a biblical and logical defense of the doctrine

One of the best treatments of the orthodox doctrine, in the face of opposition (both contemporary and historical), is that of Francis Turretin. In his discussion of the doctrine of God, he addresses the question of God's knowledge under the heading of God's intellect, will, and power. The historical and theological

context is the denial of Socinus that both "singulars" and "future contingencies" are known to God. Against that position Turretin wrote,

Concerning the intellect of God and the disquisition of his knowledge, two things must be attended to above all others: the mode and the object. The mode consists in his knowing all things perfectly, undividedly, distinctly and immutably. It is thus distinguished from human and angelic knowledge: perfectly because he knows all things by himself or by his essence (not by forms abstracted from things--as is the case with creatures--both because these are only in time with the things themselves, but the knowledge of God is eternal, and because he can have no cause out of himself).[3]

Turretin then proceeded to affirm that God's knowledge is *undivided* because it is not something acquired by "ratiocination" but is intuitive. Anthropomorphic language may appear in the Scriptures representing God as questioning or reasoning, but this is clearly the *lisp*ing of the Scriptures for our benefit. It may be described as *distinct* because it is not a gathered collection of *diverse predicates of things* which has been brought together by God's *diverse conception*. No, God sees all things *at a glance* and the smallest thing does not escape him. Finally, the Lord's knowledge is *immutable* because God never changes.[4]

Turretin was aware that among the "fathers" there were those who thought it beneath the dignity of the Deity to concern himself with such lowly questions as *how many gnats are born or die every moment* (singulars). Nevertheless, the testimony of God's Word *leaves no room for doubt*. If the Savior taught that the hairs of our head are all numbered and that God knows and wills the fall of the sparrow, then surely he knows all such things. Such knowledge in no way demeans our glorious Creator.[5]

The question that looms largest is that of future contingent things. The Socinians sometimes talked as if they believed in the full knowledge of God still many often also denied foreknowledge of future contingent events. In this way, they thought to make a strong argument for the freedom of the will from all things necessary. The Socinians denied that all things, which will take place, come under the sovereignty of God. The relationship of this viewpoint to that held by those who deny the omniscience of God, in our day, seems clear.[6]

Turretin denied this Socinian error by appealing to the words of Scripture. Does not the Word of God say, "Lord, thou knowest all things? (John 21:17) and "God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things" (1 John 3:20).[7] Did not the writer of Hebrews teach us that "All things are naked and open unto his eyes" (Hebrews 4:13)? Did not the Lord tell Jeremiah "Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee" (Jeremiah. 1:5)?[8]

A further appeal was made to the reality of *prediction* as an indication of the true deity. The idols were challenged by the Lord to, "Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods" (Is. 41:23). The prophet Isaiah in another passage confesses that "He declares the end from the beginning and from ancient times the things that are not yet done" (Isaiah 46:10).[9]

Turretin also appealed to the perfection of God and the doctrine of providence. If God is to be regarded as the perfect being, then surely he must know all things past and present, and those things that are future, whether contingent or necessary. The doctrine of providence teaches us that he, as the omnipresent Lord, is guiding and shaping the decisions of his creatures "before they move or direct themselves." Moreover, if God "immutably decreed either to effect or to permit" he must surely know all things that will happen.[10]

Shorter theological treatments from the reformers and their heirs fall into the same sort of pattern. For example, William Ames (1576-1633) taught that God's understanding is without "composition, argument, or classification." This is the same as Turretin's description of God's knowledge as "undivided." Ames also affirmed the unchangeable nature of God's understanding, and that the Lord's knowledge is infinite and eternal.[\[11\]](#)

The test of these things, for those who believe in the authority of the Word of God, is still an appeal to the perspicuous teaching of Holy Scripture. What does the Bible teach us about God's knowledge of all things? Many years ago, I was warned by a teacher of theology, that to appeal to the direct statements of Scripture as the foundation of a theological treatise was to be less than modern. He named a well-known evangelical theologian and said, "Only a man like that does theology that way!" But how else can one "do theology" if one is committed to the truthfulness, authority, and sufficiency of the Scriptures?

Omniscience, the Word of God, and our experience

O Lord, you have searched me and you know me, You know when I sit and when I rise... You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways (Ps. 139:1-2a & 3).

The assertion is that God, having brought us under his omnipotent gaze, knows everything we do. In verse one, David speaks to the Lord and acknowledges that God has looked deep into his heart, and discovered the truth of all that is there. When the Psalmist moves from place to place, and even when he takes his seat or rises from it, God is not caught unaware. He knows everything we do.

There is a very good example of this in the New Testament. Was not the Lord most surely aware of every circumstance in the life of the apostle Paul when he sent an angel to tell his apostle that not one person's life on board the ship would be lost? (Acts 27:21-25). How could God have his messenger say such a thing if he did not know all that would take place?

Did he not also know that Paul would do the responsible thing and tell the soldiers that if the sailors did not stay with the ship, they could not be saved? Surely, the Lord knew that the soldiers would make the right decision. The Lord was not waiting to find out what they would do. Though there are passages that indicate that the Lord tests us, and "awaits" our obedience, these are certainly anthropomorphic. There are far too many affirmations in Scripture that God knows all things, from the beginning, to think otherwise.

You perceive my thoughts from afar (Ps. 139:2b).

Does God know everything that we are thinking and can he "read our minds" without being present with us to observe our mood, or our visage? Indeed the Lord can do such a thing, and that is part of David's confession of faith. He knows everything we think. Does not this aspect of the knowledge of God undergird the teaching of our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount? We cannot be content with a show of outward obedience to the law, because there is a God above who sees into the very heart of man. This is the view of the writer of Hebrews. "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13).

Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord (Ps. 139:4).

As I write, I do not know precisely what I will say in the next sentence or paragraph. In fact, thanks to word processing I will no doubt easily revise my words repeatedly, hopefully for the better each time. I

do not know what I shall say, but the Lord knows each statement, each change, and the outcome, though I do not. This is the testimony of the Word of God. God knows everything that we will say before we say it.

For practical purposes, is this not the definition of the omniscience of God? He knows all things, past, present, and future, and therefore he knows all that we do (which includes the remembrance of all that we have done), all that we think (and the record of those thoughts), and all that we say.

The omniscience of God and the incarnation

To deny the omniscience of God is also to play havoc with the central verities of the faith. The clear testimony of Scripture is surely enough to convince us of the truth that God is all-knowing, but it is the incarnation and the cross of Christ that reveal this attribute in its most wondrous demonstration.

God did not await the decisions of men before announcing the specifics of his future purpose. Isaiah, for example, tells us that the Lord had revealed to him that the servant of God would be "smitten" "pierced" and "crushed." Isaiah, long before the coming of the Messiah, knew that, following his humiliation, he would "see the light of life and be satisfied" and that "by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many and he will bear their iniquities" (Isaiah 53).

The omniscient God sent an angel to the mother of our Lord to reveal a specific program. "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the son of the Most High. The Lord will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end" (Luke 1:30b-33).

The Lord could make such assertions because he knew all his holy will that he had purposed to do. None of the angelic language suggests that God might have been waiting to see what angels or men would do, before announcing a course of action.

The omniscience of God and the doctrine of salvation

If the omniscience of God is denied, the biblical revelation of God's sovereign work in saving undeserving sinners makes no sense. Paul told the Ephesians that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:3-4). The Lord could not have done this if he was under the constraint of waiting and watching to see who would decide to choose him.

In addition, according to Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost Christ was handed over to wicked men by God's set purpose and foreknowledge. There is every indication in this early Christian sermon that the Lord knew that the cross would be the destiny of the son, and that he would be raised in power on the third day. The Father clearly knew the outcome of the great battle that was joined with the forces of evil at Calvary.

In the same way, the Lord was able to reveal what had been a mystery concerning the people of God. That the church would be composed of both Jew and Gentile and that the gospel would be preached to all the nations was something that the Lord foreknew, but only revealed in fullness at the coming of Christ. These things were known by God, from all eternity, but only given partial and shadowy announcement in the words of Old Testament prophets.

The infinity of God and omniscience

The Baptist Confession of 1689 gives us one of the most profound summaries of the doctrine of God. That summary contains two very important observations about the infinity of God.

Beginning with these words: "The Lord our God is but one only living and true God; whose subsistence is in and of himself, infinite in being and perfection..." the confession goes on to say that (1) God is in "every way infinite" and that (2) his knowledge is "infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature, so as nothing is to him contingent or uncertain."

To speak of God as in *every way infinite*, is to confess what the whole testimony of Scripture assumes from Genesis to Revelation. When Sarah doubted that she would bear a son, the Lord reminded Abraham, "Is anything too hard for Jehovah?" (Genesis 18:13-14).

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was the eternally existing God who, by his being, defines what infinite attributes are. This is assumed repeatedly by the writers of Holy Scripture. Jeremiah prayed, "Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you" (Jeremiah 32:17).

If we are to love God with our minds, the logical route that we must take starts with the infinity of God, and moves to think of him as infinite in holiness, wisdom, freedom, and power. He is without the constraint of limitation. In this, he is unique; there are no angels or men who can say the same. That is the God of Scripture. If he is infinite in all things, this is true of his knowledge as well.

To speak of God as something less than omniscient, is to deny his God-ness, for his God-ness includes all things that God is, and infinitely so. Thus to speak of a "god," who does not *know* all things, is to substitute a false god for the true and living God as revealed in creation and in the Scriptures. It is the same error that the apostle Paul attributes to the pagan world (Romans 1:18-20). Men had denied the eternal power and divine nature of God and created for themselves "gods" of their own choosing.

These "invisible qualities" of our God (and that includes his knowledge) have been clearly seen since the creation of the world. We must have a verbal revelation to know the gospel. It must be proclaimed and is essential in the salvation of sinners. But creation, and God's stamp upon his creatures, as well as the Scriptures, teach us that God exists, and that he is infinite in knowledge, in presence, and in power.

Happily, Article II of *The Baptist Faith and Message, 2000 Edition* is very clear on the omniscience of God. "God is infinite in holiness and all other perfections. God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures." [\[12\]](#)

To deny these things is to do what the pagan world did long ago. It is to substitute a "god" of our making (a "god" after the likeness of man, who has limited knowledge) and thus become idolaters. "Evangelical" credentials, by the ballot of "evangelical" church bodies, mean nothing. To deny the omniscience of God is to depart from faith in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is to proclaim a "god" with limitations who can never be the true and living God of the Scriptures. He knows all things, and knowing the beginning from the end, is able to accomplish all of his most holy will.

Notes:

¹ Edward E. Plowman, "What does God Know?" *WORLD*, 17 July 1999.

² *Ibid.*

³ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Philipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 1997), 1:207.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 210.

¹¹ William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1983), 87.

¹² *The Baptist Faith and Message, 2000 Edition* (Nashville, TN: LifeWay Press, 2000), Article II.



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Pastoral Implications of Open Theism

[Tom Ascol](#)

[This article is adapted from a chapter that appears in the book, *Bound Only Once*, edited by Douglas Wilson and recently published by Canon Press.]

Recent years have witnessed a revisioning of God and reality by some that nevertheless want to maintain their credentials as evangelicals. The proponents of this new approach call themselves "open theists" and advocate a redefinition of God's omniscience that is based on a creative understanding of knowledge and the future. God, they tell us, knows everything that is capable of being known. But since the future does not fit into that category (at least not always), then it is nonsensical to suggest that God either does or does not know it. It is like debating whether God knows unicorns. Consequently, events often catch God off-guard just as they do finite beings. Knowing this, we are told, helps people to think better of God and trust Him more readily, especially when tragedies occur.

In many respects, Open Theism is a perfect theological fit for the contemporary American *zeitgeist*. In an age where empathy trumps truthfulness we are more comforted by someone who feels our pain than by someone who speaks honestly, unequivocally and consistently. Disappoint us if you will, fail to keep your promises if you must, but do not cease to reassure us that you really feel for us. The God of Open Theism perfectly fits this criterion.

