

God's Foreknowledge and how God Interacts with Mankind (An Overview of the Open View of God)

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[This syllabus has more information than is actually covered in the audio seminar, but are the notes from which the seminar was made. Not every point in this syllabus was covered in the teaching of the seminar, but the notes have been left in their complete form to help people study and learn the subject, and also for those who want notes from which to teach the subject to others.]

SESSION ONE—INTRODUCTION

PART I. Benefits of the Open View of God

- 1) We can understand God and the Bible better and are better able to relate to God
- 2). We can read the Bible and believe it at face value.
- 3) We can see that God really is love.

SESSION TWO—WHAT IS THE OPEN VIEW OF GOD?

(Props: books on Open View): This seminar is designed to cover many of the basics of the Open View of God. It will not be exhaustive.

PART II. What is the “Open View” of God?

1. The name “Open View” was coined because the future is “open,” it is uncreated and not known.
2. The “open view” of God is that God knows everything that is knowable, but does not have exhaustive foreknowledge; i.e., perfect and complete foreknowledge of everything that will happen in the future.
3. God does absolutely know everything that is knowable, i.e., every past event. Furthermore, He knows every factor in play and every line of cause and effect, so He has tremendous predictive capacity and can predict the future with incredible accuracy, but He does not absolutely know the future. Hebrews says God knows everything knowable.

Hebrews 4:13

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.

4. The Open View asserts that the passage of what we call “time” creates new realities every second, and those realities are not perfectly foreknown by God.
5. God can predict the future, and our future is certain and secure, not because God “knows” what will happen, but because God is powerful and can make things happen.
6. When God created the universe and freewill beings, He follows the rules that He Himself set and became subject to them. For example, when God said He did not lie then He became subject to that promise.

PART III. The Two Models for predicting the future

The Bible says God can predict the future: He declares the end from the beginning:

Isaiah 46:10 (HCSB):

I declare the end from the beginning, and from long ago what is not yet done, saying: My plan will take place, and I will do all My will.

The question is not, “Can God predict the future,” but “How does God predict the future?” There are two models for God’s ability to predict the future.

- The Knowledge Model: God knows the future
- The Power Model: God can make His prophecies of the future happen

We are familiar with people using different models to explain the facts of a situation. For example, we are familiar with the two major models used to explain how life started:

1. Evolution: a purely mechanistic model
2. Creation: life was designed and made

Different models are used in a courtroom: The prosecuting attorney will explain the facts of a crime using a model that portrays the accused person as being responsible for the crime. In contrast, the defense attorney will explain the same facts using a model that portrays the accused person as being innocent.

When we are looking for answers and studying different models to see which model is most likely correct for any given situation, we study the evidence and decide which model has the best or most complete “explanatory power,” that is, what model best explains the facts that we know.

In the case of God’s predicting the future, we assert that the Power Model has the best “explanatory power” when it comes to God. It best explains the verses in the Bible; it best explains God’s how God can be love and yet the world be in the bad shape it is in; and it leaves the least amount of questions unanswered.

Examples of how God can use the Power Model to predict the future:

- Giving the land to Joshua (Josh. 1:2; God says He will give the land to Israel and He does: He dries up the Jordan River so Israel can cross; causes the walls of Jericho to fall; rains hailstones on the Canaanite army (Josh. 10:11); and the result of that is that the Israelites win.
- The naming of Cyrus (Isa. 45:1; since oracles or divination were regularly sought in the naming of royalty, it would have been easy for God to give the name “Cyrus.”
- 75 pound hailstones will fall in the future (Rev. 16:21; God will make them, just like He did in the book of Joshua).

PART IV. Where did our concept of an “immutable” God come from (i.e., a God that perfectly knows the future)?

1. Orthodox theologians call God “immutable” because if He knows everything, then nothing can ever be added to that. His knowledge is static; unchanging.
2. The Christian doctrine of God was developed in an atmosphere influenced by Greek thought.”¹ Plato argued in the *Republic* that deity, being perfect, cannot change or be changed because any change in a ‘perfect’ being could be only for the worse. If the deity changes, then he is either not perfect at present, or he was previously not perfect before the change.² Aristotle taught that also.³ From this understanding it was deduced that God therefore does not change in any respect. God’s knowledge, thoughts, will, and emotions are therefore unchanging and fixed. This idea has had a profound influence upon Christian thinkers throughout the ages and continues even to this day.⁴ Augustine was a Neo-Platonist (a 3rd century modification of Platonism which syncretized it with Egyptian and Jewish thought), and saw God as immutable.
3. The word “omniscient” is not in the Bible. This is important to know because many people think of God as “omniscient” only because they have heard it over and over and therefore think it is in the Bible. It is not.

SESSION THREE—DOES GOD HAVE REAL EMOTIONS?

(Props: Book: *Figures of Speech Used In the Bible*)

PART V. Sixteen reasons to believe in the Open View of God

1. It makes God the loving, responsive, relational, personal, and passionate God we see in the Bible.

Both theologians who believe that God has exhaustive foreknowledge and theologian who believe the Open View of God recognize that the Bible says God has emotions such as joy, sorrow, anger, and jealousy, and that He even repents of some things. However, each theological system explains them differently.

The Bible says that God has:

- Joy and Rejoicing: Deut. 28:63; Ps. 104:31; Isa. 62:5.
Isaiah 62:5 (ESV) “For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.”
- Sorrow and Grief: Gen. 6:3; Jug. 10:16; Ps. 78:40; Isa. 63:10

¹ Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI, 2001), p. 68. C. Pinnock, R. Rice, J. Sanders, W. Hasker, D. Basinger, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 1994), pp. 59-100.

² Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 1998), p. 174.

³ C. Pinnock, R. Rice, J. Sanders, W. Hasker, D. Basinger, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 1994), pp. 59-100.

⁴ C. Pinnock, R. Rice, J. Sanders, W. Hasker, D. Basinger, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 1994), pp. 59-100.; Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI, 2001), chapt. 2, pp. 65-111; and Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 1998), chapt. 5, pp. 140-166.

Psalm 78:40 (ESV) How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness and grieved him in the desert!

- Regret, repentance: Gen. 6:6; Ex. 32:14; Ps. 106:45

Exodus 32:14 (KJV) “And the LORD **repented** of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.”

Exodus 32:14 (NASB) “So the LORD **changed His mind** about the harm which He said He would do to His people.”

- Anger: Ex. 4:14; Num. 11:11; Josh. 7:1; Judg. 3:8

Exodus 4:14 (ESV) Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses

- Shocked or appalled: Isa. 59:16
- Jealousy: Deut. 32:16; 1 Kings 14:22
- Displeasure: Zech. 1:15
- Laughter (mocking laughter): Ps. 2:4; 37:13
- Hate: Prov. 6:16-19 (God hates evil)

The Knowledge Model’s explanation of God’s emotions and experiences

The traditional “knowledge model” says that God does not really feel or experience the things the Bible says He feels and experiences. The Knowledge Model explains God’s emotions such as joy and anger and His actions such as repenting by asserting they are anthropomorphisms; figures of speech that make God seem to feel and act like people. In his book, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, E. W. Bullinger called them by the Greek name, “*anthropopatheia*” (p. 871-897; 27 pages).

