

# DIVINE FOREKNOWLEDGE: THE WAYWARDNESS OF THE OPENNESS MODEL

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades the pendulum of Christian dogma has swung back toward one of the earliest doctrinal debates addressed by the Church – the doctrine of God. Now development of this earliest of doctrines was more centered on that of the Trinity than ideas such as the immutability, impassibility, and omniscience of God. Yet recent challenges to traditionally orthodox views of these very issues have affected some people’s views of God – especially on the topic of divine foreknowledge. For example, some reason that if God is eternal (always has and will exist), is sovereign (directly causes or permits all things), and is exhaustively omniscient (knows all things actual and potential), any genuine sense of human responsibility or relationality between God and humanity must be ruled out. The premise is a person’s possession of free will – the exercise of self-determination with God cooperating with this self-determination to affect his purposes. Plainly put, under this reasoning God cannot be exhaustively omniscient since He learns from the free choices of individuals. He cannot be said to be immutable when he is constantly changing in his knowledge. He is not impassible because he can be moved by his own emotions, or in response to a person’s free choices or emotional pleas for assistance. Clearly, under this openness view God does not have complete knowledge of the future.

The openness model of divine foreknowledge contends God knows all that will actually happen and brings about all that actually happens, except for events where human free will is involved. In these cases, God does not know what a person will do until they actually make a decision and do something. In other words, God cannot know what actually happens if the

happening has never existed – there is nothing there to know. Instead, he reacts to human actions or even in rare cases proactively guides human actions to accomplish His purposes.

Open theists claim support for this view through the principle of taking all of Scriptures “at face value”; that is, all Scriptures are to be read and understood literally unless the passages are clearly poetic or if taken literally would obviously be ridiculous. Millard Erickson suggests the great virtue and strength of this approach is that it “enables the ordinary Christian, without a seminary education, to read and benefit from the Bible, taking it simply at its word.”<sup>1</sup> Yet consistent application of this approach leads to such conclusions that “God is mistaken on some matters, that he is ignorant of some past and present matters, that he is forgetful, that he becomes fatigued, and that he hates some people.”<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, to get around these types of issues open theists must perform hermeneutical gymnastics, often utilizing meaningless phrases or comparisons, or contrived qualifications of relative probabilities to support their model of divine foreknowledge. Moreover, for Erickson’s “ordinary Christian” this open view of God’s foreknowledge injects possible doubt into the very idea of an “Almighty” God. Why pray to God if the future is uncertain? If God answers prayer, was it the best answer or in hindsight could he have made a mistake? Can God really be trusted?

To unpack the open theism model of divine foreknowledge one needs only to evaluate the traditional understanding over and against the claims of the openness model by means of the application of a consistent hermeneutic. That is, biblical support for the openness model using the “at face value” hermeneutic will be compared and contrasted with the traditional model using a “natural” hermeneutic. Doing so will reveal that open theism’s model of divine foreknowledge

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<sup>1</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?: The Current Controversy over Divine Foreknowledge* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003), 245.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

is supported and communicated by obfuscating and confusing biblical truth and traditional orthodoxy.

#### THE OPENNESS MODEL OF DIVINE FOREKNOWLEDGE FROM SCRIPTURES

The central tenet to the openness views of God, including the openness model of divine foreknowledge, is God's love. Richard Rice suggests, "From a Christian perspective, *love* is the first and last word in the biblical portrait of God."<sup>3</sup> That is, a Christian understanding of God includes love in the list of His perfections. However, Rice proposes that biblically God is not portrayed as "a center of infinite power who happens to be loving, he is loving above all else."<sup>4</sup> Thus to truly understand the openness model of divine foreknowledge one must embrace the concept that God, being "deeply sensitive to the ones he loves," expresses this love relationally, in a "give and take fashion."<sup>5</sup> Clark Pinnock captures the concept well by envisioning "a response-able and self-sacrificing God of changeable faithfulness and vulnerable power"<sup>6</sup> – "a triune communion who seeks relationships of love with human beings, having bestowed upon them genuine freedom for this purpose."<sup>7</sup> The openness model claims biblical support for the manifestations of God's love, as will now be examined through the lens of openness view proponents only.

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Rice, "Biblical Support for a New Perspective," in *The Openness of God : A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*(Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 18.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>6</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover : A Theology of God's Openness*, Didsbury Lectures (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Paternoster Press; Baker Academic, 2001), x.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 3.

