

The Open Theism View of God's Foreknowledge, Pre-determination, and Control

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Of the several views of God's Foreknowledge, His Pre-determination, and His Control or Sovereignty over things, the Open Theism View seems to me to give the best basis for understanding how these aspects of God's character work. This view is also known as:

- The *Openness View of Creation*,
- The *Relational view of God*, or
- The *Dynamic Omniscience View of God's Foreknowledge*.

HISTORY

In contrast to the classical views, i.e. Calvinism, Arminianism, and Molinism, little is known of the ancient history of the Openness view. However, it is known that it was held by a fifth century Christian theologian named Calcidius, as well as the medieval Jewish theologians (e.g. Ibn Ezra, 12th century and Gersonides, 14th century), Faustus Socinus (16th century), and a number of 18th century Methodist theologians, including Adam Clarke.

In the 19th century the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement i.e. the Churches of Christ, Christian Churches, and Disciples of Christ generally followed this understanding as well as many Methodists, some evangelicals, and a few Catholics.

In the 20th century this expanded to include many evangelicals, many Pentecostals, as well as some notable theologians e.g. Jürgen Moltman, Paul Fides, Michael Welker and the philosophical theologian, Keith Ward.

In the 1980s and 90s Clark Pinnock (died in 2010) did much to bring this understanding back into the limelight, and his writings are certainly still very influential. This leaves the main living proponents of this view today as being: John Sanders, Richard Rice, William Hasker, David Basinger, Terrence Freitham, and Gregory Boyd. There are many other professors who hold the same view, as well as others who contribute to aspects of this understanding such as: Nicholas Wolterstorff and Robert Kane.

BRIEF EXPLANATION

This view of the future, and therefore God's foreknowledge of reality, is composed:

- Partly of **settled events**, either because God has predestined those events which He will make happen or because there are present causes which render a future event to be certain to happen, *and* —
- Partly of **open events**, either because God has not predestined them or because there are no present causes which render a future event to be certain — they are the infinite range of possibilities and probabilities.

This view of God's knowledge is called **dynamic omniscience** because God already knows the future events that He has *unconditionally or conditionally planned* and has the power to make happen. Additionally, He already knows all the possibilities and probabilities of future events, and finally He acquires knowledge as those possibilities and probabilities unfold into reality in human decisions and actions.

This latter part is because God cannot know for absolute certain beforehand, the decisions that free agents will make because those decisions have not yet been made – they do not yet exist. However, God knows them as **the infinite range of possibilities which, with time, narrows down to probabilities**. So they are part of the reality of God's foreknowledge. This can be illustrated, although rather inadequately, by the concept of a series of short stories, whereby the reader is invited to choose from a range of different endings according to his or her choice i.e., it is open-ended. We may also explain this by showing that God's sovereign will operates according to both a **purposive aspect** and a **permissive aspect**. This makes the future partly closed and partly open.

THE PURPOSIVE ASPECT IS FOREKNOWN AND PREDESTINED

The purposive aspect of God's sovereign will has led to Messiah's mission to pay for sin and to establish the Christian community. It has also led to his continuing mission as High Priest in heaven, and will lead to the next stage of Messiah's work at his return to gather his "body" who are "incorporated in Christ," and so to establish

the Kingdom of God for the blessing of all the nations. So God is described as: “...*him who works all things according to the counsel of his will...*” (Eph. 1:11) and that “...*all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose*” (Rom. 8:28).

THE PERMISSIVE ASPECT IS NOT FOREKNOWN OR PREDESTINED

This permissive aspect of God’s will encompasses all that is not the purposive aspect of God’s will so that humans may exercise their free will within the physical parameters of life. Furthermore, it is God’s sovereign will to let most events run their course. Therefore, most personal circumstances and most world events, including natural disasters are not controlled by Him. There is a very large group of statements in the Scriptures about events which are evidently open-ended.

THE INTERWEAVING OF THE PURPOSIVE AND THE PERMISSIVE ASPECTS OF GOD’S WILL

Because God’s purpose involves His foreknowing and predestining of a body of people who are “incorporated in Christ” such predestination is christocentric. It does not require that particular *individuals* have been predestined for salvation as Christians, but that *individuals* should remain in the predestined body of Christ. This can be illustrated by imagining a train with its route, its various scheduled stops, and its final destination. Such a train may represent *the body of Christ* which God foreknows and has predestined to enter the kingdom—the final destination. The passengers represent the individuals who hear the call to board the train (by hearing the Gospel). Some choose not to board it [“*many are called but few are chosen*” (Matt. 22:14)]. Some board it (by believing) but then choose, with the use of their free will, to get off at a stop earlier than the final destination. These, therefore, in using their free will faithlessly, fail to inherit the kingdom at the final destination. However, others choose to stay on the train, i.e. remain “incorporated in Christ” right to the final destination to inherit the Kingdom.

So God’s superlative assessment of mankind in general allows Him to foreknow that some individuals will fail to respond to the call and that others will respond to His call, but fail to stay to the final destination. Additionally, He foreknows that others, who have ‘boarded,’ will remain ‘on the train’ to the final destination. Yet God does not know which **particular** individuals any of these will be until they ‘respond to the call to board the train.’ This is all of immense encouragement to those who, by faithfulness, remain “incorporated in Christ.” It gives them a full assurance of their inheriting the Kingdom despite their personal failings.