Although traditional theologians agree that the emotions the Bible attributes to God are anthropomorphisms, they do not completely agree on why God uses them in the Bible.

- Some theologians, such as Philo, say they are in the Bible because some people cannot grasp the true nature of God
- Other theologians say it is so we “may understand His essence and will.”⁵

Problem #1 with the Knowledge Model explanation:

- It means God’s emotions are not real. If the Knowledge Model is correct and God has total foreknowledge, then the emotional responses that the Bible says God feels are not “real,” they are a figure of speech.
- What is God trying to say? A major purpose of figures of speech is to add emphasis or clarity to the Bible. But what emphasis and clarity would the so-called examples of *anthropopatheia* explain? When God tells us He is angry, or joyful, or repentant, if He is not, then what is He trying to say? How does His telling us He feels emotions when He really does not help us “understand His essence and will”?
- Why would God tell us He has emotions if He does not? It leaves us guessing about what God is trying to tell us, which is precisely why orthodox theologians disagree with each other about why God says He has emotions.

The end result of the Knowledge Model is that the Bible, instead of teaching us about God, tells us things that are not true about God and thus actually ends up being misleading, confusing, and

⁵ E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, originally printed 1898, reprinted 1968), p. 872.

even disingenuous, and also making our understanding of God unclear and uncertain. Why would God tell us He has emotions if He does not?

Problem 2: The Knowledge Model makes God seem to be a liar because His Word says He feels and experiences things He does not actually feel and experience. In contrast, the Power Model says that God really feels the way He says He feels, and we can read and understand the Bible in a straightforward way.

Problem 3: The Knowledge Model leaves us no effective way to relate to God. The reason we can relate to God is that we can understand Him. We can understand why He gets angry when people ignore and disobey Him. We can understand how God can feel joy when people do what He says. But how are we to relate to an emotionless God?

Problem 4: Although there are some anthropomorphisms in the Bible (such as God shooting arrows; Ps. 18:14), the Bible does make it clear that God takes on a human-like form so that He can relate to His creation. This is not just anthropomorphic language, God takes on a real human-like form, and the statements that “now the dwelling of God is with men” (Rev. 21:3), and that God will sit among us on a throne, are a very important part of our hope. If that language is figurative, then what does it represent? The real truth is that much of what we are dealing with when we see God’s emotion and way of being shows us that it is humans that are theomorphic, not God who is anthropomorphic. It is not that we make God to be like us, or need God to be like us to “understand” Him even though He is not like us, but rather that He made us like Him and we understand Him precisely because we are like Him (Gen. 1:26).

The Power Model’s explanation of God’s emotions and experiences

The Power Model explains God’s experiences and emotions in the Bible by saying He really does have them. They are not figures of speech, God really does have emotions such as joy and anger.

Advantage 1: The explanation given by the Power Model, that God really does have emotions and experiences, allows us to understand and relate to God. The Bible says that we are to have “fellowship” with God, but in order to do that we must be able to understand Him and relate to Him in a meaningful way, which we can do if the emotions and experiences the Bible says God has are real.

Advantage 2: The Power Model allows us to read the Bible and believe what it says about God’s emotions. We do not have to explain them away. The Power Model explains why the Bible says God has emotions such as joy and anger, and why He sometimes does things like repent (change His mind). He does not perfectly and exhaustively know the future, so He genuinely has experiences of joy, surprise, and anger like we do.

SESSION FOUR—GOD IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR EVIL

2) The Open View keeps God from being responsible for evil.

A difficult theological issue that scholars have been dealing with for centuries is how to reconcile that God is love with all the evil in the world. The Knowledge Model really has no good explanation for the evil in the world. If God knew about all the evil that would occur when

He created the universe before He ever created it, but created it anyway, then He is responsible for the evil in the world. In contrast, the Power Model well explains how God can be love and yet the world be evil because it explains people's free will, and thus their actions, in terms of God not having exhaustive foreknowledge.

The proper way to evaluate free will is to think of it from the perspective of before God created anything. The Knowledge Model says that before God created the universe, He knew 1/3 of the angels would fall, the vast majority of mankind would be thrown into the Lake of Fire, and that life on earth would be difficult to horrible for most people, but He created it anyway. That makes Him responsible for what happens. An illustration of this point would be a time bomb. If a person creates a time bomb knowing it will go off and kill people, he is responsible for the destruction it causes even though he was not there when it went off. He knew what would happen and built it anyway. Similarly, God is responsible for the destruction in His creation if He knew about it and created it anyway. The responsible thing for God to do if He knew about the horrors of His creation would have been to create a different reality.

Knowledge Model Objection 1: But God did not create the evil acts; He created people and angels with free will.

- **Answer 1:** If God knew the evil acts would occur before anything was created (before there was a universe), and created the universe anyway, then He is responsible for the evil act. If you cross a rattlesnake with a lion to make a lion that will rattle and warn people before attacking, but you get a lion that has a poisonous bite, you kill the beast and chalk it up to experience. If you knew beforehand what you would get and did it anyway, you are fully responsible.
- **Answer 2:** The Open View of God explains why there is so much evil in the universe: since God created beings that truly have free will, then He did not know what they would do. He certainly knew they had the potential to disobey Him, but He did not know they would. God was so certain of His power and wisdom to be able to correct and redeem any evil that His creation would do, that He was willing to create beings with truly free will. As we know, a huge number of those beings have in fact rebelled against God, yet He maintains a righteous course of action and will in fact redeem His creation. The fact remains that God did not create freewill beings whom He knew would do evil.

Knowledge Model Objection 2: While it is true God knew the evil would happen, it was part of His plan to produce a group of people who would truly love Him from their heart.

- **Answer.** God tells us not to do evil so good may come (Rom. 3:8), and He tells us to imitate Him (Eph. 5:1). If God knew that what He created would be evil, but created it anyway "for a greater purpose," then He is doing evil with the intention that good would come from it, but He cannot do that without sinning any more than we can. Jesus said that a corrupt tree cannot produce good fruit (Luke 6:43). No "good plan" uses evil means.

Knowledge Model Objection 3: God knew that His freewill beings would sin in masse and have to be destroyed, but it was still their decision and He could not create them any other way.

- **Answer 1:** There is no proof for that statement; it only protects a pre-conceived doctrine of God's exhaustive foreknowledge.

- **Answer 2:** We deny that, “God could not have created mankind any other way” than the way He did. Given what we see in animals and the blend of instinct and learning in most animals, it seems that God could have given mankind more instinct to follow Him if He truly foresaw that 1/3 of His angels and the majority of His people would not believe Him. However to do so would have destroyed the genuine free will that we humans enjoy.
- **Answer 3:** People who believe in God’s exhaustive foreknowledge often claim that it is essential in order for Jesus Christ to have been completely sinless. However, if God could, by His foreknowledge, so arrange things that Jesus Christ could be sinless, then He could arrange things so that mankind in general would be obedient also. This is a fatal point to the Knowledge Model because if God could so arrange things in His foreknowledge that Jesus would not sin, then He could do the same for the rest of mankind and avoid the horrors caused by sin and disobedience. (We will say more on this in the section covering objections to the Open View).

3) God says that He uses His power to bring to pass the things He foretold.