Greg Boyd claims that the differences between the openness and orthodox views of God are "relatively unimportant," "peripheral" and "minor."^[1] Open Theism cannot legitimately be classified as a subset of evangelicalism. It is a radically different understanding of reality and therefore of the real God. Its implications for the Christian life are as far reaching as they are devastating.

Some of these implications are self-consciously held and celebrated by the proponents of Open Theism. For instance, Boyd finds it pastorally helpful to counsel a person who has experienced great tragedy that God was as surprised as everyone else at what happened. In Boyd's mind this makes God kinder and gentler and therefore more trustworthy.^[2] Other implications are subtler and may well be renounced by open theists but, as will be seen, are nevertheless inherent in their system of thought. One cannot possess a forest without owning the trees, no matter how vehemently he might protest to the contrary.

Undermines confidence in Scripture

Boyd argues that "if we simply accept the plain meaning of Scripture" we will concur with Open Theism's claims that sometimes God "regrets how decisions he's made turn out," "questions how aspects of the future will go," "experiences frustration because free agents choose unlikely courses of action" and "genuinely changes his mind about intended courses of action."^[3] His optimistic overstatement notwithstanding, the openness perspective actually calls into question Scripture's "plain meaning" and violates fundamental principles of interpretation. The result is a huge cloud of doubt left hanging over the perspicuity and reliability of Scripture.

A long standing principle of hermeneutics declares that passages which clearly assert a doctrine or principle are to be used to shed light on narrative passages.

Interpret historic material by didactic material. Historical material is narration, the accounts of what happened in the past. Didactic material is teaching material. It is important for the didactic material to interpret the historical material rather than the other way around.[\[4\]](#)

The importance of this guiding principle can be demonstrated by applying it to the sinfulness of mankind. Romans 3:23 makes a straightforward affirmation of the universality of human sinfulness, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." This didactic passage sheds light on other passages that are narrative or testimonial. For example, the story of Daniel's life might lead one to believe that, because there is no record of any sin he committed that he was a sinless man. If the narrative passages of his life were all that we had then we, at best, could not refute such a claim.

If the principle articulated above is followed, there will be no danger of reaching that conclusion. Though the narrative might suggest that there was no sin in Daniel, the didactic passage assures us that there was. By giving priority to clearly stated teaching regarding sin and using the light which it sheds on the story of Daniel's life, we will resist making any claims of sinlessness for him.

Open theists turn this principle of interpretation on its head. John Sanders goes to great lengths to establish patterns from narrative passages on divine-human relationships and then uses those patterns to reinterpret clear, didactic Scriptures. The stories of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Gideon, Moses and David are all cited as examples of God changing his mind, repenting, being disappointed or caught off guard by what happened.[\[5\]](#) The survey of these stories is set forth as evidence "that God is in a dynamic give-and-take relationship with humans and in which God sometimes does not get what he wants."[\[6\]](#)

Efforts to interpret these texts in the light of didactic passages which assert God's sovereign control over people and events (what Sanders calls "pancausality texts") is charged with "hermeneutical malpractice."[\[7\]](#) Statements like the following are all reinterpreted in light of narrative "evidence" of the openness of God:

- "'O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?' says the LORD. 'Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!'" (Jeremiah 18:6).
- "A man's heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps" (Proverbs 16:9).
- "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, Like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes" (Proverbs 21:1).
- "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the LORD?" (Exodus 4:11).

Some of the results would be amusing if the stakes involved were not so high.

For instance, Proverbs 16:9 and 21:1 are taken to mean only that "God directs his people's steps (16:9) and guides the king of Israel (21:1) when they seek God's wisdom." Exodus 4:11 becomes nothing more than "a general statement that such things happen in God's world" and an admission that He takes "full responsibility" for creating such a world where defects are possible.[\[8\]](#)

With its presupposition that God has only limited knowledge of what will happen in the future, Open Theism must reconstruct plain statements of Scripture to the contrary. The story of Joseph provides a

case in point. At the end of the narrative, Joseph makes his famous declaration to his frightened brothers, which reflects his simple and complete confidence in God's sovereign, detailed arrangement of his life. It is his divinely inspired explanation of the events of his life: "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" (Genesis 50:20).

Sanders' interpretation of this verse is dismissive at best. He writes, "I take this to mean that God has brought something good out of their evil actions." He further comments, "Although he [Joseph] acknowledges that they sold him into Egypt, he suggests that everyone look on the bright side--what God has done through this. Their lives and those of the Egyptians have been spared the devastating effects of the famine."^[9] From a profound, theological declaration of God's unmitigated providence, Sanders reduces Joseph's words to, "Serendipity!"

Intentional or not, the openness reading of Scripture, if followed consistently, renders direct teachings of the Bible vacuous if not incomprehensible.

Undermines confidence in God

The open theistic vision of God is one that robs believers of comfort and confidence. The traditional understanding of God gives full weight to those biblical declarations which describe Him as "Lord God Almighty ... King of the Saints" (Revelation 15:3), who "rules over the nations" (Psalm 22:28) and "the raging of the sea" (Psalm 89:9) and who shall "reign forever and ever" (Exodus 15:18; cf. Psalms 93:1, 96:10, 9:1, 99:1, 146:10). Nebuchadnezzar's inspired declaration of God's unhindered, meticulous exercise of His divine providence is no embarrassment to orthodox theism:

All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing;
He does according to His will in the army of heaven
And among the inhabitants of the earth.
No one can restrain His hand
Or say to Him, "What have you done?" (Daniel 4:35).

Open Theism dismisses the view of God and providence that these verses naturally portray because it does not "fit" with the "biblical story" as they see it.^[10] Instead of recognizing God as the unrivaled Ruler of the universe, free will theists want to portray Him as the "cosmic Gambler." This view of God is supposed to engender comfort and hope on the part of believers; but in fact, it destroys the very foundation that the Bible establishes for trusting God.

Sanders is quite plain in expressing his desire to replace God as King with God as "risk taker."^[11] God took a chance in creating a world that He populated with creatures that are endowed with libertarian free wills. He did so in an effort to accomplish "the divine project," which "involves the creation of significant others who are ontologically distinct from himself and upon whom he showers his caring love in the expectation that they will respond in love."^[12] This risk, Sanders argues, had a "great chance of success and little possibility of failure;" in fact, "although sin was possible--given this sort of world--it simply was not plausible in view of the good environment God established and the love he bestowed."^[13]

However, any honest reading of history or Scripture demonstrates that the "divine project," as Sanders defines it, is a colossal failure. Jesus said that only a "few" will enter the narrow gate and walk the

narrow path of loving God (Matthew 7:13-14) and missiological analyses of Christian history certainly confirm His announcement. If the sin and degradation of the world are the result of a highly implausible disruption in God's low-risk creative venture, how can anyone be expected to trust Him for future "projects?"

Open Theism reduces God to a cosmic gambler--and not a very successful one at that. He created billions of image bearers, gambling that they would choose to love and trust Him. This was to have been an "almost sure thing" because of His love and provision. Nevertheless, in terms of sheer quantitative analysis, His gamble hardly paid off. From creation to the present, the openness God has continued to take risks, only to experience repeated failures. Both the Bible and history are filled with accounts of people and "projects" that he counted on in vain.[\[14\]](#)

How can such a God be trusted? If that which he has intended to do has so catastrophically and repeatedly failed to come to pass, why depend on Him to fulfill any of his promises, no matter how well intentioned they may be? I would sooner risk my family's finances on a lottery ticket than my soul to a gambler with such a poor track record.

Boyd does not see this problem and, in fact, argues that the open view of God makes Him more trustworthy than the classical view. Instead of seeing God as meticulously ruling and overruling all of the affairs of life for good and holy purposes, Boyd chooses to think of God's exercise of providence as being like a child's "Choose Your Own Adventure" story, in which the author creates a number of possible plots which the reader can progressively select as he or she moves through the book. In a similar way "the God of the possible is the author of the whole story line of creation and the one who offers possible alternatives to his human and angelic creations," thus leaving "plenty of room for individuals to exercise free will."[\[15\]](#)

A God who exhaustively knows the future or who ordains it is not worthy of trust, Boyd says, because that bad thing which He knows will happen to you in two days must infallibly happen, no matter what you do or do not do. He complains,

How does believing this help you "trust God"? What are you trusting God for? To simply know from all eternity that this terrible event is going to happen to you: What security is there in that: How does this belief help you in the least?[\[16\]](#)

Far better, Boyd contends, to have a God who knows this thing not as inevitability but as merely one of many possibilities which might befall you in two days. In this case, God works to encourage you to create a future which avoids that bad possibility--especially if "you are a person who frequently talks and listens to God" and "have family and friends who pray for you on a consistent basis." In such cases, God "can be trusted to inspire [you] to avoid certain future possibilities he sees coming."[\[17\]](#)

Of course, what Boyd fails to address is why anyone should be willing to trust the promptings of a God whose best intentions have been thwarted repeatedly throughout history. Indeed, an episode out of his own pastoral experience stands in protest against his theory. He tells the story of "Suzanne," a young woman who was "raised in a wonderful Christian home," had been a "passionate, godly disciple of Jesus Christ" from her youth and had a near life-long desire to be a missionary to Taiwan.[\[18\]](#) She prayed daily for her future husband that he would share her vision for Taiwan, "remain faithful to the Lord and remain pure in heart." She met and courted such a man for more than three years during college. After months of prayer, fasting, and consulting with their parents, pastor and friends, everyone agreed that "this marriage

was indeed God's will." Suzanne herself received a special confirmation of this while in prayer one day.

Shortly after her marriage, while in missionary school, Suzanne's husband began a pattern of adultery and abuse and refused to be helped or to repent. When he filed for divorce, she was left pregnant, "angry," "emotionally destroyed and spiritually bankrupt." In order to help her deal with the devastation of her ordeal, Boyd offered her "an alternative way of understanding the situation." He writes, "I suggested to her that God felt as much regret over the confirmation he had given Suzanne as he did about his decision to make Saul king of Israel (1 Sam. 15:11, 35; see also Gen. 6:5-6)." [19] However, why did God not work in Suzanne to encourage her to create a future that avoided this possibility? Surely she fits Boyd's profile of the type of person who can trust the open God to do just that.

How can God be "trusted to inspire" His children to take certain decisions when He Himself is as fallible as we are because He does not exhaustively know the future? It is hard to see how this view does not reduce God to the level of a television meteorologist--one who, because he is an expert in his field has access to information which is not readily available to others, is in a better position than most to make educated guesses about the future. The question remains, "Why should we trust such a God?"

It is one thing to base your picnic plans on a weatherman's forecast. If unexpected rain ruins your day you may be disappointed and even frustrated with him and his predictions, but you recognize that he is only making an educated guess about meteorological patterns. You do not expect him to be infallible. We have much higher expectations of God. If He inspires us to actions which He later regrets then He is ultimately untrustworthy.

The classical view of God will never lead to that conclusion. If, contrary to Open Theism, God knows the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10) and thinks and works in ways which are much higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9), then we can trust Him to work all things--including inexplicably bad things--together for our good (Romans 8:28). Remove God's sovereign control over life and His complete knowledge of the future and the very foundation for trusting Him begins to crumble.

Undermines faith in Christ

Open Theism's revisioning of the nature of the future and of God erodes the very heart of the Christian faith by undermining faith in Jesus Christ. No doubt, this is one of the unintended implications of openness proponents--and one that they would strongly renounce. When God's limited foreknowledge is applied to the incarnation and crucifixion, however, the credibility of Christ and the biblical witness to Christ is compromised.