However, the Calvinist, Arminian, and Molinist views appeal to anthropomorphisms to explain all of the above biblical statements about God’s foreknowledge.

Why the Relevant Biblical Statements Should NOT Be Interpreted as Anthropomorphic (Anthropopathic)

Anthropomorphisms are figures of speech used in the Bible **to describe God in human terms**. It is God’s metaphorical language about Himself **to accommodate human limited capacity to understand** things about Him. For example God’s arm refers to His power.

Anthropopathisms are figures of speech to **attribute human emotions or spiritual qualities to God**. So when some commentators say that one of God’s emotions is Anthropomorphic they really mean that it is anthropopathic.

However, the use of these figures of speech in Scripture concerning God only logically fits if they are **limited to His physical attributes** (anthropomorphic) which we cannot comprehend, rather than to statements about **His ethical or spiritual qualities** (anthropopathic). So these should be taken as literal (technically as conceptual metaphors, e.g., “her criticisms hit the target”) for the following reasons:

1. **RELEVANCE**. There is **nothing** in all the open-ended passages referring to God’s future knowledge **that suggests that these passages are anthropomorphic**.
2. **CONSISTENCY**. If a literal approach is taken to the group of statements in the Scriptures about events which are closed off i.e. that **God has predestined and has therefore settled these**, then, for consistency we should also take as literal the group of statements about events which are **open-ended and so are of an undetermined future i.e., a future of possibilities**.

3. REFLECTING REALTY. As with all figures of speech, anthropomorphisms must reflect a reality at some level. e.g. “God’s right hand” as meaning his power. But to say that the Scriptures describing God’s changing of His mind is only anthropomorphic would **reflect no reality at all**. Otherwise, we may as well say that the description of *God as love* doesn’t really mean that at all.
4. TRUTH ABOUT GOD’S CHARACTER. To say that such passages are anthropomorphic simply **undermines the integrity of Scripture** e.g. to say that God changed His mind when, in fact, He didn’t is completely misleading. In fact, it would not be communicating anything truthful about Him. So God is not representing His character to us **only as He seems to be** to us so that, for example, it only seems as though he changes His mind. He represents His character, His ethical or spiritual qualities as He actually is. So the relevant passages referring to God in these contexts of undetermined features are not an accommodation to our finite human thinking, i.e., **anthropomorphic** descriptions in this regard, and it is clearly inappropriate to apply this figure of speech to the relevant statements about God’s foreknowledge?

Further Details of the Open Theism View

1. God decided to create humans as capable of experiencing His love and freely responding to it with love toward Him. Therefore He has granted us genuine free will, which is necessary for a truly personal relationship of love to develop.
2. As **sovereign**, God has decided to make **some of his actions** contingent upon human requests and actions so that He works with responsive humans in His plans.
3. God can genuinely be influenced by what humans do and respond accordingly so that there is genuine interaction – it is a dynamic relationship.
4. Because the Scriptures show that God changes in some respects this implies that **God is temporal**. He works with us **so that events are sequential**, rather than His being timelessly eternal.
5. In wisdom, God has chosen to exercise general rather than overly detailed preparation for future events. This means that humans are not put into a straight-jacket, but rather that God can be creative and resourceful in working with humans i.e., flexible in His strategies.
6. God’s nature doesn’t change, but He may adjust His plans, so that He is endlessly resourceful in working towards the fulfillment of his ultimate purpose. This means that His plan is **not a detailed script or blueprint**, but a broad purpose that allows for a variety of options regarding precisely how these purposes will be fulfilled.
7. As the **omniscient** God He knows all that there is to know about the universe – He knows the past and the present with exhaustive definite knowledge. However, concerning the future He knows it as partly definite (closed) and partly indefinite (open). This means that He is dynamically omniscient. Indeed, God could have known every event of the future had He decided to create a fully determined universe. However, biblically speaking He decided to create beings with genuine free will, which implies that He chose to create a universe in which not all of the future is knowable, even for Himself, although He knows all possibilities.
8. In the open or indefinite aspect of the future, God is not caught off-guard. He has *foresight* and anticipates what we will do or may do because he already knows all possibilities.

The Open Theism View Gives the Better Understanding of God’s Foreknowledge

The several factors which indicate that the Open Theism View explains the biblical data best and therefore is most likely to be the correct one are:

(A) THE OBVIOUS PURPOSIVE AND PERMISSIVE ASPECTS TO GOD'S WILL AS DETAILED EARLIER**(B) A CONSISTENT APPROACH TO THE BIBLICAL LANGUAGE**

As mentioned a moment ago, the statements of **settled things that God has predestined** and the statements showing an **open-ended, undetermined future should be consistently understood as literal**. This is in complete contrast to the Calvinist or Arminian or Molinist views which make an inconsistent application to the various statements in reference to God's foreknowledge, namely of literalness to some of the statements, but **anthropomorphism** to other statements when there is no logical reason to do so.

(C) OPEN THEISM IS THE ONLY VIEW WHICH ACTUALLY ALLOWS FOR GENUINE HUMAN FREE WILL

Almost all promoters of the Calvinist view deny that humans actually have genuine free will; and although the Arminian and Molinist views both claim to confirm genuine human free will, this cannot actually be the case for the reasons given above. In contrast to these views the Open Theism View unassailably presents God as granting genuine human free will.