When the Bible describes God’s being able to predict the future, it does so in terms of the Power Model, not the Knowledge Model. This is very important because we Christians are supposed to get our theology from what the Bible says. If God said He gave prophecies because He already knew about them, we should believe that. But when God says He fulfills prophecies by acting on what He said, then we should believe that.

Isaiah 48:3 (HCSB)

I declared the past events long ago; they came out of My mouth; I proclaimed them. Suddenly I acted, and they occurred.

God never says, “I knew things would occur, so I said they would.” He said they would occur, then He acted to make them occur. Thus, the Power Model explains what the Bible actually says, while the Knowledge Model does not.

SESSION FIVE—GOD DOES NOT SEEM TO PERFECTLY KNOW THE FUTURE

4) The Open View explains why God is occasionally wrong in the statements He makes about the future, or has to modify what He says.

According to the traditional view that God has exhaustive foreknowledge, God should never have to change or modify a prophecy. Yet He sometimes does. The Open View explains why there are a number of prophecies in the Bible that did not come to pass and that God later had to modify.

In Jeremiah 18:1-11 God makes it clear that when He gives a prophecy, if the people change, the prophecy may change. This fits the Open View and the Power Model perfectly. But if God knew the future, He would know when the people would change and thus never give any prophecy that needed to be changed. How are we to explain prophecies that change from the Knowledge Model

point of view? If someone know something he says is not true, but say it anyway, he is a liar. Below are some examples of God changing prophecies He gave:

David

- 2 Sam. 7:11. Rest from your enemies
- 2 Sam. 12:10. Now, therefore, the sword will not depart from your house.

Solomon

- 2 Sam. 7:12, 13. Establish his kingdom
- 1 Kings 11:11. Tear the kingdom away from you.

Ahab (murdered Naboth and his family and stole his property)

- 1 Kings 21:21, 22. I am going to bring disaster on you
- 1 Kings 21:29. I will not bring the disaster in your lifetime

Hezekiah

- 2 Kings 20:1. Put your house in order, because you will die, you will not recover.
- 2 Kings 20:5. Hezekiah was given 15 more years

Jonah

- Jonah 3:4. Nineveh will be destroyed in 40 days
- Jonah 3:10. God did not bring the destruction

Zedekiah

- Jeremiah 34:4, 5. Zedekiah will die peacefully.
- Jeremiah 52:10, 11. Zedekiah was captured by Nebuchadnezzar, his children were killed while he was made to watch, then he was blinded and led away captive and died in prison.

5) The Open View explains why God “tests” people

The Bible has a number of examples of God “testing” people, and the tests are never easy. In fact, usually they involve a great deal of personal commitment and self control, such as when God tested Abraham in Genesis 22. The Open View easily explains why God tests people: the test is a genuine test and God learns about the person. In contrast, the traditional belief that God has complete foreknowledge does not offer a satisfactory explanation for God’s testing people. The Traditional theological answer to why God tests people is so that we can know what is in our own heart. Although we do learn more about ourselves when God tests us, the Bible never says that God test us so we can learn, but it does say that He learns.

- The Bible is clear that God tests us. God tests our hearts: Ps. 7:9; Jer. 17:10; 29:17; 1 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 2:23.
Psalm 17:3 (ESV): You have tried my heart, you have visited me by night, you have tested me, and you will find nothing; I have purposed that my mouth will not transgress.
- It fits both what the Bible actually says, and the character of God, that the test is real and God is the one who learns.
- If God puts someone through an ordeal when He already knows how the ordeal will play out, He is cruel.

- Genesis 22. God tests Abraham. “Now I know” (Gen. 22:10, 12). The only one who is ever said to learn anything in the record is God.
- Deut. 13:1-3. God tests Israel in the wilderness so He can “find out” what is in their heart (cp. Exod. 16:4; Deut. 8:2; Judg. 2:22; 3:4).

6) The Bible says that certain things never entered God’s mind

When humans started sacrificing their children and burning them to death to idols, God said that had never entered His mind (Jer. 7:31; 19:5; 32:35).

Jeremiah 7:31 (ESV)

And 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, nor did it come into my mind.

The Knowledge Model explains God’s statement by making it a figure of speech. In contrast, the Open View explains the statement by asserting that it is true. It is understandable that God, who is a loving Father, when he created mankind, never thought that the parental instincts He placed in a Dad and Mom could be so ignored that they would burn their children to death.

SESSION SIX—THE OPEN VIEW EXPLAINS WHY GOD HAS EXPECTATIONS THAT ARE NOT MET

7) The Open View explains how God can have expectations that are not met (if God knew the future perfectly, His expectations would have always been met).

In the text of the Bible, there are a number of times when God clearly uses the language of expectation, and says that He expects certain things to happen which do not happen.

Traditionalists who believe in God having complete foreknowledge explain these statements as anthropomorphisms; figures of speech. But that explanation is unsatisfactory because if God knows the future, why would He act as if He did not know it? If God knows the future perfectly, then what He said is inappropriate, misleading, and disingenuous. In contrast, the Open View offers an excellent explanation for why God said He expected things to happen that did not happen: God did not know they would not happen, and He expected that they would happen.

- Isa. 5:2. He expected a good crop of grapes, but got a bad one.
- Jeremiah 3:6, 7 (ESV)
 - 6) The LORD said to me in the days of King Josiah: "Have you seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and there played the whore?
 - 7) And I thought, 'After she has done all this she will return to me,' but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it. (cp. 3:19, 20).
- Ezek. 22:30, 31. God sought for a person to repair the wall, but found no one. If God perfectly knew the future, He would never have looked in the first place.

8) The Open View explains why God sometimes changes His mind

The Bible has instances where God changes His mind. People who believe that God has exhaustive foreknowledge are forced to say that God did not really change His mind, but the text is using a figure of speech. That is a poor explanation, however, because it fails to explain why God would tell us that He changed His mind if He really did not. That would mean God said things about Himself that were not true.

The Open View explains that simply by noting that God does in fact sometimes change His mind. God is in relation with His creation, and when people and circumstances change, God responds and changes too.

- 1 Chron. 21:15 says God sent an angel “to destroy” Jerusalem. But then He relents and the angel stops. But if God knew that ahead of time, is the text truthful when it says God sent the angel to destroy the city.
- Exodus 32:14 says Yahweh repented about the disaster He was going to bring.
- 1 Samuel 2:27-31. Yahweh changed his mind about the priesthood.

9) The Open View explains why the Bible says there are things that God did not know

The Bible has a number of times when God did not know things. The explanation given for this by the Open View is simple and straightforward, and allows us to believe what we read in the text: God says He did not know because He did not know. In contrast, the Knowledge Model says that God did know the things He said He did not know, but does not give us a satisfactory reason why God would tell us He did not know something when He actually did know.

- Genesis 6: God did not know how wicked people would become before the flood.
- Num. 14:10. How long will Israel refuse to believe me? (There are other “how long” statements.
- God commanded Jeremiah to preach to Israel, saying, “It may be that they will change their minds” (Jer. 26:3)
- God told Ezekiel, “Perhaps they will understand” (Ezek. 12:3).