In the openness scheme Jesus did not--could not--know beforehand that He would be called to die for sinners. Sanders unashamedly reconstructs the events leading up to and surrounding Christ's death to portray both Father and Son deciding only at the last minute that Jesus had to die. "Although Scripture attests that the incarnation was planned from the creation of the world, this is not so with the cross. The path of the cross comes about only through God's interaction with humans in history." Not until the agonizing prayer in Gethsemane do "Father and Son ... both come to understand that there is no other way." Even after this new discovery comes to God, the question still hangs over Jesus, "Will this gambit work?" [20]

Jesus' predictions of His betrayal, death and resurrection are disregarded as general observations of future possibilities rather than, as He intended, evidence that He is the Messiah. Boyd believes that "Scripture

makes the most sense when we understand Jesus' predictions about Judas's betrayal" as a well-informed prediction based on good insight into Judas's character.^[21] In Boyd's view, God planned the basic outline of Jesus' death. Then, when he observed Judas turning himself into a "son of perdition," all God had to do is figure out "how he might strategically weave the wicked character" of Judas into the divine plan.^[22]

But this construction is evidently still too deterministic for Sanders. Jesus, he argues, did not really know that Judas would betray Him. Even when He told Judas, "What you do, do quickly" (John 13:27), a huge risk was involved, "since there is no guarantee which way Judas will decide."^[23] The foretelling of Peter's denial is treated similarly. Sanders finds it preferable to view Jesus' prediction as an educated guess which in no way suggests that He knew with certainty what would happen before it happened. None of Jesus' prophecies concerning His death and resurrection "require exhaustive foreknowledge." In Sanders' mind, the cross was not planned before creation and Jesus Himself did not certainly know beforehand what events would lead up to and surround His arrest and execution.^[24] Things could have gone quite differently and, according to Open Theism, it would not make one bit of difference in the life and ministry of Jesus or in our own esteem of Him.

Jesus, however, viewed the matter quite differently. In the upper room discourse, He specifically links His predictions to His deity and to His disciples' belief in His deity. When washing His disciples' feet He said, "You are not all clean" (John 13:11), in an obvious reference to Judas. He alluded to Judas again a few verses later by identifying him with an Old Testament prophecy: "I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me'" (John 13:18). Three verses later Jesus pointedly declares, "Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me" (v. 21). Finally, He singles out Judas as the betrayer by passing a piece of bread to him (v. 26).

In the midst of these clear expressions of foreknowledge, Jesus explains to the disciples why He is telling them these things: "Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He" (John 13:19). The pronoun "He" is supplied by translators. Literally what Jesus says is "that you many believe that I am [*ego eimi*]." He connects His foreknowledge of events and His announcing of them, to His deity and to the disciples' recognition of it. It obviously mattered to Jesus that He be understood as foretelling with certainty what was going to happen to Him. His foreknowledge is foundational to the disciples' belief in His deity.

Diminish Jesus' foreknowledge and you bring His deity into question and thereby undermine the faith of those whom He calls to trust Him. Yet, this is precisely the effect of Open Theism. We are asked to trust a Christ who was prone to mistakes because He could not know the future exhaustively. As John Piper has commented on this passage, Jesus' foreknowledge "was an essential aspect of his glory as the incarnate Word, the Son of God. The denial of this foreknowledge is, I believe John would say, an assault on the deity of Christ."^[25]

Undermines prayer

Proponents of Open Theism regard the "status of petitionary prayer within this model to be one of its most attractive features."^[26] Prayer is seen as a means of influencing God to the degree of moving Him to reverse His own plans. Conversely, God is so dependent on prayer that at times, because of the failure

of people to pray, He abandons plans that He would prefer to carry out.[\[27\]](#)

One's understanding of providence necessarily affects his view of prayer. What God can do or has chosen to do in His relationship to the world governs the ways that we invoke His help for specific needs. The openness view of reality eliminates the specific control that God exercises over creatures. Because the future is not "real" and therefore cannot be known by God, and because people have libertarian freedom, God is dependent on people to help Him create the future. When God is viewed as having this kind of contingency in relation to His creation, petitionary prayer is ultimately undermined in the life of the believer.

This may not be immediately apparent. In fact, Open Theism may initially appear to have the exact opposite effect. Boyd argues that his view is a great motivation for prayer because in it God can be significantly affected and influenced by us. Many biblical examples are cited by open theists as proof that prayer does indeed bring about a change in God's mind. Abraham (Genesis 18:22-33), Jacob (Genesis 32), Moses (Exodus 32:14, 33:1-2, 14; Deuteronomy 9:13-29), Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:1-6) and Amos (Amos 7:1-6) are all regarded as having altered God's intentions through their petitions.[\[28\]](#) Prayer is seen as the creature's way of exercising "spiritual say-so" which God decided to share by making personal beings.[\[29\]](#) Because prayer can change God's plans, people should be excited about getting in on the effort to do just that in order to create a future which conforms to their own desires.

God's stated repentance and His response to prayers that plead for something different from that that has been previously announced, are hermeneutical conundrums that challenge biblical interpreters of every persuasion. Open theists profess to solve the problems (and to stake out the exegetical high ground in doing so) by taking such passages "literally."[\[30\]](#) Traditionalists, we are led to believe, simply skirt around these passages, thereby robbing people of real incentive to pray passionately.

Reformed commentators and others throughout history have addressed these challenges without giving up the classical view of God.[\[31\]](#) There can be no doubt that passion, fervency and effectiveness characterized the prayer lives of the biblical characters cited. It does not follow, however, that these qualities were born of an open view of God. Furthermore, when these examples are considered in their broader context, they set forth a view of reality (and therefore, God) which is radically different from that of Open Theism. The vision of God and His world that emerges can and should invigorate heartfelt prayer in ways that the openness view cannot.

Consider the case of Hezekiah. Isaiah is sent by God to tell the sick king, "Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live" (2 Kings 20:1). After Hezekiah prays with bitter tears, God, in response to the prayer, promises him an additional fifteen years of life. Boyd sees this account, which was determinative in his own theological pilgrimage, as demanding an openness view of God.

Now, if we accept the classical view of foreknowledge and suppose that the Lord was certain that he would *not* let Hezekiah die, wasn't he being duplicitous when he initially told Hezekiah that he would not recover? And if we suppose that the Lord was certain all along that Hezekiah would, in fact, live fifteen years after this episode, wasn't it misleading for God to tell him that he was *adding* fifteen years to his life?[\[32\]](#)

Boyd cannot escape his own criticism because the openness view must also deal with the fact that God said something was going to happen which did not happen. The open theist concludes that God spoke out of ignorance because He did not know that Hezekiah would pray with such passion and fervency as to

change the divine plan. Since God did not know, there is no moral dilemma in His reversal of His announced plans. The classical theist concludes that God's threat carried an implicit exception and that He did know that Hezekiah would repent and pray. Thus, God intended all along to extend the king's life fifteen years and to do it in response to prayer.[\[33\]](#)

The classical view is supported by the broader context of this story. When Hezekiah died, his son Manasseh, who was twelve years old, became king in his place (2 Kings 20:21, 21:1). What this means is that Manasseh was born during the fifteen year extension of Hezekiah's life. Sanders says that if Hezekiah had not prayed to God, "biblical history would have been different."[\[34\]](#) That is a woefully inadequate understatement. Had Hezekiah died when Isaiah first spoke to him, he would have left no heir to the throne and the promise that God made to David three hundred years earlier would have been broken. The Lord had promised David, "You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel" (1 Kings 2:4), which "simply affirms that the posterity of David was not to be cut off, so as to leave no offshoot which could take possession of the throne."[\[35\]](#)

If, as Boyd and his colleagues contend, God was truly ignorant of the timing of Hezekiah's death when He sent Isaiah to him, then we are left with insurmountable doubts about the Lord's faithfulness. Had Hezekiah died before his son Manasseh was born, God's Word would have failed. If God cannot be trusted to do what He says, why ask Him to do anything at all? This blasphemous thought, which emerges (no doubt unintentionally) from Open Theism's view of God, will quench any desire to pray with passion and fervency.

This problem is compounded if God is viewed as having created a world in which people have the power to do things that He never intended to happen. Any specific intervention by God to interfere directly with a person's chosen course would be a violation of the individual's personhood, as well as the "rules of the game God sovereignly established" in creating people with libertarian freedom.[\[36\]](#) How could someone pray passionately for God to restrain evil people or protect His own people if he genuinely believes that the rules by which God is bound prohibit Him from ever removing the potential to choose evil from a person? Would not such prayer be asking God to do what He has committed Himself not to do?

The examples of fervent prayers that we have in the Bible are not the least bit inhibited in these ways because they are not based on an open view of God. When Daniel prayed for the restoration of Judah, he was motivated by his recent discovery of God's promises to do just that (Daniel 9:1-19). When Zerah led a million Ethiopian soldiers against Judah, Asa prayed, "O Lord, You are our God; do not let man prevail against You!" (2 Chronicles 14:11). There is not the slightest hint of concern about any violation of Zerah's free will. A similar lack of concern is found in one of Hezekiah's earlier prayers against the Assyrian commander, Rabshakeh: "Now therefore, O Lord, our God, I pray, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the Lord God, You alone" (2 Kings 19:19).

Such examples could be multiplied many times over. The Bible is filled with prayers that exude great confidence in God to do all that He has promised He will do and bold petitions for God to specifically and directly intervene by causing people to change their intended course of action. Confidence in God's unmitigated sovereignty coupled with a clear-headed awareness of our own personal responsibility provides a much stronger foundation for passionate prayer than the one offered by Open Theism.[\[37\]](#)

Undermines confident living

The openness view rejects the idea that a person can be genuinely free if his actions are in any way determined by God. By defining freedom in libertarian terms, open theists exclude all thought of God's precise control over the world. This stems from an unwillingness to recognize a distinction between God's revealed will and His decreed will. Sanders gratuitously dismisses this distinction as "another example of the attempt to discover a God beyond the God of Scripture on the basis of a human ideal."[\[38\]](#) But Scripture gives ample reason to think in these terms: "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29). If one does not distinguish between God's secret will and His revealed will, then the biblical claims regarding God's designs, intentions and desires become terribly confusing.[\[39\]](#)

If God is not in control, then who is? No one, according to free will theists. In their scheme, the world is at the collective mercy of libertarian free human wills, libertarian free angelic wills and God. Of course, neither people nor angels have as much power as God, but neither does God have complete control over them.[\[40\]](#) One of the most devastating implications of this is the existence of gratuitous evil in the world. Sanders admits that "at least some evil is pointless" and "God does not have a specific divine purpose for each and every occurrence of evil."[\[41\]](#) Boyd also concedes this point: "It is true that according to the open view things can happen in our lives that God didn't plan or even foreknow with certainty (though he always foreknew they were possible). This means that in the open view things can happen to us that have no overarching divine purpose."[\[42\]](#)

This thought, which is rightfully disconcerting for those who have come to see God's unmitigated sovereignty taught in Scripture, is applauded by open theists as a significant theodicy. Boyd believes that "it offers the most plausible way out of the dilemma of assuming God has a purpose for allowing particular evils."[\[43\]](#) Bassinger is even more enthusiastic:

Moreover, viewing evil in this manner has practical significance. For instance, it means that we, unlike proponents of specific sovereignty, need not assume that some divine purpose exists for each evil that we encounter. We need not, for example, assume when someone dies that God "took him home" for some reason, or that the horrors many experience in this world in some mysterious way fit into God's perfect plan. We can justifiably assume, rather, that God is often as disappointed as are we that someone's earthly existence has ended at an early age or that someone is experiencing severe depression or that someone is being tortured.[\[44\]](#)

He continues,

From our perspective, to view specific tragedies in this world as the result of a system over which God has chosen not to exercise complete control is more appealing than to view such events as the outworking of some specific, preordained divine plan.[\[45\]](#)

This perspective fails to deal adequately with the death of Jesus. The paradigm by which all evil in the world must be judged is that which we find in the cross. In the crucifixion we are forced to recognize the two different ways of willing in God and we find ground for hopeful and confident living in a fallen world. The death of Jesus Christ is the greatest miscarriage of justice which the world has ever witnessed. The only innocent man who has ever lived was crucified as a common criminal. Yet, how

does the Bible require us to think about the cross? Was it God's will? Or was it a violation of His will? The open theist must choose between these two questions, because they refuse to see any distinction in the ways that God wills things. The classical theist sees the cross as the fulfillment of God's decreed will (which He purposed from eternity) and a violation of His revealed will (namely, the commandment not to murder).