### The Regrets of God

Scriptures seem to provide a dynamic portrait of God where He lays out a plan and a purpose and then regrets taking such actions. For example, God said he was “sorry that He had made man on the earth” and then decided to judge the world and begin again (Gen. 6:6, 8). In another example He expresses regret that He had made Saul king (1 Sam. 15:11). Gregory Boyd ponders how God could regret making Saul king if he knew with certainty that Saul would respond and act the way he did. The implication is that God did not know how Saul would act.<sup>8</sup> Pinnock supports this idea writing, “The writer of Samuel wants us to think carefully about what it means to say God repents. Nevertheless, it appears that God is willing to change course, especially where judgment is concerned, because he loves to be merciful and to relent from punishing (Joel 2:13; Jon. 4:2).”<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the direction history may proceed is dynamic, even for God since he is able to change course at a whim.

### God Changes His Mind

The openness model broadens the idea of God relenting to include occasions where God simply appears to change his mind. A primary example of such is His relenting from sending calamity on Nineveh in view of their repentance (Jon. 4:2). In a far more well-known case, God told Moses He would destroy the nation of Israel for their apostasy in worshiping the golden calf. Moses intervened on behalf of the people and urged God to change his mind regarding this judgment (Exod. 32:12). And in fact, “the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He

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<sup>8</sup> Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible : A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000), 56.

<sup>9</sup> Pinnock, 43.

said He would do to His people” (Exod. 32:14).<sup>10</sup> The openness model suggests that since human intercession can influence God’s actions, God’s intentions are “not absolute and invariant; he does not unilaterally and irrevocably decide what to do.”<sup>11</sup> The clear extrapolation from this premise is that God does not possess exhaustive foreknowledge.

### Prophetic Errors

Predictive prophecy is an additional area where the openness view appeals to occasions of limited divine prescience. John Sanders submits that predictive prophecies are expressed in three ways in Scriptures: God predicts the future as something he intends to do irrespective of human agency, or God may make a conditional prediction that depends on human agency, or God may simply be forecasting what will take place based on his complete knowledge of past and present factors.<sup>12</sup> The first expression is the traditional view of predictive prophecy. The second view expresses the openness view that most prophecies are conditional; that is, the future is left unsettled. Rice concurs noting that divine predictions at times seem to express what God intends to do, or what will happen, if people respond or behave in one way versus another.<sup>13</sup> By way of example, Sanders argues that God made unconditional predictions that he would destroy Nineveh (cf. Jonah 3:4) and that Hezekiah would soon die (2 Kings 20:1), yet neither of these came true because of favorable human responses to God.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all citations of Scriptures will be from the New American Standard version.

<sup>11</sup> Rice, 29.

<sup>12</sup> John Sanders, *The God Who Risks : A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 137, quoted in Pinnock, 50, n. 65.

<sup>13</sup> Rice, 51.

<sup>14</sup> John Sanders, "Be Wary of Ware: A Reply to Bruce Ware," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45, no. 2 (2002): 224.

One additional consideration is those prophecies where God “thought” or “expected” something to take place when it did not occur. An example open theists embrace is Israel’s lack of repentance in Jeremiah’s day where God “thought” Israel would return to him but they did not (Jer. 3:7). In this case God appears to be “surprised” that something did not occur, and he did not intercede to make it occur. Sanders is quick to point out these situations do not mean God was mistaken, or that he held a false belief – “God will not definitely believe that something will occur unless it is certain to occur.”<sup>15</sup> Therefore, if something is not certain to occur, then God only knows “the degree of probability that something will happen in a particular way.”<sup>16</sup> In this way God is said to have limited foreknowledge – he knows all the probabilities and possible outcomes, just not the specific outcome that will eventually occur.

#### God’s Ignorance of Certain Futures

An additional example of an apparent partially open future occurs in situations where God claims ignorance. For example, consider God’s statement regarding the Israelites idolatry in Jeremiah 7:31: “They have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, and it did not come into My mind.” To an open theist the phrase “it did not come into My mind” suggests God was unable to know what would happen in this case. In fact, Boyd submits that “it would at the very least seem to preclude the possibility that the Israelites’ idolatrous behavior was eternally certain in God’s mind.”<sup>17</sup> A similar idea can be found in Jeremiah 26:3 where God tells

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Boyd, 61.