10) The Open View explains God’s “if” statements

God’s use of the word “if” is more evidence that there are things God does not know (see #8 above). There are times in the Bible when God says “if,” but if He perfectly knows the future we have to ask, “What is the purpose of Him saying that?” Certainly there are times when we use “if” and are either stating a general case, or are using “if” like “since,” but there are times in the Bible when God clearly uses “if” and is expressing a possible condition, and it is difficult to understand how He could do that in good faith if the future were fixed. Also, when God uses the word “if” it is difficult to construct exactly what He is saying if He perfectly knows the future: how could He word what He said without the “if?”

- To Cain (Gen. 4:7): “If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door.” The plain reading of this text is that Cain has options. But if God knows what he will do and it is “fixed,” he only has the option of doing what God knows he will do. So what is the dialogue about? Given the two alternatives, the Open View and the Orthodox view, the plain reading of the text favors the Open View.
- To Abraham (Gen. 18:26). If I find 50 righteous people in Sodom, I will not destroy it.
- God gave Moses the sign of the stick and the sign of the leprous hand, saying that “if” they did not believe the first, they may believe the second (Exod. 4:8).

- To Gideon (Judg. 7:10): “If you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah.”
- To Solomon (1 Kings 9:4): “If you will walk before me as your father David.”
- To Israel (Isa. 1:19): “If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land.”

11) The Open View explains why God asks people to make choices.

The ability to choose is one of the concepts that is woven throughout the Bible, and along with it, the blessings of a good choice, or the consequences of a poor choice. In the Bible, God clearly offers people choices.

Deuteronomy 30:19 (ESV)

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live,

However, according to the traditional view of God’s foreknowledge, God is only saying He is offering Israel a choice. The actual choice had been decided in God’s plan before the universe began, and Israel was predestined to life or death. The Open View explains that God is offering a genuine choice and Israel could choose either option, life or death. Other verses also show that God gives people choices (cp. 2 Sam. 24:12; Isa. 56:4; 65:12).

SESSION SEVEN—PEOPLE IN THE BIBLE BELIVED THE OPEN VIEW

12) Great people of the Bible apparently did not believe God had exhaustive foreknowledge

It would be difficult to compile a complete list of the people who received words from God and did not believe they were “fixed,” but instead believed that what God said could be changed. The list below shows that people from Abraham to Jesus dialogued with God under the assumption that what they wanted and things they did really mattered. It is difficult—some would say impossible—to understand and explain what God is doing in these conversations if He made statements to people that He knew were not true and then pretended to change when they interacted with Him. In contrast, if our future is not already past in the mind of God, and is open, then we can understand and explain the conversation.

- Abraham bargained with God about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah rather than think God’s will on the matter was “fixed” (Gen. 18:23-33).
- God told Moses that “the elders will listen to you,” but Moses answered, “But what if they don’t?” (Ex. 3:18; 4:1).
- God told Moses He would destroy Israel and build a nation from Moses (Exod. 32:10). Moses did not accept that and interceded for Israel, at which point God “relented” and did not do what He said he would (Exod. 32:14).
- Ahab did not accept that he and his house would be destroyed, but repented and God delayed the fulfillment of His prophecy (1 Kings 21:20-29).
- God told Hezekiah he would die, but Hezekiah did not think that could not be changed (2 Kings 20:1-6).

- God told Amos about the destruction of Israel, but Amos did not believe that was set in stone and pleaded with God, who then changed (Amos 7:1-6).
- Even in light of Scriptures such as Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53, Jesus still prayed to God, “If it is possible, let this cup pass from me.” Jesus apparently thought that the future was not absolutely fixed.

13) The Open View means we can have genuine and meaningful discussions with God

This is closely related to point 11 above, and most of the examples would fit both categories, but there is a different emphasis. The great people in the Bible did not believe the future was fixed and therefore they could have genuine and meaningful conversations with God. If they believed the future was fixed, there was no need of a conversation, one would only need ask, “God, what are you going to do?”

- Gen. 19: Abraham with God concerning Sodom
- Ezek. 4:9-15. God tells Ezekiel to cook using human dung. Ezekiel complains, and God changes. Is that whole conversation fake? If God knew the future, why ask Ezekiel to use the human dung in the first place?
- Amos 7:1-6. God shows Amos some coming judgments. Amos intercedes, and God changes.

14) The Open View explains why some people will be blotted out of the Book of Life

The Bible portrays the “Book of Life” as a book of those who are going to live forever, and the impression is that every person is in the Book until they do not do what it takes to get saved, at which time they are “blotted out” of the Book of Life. God said to Moses: “Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book” (Exod. 32:33; cp. Ps. 69:28). Similarly, Revelation 3:5 says the people who overcome by the blood of the Lamb will never be blotted out of the Book of Life. But if God perfectly knows the future, the threat that someone could be “blotted out” of the Book is disingenuous because they were never in it to begin with. God knew all the time they would not get saved.

15) If God has exhaustive foreknowledge, that means our free will is not really “free.” It was foreseen and foreplanned eons before we were born and cannot be changed, not even by God.

We understand that the past cannot be changed. For example, the events of September 11, 2001 are history and they are fixed. They cannot be altered. But for God to have foreknown that event perfectly, it would have had to be “past” for Him before it happened for us. In fact, our lives would all be “past” to Him before we were born, and therefore would be unalterable. Therefore, for God to create a universe with everything being “past” to Him would mean that from the moment of creation nothing could be changed. Everything would happen exactly as it was foreseen because everything is actually “past.” This is exactly what some of the Church Father’s believed and what they meant when they said God was “immutable.” God cannot change, and His knowledge of what will happen cannot change.

That means our “free will” is only “free” to do what has been foreseen and foreplanned, which is not actually “free.” The Arminian definition of free will is the freedom to do something other than what we are doing. But that freedom does not exist in a closed system. We “feel free,” but

that is only perception, not reality. If the Knowledge Model is correct, then the reality is that our “freedom” is not actual, we are going through the motions in a closed system. It is like when we roll a marble down a track—the track completely determines the course of the marble even if the marble cannot see around the next bend in the track. In our case, our lives were “past” before the foundation of the world, and therefore were determined and unalterable. Of course, most Knowledge Model theologians (Calvinists are a good example) admit this, and say “God is God,” and we are just acting out His plan, but to us that means that when God indicates that we are in a real relationship with Him in which we respond to each other, He is being disingenuous.

16) The Open View explains why God created people in the first place

It is commonly taught and believed, and rightly so, that God created people so He could love them and be loved by them. But if God is truly immutable, and if people only do what He planned for them to do, and if nothing people do can change or affect Him, then God does not love people in any meaningful sense of the word, nor can people really love God in any meaningful sense of the word. If everything in creation is just following a path laid down in God’s eternal plan, then, at least in human terms and experience, there is no point to creation and mankind. In stark contrast, the Open View explains that God created mankind to love them and be loved by them.

SESSION EIGHT—OBJECTIONS TO THE OPEN VIEW

PART VI. Nineteen objections to the Open View asked and answered

1) It is not “orthodox” (It has never been the accepted theology of the Church)

Answer 1: That is not a valid objection. The Church has not been correct on many things and has changed many doctrines over the years. Furthermore, denominations differ on what is true. For example, one hundred years ago there was an almost universal condemnation of speaking in tongues by the denominations, but now more and more denominations are accepting it. Nevertheless, it is still condemned by many denominations.