(D) GOD IS NOT SEEN AS A LIMITED OR A HARSH GOD – HE IS A GOD OF INFINITE POSSIBILITIES

The Calvinist View promotes a God who harshly predestines the majority of mankind to either eternal destruction or eternal torment. He is also shown to be **not secure enough** to allow others to have free will.

Yet, the Arminian and Molinist views promote a God who is **not able to change whatever evil things** will happen, and so appears weak. However, the Scriptures give us a quite different and positive picture of God's character if we accept the Open Theism view of His foreknowledge. This view of how God's foreknowledge works demonstrates God's supreme intelligence, because it requires that He use **His infinite problem-solving intelligence** in analysing all of the combinations of all of the possibilities that there are, and clearly He has always known what all the possibilities are! This requires much greater intelligence than a God who simply foreknows or predestines the entire future.

The Open Theism View also presents God as **able to respond to changing circumstances** by using His infinite intelligence to accomplish His purposes as His creation moves through time, rather than having everything foreknown and settled prior to creation. This also takes a greater amount of intelligence than would be the case in the Calvinist and Arminian views.

The Settled Events of God's Predestined Sovereign Purpose

In looking at those aspects of God's foreknowledge concerning what is settled we see that God's predestined sovereign eternal purpose is for a paradise earth in which perfect humans who perfectly love Him will exist. This comes from "...*the hidden wisdom of God, which God **decreed before the ages for our glory***" (1 Cor. 2:7). It is God's plan or purpose that He "...*had **predestined to take place***" (Acts 4:28).

Because of His power and determination with all these settled things God can say: "*I am God...**declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done. Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose***" (Isa. 46:9-11). Later God speaks of "***The former things I declared of old; they went out from my mouth, and I announced them; then suddenly I did them, and they came to pass***" (Isa. 48:3).

However, these statements are not universal. They do not mean that God controls absolutely all events that take place so that humans have no control over anything.

GOD DOES NOT CHANGE HIS MIND CONCERNING THE PURPOSIVE ASPECT OF HIS WILL

Unlike the pagan gods, the True God is not fickle or unreliable. He "*is not a man, that he should **lie**, nor a son of man, that he should **change his mind***" (Num. 23:19 also 1 Sam. 15:29) concerning what he purposes to do.

Along with God's over-all purpose there are features toward the accomplishment of His purpose which, at particular times He predetermines to happen and therefore foreknows will happen. These include:

1. Events to occur to particular cities and nations.
2. Situations or events to occur to particular individuals.
3. That there would be a Messiah.
4. That there would be an unspecified person who would betray the Messiah.
5. That there would be a body of people who would become united to the Messiah.

1. Events That Were Foreknown and Predestined to Occur to Particular Cities and Nations

The following are just a few examples of the many nations that God foreknew and predestined at particular times (but not from eternity) to experience certain situations:

- The 400 year captivity of the Israelites in Egypt and their later release (Gen. 15:13-15).
- The release of the nation of Judah after their 70 year captivity in Babylon (Jer. 29:10-11).
- The future destruction of the city of Tyre (Ezek. 26:7-21).

2. Events That Were Foreknown and Predestined to Occur to Particular Individuals

The roles which Samson, Jeremiah, and John the Baptist were to play were predestined before their *birth but not from eternity*. **Samson** was simply foreordained to be a Nazirite (Judges 13:3-5), **Jeremiah** was foreordained to be a prophet to the nations (Jer.1:5), and **John the Baptist** was foreordained to prepare the people for the advent of Messiah. What was said in Romans 9 concerning **Esau and Jacob** was with reference to the nations that descended from them (Mal.1:2, 3) and based on the genetic make-up of Esau and Jacob that God could examine from the time of their conception. Regarding **Cyrus the Persian** (Isa. 44:26-28; 45:1-4) it was not a case of someone being personally foreknown by God nearly two centuries before his actions, but rather that God would use a conqueror by that name who would, by means of his conquest of the Babylonian Empire, cause the release of the Jews thereby allowing them to rebuild Jerusalem. **The Pharaoh** of Moses' time was not foreknown by God before his birth but only from the time that Moses confronted Pharaoh, at which time God foreknew that Pharaoh would harden his heart against the release of the Israelites. (Please see our study on Romans 9 concerning God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart). However, for all of the above individuals there was no pre-ordained detailed script for their entire lives or for their final destinies.

3. Messiah was Foreknown and Predestined

Messiah "*was foreknown before the foundation of the world*" (1 Pet. 1:20), and was predestined in the sense that the details of his sufferings, crucifixion, resurrection, exaltation and future return were foreknown by God and so were predestined by Him (1 Pet. 1:11).

4. The Predestination of Someone Who Would Betray the Messiah

The prophecies did not specify which close companion of Jesus would betray him (Ps. 41:9; 55:12-14; Ps. 109:2-19). So Judas was not personally predestined to betray Jesus. In fact, Jesus had made a prayerful and excellent selection, with God's guidance, of his 12 apostles, including Judas Iscariot. It was Judas himself who allowed his heart to turn away from his lord so that in time it became evident to Jesus that it was Judas who would betray him.