Jeremiah to make a proclamation to Judah and says “perhaps they will listen and everyone will turn from his evil way, that I may repent of the calamity which I am planning to do to them because of the evil of their deeds.” Pinnock writes, “Evidently God did not know at this time how they would decide. Clearly, the future in certain respects is open, and what people decide can change the course of events.”<sup>18</sup>

Those who hold to the openness view of divine foreknowledge count the biblical proofs presented herein as examples supporting the development of their new theology of God. As will now be examined, those who hold to a traditional view of divine foreknowledge utilize their own biblical proof texts to support the model of God’s exhaustive foreknowledge.

#### THE TRADITIONAL MODEL OF DIVINE FOREKNOWLEDGE FROM SCRIPTURES

While the openness view of divine foreknowledge is supported by various Scriptures that imply God’s limited prescience, the traditional view of divine foreknowledge is able to assemble a vast number of Scriptures to support the position of God’s exhaustive foreknowledge.

#### God’s Foreknowledge of People

The openness view holds that God knows people in their present state – their thoughts and feelings – and, therefore, is able to predict what a person might say in any given instant. Yet Scriptures seem to paint a different portrait of God’s intimate involvement with his creatures. For example, consider Psalm 139 where David writes in verse 4, “Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord.” In fact, John Hammett rightly observes that verses 1 through 6

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<sup>18</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, "There Is Room for Us: A Reply to Bruce Ware," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45, no. 2 (2002): 217.

reveal God's comprehensive knowledge of David, including David's future choices.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, verse 16 proclaims, "Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them." Craig Broyles warns this passage is not providing a notion of predestination, but of God's foreknowledge.<sup>20</sup> This is not foreknowledge of probabilities, but of actualities.

A related aspect of God's foreknowledge of people can be found in passages where God predicts a significant thing a person will do long before the person is even born, and he gives the name of the person. Consider 1 Kings 13:1-3, where a prophet tells Jeroboam over 300 years before it occurred that Josiah will be born into the house of David and slay all the priests of the high places. Or in another passage God declares 210 years before it came to pass that he will raise up Cyrus who will allow Jerusalem to be rebuilt (Isa. 44:28). Now openness proponents would argue these are examples of instances where God hedged in the actors such that they had no real freedom to do other than what God foreordained. Erickson does not throw punches at this assertion, but he questions "if God can know future events like this, which involve so many free human actions, there is no real reason in principle why he could not foreknow all events."<sup>21</sup>

### God's Foreknowledge of People's Actions

Certainly God's foreknowledge of the persons and actions of Josiah and Cyrus is prophetic, but there are still other examples of God's foreknowledge in Scripture that describe in rather explicit detail specific actions people will take long before they occur. One case in point is

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<sup>19</sup> John S. Hammett, "Divine Foreknowledge and Open Theism," *Faith and Mission* 21, no. 1 (2003): 19.

<sup>20</sup> Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Peabody, MA; Grand Rapids, MI: Hendrickson ; Baker Books, 1999), 486.

<sup>21</sup> Erickson, 50.



Judas' betrayal of Christ. Jesus specifically declared one of his disciples would betray him and revealed which one by giving him a piece of bread he had dipped in a dish (John 13:26). This was not a guess by Christ, and he had even hinted earlier that he knew a betrayer was among the twelve (cf. John 6:64, 70-71). In yet another case Jesus tells Peter of his upcoming threefold denial (Matt. 26:33-35) – an especially detailed prophecy that came to pass that very evening, before the rooster crowed (Matt. 26:59-75). Finally, though not specifically named, the actions of the soldiers at Christ's crucifixion were arguably detailed several centuries before they occurred – the piercing of Jesus' side (John 20:34-37, cf. Zech. 12:10), and casting lots for his cloak (John 19:24, cf. Ps. 22:18). Boyd interjects here that there was only the requirement that these prophecies be fulfilled, not specifically who would fulfill them.<sup>22</sup> In some sense he is suggesting God was exerting causative influence on the actors to make sure these events transpired. Steve Lewis disagrees writing,

God's foreknowledge of future human behavior does not necessarily exert a causative influence which overpowers the so-called free will of His creatures. The mere fact that God knows a future action will not cause that action to occur in violation of human choice. . . . God will bring specific events to pass by His own sovereign will, but His foreknowledge or "pre-vision" of future events should not be viewed as exerting an inevitable causative influence and therefore as being deterministic.<sup>23</sup>

### Foreknowledge as a Requirement of Deity

Erickson characterizes Isaiah 41-48 as one of the "*locus classicus* of the traditional view of divine foreknowledge."<sup>24</sup> To wit, within these chapters alone there are at least nine specific

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<sup>22</sup> Boyd, 22.