Answer 2: We assert that truly biblical people held to the open view but did not think about it in those specific terms. The evidence in the Bible is that people dialogued with God and spoke with Him as if the future was not “fixed.” All through the ages the prophets challenged God and argued with Him to get Him to change His mind. Abraham’s arguing with God over the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is a good example. If those biblical people did not feel that the future was “open,” then they would simply have asked God what was going to happen and that would have ended the discussion. Many committed Christians do the same thing the great people in the Bible did: they fast and pray in order to change things, and many Christians testify to the fact that “prayer changes things.”

If the future is fixed, then prayer does not actually change anything and there is no need to pray or ask God to intervene in our lives (that is, by the way, the majority belief about prayer—that it does not change anything—which can be confirmed by checking almost any mainstream Bible

dictionary on “prayer”). If the future is fixed, we should just be asking God what is going to happen.

Answer 3: There have been individuals (Calcidius – 5th century theologian), and groups (some 19th century Methodists) who believed in a limited view of God’s knowledge. Also, the exact extent of God’s knowledge has often been discussed and debated in Christendom.

2) The Open View limits God

Objection: The Open View limits God, and in effect, keeps God from being God.

Answer 1: When non-traditional views of the Bible are set forth, a common objection to them is, “That keeps God from being God.” That is a bogus objection. Nothing keeps God from being God. He is who He is no matter what we believe. But we Christians are supposed to get our understanding of who God is from the Bible, which is what God tells us about Himself, not from tradition, or mathematical logic. If the Bible reveals that God has exhaustive foreknowledge, then He does. If it reveals that He lives in time with us and experiences things just as we do, then that is what He says about Himself and that is what we should believe.

Answer 2: God limited Himself when He created the universe and placed restrictions on Himself. For example, He cannot lie, and He cannot make a round square. Once God defines reality, He abides by His definition. To do otherwise would make Him untrustworthy. Furthermore, it is apparent that God wanted to limit Himself so that He could be in a genuine relation with the freewill beings He created, and truly love and be loved.

Actually, both the traditionalist view of God having exhaustive foreknowledge and the Open View limit God. The question is which limit is the correct and biblical one.

The Open View recognizes limits that pertain to God based on what He says about Himself: that He does not know certain things, that He sometimes repents and changes His mind, and that He is in relation to His creation and responds to them with anger, joy, displeasure, or laughter, according to the situation.

The traditional view limits God by saying that He does not really feel the emotions the Bible says He feels, He cannot be changed or moved by anything we do or any prayer we pray, and any discussion we have with Him in which He seems to be responding to us is just make-believe. The traditional God may be all powerful and all knowing, but He is cold and unresponsive. To us, the limits placed upon God by the Knowledge Model are unsatisfactory and unbiblical.

3) The Open View means God is not “perfect”

Answer: To answer this objection we must define “perfect.” According to the Knowledge Model, the word “perfect” is understood in the same way that Plato defined it; in terms that are basically mathematical. Plato’s theology said that God was “perfect,” which meant He could not change because any change would have to be for the worse. That is because if God could have changed for the better, then He would not have been “perfect” before. However, the Bible never says God is “perfect” in the mathematical sense of the word, as Plato took it (Plato’s theory of perfect “Forms” can be studied in any good encyclopedia).

We assert that God is “perfect” in the Hebraic sense of the word. The Hebrew concept of perfect is not mathematical, it is relational, which is why the Bible says Job was “perfect” (Job 1:1 KJV and Hebrew text). God is perfect in the sense that He cannot do anything He does any better.

4) The Open View makes God not in control of the world

Answer 1: God does not “control” freewill beings, and He does not “control” the world in the sense that His will always happens. Many of the things that happen on earth are outside the will of God.

Answer 2: “Control” has never been considered a godly characteristic. “Controlling” people are considered ungodly. Love is by nature not controlling. 1 Corinthians 13:5 says that love is not self-seeking, but control is all about one’s own desires. Love guides, directs, encourages, and helps, but it does not control. The Open View explains how God can truly be love and genuinely guide and help people.

5) The open view makes God dependent on man

Objection: The open view makes God dependent on man; for example, it makes God dependent on man’s decision to obey, or pray, or even get saved (who will God spend eternity with?).

Answer: We assert that there are things in which God and man are dependent on each other: they are interdependent. In any genuine relationship, healthy co-dependency or interdependency is a good thing. We depend on people all the time, and much of the richness of life is in our mutual dependence and the help we give each other. A person who seems incapable of healthy co-dependence is called “undependable.” God tells us over and over that we help with His work, which is why we are God’s co-workers (1 Cor. 3:9). God makes us His children, His co-workers, and His ambassadors. When humans willingly defy Him, He becomes angry precisely because He has expectations concerning us and often depends on us (Rom. 1:18).

SESSION NINE—WE CAN HAVE CONFIDENCE IN GOD

6) The Open View causes Christian’s to lose their confidence in God.

Objection: If God does not know the future, then how can we be confident that what will happen is God’s will?

Answer 1. God will bring about the final end He promised: He has the power to do that, and has demonstrated that many times in history.

Answer 2. We cannot understand how anyone who believes that everything what happens on earth today is the will of God can have any confidence in God. If the torture, killing, maiming, rape, child abuse, sexual slavery, and general evil and mayhem we see on earth is the will of God, how can we be confident in Him? To us, the Open View of God is a major part of restoring confidence in God. Christian theology has so perverted what God does that men like Darwin quit training for Christian ministry and became atheists. Similarly, even if God foreknew the world would be the cruel place it is, and created it anyway, that does not restore confidence in God. Why would God knowingly create such a horrible place? Does He not have the power to have

made some changes before He created anything so things would be better? We contend that the Knowledge Model does not explain the evil in the world around us and actually undermines people's confidence in God, and the Open View, by giving a sound and reasonable explanation for the things we see in the world around us, restores our confidence in God.

7) God says He does not change His mind

Objection: There are two verses that say God does not change His mind. Num. 23:19 is one of them: "God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?" (cp. 1 Sam. 15:29). Also, Malachi 3:6 says God does not change.

Answer 1: The Bible has a couple verses that say God does not change or change His mind, but it also has many verses that show God changing His mind. Obviously, both cannot be true. When we examine the few verses that say God does not change His mind, we find they can be explained in their context. In contrast, the times that God changes His mind appear straightforward and are accompanied by contexts that show that God did in fact change His mind.

- Num. 23:19 is one of the two verses that says God does not change His mind. It is a prophecy given by Balaam who Balak the king of Moab hired to curse Israel. Even after Balaam blessed Israel the first time, the king of Moab thought that if Balaam tried again, he would get a curse prophecy from God upon Israel. The point God was making in that context about not changing His mind was that once God had finally decided to do something, such as bless Israel, He was going to do it.
- 1 Sam. 15:29 is about king Saul, and that God had taken his kingdom away and would not change His mind. It was a specific comment for a specific situation. Not too long after, God said He would establish Solomon's kingdom, then changed His mind and took it away when Solomon sinned. Thus we see that God does change His mind about some kings, but He was not going to change it about king Saul.
- Malachi 3:6 is often quoted that God does not change. We need to read the verse and context to see what God meant. "I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed." What God is saying is that even though Israel was deep in sin, God was not going to "change" the multiple promises He had made to bless and preserve them, and change and destroy them.