NOTE: When John 6:64 says: "For Jesus knew from **the beginning**...who it was who would betray him" the phrase "**the beginning**" does not mean the beginning of creation or the beginning of his ministry but rather from *the beginning of Judas' turning away from a course of loyalty to Jesus*.

5. The Predestination of the Body of Christ

As part of the Messianic/Kingdom arrangement the body of Christ was "*predestined to be conformed to the image of [God's] Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers*" (Rom. 8:29). And this was because God had "*determined in advance to give us status as His own children through Jesus the Messiah...in harmony with His will and good pleasure.*" And "*Through incorporation into [Jesus] we were given an inheritance! We were appointed in advance, in harmony with the purpose of the One who does everything according to His stated purpose*" (Eph. 1:5, 11 KJV). So there was always absolutely certain that there would be a body of Christians.

Those Events Which Were Open and Therefore Not Settled

The following are the categories of statements in which God is shown to:

1. Confront the unexpected.
2. Have no foreknowledge of certain things.
3. Experience regret.
4. Express frustration.
5. Test individuals to learn or confirm something about their character.
6. Speak in conditional terms
7. Change His mind if the circumstances change, even though it was a decree.

1. God Confronted the Unexpected

Concerning Yahweh's vineyard—Israel "*He **expected** it to yield fine grapes; wild grapes were all it yielded ... what more could I have done for my vineyard that I have not done? **Why** when I expected it to yield fine grapes, has it yielded wild ones ... He **expected** fair judgement, **but found** injustice*" (Isa. 5:2, 4, 7). These were not the words of someone who foreknew the way these Israelites would turn out.

Jeremiah records a similar situation whereby God's own expectation concerning Israel proved to be wrong. God says:

- ❖ "Have you seen what disloyal Israel has done? How she made her way up every high hill and to every green tree, and played the whore there? **I thought**, 'After doing all this **she will come back** to me'. *But she did not come back ...* "**I thought**: You will call me Father and will never cease to follow me. **But** ... you have betrayed me" (Jer. 3: 6, 7, 19, 20).

Could God genuinely say that he "he thought" or "expected" this outcome but instead got that different outcome, if he had eternally **foreknown** or **predestined the outcome that He got**? Rather this would have been one of the many possibilities that He would have anticipated.

Similarly, if God eternally foreknows that His work with Israel is bound to be a waste of time, why do Scriptures occasionally inform us that God's own spirit is "grieved" (Eph. 4:30) by those who resist His attempts to build the relationship with them? So the very genuineness of God's attempts with them, and the fact of God's grief must be dependent upon the uncertainty of the outcome.

2. Things of Which God Had No Foreknowledge

- a.** God gains knowledge when He finds out Adam's choices of animal names after He "*brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name*" (Gen. 2:19). However, if God already knew Adam's choices, then His motive in bringing the animals to Adam would be called into question.
- b.** God is heartbroken because of Israel's willingness: "*...to burn their sons and daughters: a thing I never ordered, that had **never entered my thoughts***" (Jer. 7:31). Yet this does not mean that the actual concept had never occurred to God. In fact, long before this statement He had warned Israel never to do this sort of thing (Deut. 12:13; 18:10). But the statement in Jeremiah 7 simply means that God is shocked that the Israelites would do such a despicable thing.
- c.** Wicked humans are told by Jesus: "*Depart from me, accursed ones, into the fire **prepared for the devil and his angels***" (Matt. 25:4). But if humans were not originally meant to go into the fire then God could not have foreknown it.
- d.** Furthermore, the early Christians did not think that all prophecy was unalterable because the prophet: "*Agabus ... said, 'This is what the Holy Spirit says: "In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles."* When we heard this we...began begging him not to go to Jerusalem" (Acts 21:10-12). So Christians there clearly did not believe that this was unalterable, otherwise why would they have tried to dissuade Paul from going to Jerusalem. In fact, contrary to Agabus'

prophecy the Jews never bound Paul and handed him over to the Romans. Instead he was rescued by the Romans from the Jews.

e. Then again God discovers those who are worthy of life in the age to come. Jesus informs us that *“The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life...”* (Rev. 3:5). Logically God would not even bother to record the names of those he has always known would “conquer” or would fail “to conquer.” In fact Revelation 13:8, 17:8 describe names being recorded in God’s book of life “**from** the foundation of the world.” However, no passage states that the names were recorded **at** or “**before** the foundation of the world” Yet one would expect this if the future was exhaustively settled.

So if we take the Scriptures at face value we have to conclude that God does not always foreknow everything.

3. When God Experienced Regret

After God had discovered just how wicked the whole human race could be, He showed regret for having made mankind and then proceeded to destroy all of the wicked in the great flood, the Bible states that: *“The LORD was sorry that he made man on the earth, and it grieved him...”* (Gen. 6:5–6).

If everything was exhaustively settled and foreknown by God before he created the world, then even before He created mankind, He had to have known with absolute certainty that they would become so terribly wicked at that exact time. If that were the case it would be impossible for Him to sincerely regret his decision to create them? By contrast, if we accept that God’s regret was plainly real then it is evident that, until that time, God did not know with certainty that humanity would cause Him such grief.