The early apostles did not view the death of Jesus from an open theistic point of view. At Pentecost, Peter preached Christ as, "Him, being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death" (Acts 2:23). "Determined counsel and foreknowledge of God," means it was God's (decreed) will. "Lawless hands" means it was contrary to God's (revealed) will. This same perspective is found in the disciples' prayer recorded in Acts 4:24-30. It is difficult to understand, in the light of this apostolic viewpoint, why Boyd is driven to help us "rid ourselves of any lingering suspicion that evil somehow fits into the eternal purposes of God."[\[46\]](#)

If the greatest evil in all the world, though a clear violation of God's revealed will, was definitely decreed by God for the good of His people, then why would we not believe that in a similar way all lesser evils in the world, though contrary to God's commandments, nevertheless fall within His good, wise and sovereign will for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose? Such a view of God's ways with us in no way diminishes the tragedy of evil and suffering. However, it does give us reason to live with joy and hope in the midst of suffering. For though the pain that a child of God endures may seem pointless, it cannot be. No suffering by believers in this world is ever wasted. Joseph, Job, Stephen, Paul, and any other believer who, like their Lord, experience evil in this world may take hope and be confident that God is working out His good and wise purposes through their sufferings.[\[47\]](#)

The opening question and answer in the Heidelberg Catechism summarizes this hopeful vision of the Christian life in a wonderful way. The question is, "What is your only comfort in life and in death?" to which the following answer is given.

That I am not my own, but belong--body and soul, in life and in death--to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to Him, Christ, by His Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me whole-heartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

No open theist will ever know such comfort.

Conclusion

The devotional house in which one lives will be largely determined by the doctrinal foundation on which he builds. The vibrant, joyful life of faith which marked the New Testament church was rooted in a steadfast commitment to the "apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42). The Apostle Paul regularly structured his arguments in his letters to the early churches so that his imperatives rested upon his indicatives. First, he laid a doctrinal foundation (for example in Romans 1-11 and Ephesians 1-3); then he exhorted his readers to live up to what they believed (as in Romans 12-16 and Ephesians 4-6). Right believing leads to right living.

It is hard to understand, then, the almost nonchalant attitude of Boyd when he writes, "Next to the central

doctrines of the Christian faith, the issue of whether the future is exhaustively settled or partially open is relatively unimportant. It is certainly not a doctrine Christians should ever divide over."^[48] Contrary to the way Boyd makes it sound, Open Theism is not simply a philosopher's debate. Redefine reality and the God of reality changes with it. What is at stake is the very doctrine of God, and with that, every aspect of the Christian life.

As A. W. Tozer noted in the middle of the last century, "The gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like." He goes on to observe, "Were we able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question, 'What comes into your mind when you think about God?' we might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man."^[49] Open Theism's redefinition of God bodes ill for those who embrace it. If our vision of God is diminished, vital godliness is sure to shrink with it.

Notes:

¹ Greg Boyd, *God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 8, 20, 89.

² *Ibid.*, 103-6.

³ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁴ James M. Boice, *Standing on the Rock, Biblical Authority in a Secular Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 82. See also Robertson McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 233-34, and R.C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 68-75. Sproul points out the need for particular care in recognizing phenomenological language in biblical narrative.

⁵ John Sanders, *The God Who Risks, a Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998) 41-75.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁰ Sanders, 228.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 11. See Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 57-58.

¹² Sanders, 169.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹⁴ See, for example, *ibid.*, 71-72 and Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 55-56.

¹⁵ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 43.

¹⁶ Ibid., 151.

¹⁷ Ibid., 152.

¹⁸ The details of this story, from which the quotes of this paragraph are taken, can be found in *ibid.*, 103-6.

¹⁹ Ibid., 105.

²⁰ Sanders, 100-01. He writes, "My own view is that the incarnation was always planned, for God intended to bring us into the joy and glory shared among the triune Godhead (Jn 17:22-24). Human sin, however, threw up a barrier to the divine project, and God's planned incarnation had to be adapted in order to overcome it." Ibid., 103.

²¹ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 37.

²² Ibid., 38.

²³ Sanders, 99.

²⁴ Ibid., 134-36.

²⁵ John Piper, "Why the Glory of God is at Stake in the 'Foreknowledge' Debate," *Modern Reformation* (September/October 1999), 42.

²⁶ David Bassinger, "Practical Implications," in *The Openness of God*, by Clark Pinnock et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 162. Boyd writes, "I do not see that any view of God captures the power and urgency of prayer as adequately as the open view does, and, because the heart is influenced by the mind, I do not see that any view can inspire passionate and urgent prayer as powerfully as the open view can" (*God of the Possible*, 98).

²⁷ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 97; Sanders, 273-74.

²⁸ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 82-85; Sanders, 53-54; 63-66.

²⁹ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 96-97.

³⁰ Ibid., 84.

³¹ Besides standard, time-tested writers like John Calvin, John Gill and Matthew Henry, many contemporary expositors have convincingly addressed the exegetical questions raised by open theists. One of the most thoughtful of the latter is John Piper, who has published several articles on the web site of the Baptist General Conference. See his *Answering Greg Boyd's Openness of God Texts*. 11 May 1998 and *The Enormous Ignorance of God: When God Doesn't Know the Future Choices of Man*. 2 Dec. 1997, available at <http://www.bgc.bethel.edu/4know/pessays.htm>.

³² Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 82.

³³ See Piper, *Answering Greg Boyd's Openness of God Texts*.

³⁴ Sanders, 271.

- ³⁵ C. F. Keil and C. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, volume 3; translated by James Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 1986), 28.
- ³⁶ Sanders, 222; cf. 194-95. David Bassinger tries to hedge his openness bet at this point. He admits that God "can unilaterally intervene in earthly affairs" but quickly adds that "a key assumption in the open model is that God so values the inherent integrity of significant human freedom--the ability of individuals to maintain control over the significant aspects of their lives--that he will not *as a general rule* force his created moral agents to perform actions that they do not freely desire to perform or manipulate the natural environment in such a way that their freedom of choice is destroyed" (*Openness*, 160-61, emphasis added).
- ³⁷ An excellent resource for comparing the openness view of providence and prayer with other models is Terrance Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer, How Does God Work in the World?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).
- ³⁸ Sanders, 331, fn. 5.
- ³⁹ Theologians have made this distinction in various ways throughout history. For a very helpful treatment of the issue from a biblical-theological perspective, see John Piper, "Are There Two Wills in God? Divine Election and God's Desire for All to Be Saved," in *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will*, eds. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 2 vols. 1:107-31.
- ⁴⁰ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 153; Tiessen, 100-2. Boyd has called attention to the demonic realm of influence from the openness viewpoint in his *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997).
- ⁴¹ Sanders, 261-62.
- ⁴² Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 153.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 99.
- ⁴⁴ Bassinger, 170.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 171.
- ⁴⁶ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 102.
- ⁴⁷ Piper has good, brief essay on this point entitled, *Pastoral Implications of Greg Boyd's View in Dealing with Suffering*. 8 April 1998 available at <http://www.bgc.bethel.edu/4know/pessays.htm>.
- ⁴⁸ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 8.
- ⁴⁹ *The Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1961), 1.



Pastoral Implications of Open Theism

[Tom Ascol](#)

[This article is adapted from a chapter that appears in the book, *Bound Only Once*, edited by Douglas Wilson and recently published by Canon Press.]

Recent years have witnessed a revisioning of God and reality by some that nevertheless want to maintain their credentials as evangelicals. The proponents of this new approach call themselves "open theists" and advocate a redefinition of God's omniscience that is based on a creative understanding of knowledge and the future. God, they tell us, knows everything that is capable of being known. But since the future does not fit into that category (at least not always), then it is nonsensical to suggest that God either does or does not know it. It is like debating whether God knows unicorns. Consequently, events often catch God off-guard just as they do finite beings. Knowing this, we are told, helps people to think better of God and trust Him more readily, especially when tragedies occur.

In many respects, Open Theism is a perfect theological fit for the contemporary American *zeitgeist*. In an age where empathy trumps truthfulness we are more comforted by someone who feels our pain than by someone who speaks honestly, unequivocally and consistently. Disappoint us if you will, fail to keep your promises if you must, but do not cease to reassure us that you really feel for us. The God of Open Theism perfectly fits this criterion.

Greg Boyd claims that the differences between the openness and orthodox views of God are "relatively unimportant," "peripheral" and "minor."^[1] Open Theism cannot legitimately be classified as a subset of evangelicalism. It is a radically different understanding of reality and therefore of the real God. Its implications for the Christian life are as far reaching as they are devastating.

Some of these implications are self-consciously held and celebrated by the proponents of Open Theism. For instance, Boyd finds it pastorally helpful to counsel a person who has experienced great tragedy that God was as surprised as everyone else at what happened. In Boyd's mind this makes God kinder and gentler and therefore more trustworthy.^[2] Other implications are subtler and may well be renounced by open theists but, as will be seen, are nevertheless inherent in their system of thought. One cannot possess a forest without owning the trees, no matter how vehemently he might protest to the contrary.

Undermines confidence in Scripture

Boyd argues that "if we simply accept the plain meaning of Scripture" we will concur with Open Theism's claims that sometimes God "regrets how decisions he's made turn out," "questions how aspects of the future will go," "experiences frustration because free agents choose unlikely courses of action" and "genuinely changes his mind about intended courses of action."^[3] His optimistic overstatement notwithstanding, the openness perspective actually calls into question Scripture's "plain meaning" and violates fundamental principles of interpretation. The result is a huge cloud of doubt left hanging over the perspicuity and reliability of Scripture.

A long standing principle of hermeneutics declares that passages which clearly assert a doctrine or principle are to be used to shed light on narrative passages.

Interpret historic material by didactic material. Historical material is narration, the accounts of what happened in the past. Didactic material is teaching material. It is important for the didactic material to interpret the historical material rather than the other way around.^[4]

The importance of this guiding principle can be demonstrated by applying it to the sinfulness of mankind. Romans 3:23 makes a straightforward affirmation of the universality of human sinfulness, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." This didactic passage sheds light on other passages that are narrative or testimonial. For example, the story of Daniel's life might lead one to believe that, because there is no record of any sin he committed that he was a sinless man. If the narrative passages of his life were all that we had then we, at best, could not refute such a claim.

If the principle articulated above is followed, there will be no danger of reaching that conclusion. Though the narrative might suggest that there was no sin in Daniel, the didactic passage assures us that there was. By giving priority to clearly stated teaching regarding sin and using the light which it sheds on the story of Daniel's life, we will resist making any claims of sinlessness for him.

Open theists turn this principle of interpretation on its head. John Sanders goes to great lengths to establish patterns from narrative passages on divine-human relationships and then uses those patterns to reinterpret clear, didactic Scriptures. The stories of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Gideon, Moses and David are all cited as examples of God changing his mind, repenting, being disappointed or caught off guard by what happened.^[5] The survey of these stories is set forth as evidence "that God is in a dynamic give-and-take relationship with humans and in which God sometimes does not get what he wants."^[6]

Efforts to interpret these texts in the light of didactic passages which assert God's sovereign control over people and events (what Sanders calls "pancausality texts") is charged with "hermeneutical malpractice."^[7] Statements like the following are all reinterpreted in light of narrative "evidence" of the openness of God:

- "'O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?' says the LORD. 'Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!'" (Jeremiah 18:6).
- "A man's heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps" (Proverbs 16:9).
- "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, Like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes" (Proverbs 21:1).
- "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the LORD?" (Exodus 4:11).