<sup>23</sup> Steve Lewis, "The Implications of God's Infinity for "Open" Theism," *Conservative Theological Journal* 7, no. 20 (2003): 95. For examples of other passages that suggest God's foreknowledge of human action, see 1 Chron. 5:26; 2 Chron. 21:16-17; Prov. 21:1; Isa. 44:23.

<sup>24</sup> Erickson, 42.

groups of passages (41:21–29; 42:8–9; 43:8–13; 44:6–8; 44:24–28; 45:20–23; 46:8–11; 48:3–8; 48:14–16) that affirm God’s foreknowledge of a myriad of future events. He challenges idols who are proclaimed to be gods to announce what is coming in the future, to declare what will happen even after that (41:22-23). God himself declares things will happen, and he tells of them before they happen (42:9). Over and against the openness view that people can thwart the plans of God, God proclaims that no one can reverse his acts (43:13). These continuing themes decry any possibility that God does not have exhaustive foreknowledge. Bruce Ware presses this point deeper noting these passages all assert divine foreknowledge as “a test for true deity,” a way to distinguish between the only true God and mere idols.<sup>25</sup> In other words, “God’s designated authenticating sign of his deity is the reality and truthfulness of his foreknowledge.”<sup>26</sup> In the end this supports the traditional conception of God in that by his very existence as God he must possess exhaustive foreknowledge.

### COMPARISON OF HERMENEUTICS

In general, traditional theism approaches the text of the Bible by utilizing grammatical-historical principles of interpretation. This traditional method was described long ago by Milton Terry who stated the grammatical-historical method means taking “the most simple, direct, and ordinary meaning of phrases and sentences” within the author’s historical context.<sup>27</sup> Traditional hermeneutics also embraces the *analogia scriptura* (“analogy of Scripture”). In other words, Terry’s dictum holds sway: “No single statement or obscure passage of one book can be allowed

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<sup>25</sup> Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory : The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2000), 103.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>27</sup> Milton Spenser Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics : A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub. House, 1974), 101, 103.

to set aside a doctrine which is clearly established by many passages.”<sup>28</sup> Grant Osborne strengthens this argument adding “that doctrines should not be built on upon a single passage but rather should summarize all that Scripture says on that topic.”<sup>29</sup>

In view of this traditional approach, a brief examination can be performed of the hermeneutics utilized by openness proponents. It is noteworthy that Boyd rejects any notion that openness proponents have ever espoused a new or unique hermeneutical method. Rather, he claims they utilize the same methods as “everyone else” and seek to interpret Scripture in accordance with the author’s intended meaning.<sup>30</sup> However, as will be shown by examples, openness proponents do indeed develop a pattern of new hermeneutical principles necessitated by their adoption of “God is love” as their interpretive center.<sup>31</sup>

#### “Literally” Understood

From the outset openness advocates claim to bring to the study of Scripture a “straightforward” hermeneutic; that is, verses that portray God changing his mind, being surprised, or repenting/relenting are to be treated just as literally as those that portray a determined future.<sup>32</sup> These passages should be taken “at face value,” or should be read “straightforwardly.” For example, reading Genesis 2:19 straightforwardly suggests that when

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 579.

<sup>29</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral : A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 11.

<sup>30</sup> Gregory A. Boyd, "Christian Love and Academic Dialogue: A Reply to Bruce Ware," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45, no. 2 (2002): 240.

<sup>31</sup> Robert L. Thomas, "The Hermeneutics of "Open Theism", " *Master's Seminary Journal* 12, no. 2 (2001): 187.

<sup>32</sup> Erickson, 62.

God brought the animals to Adam “to see” what Adam would name them, God did not yet know the names of the animals. Robert Pyne and Stephen Spencer note contradictory ideas within the context of this and surrounding passages in that if Genesis 2:19 implies God’s lack of foreknowledge, then do not the interrogative questions to Adam and Eve in 3:9-11 and 3:13 imply God truly did not know where they were or what they had done?<sup>33</sup> According to Pyne and Spencer, Boyd rejects this argument holding these questions were rhetorical and God already knew the answers. Yet how does one reconcile God’s ignorance in the naming of animals with God knowledge of the shamed couple? Thus the inconsistency of this hermeneutical method is betrayed.

