

## **Is the Open Theistic Interpretation of Divine Foreknowledge Biblical?**

### **Being Reflective Thoughts on Open theism**

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Does God know ALL things exhaustively whether past present or future? Does He know the minute details of all events or just the generals? Does he know the path of each person or only knows the bigger picture of things? Some say yes, others flatly deny this and even go so far as to summon scripture to support their assertions.

Of the group that denies the exhaustive knowledge of God of all things into the future are the people who propagate the *Open Theism* position. This theological error hinges on several pivotal tenets which basically claim a number of things including:

- a. That God is influenced by the actions of men.
- b. God does not know the future.
- c. God's knowledge of the future is increased as events occur.
- d. God does not have control of the future and thus merely reacts.

The Open Theists claim that the scripture nowhere teaches that God exhaustively knows all things in the future. Rather they teach that God knows ALL things past and to some extent present of anything that CAN be known. In effect, they say God has learnt from the past and therefore is an expert at what is knowable from the past. They further assert that God is able, to some extent, predict what will happen based on certain factors which will lead to an inevitable direction, provided certain conditions have been met. In addition, they claim that since God does not know all things, he can make mistakes, get frustrated, regret his actions and therefore change course as a result. They summon some select verses to support their claims. All these points are because they hold that God is sovereign to a limited extent and thus cannot do as he pleases due to his limited knowledge of the future. In other words, God takes calculated risks that may or may not backfire. Since he is thus vulnerable, he is viewed to be responsive and entirely dependent on human actions and events.

But is that what the Bible says? Is this the God of the Bible that we know about? A careful reader of the Bible or even a casual one for that matter does not need to go far into reading the Bible before realising that indeed the God of the Bible is the sovereign ruler of the skies, ever gracious, ever wise. In the words of the hymn writer Cowper, *he moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform. He plants his footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm!* That is the God of the Bible, the majestic and holy one of Israel who does as he pleases with his creatures! More than that, he knows all things past present and future and none can stay his hand. He does as he pleases and has decreed all things before any of those things ever come to pass. Consider Psalm 139, the scripture there declares that God knows ALL the days allotted to the Psalmist long before any of them ever came to be. Further, the Bible clearly states that God knows things to the detail and not in general. The Arminian on the other hand claims that God knows in general what may come to pass and therefore shows his electing love to God's saints but the picture consistently across scripture is entirely different. God's foreknowledge has to do with his absolute knowledge (or some contexts, 'love') of all details in future long before they come to pass. Thus, when a prophecy is made, it is not a mere prediction of what may come to pass contingent on certain conditions being right and thus some piece of guess work, no! God speaks because he knows and gives certain conditions.

The open theist claims that God is said to change his mind when he threatens because he learns with time or makes mistakes. That is not entirely correct. In interpreting certain passages, it is important to bear in mind that God uses anthropomorphic language as well as makes statements in a judicial sense. Further, whatever he says, he gives conditions failure to which certain repercussions will follow. This shows that God cares, warns and follows through. In short he is responsive. Put differently, although God knows all things that can and will come to pass, he has ordained means through which his purpose will be fulfilled. Thus, when he says that the soul that sins it shall die, he means just that and will execute it according to plan using the appointed means. As we examine the scriptures further, we notice that at times God gives exact details of what will happen long before things ever come to pass. At other times, he gives details very near to the action time and things happen exactly as he has planned. Still at other times, he asks questions as though he does not know when in actual fact he does. Take the case of Adam (Genesis 3:9,11) after the fall for example, God calls and asks, where are you? Did you eat from the tree that I told you not to? In this case, it may appear to the casual reader that God is ignorant of what Adam has done when in fact he knows as he interrogates him and then passes a sentence on him.

Take another case of Paul's doxology in Romans 11:33-36, the man is literary blown apart by the awesome realisation of God's majesty! When he considers how God has created all things without consulting and has fashioned them all for his own ends, Paul cannot help but well up in praise to the ancient of days. Take

another case in Romans 8:28-30, the writer clearly demonstrates that God has predestined and foreknown some to salvation and as far as God is concerned, this is a done job. We, as humans, do not know who these people are but God knows perfectly who will be saved, how and when. This gives great comfort to the saint to know that our God knows all things and nothing ever catches him by surprise. What he says, that will he do. What he warns or foretells about, it will certainly come to pass.

### **Concluding remarks**

What are we to make of the teachings of the open theists then? I think we ought to discard it with the contempt it deserves because it is both inconsistent with scripture and a misrepresentation of the God of the Bible. It in effect undermines our confidence in God. I am glad I know such a majestic, omniscient and powerful God who never slumbers nor forgets about me, ever!

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