Some of the results would be amusing if the stakes involved were not so high.

For instance, Proverbs 16:9 and 21:1 are taken to mean only that "God directs his people's steps (16:9) and guides the king of Israel (21:1) when they seek God's wisdom." Exodus 4:11 becomes nothing more than "a general statement that such things happen in God's world" and an admission that He takes "full responsibility" for creating such a world where defects are possible.[\[8\]](#)

With its presupposition that God has only limited knowledge of what will happen in the future, Open Theism must reconstruct plain statements of Scripture to the contrary. The story of Joseph provides a case in point. At the end of the narrative, Joseph makes his famous declaration to his frightened brothers, which reflects his simple and complete confidence in God's sovereign, detailed arrangement of his life. It is his divinely inspired explanation of the events of his life: "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" (Genesis 50:20).

Sanders' interpretation of this verse is dismissive at best. He writes, "I take this to mean that God has brought something good out of their evil actions." He further comments, "Although he [Joseph] acknowledges that they sold him into Egypt, he suggests that everyone look on the bright side--what God has done through this. Their lives and those of the Egyptians have been spared the devastating effects of the famine."[\[9\]](#) From a profound, theological declaration of God's unmitigated providence, Sanders reduces Joseph's words to, "Serendipity!"

Intentional or not, the openness reading of Scripture, if followed consistently, renders direct teachings of the Bible vacuous if not incomprehensible.

Undermines confidence in God

The open theistic vision of God is one that robs believers of comfort and confidence. The traditional understanding of God gives full weight to those biblical declarations which describe Him as "Lord God Almighty ... King of the Saints" (Revelation 15:3), who "rules over the nations" (Psalm 22:28) and "the raging of the sea" (Psalm 89:9) and who shall "reign forever and ever" (Exodus 15:18; cf. Psalms 93:1, 96:10, 9:1, 99:1, 146:10). Nebuchadnezzar's inspired declaration of God's unhindered, meticulous exercise of His divine providence is no embarrassment to orthodox theism:

All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing;
He does according to His will in the army of heaven
And among the inhabitants of the earth.
No one can restrain His hand
Or say to Him, "What have you done?" (Daniel 4:35).

Open Theism dismisses the view of God and providence that these verses naturally portray because it does not "fit" with the "biblical story" as they see it.[\[10\]](#) Instead of recognizing God as the unrivaled Ruler of the universe, free will theists want to portray Him as the "cosmic Gambler." This view of God is supposed to engender comfort and hope on the part of believers; but in fact, it destroys the very foundation that the Bible establishes for trusting God.

Sanders is quite plain in expressing his desire to replace God as King with God as "risk taker."[\[11\]](#) God took a chance in creating a world that He populated with creatures that are endowed with libertarian free

wills. He did so in an effort to accomplish "the divine project," which "involves the creation of significant others who are ontologically distinct from himself and upon whom he showers his caring love in the expectation that they will respond in love."[\[12\]](#) This risk, Sanders argues, had a "great chance of success and little possibility of failure;" in fact, "although sin was possible--given this sort of world--it simply was not plausible in view of the good environment God established and the love he bestowed."[\[13\]](#)

However, any honest reading of history or Scripture demonstrates that the "divine project," as Sanders defines it, is a colossal failure. Jesus said that only a "few" will enter the narrow gate and walk the narrow path of loving God (Matthew 7:13-14) and missiological analyses of Christian history certainly confirm His announcement. If the sin and degradation of the world are the result of a highly implausible disruption in God's low-risk creative venture, how can anyone be expected to trust Him for future "projects?"

Open Theism reduces God to a cosmic gambler--and not a very successful one at that. He created billions of image bearers, gambling that they would choose to love and trust Him. This was to have been an "almost sure thing" because of His love and provision. Nevertheless, in terms of sheer quantitative analysis, His gamble hardly paid off. From creation to the present, the openness God has continued to take risks, only to experience repeated failures. Both the Bible and history are filled with accounts of people and "projects" that he counted on in vain.[\[14\]](#)

How can such a God be trusted? If that which he has intended to do has so catastrophically and repeatedly failed to come to pass, why depend on Him to fulfill any of his promises, no matter how well intentioned they may be? I would sooner risk my family's finances on a lottery ticket than my soul to a gambler with such a poor track record.

Boyd does not see this problem and, in fact, argues that the open view of God makes Him more trustworthy than the classical view. Instead of seeing God as meticulously ruling and overruling all of the affairs of life for good and holy purposes, Boyd chooses to think of God's exercise of providence as being like a child's "Choose Your Own Adventure" story, in which the author creates a number of possible plots which the reader can progressively select as he or she moves through the book. In a similar way "the God of the possible is the author of the whole story line of creation and the one who offers possible alternatives to his human and angelic creations," thus leaving "plenty of room for individuals to exercise free will."[\[15\]](#)

A God who exhaustively knows the future or who ordains it is not worthy of trust, Boyd says, because that bad thing which He knows will happen to you in two days must infallibly happen, no matter what you do or do not do. He complains,

How does believing this help you "trust God"? What are you trusting God for? To simply know from all eternity that this terrible event is going to happen to you: What security is there in that: How does this belief help you in the least?[\[16\]](#)

Far better, Boyd contends, to have a God who knows this thing not as inevitability but as merely one of many possibilities which might befall you in two days. In this case, God works to encourage you to create a future which avoids that bad possibility--especially if "you are a person who frequently talks and listens to God" and "have family and friends who pray for you on a consistent basis." In such cases, God "can be trusted to inspire [you] to avoid certain future possibilities he sees coming."[\[17\]](#)

Of course, what Boyd fails to address is why anyone should be willing to trust the promptings of a God whose best intentions have been thwarted repeatedly throughout history. Indeed, an episode out of his own pastoral experience stands in protest against his theory. He tells the story of "Suzanne," a young woman who was "raised in a wonderful Christian home," had been a "passionate, godly disciple of Jesus Christ" from her youth and had a near life-long desire to be a missionary to Taiwan.^[18] She prayed daily for her future husband that he would share her vision for Taiwan, "remain faithful to the Lord and remain pure in heart." She met and courted such a man for more than three years during college. After months of prayer, fasting, and consulting with their parents, pastor and friends, everyone agreed that "this marriage was indeed God's will." Suzanne herself received a special confirmation of this while in prayer one day.

Shortly after her marriage, while in missionary school, Suzanne's husband began a pattern of adultery and abuse and refused to be helped or to repent. When he filed for divorce, she was left pregnant, "angry," "emotionally destroyed and spiritually bankrupt." In order to help her deal with the devastation of her ordeal, Boyd offered her "an alternative way of understanding the situation." He writes, "I suggested to her that God felt as much regret over the confirmation he had given Suzanne as he did about his decision to make Saul king of Israel (1 Sam. 15:11, 35; see also Gen. 6:5-6)."^[19] However, why did God not work in Suzanne to encourage her to create a future that avoided this possibility? Surely she fits Boyd's profile of the type of person who can trust the open God to do just that.

How can God be "trusted to inspire" His children to take certain decisions when He Himself is as fallible as we are because He does not exhaustively know the future? It is hard to see how this view does not reduce God to the level of a television meteorologist--one who, because he is an expert in his field has access to information which is not readily available to others, is in a better position than most to make educated guesses about the future. The question remains, "Why should we trust such a God?"

It is one thing to base your picnic plans on a weatherman's forecast. If unexpected rain ruins your day you may be disappointed and even frustrated with him and his predictions, but you recognize that he is only making an educated guess about meteorological patterns. You do not expect him to be infallible. We have much higher expectations of God. If He inspires us to actions which He later regrets then He is ultimately untrustworthy.

The classical view of God will never lead to that conclusion. If, contrary to Open Theism, God knows the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10) and thinks and works in ways which are much higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9), then we can trust Him to work all things--including inexplicably bad things--together for our good (Romans 8:28). Remove God's sovereign control over life and His complete knowledge of the future and the very foundation for trusting Him begins to crumble.

Undermines faith in Christ

Open Theism's revisioning of the nature of the future and of God erodes the very heart of the Christian faith by undermining faith in Jesus Christ. No doubt, this is one of the unintended implications of openness proponents--and one that they would strongly renounce. When God's limited foreknowledge is applied to the incarnation and crucifixion, however, the credibility of Christ and the biblical witness to Christ is compromised.

In the openness scheme Jesus did not--could not--know beforehand that He would be called to die for sinners. Sanders unashamedly reconstructs the events leading up to and surrounding Christ's death to

portray both Father and Son deciding only at the last minute that Jesus had to die. "Although Scripture attests that the incarnation was planned from the creation of the world, this is not so with the cross. The path of the cross comes about only through God's interaction with humans in history." Not until the agonizing prayer in Gethsemane do "Father and Son ... both come to understand that there is no other way." Even after this new discovery comes to God, the question still hangs over Jesus, "Will this gambit work?" [20]

Jesus' predictions of His betrayal, death and resurrection are disregarded as general observations of future possibilities rather than, as He intended, evidence that He is the Messiah. Boyd believes that "Scripture makes the most sense when we understand Jesus' predictions about Judas's betrayal" as a well-informed prediction based on good insight into Judas's character. [21] In Boyd's view, God planned the basic outline of Jesus' death. Then, when he observed Judas turning himself into a "son of perdition," all God had to do is figure out "how he might strategically weave the wicked character" of Judas into the divine plan. [22]

But this construction is evidently still too deterministic for Sanders. Jesus, he argues, did not really know that Judas would betray Him. Even when He told Judas, "What you do, do quickly" (John 13:27), a huge risk was involved, "since there is no guarantee which way Judas will decide." [23] The foretelling of Peter's denial is treated similarly. Sanders finds it preferable to view Jesus' prediction as an educated guess which in no way suggests that He knew with certainty what would happen before it happened. None of Jesus' prophecies concerning His death and resurrection "require exhaustive foreknowledge." In Sanders' mind, the cross was not planned before creation and Jesus Himself did not certainly know beforehand what events would lead up to and surround His arrest and execution. [24] Things could have gone quite differently and, according to Open Theism, it would not make one bit of difference in the life and ministry of Jesus or in our own esteem of Him.

Jesus, however, viewed the matter quite differently. In the upper room discourse, He specifically links His predictions to His deity and to His disciples' belief in His deity. When washing His disciples' feet He said, "You are not all clean" (John 13:11), in an obvious reference to Judas. He alluded to Judas again a few verses later by identifying him with an Old Testament prophecy: "I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me'" (John 13:18). Three verses later Jesus pointedly declares, "Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me" (v. 21). Finally, He singles out Judas as the betrayer by passing a piece of bread to him (v. 26).

In the midst of these clear expressions of foreknowledge, Jesus explains to the disciples why He is telling them these things: "Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He" (John 13:19). The pronoun "He" is supplied by translators. Literally what Jesus says is "that you many believe that I am [*ego eimi*]." He connects His foreknowledge of events and His announcing of them, to His deity and to the disciples' recognition of it. It obviously mattered to Jesus that He be understood as foretelling with certainty what was going to happen to Him. His foreknowledge is foundational to the disciples' belief in His deity.

Diminish Jesus' foreknowledge and you bring His deity into question and thereby undermine the faith of those whom He calls to trust Him. Yet, this is precisely the effect of Open Theism. We are asked to trust a Christ who was prone to mistakes because He could not know the future exhaustively. As John Piper has commented on this passage, Jesus' foreknowledge "was an essential aspect of his glory as the

incarnate Word, the Son of God. The denial of this foreknowledge is, I believe John would say, an assault on the deity of Christ."[\[25\]](#)

Undermines prayer

Proponents of Open Theism regard the "status of petitionary prayer within this model to be one of its most attractive features."[\[26\]](#) Prayer is seen as a means of influencing God to the degree of moving Him to reverse His own plans. Conversely, God is so dependent on prayer that at times, because of the failure of people to pray, He abandons plans that He would prefer to carry out.[\[27\]](#)

One's understanding of providence necessarily affects his view of prayer. What God can do or has chosen to do in His relationship to the world governs the ways that we invoke His help for specific needs. The openness view of reality eliminates the specific control that God exercises over creatures. Because the future is not "real" and therefore cannot be known by God, and because people have libertarian freedom, God is dependent on people to help Him create the future. When God is viewed as having this kind of contingency in relation to His creation, petitionary prayer is ultimately undermined in the life of the believer.