4. When God Expressed Frustration

Regarding Israel God asks in frustration: *“How much longer will these people treat me with contempt? How much longer will they refuse to trust me?”* (Num. 14:11). But if God had definitely foreknown or predestined Israel’s treatment of Him, how could it possibly turn out differently and so causing Him to become frustrated with them.

Similarly, God *“sought for a man among them who should build up the {Jerusalem} wall and stand in the breach [gap] before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none”* (Ezek. 22:30). But can a person genuinely look for something that they have known from eternity is not there? Instead, there was the possibility that there was someone to do this.

5. When God Tested Individuals to Learn or Confirm Something about Their Character

ABRAHAM

After Abraham had shown himself to be willing to offer Isaac as a sacrifice in obedience to God, Abraham was told: *“...for now I know that you fear God”* (Gen. 22:12). Certainly this was no fake test; but this doesn’t mean that Abraham was not God-fearing before this test. He clearly was, in view of his willing obedience to leave Ur of the Chaldees at God’s command.

However, in offering his only son, as one of the most severe of tests, was of a different order of magnitude altogether compared to simply moving location. So here God is learning something new about Abraham, namely that his fear of or reverence for God was even stronger than God had previously known.

ISRAEL

Moses informs Israel that *“Yahweh your God is testing you to know if you love Yahweh your God with all your heart and all your soul”* (Deut. 13:4). He later informs them that Yahweh had kept them in the desert for forty years: *“in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments”* (Deut. 8:2).

If the True God was actually as described in the traditional Platonic model i.e. a static god who has exhaustively settled the entire future, then that god would have obviously eternally known the character the Israelites would develop during their time in the desert, and so there would be no point in testing any of them.

Surely, if God had eternally foreknown the character of these Israelites, why would He have bothered with them for forty years? Why bother with a project that one knows for certain will fail? Wouldn't God simply be wasting time in testing people if He already fully knows their deep convictions? Further testing of Israel can be seen in Exodus 16:4 and Judges 2:20–3:5 as well as Hezekiah (2 Chron. 32:31). All this was to increase God's knowledge of the character of His chosen people.

Furthermore, Psalm 95:10–11 and Hebrews 3:7–10 show God's great disappointment in the outcome of that testing of Israel. This is difficult to reconcile with the view that God was certain of the outcome before He had even created the world.

6. When God Spoke in Conditional Terms

In this wonderful lesson God says: *“If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it. And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it”* (Jer. 18:7-10). This demonstrates the wise flexibility of God, which cannot be the case in the Classical views.

7. When God Changed His Mind Because of Changed Circumstances After He Had Decreed an Event

- ❖ *MOSES pleads: “...change your mind about doing harm to your people...So the LORD changed His mind about the harm He said He would do to His people”* (Ex. 32:12, 14).
- ❖ *“...and the fire of Yahweh broke out among them; it devoured one end of the camp. The people appealed to Moses who interceded with Yahweh and the fire died down”* (Num. 11:1, 2 NJB).
What would be the point of prayer if God's actions were unalterably foreordained?
- ❖ *When KING DAVID was incited by Satan to arrange for a census “God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it; but as he was about to destroy it, the LORD saw, and he relented from the calamity. And he said to the angel who was working destruction, ‘It is enough; now stay your hand’”* (1 Chron. 21:15).

Here God clearly changed his mind. If He had foreknown that He wasn't going to destroy Jerusalem, He couldn't have genuinely intended to destroy it and so the passage becomes nonsensical. Furthermore, how could God have genuinely **relented** from a previous plan if it wasn't really the original plan in His mind? For Christians today, if one doesn't take the above account as literal, one would have to ask: What is the use of intercessory prayer if God's actions have already been determined from eternity?

- ❖ *“HEZEKIAH fell ill and was at the point of death. And Isaiah...said to him, Yahweh says this, ‘Put your affairs in order, for you are going to die’”* (2 Kings 20:1).

God now changes His mind in answer to Hezekiah's pleadings:

- ❖ *“I have heard your prayer and seen your tears. I shall cure you: In three days time you will go up to the temple of Yahweh. I shall add 15 years to your life”* (2 Kings 20:5, 6).
- ❖ *“When God saw the deeds of the NINEVITES, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it”*
(Jonah 3:10).

After Israel sinned because of KORAH, Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron:

- ❖ *“Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment”* (Num. 16:21).

After Moses and Aaron begged Yahweh to judge only the fully guilty ones He modified His judgment and gave the people a choice. So if all of the future is exhaustively settled in God's mind then His stated intention to “consume” the whole congregation could not have been sincere because He always foreknew he would not do it.

Because of KING SAUL's rebellion, Samuel tells him:

- ❖ “For then the LORD **would have** established your kingdom over Israel forever. **But now** your kingdom shall not continue” (1 Sam. 13:13, 14).

God's plan was to establish Saul's descendants as permanent heirs to Israel's throne. However, He changed his mind because of Saul's monumental failures. This could not be so if the traditional explanation of divine foreknowledge is correct.

Yahweh gets Jeremiah to write his prophecy concerning JUDAH on a scroll, telling him that,

- ❖ “**It may be** that the house of Judah will hear all the disaster that I intend to do to them, so that every one **may turn from** his evil way, and **that I may forgive** their iniquity and their sin” (Jer. 36:3).

Jeremiah then tells his scribe to read the scroll to the people, saying to him:

- ❖ “**It may be** that their plea for mercy will come before the LORD, and that every one **may turn from** his evil way.” (vs. 7).