To be fair, Erickson concedes a “literal” or “plain” approach to hermeneutics is the approach used in most cases by evangelical biblical interpreters, but the term “literal” is seldom used in favor of “natural.”<sup>34</sup> In other words, the natural sense is used unless good reason is given not to. Emphasizing a “straightforward” reading of many biblical metaphors or anthropomorphisms would result in fallacious, even heretical, notions of God.<sup>35</sup>

### The Analogy of Scripture

As previously described, the analogy of Scripture presumes it provides its own interpretation. Openness proponents appear to subscribe to this idea but is this only a reflection of a state of denial of reality? Consider the following results of research conducted by Steven Roy regarding God’s omniscience, and most particularly his foreknowledge, within the Bible:

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<sup>33</sup> Robert A. Pyne and Stephen R. Spencer, "A Critique of Free-Will Theism, Part One," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158, no. 630 (2001): 270.

<sup>34</sup> Erickson, 63.

<sup>35</sup> Pyne and Spencer, "A Critique of Free-Will Theism, Part One," 271.

“164 texts explicitly teach/affirm God’s foreknowledge; 271 texts explicitly teach/affirm other aspects of God’s omniscience (e.g., knowledge of past or present or possible states of affairs); 128 texts offer predictions of what God will do through nature; 1,893 texts state predictively that God will do something or other in or through human beings; 1,474 texts state predictively what human beings will do, apart from God directly acting in or through them; 622 texts state predictively what unbelievers will do or have happen to them; 143 texts affirm God’s sovereign control of human choices; and, 105 texts of apparent counter evidence.”<sup>36</sup> Erickson goes so far as to grant more of the passages to open theists than Roy, but he states, “Thus, on the most generous assessment, 1,617 texts, or 33.6875 percent of the texts, present a problem for the open theist view, and perhaps as high as 89.5 percent represent difficulties for that position, whereas the traditional view has difficulty with only 2.1875 percent.” Simply put, openness proponents have built their doctrine of God on much less stable ground than traditional theism. Both views have biblical support, but clearly the openness view is far less supported.

### Consistency in Method

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the hermeneutics employed by openness advocates is their inconsistent application of their methods. For example, Boyd suggests that Jesus as God knew Peter’s character so well that he could precisely predict Peter would deny him three times that evening. Yet no matter how comprehensively God knew Peter, his denial of Christ three times would have only been one of many possibilities that God could have known. Why did he not deny Christ only two times? Thus Boyd is suggesting God did know precisely what Peter was going to do, including the precise possibility that would occur. But openness proponents

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<sup>36</sup> Ware, 100, n. 2.

eschew as logically impossible God's ability to know with this precision since individual freedom is involved. This type of reasoning is circular and seems to occur in much of the openness hermeneutical method.

#### HOW THE OPENNESS MODEL IS ADVOCATED AND COMMUNICATED

Notwithstanding some of the previous criticisms, perhaps the most engaging aspect of openness view is the way its proponents defend/advocate and communicate the theology to the masses. Ron Highfield laments that "every word in the new open theist dictionary possesses a meaning different than the old one I still use. The words 'God,' 'providence,' 'freedom,' 'love,' 'Creator,' 'Savior,' 'Lord,' 'omnipotence,' 'omniscience,' 'grace,' 'eternity,' 'wisdom,' and many more have been retained, but their meaning have been revised."<sup>37</sup> Consider the term "omniscience." Traditional theism defines this term as God's knowledge of all truths that will ever exist, including human actions. Open theists nuance the term defining it as God's knowledge of all facts that are logically possible for him to know – past, present, and future.<sup>38</sup> What their definition hides is a belief that it is logically impossible for God to know all things a human being will do since in love God has granted individual freewill – in the case of people, the future is indeterminate. God knows all the possibilities, just not the actualities when people are involved. Consider the following obscure remark by Boyd: "Open theists affirm God's omniscience as emphatically as anybody does. The issue is not whether God's knowledge is perfect. It is. The issue is about the nature of the reality that God perfectly knows."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ron Highfield, "Response to Gregory A. Boyd," in *Four Views on Divine Providence*, ed. Dennis W. Jowers, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2011), 231.

<sup>38</sup> Dennis W. Jowers et al., *Four Views on Divine Providence*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2011), 249.