This may not be immediately apparent. In fact, Open Theism may initially appear to have the exact opposite effect. Boyd argues that his view is a great motivation for prayer because in it God can be significantly affected and influenced by us. Many biblical examples are cited by open theists as proof that prayer does indeed bring about a change in God's mind. Abraham (Genesis 18:22-33), Jacob (Genesis 32), Moses (Exodus 32:14, 33:1-2, 14; Deuteronomy 9:13-29), Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:1-6) and Amos (Amos 7:1-6) are all regarded as having altered God's intentions through their petitions.[\[28\]](#) Prayer is seen as the creature's way of exercising "spiritual say-so" which God decided to share by making personal beings.[\[29\]](#) Because prayer can change God's plans, people should be excited about getting in on the effort to do just that in order to create a future which conforms to their own desires.

God's stated repentance and His response to prayers that plead for something different from that that has been previously announced, are hermeneutical conundrums that challenge biblical interpreters of every persuasion. Open theists profess to solve the problems (and to stake out the exegetical high ground in doing so) by taking such passages "literally."[\[30\]](#) Traditionalists, we are led to believe, simply skirt around these passages, thereby robbing people of real incentive to pray passionately.

Reformed commentators and others throughout history have addressed these challenges without giving up the classical view of God.[\[31\]](#) There can be no doubt that passion, fervency and effectiveness characterized the prayer lives of the biblical characters cited. It does not follow, however, that these qualities were born of an open view of God. Furthermore, when these examples are considered in their broader context, they set forth a view of reality (and therefore, God) which is radically different from that of Open Theism. The vision of God and His world that emerges can and should invigorate heartfelt prayer in ways that the openness view cannot.

Consider the case of Hezekiah. Isaiah is sent by God to tell the sick king, "Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live" (2 Kings 20:1). After Hezekiah prays with bitter tears, God, in response to the prayer, promises him an additional fifteen years of life. Boyd sees this account, which was determinative in his own theological pilgrimage, as demanding an openness view of God.

Now, if we accept the classical view of foreknowledge and suppose that the Lord was certain that he would *not* let Hezekiah die, wasn't he being duplicitous when he initially told Hezekiah that he would not recover? And if we suppose that the Lord was certain all along that Hezekiah would, in fact, live fifteen years after this episode, wasn't it misleading for God to tell him that he was *adding* fifteen years to his life?[32]

Boyd cannot escape his own criticism because the openness view must also deal with the fact that God said something was going to happen which did not happen. The open theist concludes that God spoke out of ignorance because He did not know that Hezekiah would pray with such passion and fervency as to change the divine plan. Since God did not know, there is no moral dilemma in His reversal of His announced plans. The classical theist concludes that God's threat carried an implicit exception and that He did know that Hezekiah would repent and pray. Thus, God intended all along to extend the king's life fifteen years and to do it in response to prayer.[33]

The classical view is supported by the broader context of this story. When Hezekiah died, his son Manasseh, who was twelve years old, became king in his place (2 Kings 20:21, 21:1). What this means is that Manasseh was born during the fifteen year extension of Hezekiah's life. Sanders says that if Hezekiah had not prayed to God, "biblical history would have been different." [34] That is a woefully inadequate understatement. Had Hezekiah died when Isaiah first spoke to him, he would have left no heir to the throne and the promise that God made to David three hundred years earlier would have been broken. The Lord had promised David, "You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel" (1 Kings 2:4), which "simply affirms that the posterity of David was not to be cut off, so as to leave no offshoot which could take possession of the throne." [35]

If, as Boyd and his colleagues contend, God was truly ignorant of the timing of Hezekiah's death when He sent Isaiah to him, then we are left with insurmountable doubts about the Lord's faithfulness. Had Hezekiah died before his son Manasseh was born, God's Word would have failed. If God cannot be trusted to do what He says, why ask Him to do anything at all? This blasphemous thought, which emerges (no doubt unintentionally) from Open Theism's view of God, will quench any desire to pray with passion and fervency.

This problem is compounded if God is viewed as having created a world in which people have the power to do things that He never intended to happen. Any specific intervention by God to interfere directly with a person's chosen course would be a violation of the individual's personhood, as well as the "rules of the game God sovereignly established" in creating people with libertarian freedom.[36] How could someone pray passionately for God to restrain evil people or protect His own people if he genuinely believes that the rules by which God is bound prohibit Him from ever removing the potential to choose evil from a person? Would not such prayer be asking God to do what He has committed Himself not to do?

The examples of fervent prayers that we have in the Bible are not the least bit inhibited in these ways because they are not based on an open view of God. When Daniel prayed for the restoration of Judah, he was motivated by his recent discovery of God's promises to do just that (Daniel 9:1-19). When Zerah led a million Ethiopian soldiers against Judah, Asa prayed, "O Lord, You are our God; do not let man prevail against You!" (2 Chronicles 14:11). There is not the slightest hint of concern about any violation of Zerah's free will. A similar lack of concern is found in one of Hezekiah's earlier prayers against the Assyrian commander, Rabshakeh: "Now therefore, O Lord, our God, I pray, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the Lord God, You alone" (2 Kings 19:19).

Such examples could be multiplied many times over. The Bible is filled with prayers that exude great confidence in God to do all that He has promised He will do and bold petitions for God to specifically and directly intervene by causing people to change their intended course of action. Confidence in God's unmitigated sovereignty coupled with a clear-headed awareness of our own personal responsibility provides a much stronger foundation for passionate prayer than the one offered by Open Theism.[\[37\]](#)

Undermines confident living

The openness view rejects the idea that a person can be genuinely free if his actions are in any way determined by God. By defining freedom in libertarian terms, open theists exclude all thought of God's precise control over the world. This stems from an unwillingness to recognize a distinction between God's revealed will and His decreed will. Sanders gratuitously dismisses this distinction as "another example of the attempt to discover a God beyond the God of Scripture on the basis of a human ideal."[\[38\]](#) But Scripture gives ample reason to think in these terms: "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29). If one does not distinguish between God's secret will and His revealed will, then the biblical claims regarding God's designs, intentions and desires become terribly confusing.[\[39\]](#)

If God is not in control, then who is? No one, according to free will theists. In their scheme, the world is at the collective mercy of libertarian free human wills, libertarian free angelic wills and God. Of course, neither people nor angels have as much power as God, but neither does God have complete control over them.[\[40\]](#) One of the most devastating implications of this is the existence of gratuitous evil in the world. Sanders admits that "at least some evil is pointless" and "God does not have a specific divine purpose for each and every occurrence of evil."[\[41\]](#) Boyd also concedes this point: "It is true that according to the open view things can happen in our lives that God didn't plan or even foreknow with certainty (though he always foreknew they were possible). This means that in the open view things can happen to us that have no overarching divine purpose."[\[42\]](#)

This thought, which is rightfully disconcerting for those who have come to see God's unmitigated sovereignty taught in Scripture, is applauded by open theists as a significant theodicy. Boyd believes that "it offers the most plausible way out of the dilemma of assuming God has a purpose for allowing particular evils."[\[43\]](#) Bassinger is even more enthusiastic:

Moreover, viewing evil in this manner has practical significance. For instance, it means that we, unlike proponents of specific sovereignty, need not assume that some divine purpose exists for each evil that we encounter. We need not, for example, assume when someone dies that God "took him home" for some reason, or that the horrors many experience in this world in some mysterious way fit into God's perfect plan. We can justifiably assume, rather, that God is often as disappointed as are we that someone's earthly existence has ended at an early age or that someone is experiencing severe depression or that someone is being tortured.[\[44\]](#)

He continues,

From our perspective, to view specific tragedies in this world as the result of a system over which God has chosen not to exercise complete control is more appealing than to view such

events as the outworking of some specific, preordained divine plan.[\[45\]](#)

This perspective fails to deal adequately with the death of Jesus. The paradigm by which all evil in the world must be judged is that which we find in the cross. In the crucifixion we are forced to recognize the two different ways of willing in God and we find ground for hopeful and confident living in a fallen world. The death of Jesus Christ is the greatest miscarriage of justice which the world has ever witnessed. The only innocent man who has ever lived was crucified as a common criminal. Yet, how does the Bible require us to think about the cross? Was it God's will? Or was it a violation of His will? The open theist must choose between these two questions, because they refuse to see any distinction in the ways that God wills things. The classical theist sees the cross as the fulfillment of God's decreed will (which He purposed from eternity) and a violation of His revealed will (namely, the commandment not to murder).

The early apostles did not view the death of Jesus from an open theistic point of view. At Pentecost, Peter preached Christ as, "Him, being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death" (Acts 2:23). "Determined counsel and foreknowledge of God," means it was God's (decreed) will. "Lawless hands" means it was contrary to God's (revealed) will. This same perspective is found in the disciples' prayer recorded in Acts 4:24-30. It is difficult to understand, in the light of this apostolic viewpoint, why Boyd is driven to help us "rid ourselves of any lingering suspicion that evil somehow fits into the eternal purposes of God."[\[46\]](#)

If the greatest evil in all the world, though a clear violation of God's revealed will, was definitely decreed by God for the good of His people, then why would we not believe that in a similar way all lesser evils in the world, though contrary to God's commandments, nevertheless fall within His good, wise and sovereign will for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose? Such a view of God's ways with us in no way diminishes the tragedy of evil and suffering. However, it does give us reason to live with joy and hope in the midst of suffering. For though the pain that a child of God endures may seem pointless, it cannot be. No suffering by believers in this world is ever wasted. Joseph, Job, Stephen, Paul, and any other believer who, like their Lord, experience evil in this world may take hope and be confident that God is working out His good and wise purposes through their sufferings.[\[47\]](#)

The opening question and answer in the Heidelberg Catechism summarizes this hopeful vision of the Christian life in a wonderful way. The question is, "What is your only comfort in life and in death?" to which the following answer is given.

That I am not my own, but belong--body and soul, in life and in death--to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to Him, Christ, by His Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me whole-heartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

No open theist will ever know such comfort.

Conclusion

The devotional house in which one lives will be largely determined by the doctrinal foundation on which he builds. The vibrant, joyful life of faith which marked the New Testament church was rooted in a steadfast commitment to the "apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42). The Apostle Paul regularly structured his arguments in his letters to the early churches so that his imperatives rested upon his indicatives. First, he laid a doctrinal foundation (for example in Romans 1-11 and Ephesians 1-3); then he exhorted his readers to live up to what they believed (as in Romans 12-16 and Ephesians 4-6). Right believing leads to right living.

It is hard to understand, then, the almost nonchalant attitude of Boyd when he writes, "Next to the central doctrines of the Christian faith, the issue of whether the future is exhaustively settled or partially open is relatively unimportant. It is certainly not a doctrine Christians should ever divide over."^[48] Contrary to the way Boyd makes it sound, Open Theism is not simply a philosopher's debate. Redefine reality and the God of reality changes with it. What is at stake is the very doctrine of God, and with that, every aspect of the Christian life.

As A. W. Tozer noted in the middle of the last century, "The gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like." He goes on to observe, "Were we able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question, 'What comes into your mind when you think about God?' we might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man."^[49] Open Theism's redefinition of God bodes ill for those who embrace it. If our vision of God is diminished, vital godliness is sure to shrink with it.

Notes:

¹ Greg Boyd, *God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 8, 20, 89.

² *Ibid.*, 103-6.

³ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁴ James M. Boice, *Standing on the Rock, Biblical Authority in a Secular Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 82. See also Robertson McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 233-34, and R.C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 68-75. Sproul points out the need for particular care in recognizing phenomenological language in biblical narrative.

⁵ John Sanders, *The God Who Risks, a Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998) 41-75.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁰ Sanders, 228.

¹¹ Ibid., 11. See Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 57-58.

¹² Sanders, 169.

¹³ Ibid., 172.

¹⁴ See, for example, ibid., 71-72 and Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 55-56.

¹⁵ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 43.

¹⁶ Ibid., 151.

¹⁷ Ibid., 152.

¹⁸ The details of this story, from which the quotes of this paragraph are taken, can be found in ibid., 103-6.

¹⁹ Ibid., 105.

²⁰ Sanders, 100-01. He writes, "My own view is that the incarnation was always planned, for God intended to bring us into the joy and glory shared among the triune Godhead (Jn 17:22-24). Human sin, however, threw up a barrier to the divine project, and God's planned incarnation had to be adapted in order to overcome it." Ibid., 103.

²¹ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 37.

²² Ibid., 38.

²³ Sanders, 99.

²⁴ Ibid., 134-36.

²⁵ John Piper, "Why the Glory of God is at Stake in the 'Foreknowledge' Debate," *Modern Reformation* (September/October 1999), 42.

²⁶ David Bassinger, "Practical Implications," in *The Openness of God*, by Clark Pinnock et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 162. Boyd writes, "I do not see that any view of God captures the power and urgency of prayer as adequately as the open view does, and, because the heart is influenced by the mind, I do not see that any view can inspire passionate and urgent prayer as powerfully as the open view can" (*God of the Possible*, 98).

²⁷ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 97; Sanders, 273-74.

²⁸ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 82-85; Sanders, 53-54; 63-66.

²⁹ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 96-97.

³⁰ Ibid., 84.

³¹ Besides standard, time-tested writers like John Calvin, John Gill and Matthew Henry, many contemporary expositors have convincingly addressed the exegetical questions raised by open theists. One of the most thoughtful of the latter is John Piper, who has published several articles on the web site of the Baptist General Conference. See his *Answering Greg Boyd's Openness of God Texts*. 11 May 1998 and *The Enormous Ignorance of God: When God Doesn't Know the Future Choices of Man*. 2 Dec. 1997, available at <http://www.bgc.bethel.edu/4know/pessays.htm>.

³² Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 82.

³³ See Piper, *Answering Greg Boyd's Openness of God Texts*.

³⁴ Sanders, 271.

³⁵ C. F. Keil and C. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, volume 3; translated by James Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 28.

³⁶ Sanders, 222; cf. 194-95. David Bassinger tries to hedge his openness bet at this point. He admits that God "can unilaterally intervene in earthly affairs" but quickly adds that "a key assumption in the open model is that God so values the inherent integrity of significant human freedom--the ability of individuals to maintain control over the significant aspects of their lives--that he will not *as a general rule* force his created moral agents to perform actions that they do not freely desire to perform or manipulate the natural environment in such a way that their freedom of choice is destroyed" (*Openness*, 160-61, emphasis added).

³⁷ An excellent resource for comparing the openness view of providence and prayer with other models is Terrance Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer, How Does God Work in the World?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

³⁸ Sanders, 331, fn. 5.

³⁹ Theologians have made this distinction in various ways throughout history. For a very helpful treatment of the issue from a biblical-theological perspective, see John Piper, "Are There Two Wills in God? Divine Election and God's Desire for All to Be Saved," in *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will*, eds. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 2 vols. 1:107-31.

⁴⁰ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 153; Tiessen, 100-2. Boyd has called attention to the demonic realm of influence from the openness viewpoint in his *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997).

⁴¹ Sanders, 261-62.

⁴² Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 153.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁴⁴ Bassinger, 170.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁴⁶ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 102.

⁴⁷ Piper has good, brief essay on this point entitled, *Pastoral Implications of Greg Boyd's View in Dealing with Suffering*. 8 April 1998 available at <http://www.bgc.bethel.edu/4know/pessays.htm>.

⁴⁸ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 8.

⁴⁹ *The Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1961), 1.



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Book Review

Bruce A. Ware. *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001. Paperback, 240 pages, \$15.99.

Reviewed by [Brian G. Hedges](#)

This is the first full-length book written by a classical theist to combat the menacing theological plague of open theism. Bruce Ware takes on the issues with both respect for the opponents and reverence for Scripture. He sees the stakes as high: "Divine providence as a doctrine is in great turmoil. Theological earthquakes shake its foundation...As goes the doctrine of divine providence, so go vast portions of our entire doctrine of God and with it our conception of God's glory" (13). The title really does encapsulate the issue at stake.

Ware introduces the book with a look at the issues and why they should concern us, asserting that our "overall conception of God and our broad understanding of living the Christian life are both deeply affected by the openness view" (19). Considerable space is also given to exploring the rise of open theism, especially within the Baptist General Conference.

The author deals honestly with the criticism of classical theism advanced by openness advocates, and gives us a whole chapter on "The Perceived Benefits of Open Theism." It was in this chapter that I first began to see the attraction Openness theology holds to some people, namely, in its response to human suffering. Citing both John Sanders and Greg Boyd, Ware shows that "when human tragedy, injustice, suffering, or pain occurs, open theists stand ready with their words of comfort and pastoral counsel: God is as grieved as you are about the difficulties and heartache you are experiencing, and he, too, wishes that things had worked out differently" (56). This concept of a God who can be surprised by our suffering, and yet remains empathetic, probably does appeal to some people--those who would rather have a grandfatherly-like God who feels sorry for them than an All-knowing and All-powerful Sovereign to whom they must submit. In reality, I have come to think that at least one of the reasons openness theology attracts people is because it shortens the distance between man and God and makes fewer demands of faith and submission. But this view of God leaves you bankrupt, because in the final analysis, the god of open theism is nothing better than a crippled king who, though his heart is sympathetic, can not or will not help us. Gratuitous suffering and evil have no purpose. They merely reflect upon the limitations of a god whose creation project went awry and is desperately trying to remedy the situation without violating the all-important freedom of his moral creatures. Open theism assigns God to a wheel chair.

Part two of the book assesses open theism from a biblical perspective, working through various proof-texts--and pointing out the multitudes of texts that open theists never reckon with. Of great value is Ware's exposition of a whole string of texts from Isaiah (Isaiah 41:21-29; 42:8-9; 43:8-13; 44:6-8; 44:24-28; 45:20-33; 46:8-11; 48:3-8; and 48:14-16). He also addresses questions of God's immutability and divine "repentance."

Having exposed the shaky foundation of open theism, part three of the book focuses on its crumbling structure by examining several practical implications. Openness teaching impacts three different areas of

life: the Christian's prayer life, his confidence in God's guidance, and his suffering and pain. In this section, Bruce Ware turns the guns of openness advocates against themselves, deftly using their own arguments to expose open theism's weaknesses. The perceived benefits are nothing but a cloud of dust hiding the devastation of a theology bereft of omniscience. There are no gains, only losses.

This book ends with a rhapsodic, John Piper-like chapter on "God's Greater Glory and Our Everlasting Good," the two great things secured by a biblical view of God. Adding to the value of the book are both a general and a Scripture index. Every pastor, professor, and theologian needs to read this book. Let us be equipped to defend the precious biblical doctrine of omniscience!



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A Doctrinal Study: The Decrees of God

[James P. Boyce](#)

The following study is adapted from Chapter 13 of Boyce's [Abstract of Systematic Theology](#). This book is based primarily on Boyce's classroom lectures on systematic theology delivered at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary during the first twenty-five years of its existence.

The decrees of God may be defined as that just, wise, and holy purpose or plan by which eternally, and within himself, he determines all things whatsoever that come to pass.

I. This purpose or plan is just, wise, and holy. Since it is formed by God it must have this character. His nature forbids that anything otherwise shall proceed from him. Though what he permits may be unrighteous, or foolish, or sinful, these characteristics belong to it because of others; while his will, purpose, or plan continues just, wise, and holy.

It is needful that this fact be always remembered.

1. Since, on account of the ignorance of man, there must be much in connection with this subject, which cannot be comprehended; because (1.) man's finite knowledge cannot compass the nature, and mode, and reasons of the will, and action of the infinite God, (2.) because of the difficulty of reconciling the free agency and responsibility of man, with the pre-existent knowledge and purposes of God, and (3.) because of the perplexities which arise from the existence of sin in a world planned, created and governed by a holy, all-wise, and almighty God.

2. The same fact should also not be forgotten, because of the natural corruption of the human heart, which makes it (1.) revolt against the sovereignty of God, (2.) seek refuge from the condemnation justly due to sin, and (3.) endeavor to find excuses for continuance therein.

It is our duty, therefore, (1.) to seek to learn all the facts made known by reason and revelation, (2.) to accept them, (3.) to recognize them as the testimony of God, (4.) to admit that our knowledge is still imperfect, (5.) to believe that further information will still further remove the difficulties, (6.) to refuse on account of the difficulties to reject what God has actually taught, and (7.) amid all, to believe that whatever that teaching is, it must accord with justice, wisdom and holy perfection, because it is God of whom these things are affirmed.

II. These decrees are properly defined to be God's purpose or plan.

The term "decree" is liable to some misapprehension and objection, because it conveys the idea of an edict, or of some compulsory determination. "Purpose" has been suggested as a better word. "Plan" will sometimes be still more suitable. The mere use of these words will remove from many some difficulties and prejudices which make them unwilling to accept this doctrine. They perceive that, in the creation, preservation, and government of the world, God must have had a plan, and that that plan must have been just, wise and holy, tending both to his own glory and the happiness of his creatures. They recognize that a man who has no purpose, nor aim, especially in important matters, and who cannot, or does not, devise the means by which to carry out his purpose, is without wisdom and capacity, and unworthy of his

nature. Consequently, they readily believe and admit that the more comprehensive, and, at the same time, the more definite is the plan of God, the more worthy is it of infinite wisdom. Indeed they are compelled to the conclusion that God cannot be what he is, without forming such a purpose or plan.

III. Any such plan or purpose of God must have been formed eternally, and within himself.

1. It must have been eternally purposed, because God's only mode of existence, as has been heretofore proved, is eternal, and therefore his thoughts, and purpose, and plan must be eternal. The fact also that his knowledge is infinite, and cannot be increased, forbids the forming of plans in time, which, as they become known to him, would add to that knowledge. It is also to be remembered that the plan must precede its execution, but as time began with that execution, the plan must not have been formed in time, and must be eternal.

2. In like manner, also, was it formed within himself. He needed not to go without himself, either for the impulse which led to it, or the knowledge in which it was conceived. He had all knowledge, both of the actual and the possible, all wisdom as to the best end and means, all power to execute what he devised in the use, or without the use of appropriate secondary means, and free will to select, of all possible plans and means, whatever he himself should please, and the impulse which moved him existed alone in that knowledge and will.

IV. By this plan or purpose God determined all things which it included.

This is manifestly true, even if all things whatsoever were not thus embraced.

To say the least, all the parts of it, as well as the whole, were known to him. But this knowledge, apart from any decree, determines, marks out, and fixes the nature, limits, time, sequence and relation to each other of the whole, and of all the parts. Things which are known by God as future, must certainly be future. A determination, or decree to bring them to pass, and even their actual existence, does not make them more certain.