However, the people didn't listen to the warning (vss. 24, 25) and so Yahweh judged them (vss. 30, 31). The fact that Yahweh motivated Jeremiah by telling him that the people may repent must mean that it was possible that they could repent? This implies that the future is made, in part, of possibilities. Yet if the future is eternally settled and God knows it as such, how can He honestly tell Jeremiah that something **may happen** when He knows that **it will not happen**? In fact, there are about 39 instances in the Scriptures where God explicitly changes His mind and over 200 times where it is implied that he changes His mind. However, the traditional Platonic model of a static God who has exhaustively settled the future means that one must interpret in a very artificial way all the passages which depict Him as changing his mind. It is evidently more honest to accept that God really can change his mind about certain matters. Without this open and dynamic view one's prayers would be of no effect.

God's Patience Shows That the Future Is Partly Open

If absolutely all is foreknown or predestined by God from eternity why would He need to be patient so that certain ones would not perish? Yet that is exactly the king of caring God that we worship, just as Peter describes:

- ❖ “The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is **patient towards you, not wishing** that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, **what sort of people ought you to be** in lives of holiness and godliness,¹² waiting for and **hastening the coming of the day of God**, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!” (2 Pet. 3:9, 11b-12a).

Also why, in the predestined “*things to be dissolved*,” would it matter “*what sort of people ought you to be*” if they were individually foreknown or predestined from eternity. Furthermore, if the rendering is correct, it appears that Christians can make a contribution to the timing of “*the coming of the day of God*” by “*hastening*” it. This is not possible if the time for that day was absolutely foreknown or predestined by God from eternity.

God's Knowledge of all Possibilities and Probabilities

Evidently God knows the full range of possibilities for any situation, but He also narrows this to a range of feasible situations and finally to the most likely one. He has a perfect knowledge of all future variables. Because God is infinitely intelligent, he is perfectly prepared for whatever possible event gets actualized *as if* it were the only possible event that could be actualized. So while God perfectly anticipates all possible outcomes, when the improbable occurs, it is by definition not what an omniscient God would have expected to occur; yet He is perfectly prepared for it. If, for example, the Hebrew midwives had obeyed Pharaoh's order rather than God's and killed all the baby boys, then God would have responded accordingly to produce a different scenario.

In daily life for Humans there is a balance between the predictable and the unpredictable. For instance, physicists can predict the behaviour of a group of quantum particles, but have difficulty assessing the course of individual particles. God however, often uses his ability to foreknow the course of groups, nations or even all mankind, but mostly refrains from foreknowing the course of individuals. For example God says: “*They [the elders of Israel] will listen to your words*” (Ex. 3:18). Yet Moses is clearly unaware of God having exhaustively definite knowledge of this matter, so he asks: “*But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my words*” and God replies “*...but should they not be convinced by either of these two signs and refuse to listen to what you say...*” (Ex. 4:1, 9). Evidently God thinks that they may or may not be convinced. He simply does not know. Similarly Jeremiah 26:3 says: “*It may be they will listen...*” Additionally, the uncertainty aspect is evident when the Israelites left Egypt: “*God did not lead them on the road through the Philistines country, though that was shorter. For God said, ‘If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt’*” (Ex. 13:17 NIV). Clearly God considered the possibility, but not the certainty, that the Israelites would change their minds if they faced war. Similarly, later Israelites faced exile and Ezekiel was to symbolize it for them so that: “*Perhaps they will understand, though they are a rebellious house*” (Ezek. 12:3). Again there is uncertainty for God i.e. the Israelites may or may not understand.

Lastly we consider Jesus’ plea: “*My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will*” (Luke 26:39). This was a course that was fixed in the mind of God and yet it shows that in Jesus’ mind there was at least the theoretical possibility that there could be another way—“**if it be possible...**”

What the Controversy Means with Reference to God’s Character

The controversy in recent decades that has been raised by the bringing of the Openness of Creation View (dynamic omniscience) into the public domain concerns the very picture of God’s character. This is because the Classical views leave many people unable to relate to a God who is portrayed as being without emotion and perhaps even indifferent to the needs of people. The Openness View has attempted to show that the Classical view of God is not the biblical one, but rather that the Bible describes God as One who expresses emotions, including sorrow, justified anger, and as one regretting certain of His actions.

However, those of the various Classical views of God often accuse those of the Openness View of failing to emphasize God’s transcendence i.e. His separation from His creation. Indeed, there obviously is an absolute difference between God and man - there is a great distance between God and man in many ways. However, this does not mean that He does not have the qualities that the Bible describes in quite literal terms, and which we will see in the following Scriptures, and neither does it mean that we cannot get close to Him. In fact we have “a better hope..., through which **we draw near to God**. (Heb. 7:19). This is available to all mankind if: “*...they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way towards him and find him. Yet he is actually **not far from each one of us***” (Acts 17:27).

This is called God’s **immanence – His nearness to us and involvement with His creation** so that He is not aloof. Therefore, the biblical descriptions are not meant to be tangled in anthropomorphisms. They are presented in such a way that we can truly understand God’s character and identify with Him. So although the Scriptures do use some figurative language about God’s character they do so in a way that is easily understood, meaningful and not contradictory. For example He is portrayed as a loving Father who welcomes His returning wayward son (Luke 15:11-32).