It is actually worth rereading Numbers 23:19, because it actually supports the Power Model of God's predicting the future. It says, "Does he speak and then not act?" God says what He will do in the future, and then He acts and does it.

Answer 2: It is important that we notice that when God changes His mind He never changes His character. God is love, good, righteous, etc., and when He changes His mind due to His relationship with people, His righteous and loving character never change.

8) God exists outside of time; He is timeless

Objection: God created time, so He is outside of time and experiences all time, past and future, at one time.

Answer 1: The Bible never says God exists outside of time. Time is just our way of measuring change. Orthodox theologians can say God is “timeless” because they say He does not change and is totally static. But we deny that and assert that we have a God who changes in relation to us, and genuinely relates to us. As He relates to us and to His creation, He experiences what we know as time. For example, when He created the days in Genesis, He had to wait for the first day to be finished before creating the second day.

Answer 2: The Bible says God experiences time: 2 Peter 3:8: “But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.” This statement is made in view of God being patient with mankind. Also, the Bible says that God waits for people (Isa. 30:18; KJV; ESV; NRS), but that cannot be if in fact God is outside of time, because He would then be experiencing the unfinished and finished reality at the same time, and therefore would not actually be waiting at all. Again, we are faced with either saying the Bible can be read and believed at face value when it says that God waits for people, or it is making a statement that is not true, which means it is hard to explain both why God said it at all, and what it really means. It would be giving us a false picture of God.

9) If the Open View is true, then God cannot exactly predict the future

Answer 1. Many people are unsettled by the Open View of God because they think it is saying that God does not know the future any better than we do, and that, understandably, would be very disconcerting. But the Open View acknowledges that God can and does make very accurate predictions, and He does so based on a combination of knowledge and power.

God knows everything that can be known in the universe (all past and present events; all chains of cause and effect; all possible options). Thus, like a good chess player He can see far down the road, and on that basis alone He can make predictions that to us seem impossible. When we add His immense power to His exhaustive knowledge of the past and present, it is easy to see that God does not need to have exhaustive foreknowledge to predict the future extremely accurately. We must remember that God did not tell us He foretold the future because He knew it, but because He acted and made His predictions happen: Isaiah 48:3 (HCSB): I declared the past events long ago; they came out of My mouth; I proclaimed them. Suddenly I acted, and they occurred.

Answer 2. It is an interesting “objection” that “If the Open View is true, then God cannot exactly predict the future,” because in the Bible God speaks prophecies that do not come true and that He changes (this point is covered above). If God knew what He said in a prophecy was not going to come to pass, and He said it anyway, especially if He said it in a way that people believed it fully, then He is a liar.

Answer 3. The fact that God cannot exactly predict every event does not mean that God’s promises about our everlasting future are in doubt. God created the universe, and He has the wisdom and power to make promises come true.

10) The Open View of God means God is not eternally prepared for every eventuality.

Answer: The Bible never claims God is “eternally prepared for every eventuality.” He just needs to be able to deal with what actually happens, and He certainly is that.

SESSION TEN

11) The Bible says that God “foreknew” Jesus.

Objection: God foreknew Jesus, and foreknew the crucifixion. God loved Jesus before the foundation of the world (John 17:24, 25). Why would God love Jesus “before the foundation of the world” if mankind had not sinned yet? A number of verses say or imply that Jesus was “foreknown:” 1 Pet. 1:21 (“foreordained” in some versions is *proginōskō*, “foreknown”).

Answer 1: The questions about Jesus are the most difficult to understand from the point of view of the Open View of God. The Open View does not have “pat answers” for everything. It is a developing theology, and we are learning. But the Open View does so far have the best answers and explanations for the majority of philosophic and scriptural problems concerning God.

Answer 2: Jesus Christ is not only the savior of mankind, he is the savior of the universe—God’s entire creation, and the Genesis 1:1 creation was ruined before the foundation of this world, which God started to reform in Genesis 1:3. The Bible says that the whole creation is in bondage and waiting for the redeemer (Rom. 8:19-22). Even if Adam had not sinned, the creation still would have needed to have been restored. Thus, God planned for, and “foreknew” the Redeemer before the foundation of this world. Jesus was foreknown and was God’s plan of redemption for His creation.

Answer 3: Adam and Eve did not need to sin in order for Jesus Christ to be necessary. As we have seen, he was necessary before mankind. However, Adam and Eve were commanded to multiply and fill the earth. Given what God had already experienced with the rebellion of the angels, no doubt He anticipated that some of Adam’s descendants would sin, and therefore would need a redeemer. At some point in the distant past He planned for that redeemer for mankind before He prepared the world for mankind and created Adam and Eve. The redemption of man, in case of sin, was not an afterthought, but a carefully considered contingency.

12) God says in Romans that He foreknew the people who would be saved.

Objection: How could God “foreknow” the people who were going to be saved? (Rom. 8:29: “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers”).

Answer: The word “know” (and also “foreknow”) are sometimes used idiomatically. We know that “foreknow” is being used in an idiomatic way in Romans 8:29 just by reading the verse. If God has perfect foreknowledge, as is commonly taught, then He “foreknew” everyone. But Romans 8:29 says that “those He foreknew” He predestined to be saved, which would mean that every person is going to be saved. But that is clearly not the teaching of Scripture, so what is the verse saying?

The idea of “knowledge” is often used idiomatically to mean love and special attention. That is the way the same Greek word is being used a few chapters later, in Romans 11:2, which says, “God did not reject his people [the Jews] whom he foreknew.” This verse is not saying that God simply knew about the Jews ahead of time. It is saying God “loved” or “paid special attention to”

the Jews. Similarly, Ruth said to Boaz: “Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me” (Ruth 2:10; in the LXX the Greek word is still *epiginōskō*; cp. Ruth 2:19). Ruth was not saying that Boaz learned about her, but that he took care of her. Similarly, Psalm 144:3 says God “takes knowledge” of man, meaning He loved him and took care of him. Romans 8:29 says that people that God especially loved (who are the ones who accepted Him), He planned for them to be “conformed to the image of His Son,” i.e., saved. The word “remember” is another word related to knowledge that is used idiomatically for love and special attention. In Genesis 8:1 God “remembered” Noah and the animals and took care of them. In 1 Samuel 1:11 Hannah prayed that God would “remember” her so she would get pregnant, and 1 Samuel 1:19 says God remembered her and she got pregnant. The Psalmist asked God not to remember him (pay attention to him) because of his sin, but “remember” him because of God’s goodness (Ps. 25:7).

13) Ephesians says God chose those who would be saved before the foundation of the world

Objection: the Bible says God “chose us” before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4-6, 11, 12). Therefore He had to know who would be saved and who would not be.