But whence is God's knowledge of the futurity of any events, except from the knowledge of his purpose, to cause or permit them to come to pass? The knowledge of the futurity of any event, over which any one has absolute control, is the result of his purpose, not its cause. And, as God has such absolute control over all things, his knowledge that they will be, must proceed from his purpose that they shall be. It cannot be from mere perception of their nature, for he gives that nature, and in determining to give it, determines what it shall be, and thus determines the effects which that nature will cause. Nor is it from mere knowledge of the mutual relations which will be sustained by outward events or beings, for it is he that establishes these relations for the accomplishment of his own purposes. To say that this nature and these relations are from God, and are not from his purpose, is in the highest degree fatalistic, for it would involve that they originate in some necessity of the nature of God, because of which he must give them existence without so willing, and even against his will. In this way alone could God be said to know, and yet not to purpose them. His knowledge would arise from knowledge of his nature, and of what that nature compels him to do, and not from knowledge of his purpose and of his will involved in that purpose. This, and this alone, would make equally certain and known what will come to pass, without basing that knowledge upon his purpose; but it would not only be destructive of his free agency and will, but, from the nature of necessity, would make the outward events eternal and prevent the existence of time, and the relation to it of all things whatsoever.

V. This plan, or purpose, includes all things whatsoever that come to pass; not some things, but all

things; not all things in general, but each thing in particular.

So interwoven are all these things, that the lack of purpose, as to any one, would involve that same lack as to multitudes of others, indeed as to every other connected in the slightest degree with the one not purposed.

This is evidently true as to all subsequent events; but it is equally so as to those that are antecedent, for these thus connected antecedent events have been established with efficient causative power, relative to all their effects. God knows the existence of this power; he has in fact ordained and bestowed it. He knows also what will be its effects. With this knowledge, God must, therefore, either allow them to act, because he purposes that the result shall follow, or he must hinder, or restrain, or accelerate their action because he would change the effect. In each case he purposes, in the one to effect, in the other to permit, and his purpose thus extends to all things. Any limitation of his purpose involves limitation of his knowledge, and this cannot be true of the omniscient God.

To such an extent is the force of this realized, that it is admitted by all, that, in the mechanical universe, and even in the control of the lower animals, this is true. But the free agency of man, and of other rational and moral agents, is supposed to prevent God's purposing, or willing, all things with reference to them. It is said that such purposing would take away that free agency, and consequent responsibility.

The Scriptures recognize both the sovereignty of God, and the free agency, and accountability of man. Consciousness assures us of the latter. The nature of God, as has just been shown, proves the former. The Bible makes no attempt to reconcile the two. Paul even declines to discuss the subject, saying, "Nay but, oh man, who art thou that repliest against God?" Rom. 9:20. The two facts are plainly revealed. They cannot be contradictory, they must be reconcilable. That we cannot point out the harmony between them is a proof, only of our ignorance, and limited capacity, and not that both are not true. It is certain, however, that, whatever may be the influences which God exercises, or permits, to secure the fulfillment of his purposes, he always acts in accordance with the nature, and especially with the laws of mind he has bestowed upon man. It is equally true, that his action is in full accord with that justice, and benevolence, which are such essential attributes of God himself.

The Scriptural authority for the doctrine of decrees will appear from the following statements and references, gathered with slight modifications from Hodge's Outlines, pp., 205-213:

1. God's decrees are eternal. Acts 15:18; Eph. 1:4; 3:11; 1 Pet. 1:20; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Cor. 2:7.

2. They are immutable. Ps. 33:11; Isa. 46:9.

3. They comprehend all events.

(1.) The Scriptures assert this of the whole system in general embraced in the divine decrees. Dan. 4:34, 35; Acts 17:26; Eph. 1:11.

(2.) They affirm the same of fortuitous events. Prov. 16:33; Matt. 10:29, 30.

(3.) Also of the free actions of men. Eph. 2:10, 11; Phil. 2:13.

(4.) Even the wicked actions of men. Acts 2:23; 4:27, 28; 13:29; 1 Pet. 2:8; Jude 4; Rev. 17:17. As to the history of Joseph, compare Gen. 37:28, with Gen. 45:7, 8, and Gen. 50:20. See also Ps. 17:13, 14; Isa.

10:5, 15.

4. The decrees of God are not conditional. Ps. 33:11; Prov. 19:21; Isa. 14:24, 27 ; 46:10; Rom. 9:11.

5. They are sovereign. Isa. 40:13, 14; Dan. 4:35; Matt. 11:25, 26; Rom. 9:11, 15-18; Eph. 1:5, 11.

6. They include the means. Eph. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2.

7. They determine the free actions of men. Acts 4:27, 28 ; Eph. 2:10.

8. God himself works in his people that faith and obedience which are called the conditions of salvation. Eph. 2:8; Phil. 2:13; 2 Tim. 2:25.

9. The decree renders the event certain. Matt. 16:21; Luke 18:31-33; 24:46; Acts 2:23; 13:29; 1 Cor. 11:19.

10. While God has decreed the free acts of men, the actors have been none the less responsible. Gen. 50:20; Acts 2:23; 3:18; 4:27, 28.



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News

Subscription Price to Increase

Significant postage hikes imposed by the United States Postal Service over the last year will necessitate an increase in the *Founders Journal* yearly subscription rate. Beginning January 1, 2002 the domestic subscription cost will increase to \$15.00 per year and \$20.00 per year for foreign subscriptions.

Changes in Founders Board

Mark Dever has resigned from the Board of Trustees for Founders Ministries, effective July 20, 2001. He continues to serve Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington D.C. as pastor and as a member of the planning committee for the Mid-Atlantic Founders Conference that meets in Lynchburg, Virginia. Phil Newton, pastor of South Woods Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee was added to the board at the July meeting. Phil is a graduate of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (MDiv) and Fuller Theological Seminary (DMin). He is a frequent contributor to magazines and journals and serves as Adjunct Professor at Crighton College.

Mid-Atlantic Founders Conference, October 18-20, 2001

"The Doctrine of God" is the theme for the 2nd Annual MAFC, scheduled to meet in Lynchburg, Virginia at the Old Forest Road Baptist Church. Andy Davis, Mark Dever, Bruce Ware and James White are the scheduled speakers. For more information, contact the church at (434) 385-7413.

LifeWay announces updated Spanish Scofield Bible

Leticia Calcada, Spanish projects editor for LifeWay's International Department worked four years to translate the New Scofield Bible into Spanish. The Bible is published by Broadman & Holman International, a division of LifeWay Christian Resources (formerly the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention). This dispensationalist handbook was expected to go into a second printing shortly after its release.



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Letters

Dear Dr. Ascol:

Thanks for your excellent response ("Calvinism, Evangelism and Founders Ministries," Issue #45) to the erroneous assertions, representations, and caricatures made by some brethren concerning the teaching and tendencies of the doctrines of grace. I am sure you had the difficult decision of choosing what to leave out from the mountain of evidence in favor both of our SBC Calvinistic roots and of the fact that Calvinism is no drag on evangelism and missions. I know we all grow weary having to re-plow the same old ground, but after decades of doctrinal drift away from truth, I suppose we need not be surprised. When the ground isn't tended we should not but expect the weeds to take over. May God give us each grace to be faithful in our generation.

When I first had these truths "burned into my heart as with a hot iron," to quote Bunyan, I didn't know for sure of another soul who believed them. God convinced me from my reading of Ephesians 2:1-10 while I was in college. I was called a hyper-Calvinist and I had never even heard the term. Today young men and women in numbers I never imagined are espousing the grand old truth for which I am most grateful.

Let me especially thank you and Josh White for your research of and information on the Sandy Creek Association. This has been most helpful. This is an area I had not studied much in the past, but your work has helped me to answer questions I had about the "two tributary" theory of our SBC origins. I pastor a church established in 1861 and their original confession of faith then was the New Hampshire Confession. From what I have gathered in my limited research I have found that Southern Baptist Churches established before 1900 had Calvinistic confessions of faith.

I suppose the specters of Pelagius, Erasmus, and Arminius will always haunt us in some form or another. But we are not children to be afraid of phantoms. The light of God's truth will scatter the darkness and give us courage and cheer to press on.

Thank you and the faithful men with you who keep fighting the good fight.

Yours in Christ,

D.C., Grove Hill, AL

Dear Representative:

In the providence and grace of God, greeting! It is my hope and prayer that this communication finds all to be well with and for you and your co-workers in the ministry in which God has placed you--and that you are all daily provided by God with peace of heart and mind, strength, encouragement, and confidence, in union with Christ Jesus, our Redeemer and Lord.

While reading through a recent issue (Mar/Apr) of "Modern Reformation," I noticed (inside front cover) an "advertisement" with regard to Founders Ministries. Having read, in that "advertisement", a brief description of the ministry of which you are a representative, I thought to write to you with regard to the

following:

In my present facility assignment, there is little available with regard to Reformed/Reformation theological and doctrinal perspective. Most of the material is quite "basic" ("milk" rather than "meat")--and much of it is reflective of the Hagin/Copeland type teaching (a theological and doctrinal perspective with which--for the most part--I am *not* in agreement; and which I find to be, in greater part, fairly distasteful). So it is that, to the extent I am able, I turn to the writings of Luther, Calvin, some Puritan writings, and others of years past that reflect what I consider to be a more reliable perspective with regard to theology and doctrine. However, such material as I've been able to obtain--thus far--has come my way rather slowly; and so I am ever on the "lookout" to acquire further material conducing to greater edification (not only for myself; but also with a view toward sharing it with others who may derive benefit from it). So it is that I now contact Founders Ministries, in hope that I may obtain your assistance.

I do *not*, incidentally, mean to place unacceptable burden upon you or Founders Ministries, in this request for assistance. I also do not mean for this request to reflect any (or be construed as) presumptuousness on my part. Any assistance you may choose to render will be greatly appreciated by me.

If you are able (and have the resources to do so), I request that you please send to me a back issue or two of the *Founders Journal*--and, if you can do so, please also send any articles that express a more thorough (in depth) treatment of: the sovereignty of God, and/or the depravity of mankind (dealing with the doctrines of original and indwelling sin), and/or the believer's sanctification (positional and progressive [*no* "Finneyite" or "Wesleyan" teachings please]). With regard to such central doctrines of the faith--any articles sent (apart from those in the *Founders Journal*) must be sent in 8 1/2 x 11 "printout" form (loose pages; unbound), or Xerox copy (8 1/2 x 11 unbound pages). The reason for this is that I already have my allowable book limit--and so I am not permitted to receive or possess any other books at this time. If you can provide me with such material as I've requested, it will certainly prove useful (and, I'm sure, beneficial). Any writings of authors from the Reformation period, Puritan writings, or those of the 1700s and 1800s (or even 1900s; prior to 1950) are acceptable.

I shall close this out. I thank you now for any assistance you provide with regard to this request. May God daily bless you and yours.

Cordially, In God's Providence and Grace,

R. W. D., Cañon City, CO

Dear Brethren,

I want to thank you so much for sending me a copy of the *Founders Journal*. Reading it has been a great blessing to my soul. Oh, how good it is to read solid biblical truths. I'm looking forward to my next copy and will be telling my friends about you. May the Lord richly bless your ministry for our glorious sovereign God.

With my love in Christ,

R. B., Portland, OR

"a poor sinner saved by grace"

Dear Dr. Ascol:

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! I received my copy of the *Founders Journal* [FJ 45] yesterday. As usual, I set everything else aside in order to read through it. I think that the journals get better with each issue, and this one was superb! Dr. Ascol, your article was simply outstanding. You addressed a number of issues within SBC life, and I hope and pray that some of the Fundamentalist leadership is paying attention.

As you know, I am currently working on a Ph.D. at Southwestern Seminary in the area of evangelism. I am planning on writing my dissertation on "An Historical Overview of the Impact of 'The Doctrines of Grace' Upon the Great Commission (from the Time of Calvin to the Present)." There is no doubt that I will utilize your article. There were even a couple of names that you mentioned that of which I was unaware (Robert Hall, William Mitchell, Ezra Courtney, Spencer Cone and Malcolm McGregor), and so I will be able to do even more research with those individuals in mind.

I commend your courage and your tact in writing this article. I know that you have not done it for your own sake, or even the sake of Founders Ministries, but for the sake of Christ and His truth. Thank you for your encouragement and your example.

By His Grace Alone,

J.G., Cleburne, TX



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