However, none of this detracts from our understanding that God is sovereign over His creation – these are not diminished in the minds of those who understand the Openness View. In fact, His sovereignty is balanced by and is part of His sacrificial love as well as many other qualities based on that love, so that we see God as he truly is according to the biblical descriptions.

Summary

The Openness/Dynamic Omniscience View shows that:

1. God is omniscient because He knows all of reality, but future reality is seen in infinite possibilities and probabilities. Therefore He does not have exhaustive definite foreknowledge.
2. God experiences sequence of events and duration of time.

3. God is immanent as meaning that He is relationally close to us and hears our prayers.
4. God is not strongly immutable. Although His character does not change, He can have changing plans, thoughts and emotions.
5. God is not strongly impassible. Therefore He is affected by and responds to our actions and prayers.
6. God has general sovereignty. He ordains the structures of creation (our boundaries) and yet, at times He will act to ensure that specific things happen.
7. God does not have a meticulous blueprint for everything that happens. He has an overall definite plan.
8. God does not exercise meticulous providence. This means that the divine will can be frustrated at times. It also means that God takes risks in the relationship with His creation.

In contrast to the Calvinist view, both of the two Arminian views and the Molinist View also promote either most or many of the above. However the Openness-Dynamic Omniscience View is **the only view** demonstrating that:

- The future is at least partly open and unsettled in God's mind, but with other aspects of the future being unalterably fixed and certain of fulfilment. In other words, the future is settled to whatever extent the Creator decides to settle it. So God's foreknowledge encompasses:
 1. All that He has unconditionally determined will happen.
 2. All that He has determined will happen, but conditioned upon the response of those humans involved.
 3. All of the possibilities and probabilities of what may happen.
- Actually allows for genuine human free will.
- Demonstrates that the future decisions of free agents are not yet part of reality.
- Takes the relevant biblical statements concerning God's foreknowledge as literal (conceptual metaphors) as they obviously should be taken, rather than anthropomorphically.
- Demonstrates that God is dynamic and acquires new knowledge.
- Shows that God is the God of infinite possibilities and therefore of supreme intelligence. This requires much greater intelligence than a God who simply foreknows or predestines the entire detailed future.
- Presents God's ability to respond to changing circumstances by using His supreme intelligence to accomplish His purposes as His creation moves through time, rather than having everything foreknown and settled prior to creation.

Conclusion

In being largely based on philosophy, the Calvinist Platonic view, as it has been applied to the True God by Christian Orthodoxy, does not stand up under the scrutiny of the Scriptures. Yet the Arminian Simple-Foreknowledge view, the Arminian incremental foreknowledge view, and the Molinist Middle-Foreknowledge view, while purporting to allow for human free will, in fact lock out such genuine free will before the creation, so that the claims of those who promote these views of confirming genuine human free will are in fact bogus. Furthermore, along with the Calvinist View, these views both turn the plainly literal statements concerning the open future into anthropomorphisms and thus communicate nothing truthful about God and so undermine the integrity of Scripture.

It also has to be said that, far more so than the Classical views, the Openness-Dynamic Omniscience View:

- Exalts God's wisdom and sovereignty.
- Emphasizes God's genuine relationships with humans.
- Harmonizes with our experience in life.
- Harmonizes with contemporary science.
- Helps with understanding the problem of evil in some respects.
- Motivates Kingdom work.
- Solves some otherwise paradoxical situations.

However, I don't want you to run away with the idea that the "Openness" view gives all the answers to absolutely all questions in this area. This is certainly a massive subject and to help with that I have a few copies of an appendix paper to answer many questions if anyone would like this paper.

Subject Concordance

The bracketed verses are either parallel to or for comparison with the listed verses.

Duration and Sequence Are Part of God's Nature – He is Not Timeless

Gen. 1:1; **Ps.** 55:19; 90:1-4; **102:24-27**; Prov. 8:22-23;
 John 17:24; **1 Cor. 2:7**; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2-3; 1 Pet. 1:20; 2 Pet. 3:8.
 God has memory and therefore a history: Gen 8:1; 30:22; Ex. 2:24; Isa. 43:25; Ezek. 18:21

God Does Not Change in His Character

Ps. 102:27; Mal. 3:6; Jas 1:17.

God Does Not Change His Overall Determined Purpose

Ps. 33:11; Prov. 19:21; Isa. 46: 9-10; 48:3-5; 1 Cor. 2:7; **Acts 2:23**.

God's Exhaustive Current Knowledge

Ps. 147:4; Isa. 40:14; Matt. 10:29-30; Rom. 11:33.

The Term "Predestine, Foreordain (Gk *Proorizo*)"

Acts 4:28; Rom. 8:29, 30; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:5, 11.

The Term "Foresaw, Previously Seen (Gk *proorao*)".

Humans only: Acts 2:25; 21:29.

The Terms "Foreknow (Gk *proginosko*)" and "Foreknowledge (Gk *prognosis*)"

For God: Rom. 8:29; 11:2; 1 Pet. 1:20; ... Acts 2:23; 1 Pet.1:2.

For Humans: Acts 26:5; 2 Pet. 3:17.

