

# An Evaluation of the Open View of God



November 1, 2000

## ***Faith Pulpit***

**Faith Baptist Theological Seminary**

**Ankeny, Iowa**

**November 2000**

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### **Introduction**

The traditional Christian view of God says that He knows all things. This refers to knowledge of things that have occurred, that are occurring, and that will occur, and includes the future free choices of every human being. It also includes certain knowledge of everything that would have occurred under any set of circumstances (*The Moody Handbook of Theology*, Paul Enns, editor, 194–195). This all-encompassing knowledge, when referring to everything that has happened or that will happen, is sometimes described as God’s decree. This decree is divided into those things God wants to happen and thus so determines, as well as those things which He permits but for which He does not assume responsibility (*Systematic Theology*, L. Berkhof, 102–103).

More recently, the Open View of God has been promoted, which teaches that “the future consists partly of settled realities and partly of unsettled realities . . . . If God does not foreknow future free actions, it is not because his knowledge of the future is in any sense incomplete. It’s because there is, in this view, nothing definite there for God to know!” (*God of the Possible*, Gregory A. Boyd, 16). This view of God affirms that “He is never caught off guard or at a loss of options. He anticipates and ingeniously outmaneuvers his opponents . . . . Balancing the determined aspects of the future is a realm composed of open possibilities that will be resolved only by the decisions of free agents.” (Boyd, 51, 53–54).

## **A Biblical Evaluation**

Those who believe that God does not know what decision people will make before they make it appeal to certain Old Testament narratives. Some of these passages show God regretting how things turned out. Other passages portray Him as being frustrated over people who refuse to obey Him. Still other passages describe God as entering into genuine dialogue with a person or persons.

Those who believe that God does know everything, including the choice a person will make, describe these biblical passages as examples of anthropomorphism. One writer describes anthropomorphism as an attempt “to express the truth about God through human analogies” (Christian Theology by Millard Erickson, page 294 in revised edition). Passages such as Psalm 14:2–3, in which God’s omniscience is described in terms of God looking over the edge of heaven to determine if anyone seeks after Him, would be an example of anthropomorphism. Further, a rhetorical device used by God for the benefit of His human creatures would also be a form of anthropomorphism. Thus, when God sought Adam and Eve after they had sinned, He called, “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:9). This question was not for God’s benefit, as if He didn’t know where Adam and Eve were hiding, but was rather a rhetorical question for their benefit, giving them an opportunity to come out of hiding and explain what had happened. Another form of anthropomorphism would be the parent/child relationship as an analogy of God’s relationship to believers. In Psalm 103:13–14 we are told, “As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.” Thus, God’s father-like willingness to bargain with Abraham about the future of Sodom in Genesis 18:16–33 was to show Abraham how wicked the city really was. Similar to this anthropomorphic form is the ruler/subject relationship as an analogy of God’s relationship to the nations. This would also include passages where God’s pronouncement of judgment was either explicitly or implicitly conditional, as in the book of Jonah.

Those who deny that God foresees the choice that people will make fail to understand the extent of God’s power. In Psalm 147:4–5 we read, “He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name. Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite.” By means of this great power and understanding, the Lord was able to predict with infallible certainty that Peter would deny Him three times—no more and no less! (Matthew 26:33–35). God is able to predict what choice people would have made under certain circumstances—even though these circumstances did not occur. Thus, Jesus could condemn the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida, saying, “For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes” (Matthew 11:21).

God not only foresees the free acts of men; sometimes He influences them. Thus Scripture tells us, “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). Rehoboam’s refusal to listen to the people is said to be from the Lord, so that He might fulfill the promise He made to Jeroboam to give him the ten northern tribes of Israel (1 Kings 12:15; cf. 11:29–39). The Bible says that God stirred up the king of Assyria’s spirit to take the Reubenites, Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh into captivity (1 Chronicles 5:26). The Bible also says that He stirred up the spirit of the Philistines and the Arabians against King Jehoram of Judah to invade his palace and capture his possessions and most of his sons (2 Chronicles 21:16,17).

## **A Theological Evaluation**

Boyd says, “If God foreknew that Adolf Hitler would send six million Jews to their death, why did he go ahead and create a man like that? If I unleash a mad dog I am certain will bite you, am I not responsible for my dog’s behavior?” (Boyd, page 10). Boyd believes that God didn’t know what Hitler would be like when He created him. But why didn’t God catch on to what Hitler was doing, once he had started murdering the Jews, and stop him? Claiming divine ignorance of future events doesn’t let God “off the hook” once the events start to happen. Since both views of God

come under the criticism Boyd levels at the traditional view, perhaps it is wiser to let God be God rather than trying to determine what is or is not proper for God to know and to do!

Those who teach the Open view of God must deny that God foreknows who will be saved. Boyd says, “So too, in Romans 8:29 Paul is saying that the church as a corporate whole was in God’s heart long before the church was birthed. But this doesn’t imply that he knew who would and would not be in this church ahead of time.” (Boyd, page 48).

One has only to reflect upon Romans 8:29–30 to realize that this interpretation is not correct. “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined . . . Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” Does God justify groups or individuals? Romans 3:26 describes God as “the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus,” and Romans 3:28 states, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.” God does not justify groups; He justifies individuals. But these individuals were not only justified; they were also foreknown.

### **Conclusion**

Does God know everything—including the choices people will freely make? If so, He is in control of each circumstance we face. If He doesn’t, then there are times when He is caught off guard, times when He does not anticipate and ingeniously outmaneuver His opponents, times when He does become frustrated. Do we really believe that all things work together for good? Is God in control of everything that happens? If so, now is the time for Christians to publicly affirm their belief in the traditional view of God, recognizing that this is the authentic teaching of God’s Word. “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.” (Romans 11:33–36).