Answer: This question has been central to the Calvinist-Arminian debate for centuries. We need to pay attention to the fact that Ephesians 1:5, etc., do not just say God knew who was going to be saved, but that He “chose us” before the foundation of the world. The Calvinists claim that the only way God could legitimately “choose” someone for salvation before the foundation of the world was if there was “irresistible grace” such that the person who God chose could not refuse salvation. Thus they say that before the foundation of the world, God chose some people to salvation and left others (or chose others) to be damned.

The Arminians (named after James Arminius, not the Armenians, from Armenia) reject the Calvinist interpretation and point out that in chapters such as Ephesians 1, the pronouns are plural. In other words, it was not individuals who were being chosen to salvation, but “us,” the group, the Body of Christ, the Church. In other words, before the foundation of the world God planned out the Administration of Grace with the grace and blessings it would enjoy, knowing that some people would get saved and join the Church. However, it is the individual’s choice whether or not to get saved and be a part of the Church.

We agree with the Arminians, and assert that God did plan for a special group on which He would pour His grace, and He planned for that group before the foundation of the world. What we would add was that in God’s planning for the Church, He did not know exactly who would join by getting saved, and who would choose not to join.

14) Types, shadows, and illustrations

Objection: God put many “types,” “shadows,” and “illustrations” in place in the Old Testament to illustrate the New Testament, and He could not have done that unless He knew what to illustrate.

Answer: God did put many types and illustrations in the Old Testament, but He did not have to have exhaustive foreknowledge to do that, He just needed a plan and then ways to illustrate it. God did plan for the redemption of His creation, and illustrated it by types and shadows.

- Most of the types and illustrations in the OT are broad and sweeping, and are fulfilled in God’s plan only in a very general way.
 - Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac showed the Father willing to sacrifice his son and the son willing to die, but nothing in the illustration required exhaustive foreknowledge; that was all part of God’s plan for redemption.
 - The record of Joseph portrays a humiliated man becoming second in command to the ruler, but that did not require exhaustive foreknowledge either.
 - The Flood and Noah’s Ark portrayed the destruction of the wicked and the salvation of the righteous, but in general, not specific, terms.
- All of the types and illustrations have things that do not “line up” with the reality—it is usually only some of the major themes that line up and create the illustration.
 - In the Abraham example, Jesus did not walk anywhere for three days, nor was there a fire, altar, knife, etc. Furthermore, Jesus died but Isaac did not.
 - In the Joseph example, Jesus was never a slave; he did not rule in Egypt, did not have eleven brothers, etc.
 - In the Flood record, there is no boat or flood on the Day of Judgment.
- The types are not “fixed” or “set in stone.” However, there is usually no way to tell if an illustration that was designed to be more exact on some point got “missed” because someone did not walk it out fully. We do know of one type that was “broken” because of man’s disobedience (and this “broken type” could not have happened if God always knows exactly what someone will do: every type would work out perfectly):
 - God tried to picture Christ by two rocks in the wilderness that would pour forth “living water.” The first rock Moses struck with his rod (Ex. 17:6). The second rock Moses was just supposed to speak to (Num. 20:8). This was supposed to portray that Christ would be smitten but after that would only have to be asked and he would pour forth living water. Unfortunately, Moses became so angry and frustrated with the Israelites that he hit the second rock too (Num. 20:11). This made God so mad He immediately spoke to Moses and told him that he would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land (Num. 20:12). If God knew that Moses would disobey His command and be punished, but went through the whole scene (including the feigned anger) anyway, then what is He doing, and how are we supposed to make sense of His actions? In contrast, the Open View allows us to read and understand the record perfectly: Moses had been so faithful for years that God was caught off guard by Moses’ disobedience, and reacted in anger.

SESSION ELEVEN—HOW COULD JESUS HAVE BEEN SINLESS?

15) Rhetorical Questions

Objection: God uses rhetorical questions in the Bible, such as when God asked Adam and Eve, “Where are you” (Gen. 3:9), or asked Cain, “Where is your brother” (Gen. 4:9). So when God said “Now I know” to Abraham (Gen. 22:12) or said that He tested Israel to know what was in their heart, that was rhetorical too.

Answer: While God’s asking rhetorical questions explains some of His questions, it does not explain all of them. It is misreading the text and context of Scripture to make all of God’s questions rhetorical. While it is sometimes difficult to tell a rhetorical question from a genuine

question, some questions are clearly rhetorical and some statements are clearly not. When God asked Adam, “Where are you,” the knowledge was available to God, and it was Adam who needed to know where he was (fallen; in need of a savior). When God said, “Now I know,” in the record of Abraham in Genesis 22, in the entire record He is the only one who actually learned anything. Therefore the evidence is that God’s question was literal. Especially when we study every question God asked, the best explanation of them is that many were literal, and the Open View explains why God needed to ask them, which is that He did not know the answer.

16) God says the Devil will be destroyed in the Lake of Fire

Objection: God says the Devil will be destroyed in the Lake of Fire, but if he has free will and God does not know the future, he may repent, in which case God would not destroy him. The fact that God says He will destroy him in the Lake of Fire proves God knows the future.

Answer: This objection misunderstands God’s justice. God has two kinds of justice: corrective and retributive. God’s “corrective” justice is designed to correct bad behavior, while retributive justice (from the word “retribution”) is not designed to correct, it is retribution (repayment) for a wrong done.

We are familiar with God’s corrective justice, because it is why the Bible says God “chastens” every child He loves (Heb. 12:6). God uses His corrective justice to turn us from evil and get us doing the right thing. We are also familiar with God’s retributive justice. Retributive justice is not “corrective;” it is not designed to teach the criminal anything. It is retribution for sin committed and damage done. A good example is the death penalty, which does not correct the person but is retribution from evil that has been done.⁶ There are sins that result in death. We are familiar with this in the Gospels because of the teachings of Jesus on the “unforgiveable sin” (Matt. 12:32).

When it comes to people, the Bible has examples of both God’s corrective and retributive justice. In contrast, the Bible does not give us any examples of God’s corrective justice being applied to angels or demons. It very likely happens, but the Bible does not give us any examples of it. In contrast, we see God’s retributive justice being applied to the Devil and his demons when they are thrown into the Lake of Fire.

The Bible does not tell us at what point the Devil’s sin became so great that he became subject to God’s retributive justice. Although Genesis 3:15, seen in hindsight, can be taken to mean that the Devil will be destroyed, it does not have to mean that. The phrase that the Devil’s “head” would be “hit,” or “stricken” does not force us to conclude that he would be totally destroyed (the Hebrew word can mean “hit,” “bruise” “crush, etc.). However, the destruction of the Devil was clearly foretold in Isaiah 14:15 (c. 700 BC). So we know that after thousands of years of causing death and destruction and rejecting God, by Isaiah’s time the Devil could no longer avoid being destroyed. The Devil will be destroyed because he has caused so much death and destruction that he now deserves the death penalty.

⁶ It is commonly believed that God is against the death penalty, but that is not true, as reading the Bible shows (cp. Exod. 21:12-14, 23-25; Lev. 24:17, 21; Num. 35:16-18; Deut. 19:11-13). Furthermore, Moses, Joshua, David, and Solomon all executed criminals, and they knew the Law. Jesus said to turn the other cheek, but he was not speaking about ignoring capital crime. See John Schoenheit, *The Death Penalty: Godly or Ungodly?*

17) Jesus could not have lived a sinless life unless God had foreknowledge of it.