Messiah Was Foreknown and Predestined

Gen. 3:15; Isa. 11:1-3; 53:10;
 Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:11, 20; Rev. 13:8.

The Christian Body of Messiah (Not Individuals) Was Foreknown by God

Rom. 8:27-29; 9:11-13; Eph. 1:4-5, 11-12; 1 Pet. 1:2; 2 Pet. 1:10.

Particular Individuals Predestined For Particular Roles

Samuel: Judges 13:3-5;
 Josiah: 1 Kings 13:2;
 Cyrus: Isa. 44:28-45:1.

Unborn Particular Individuals Foreknown to God

Jer. 1:5; Acts 15:7; Gal. 1:15.

The Originally Unknown Individual to Betray the Messiah

Ps. 41:19; 55:12-14; 109:2-19 (Acts 1:20); Matt. 26:14-16; Luke 22:3; John 6:64; 17:12

Predestination of Nations

Gen. 25:23 (Mal. 1:1-4; Rom. 9:11-12).

Further Details of God's Predestined Purpose

Matt. 25:41; Rev. 17:17.

God's Foreknowledge of What Will Happen If....

David in Keilah: 1 Sam. 23:10-13.

What God Did Not Foreknow

Adam's naming the animals: Gen. 2:19.

Abraham's being God-fearing: Gen. 22:12.

If Israel would keep His commandments: Ex. 16:4; **Deut. 8:2; 13:3**; Judg. 2:22; 3:4.

How long Israel would spurn Him: Num. 14:11.

What was in Hezekiah's heart: 2 Chron. 32:31.

How long Israel would not remain Innocent: Hos. 8:5.

What God Regrets (and Therefore Did Not Foreknow)

Making mankind: Gen. 6:6, 7.

Eli's priesthood: 1 Sam. 2:30-32;

Saul's kingship: 1 Sam. 15:10, 35;

The slaughter of Israelites because of David's census: 2 Sam. 24:15-16; (1 Chron. 21:15).

God Speaks in Conditional Terms

Ex. 4:8; 13:17; **Ezek. 12:3; 33:13-15**; **Jer. 7:5-7; 18:7-10**; 26:3; 38:17-18.

God Changed His Mind in Response to Entreaty (and Therefore Did Not Foreknow)

Concerning His intention to destroy Israel: Ex. 32:10-14; Num. 11:1-2; 14:12-20; Ps.106:23.

Concerning the Ammonite attack: Judg. 10:13-16;

Ahab's repentance: 1 Kings 21:21-29;

Hezekiah's added 15 years: 2 Kings 20:1, 6.

Rehoboam's repentance: 2 Chron. 12:5-8.

Nations which repent: Jer. 18:4-10; 26:3, 13.

Nineveh's repentance: Jonah 3:4-10.

Defiled bread in Jerusalem: Ezek. 4:9-15.

Locust attack and fire: Amos 7:1-6.

Times When God Did Not Change His Mind

Balaam's attempt to curse Israel: Num. 23:19.

Saul appeal to remain as King: 1 Sam. 15:29.

David's prayer for his dying son: 2 Sam. 12:14, 22.

Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane: Matt. 26:39.

God Confronts the Unexpected

Parable of the Vineyard: Isa. 5:1-7.

"I thought she will return": Jer. 3:6-7.

"It did not come into my mind": Jer. 7:31; 19:5.

God Expresses Frustration

Moses' excuse: Ex. 4:10-15.

"Searched...found no one": Ezek. 22:30-31.

The spirit is grieved: Eph. 4:30.

Individuals Have Genuine Free Will

(Deut. 30:19; Josh. 24:15; 2 Sam. 24:12-13; Isa. 1:18-20);
 Luke 7:30; 8:13; John 7:17; 10:18; Acts 7:51; 13:46;
 Rom. 2:4-5; 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:11; Philemon 1:14; Rev. 22:17.

God's Will Can Be Resisted

Pharisees reject God's purpose for them: Luke 7:30;
 "Believe for a while": Luke 8:13;
 Jews resist holy spirit: Acts 7:51;
 Stubborn/unrepentant heart: Rom. 2:4-5.

Salvation Is Conditional

Rom. 8:17; 11:22; 1 Cor. 15:2; Phil. 2:12; Col. 1:23; 1 Tim. 4:1, 16; 2 Tim. 2:12; Heb. 3:14; 10:38-39.

Salvation Can Be Lost

John 15:1-6; 1 Tim. 4:1-2; Heb. 6:4-6; Jas. 5:19-20.

Individuals Can Be Blotted Out of the Book of Life

Ex.32:32; Ps. 69: 28; Rev. 3:5.

SUGGESTED READING

The Openness of God Pinnock, Rice, Sanders, Hasker, Basinger
God of the Possible Gregory Boyd
Is God to Blame Gregory Boyd
Satan and the problem of Evil Gregory Boyd
The God Who Risks John Sanders
Divine Foreknowledge – Four Views Edited by Beilby and Eddy.
Four Views on Divine Providence Edited by Gundry and Jowers
Four Views God and Time Edited by Gregory Ganssle
 The Significance of Free Will Robert Kane

SUGGESTED VIEWING ON THE INTERNET

In the Google box just enter: *Greg Boyd on Youtube - on Open Theism*. Only the first 6½ videos are watchable. The questions from the audience are not clearly heard on the remaining videos.