<sup>39</sup> Boyd, *God of the Possible : A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God*, 15-16.

Openness proponents encapsulate the bulk of their doctrine of God within the idea of divine love. God's love is the beginning and end point for their theologies. Their view of divine love necessitates relationality between God and human beings. This relationality, Highfield notes, "demands that two related things inhabit the same causal space and hence both be subject to being changed by the relation. . . . God is temporal, changeable, and passible because he is related to temporal, changeable, and passible creatures."<sup>40</sup> From a human perspective this is a very enticing idea, that God can be manipulated to respond by his creatures. There exists, then, a certain vulnerability in God, just as there are vulnerabilities in human relationships. As has been previously shown, open theists pick and choose passages where God appears to show compassion for his creatures and regrets his actions, changes his mind, or is even surprised people did not do what he thought they would do. God is then actualized in the image of man and becomes more relatable and more appealing to Erickson's "ordinary Christian."

The openness view also magnifies human ability in individual freedom and rejects God as the cause of all human acts – again, an appealing view that appears to overcome the misconception that God causes evil. Boyd holds that human beings are "the ultimate originators and ultimate explanation of their own acts."<sup>41</sup> Therefore, where they choose to do evil/sin, they are in effect acting in every way as the primary cause of their actions with no origination of plan or purpose from God. As an all-loving God, he limits his omnipotence, and in their view his omniscience, permitting his creatures free agency as uncaused causes. Dennis Jowers sees this whole concept as a danger to monotheism "if one postulates the existence of multiple uncaused causes, as Boyd appears to do when he identifies the ultimate source of free human acts as

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<sup>40</sup> Highfield, 232.

<sup>41</sup> Gregory A. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil : Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 78, quoted in Jowers et al., 245.

human beings rather than God.”<sup>42</sup> The neo-orthodox “theologian” Reinhold Niebuhr once quipped, “Man is mortal, that is his fate; man pretends not to be mortal, that is his sin.”<sup>43</sup> While open theists would deny their doctrine of individual free agency represents mankind reaching for immortality, for Erickson’s “ordinary Christian” there is certainly an appeal to the human ego.

These are but several examples of how the openness view of divine foreknowledge and the interrelated ideas supporting the openness view are supported and communicated to the masses. Their theology is one they regard as a commonsense approach to understanding God and the Bible and often appeals to the “ordinary Christian.” In the scholarly realm, their appeal is to the pietistic, where Pinnock acknowledges “doctrinal precision is not everything” and “a measure of theological pluralism is possible.”<sup>44</sup> This idea seems to fit nicely with post-modernity as openness, doctrinal flexibility, and theological pluralism implies relativity – an appeal to a much wider audience than perhaps traditional theism.

## CONCLUSION

The openness view of divine foreknowledge is somewhat like a three-legged chair. The first leg argues from a philosophical vantage point that God can only know what actually is. If nothing has happened then there is nothing to know. The second leg argues from a psychological perspective that the only way to clearly understand God is to view him as the “God of love.” In view of this love the way he meaningfully relates to his creatures is to give them free agency, of which he does not know the results of their decisions until they are made. The final leg of this

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<sup>42</sup> Dennis W. Jowers, “Conclusion,” in *Four Views on Divine Providence*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2011), 245.

<sup>43</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy; Essays on the Christian Interpretation of History*, Essay Index Reprint Series (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 128.

<sup>44</sup> Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness*, 185.



chair argues from a hermeneutical perspective where passages of Scripture are read “straightforwardly.” Passages where God is said to grieve, regret, or become angry are taken literally. Passages where God does not seem to know the outcome of an event or action are interpreted literally.

The problem with this three-legged chair is its theological instability. The first leg wobbles under a philosophical presupposition of reality that places God in time and space with human beings. God transcends his creation and his knowledge is not limited by its very bounds. The second leg wobbles under a psychology that applies the concepts of love and relation to God in the same sense as human beings. God is not subject to human-like vulnerabilities and change. The final leg wobbles under inconsistent and disingenuous hermeneutical methods. This is not to say the traditional theism is without its own shortcomings in some areas. Nevertheless, traditional theism has fewer issues to contend with theologically, and has centuries of development as its basis. For the “ordinary Christian” and the church, the openness view of God’s foreknowledge is not wrong just because it is recent, it is wrong because it represents a theological system that does damage to most other fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith by obfuscating and confusing biblical truth and traditional orthodoxy.

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