Objection: If God was working with only knowledge that was available to Him, Jesus could not have been sinless. There was just too much pressure to sin, and no one since Adam had even come close to being sinless. God had to work things out in His foreknowledge and plan such that Jesus would be sinless.

Answer 1: It is hard to see how God's foreknowledge has anything to do with the statistical probability that Jesus could be sinless before dying on the cross. It was Jesus who had to make the minute by minute decision to obey God and not give in to sin, and he was fully human. How would God having foreknowledge make Christ's work possible? What could God do by having perfect foreknowledge that He could not do with the knowledge and power available to Him as God?

Answer 2: Asserting that God's perfect foreknowledge made it available for Jesus to live without sinning confirms our point that the Knowledge Model makes God responsible for the evil in the world. According to the Knowledge Model's explanation of Jesus being sinless, God did not create the universe until He arranged things in His plan so that Jesus did not sin. But if He could do that, then He could have arranged things so that lots of other people on earth would not have sinned or sinned as egregiously as they do, and thus the huge amount of death and destruction on earth would not have happened (or would have been much less).

Either God can arrange things such that freewill beings do not sin, or He cannot. If He can, then He is clearly responsible for the huge amount of sin in the world. If He cannot, then His having foreknowledge would not have kept Jesus from sinning.

Furthermore, if God planned things and created the universe such that Jesus could not sin, and since all creation is "past" to God and therefore unalterable once it is created, then Jesus was not actually free to sin, so his not sinning was not a heroic feat.

SESSION TWELVE—WE CAN HAVE FAITH IN GOD

18) Prophets and prophecy

Objection: The prophets could not have prophesied accurately unless God had perfect foreknowledge, and if they were wrong they were considered false prophets and were killed.

Answer 1: It is commonly believed that if a prophet gave a prophecy that did not come to pass he was considered a false prophet and was executed. That is not the case (see the book by John Schoenheit, *Prophecy: Understanding and Utilizing the Manifestation of Prophecy*, Appendix B: "False Prophets and False Prophecies").

Answer 2: Many prophets of God gave prophecies that did not come to pass, or come to pass exactly as they were foretold. In the explanations above we saw prophecies spoken by Elijah, Nathan, Jonah, and Jeremiah that did not come to pass, and yet they were true prophets and were not executed. Also, what Agabus said about Paul in Acts 21:11 did not come to pass as he said, but he is not a false prophet either. The Open View explains why prophets can speak prophecies that do not come to pass.

Answer 3: Jeremiah 18 and God's teaching Jeremiah at the potter's house shows that God will often give a prophecy that "wakes people up" such that they repent of their sin and change. At that point, God sometimes modifies what He foretold. The classic example of this is the prophecy Jonah gave to the Ninevites that Nineveh would be destroyed in forty days. The Ninevites repented and God modified the prophecy He had given and Nineveh was spared. The very nature of prophecy is that it describes what will happen if circumstances do not change. This is well understood, and is known by theologians as the conditional nature of prophecy (see Schoenheit, *Prophecy*, chapter two: "The Conditional Nature of Prophecy").

Answer 4. When a prophet declares something that will absolutely happen in the future (like the future coming of the Millennial Kingdom), either there are circumstances that allow God to know that and thus speak it exactly, or God can use the Power Model and make it happen. There is no necessity for "absolute foreknowledge" in prophecy.

19) Faith

Objection: If God does not know the future, we cannot have faith in what He says.

Answer 1: Faith is "trust," and we have to know the context of what God says before we can say we can absolutely trust Him. For example, Jonah walked into Nineveh and said, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4). Did the Ninevites trust God's word to them? Thankfully, no. They repented and God altered His prophecy. Similarly, Hezekiah did not trust the word of Isaiah that he would die (2 Kings 20:1); Moses did not trust that God would destroy Israel (Exod. 32:10) and, years later, Amos did not either (Amos 7:1-6). These prophets knew that God sometimes said things He would change if circumstances changed, so they took what He said as a warning, not as an absolute statement of fact.

Does the fact that God sometimes changes what He says mean that we cannot trust God? No, we just have to evaluate the situation in which God speaks and what He says, and weight it against the whole of His Word and His character. When God says we can be saved through faith in Christ, we can trust that promise. The same goes for His promise of restoring the earth in the future. There is no evidence that those prophecies are in any way conditional.

Answer 2: When we do trust God about what we consider His unconditional prophecies and promises, we do not base that trust on His foreknowledge, but on His ability to fulfill His promises.

If we based our trust in God on His foreknowledge, then He seems capricious and unpredictable. That is because He says things that turned out not to be correct, such as that Nineveh would be destroyed in 40 days and Hezekiah would die soon. If God had perfect foreknowledge and yet made those erroneous statements knowing they were wrong, then He is untrustworthy, which by definition means that we cannot have faith in Him.

In order for us to trust someone who makes erroneous statements we have to be able to explain why the erroneous statement was made. If a person tells us he will pick us up from work and take us home, but then does not show up or call, we think of him as untrustworthy. But our opinion would change if we found out that when he was on his way to get us he was in a car wreck and was taken unconscious to the hospital. Our new understanding of the circumstances would restore our trust in the person. But when it comes to God, why would He make a statement He knows is not true? If God really did know the future, but made a statement about the future He

knew was wrong, then we would normally think of Him as untrustworthy and our faith in Him would be shaken. However, when we realize that God does not perfectly know the future and actually changes when circumstances change restores our faith in Him when He makes statements that do not turn out to be factually true. However, it means the future is not “fixed” but is “open.”

Answer 3. More evidence that we do not need God to have perfect foreknowledge to trust Him is that most of us have people in our lives whom we trust, and they do not have perfect foreknowledge. Foreknowledge is not a requirement for trust, trustworthiness is the requirement; and trustworthiness is a part of one’s character. In that light, the Orthodox view of God’s foreknowledge opens the door for many more questions about God’s character than the Open View does.

Answer 4. We trust God because of His character and that He has proven Himself trustworthy, and because of His power to bring what He promised to pass (the Power Model). The Bible says we can have confidence in God because “He is able” to do what He says, not because He has perfect foreknowledge of what will happen.

2 Timothy 1:12

I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.

God “is able” to fulfill His promises and do such things as raise us from the dead and give us new, everlasting bodies.

VII. Benefits of the Open View of God

- We can read the Bible and believe the things it says about God, such as His having emotions, changing His mind, and testing people.
- We can see how God is truly love, and not responsible for evil.
- We can understand why God’s prophets are sometimes wrong.
- The Open View makes our relationship with God real and “in the moment.”
- The Open View means that our prayers are very important and actually change things.
- The Open View means that God does not have a detailed blueprint for my life, but rather has goals that He would like me to achieve. Then, God and I work out my life, together making each next decision the best one possible.
- The Open View means that what we do plays an important part in shaping the future.

VIII. Selected Bibliography

There is an increasing number of theologians who are accepting the Open View of God, and an exhaustive and current bibliography would be hard to compile. Nevertheless, the books below are very helpful in learning about the Open View.

Basinger, David; Hasker, William; Pinnock, Clark; Rice, Richard; Sanders, John; *The Openness of God* (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 1994).

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