

Open Theism & the Emerging Church

CGYG Program

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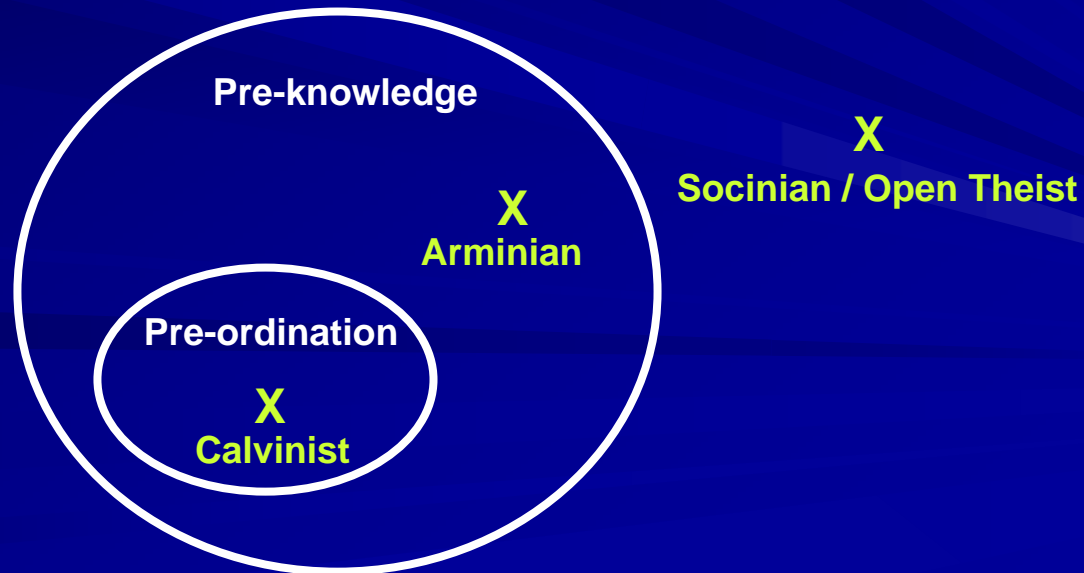
Omniscience of God

- Omniscience is the attribute of God that describes His 'all-knowing' nature
- Omniscience and Omnipresence (that God is present everywhere) are two foundational doctrines of the Christian church
- Historic orthodox Christianity: God knows all things past, present and the entirety of the future, exhaustively

“This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.” – 1 John 3:19-20

Omniscience of God

- Doctrine of omniscience has historically been affirmed by Arminians and Calvinists, as well as non-evangelical groups, e.g. Roman Catholics
- Open theism has been pushed as a 'new model' of describing God's nature in what He knows



What is Open Theism?

- Heretical teaching that God does not know the future exhaustively, only those things that pertain to His nature
- Actions that result from human decision and their consequences are not under God's control
- Hence, God 'finds out' things at the same time as we do, and is a 'plan B' God
- Rationale:
 - Since God has granted humanity free will, in order for it to be truly free, the future free choices of man cannot be known ahead of time by God

Basic Tenets of Open Theism

Open theists approach the Bible and interpret it with these presuppositions:

1. God's greatest attribute is love

- Love is elevated above all other attributes and used to interpret God in such a way as to be a 'cosmic gentleman' who wants all to be saved and mourns over their loss

2. Man's free will is truly free in the libertarian sense

- Man's free will is not restricted by his sinful nature but is equally able to make choices between different options

Basic Tenets of Open Theism

3. God does not know the future

- This is either because God cannot know the future because it does not exist or because God chooses to not know the future even though it can be known

4. God 'takes risks'

- Because God does not know the future exhaustively, He must take risks with people whose future free will choices are unknowable

5. God 'learns' and can be 'surprised'

- Because God does not know the future exhaustively, He learns as the realities of the future occur

Basic Tenets of Open Theism

6. God 'makes mistakes'

- Because God does not know all things and because He is dealing with free will creatures (whose future choices He does not know), God can make mistakes in dealing with people. Therefore, God would change His plans accordingly.

7. God 'changes His mind'

- God can change His mind on issues depending on what He learns and what He discovers people do. Usually, God's change of mind is due to Him being surprised by something He didn't not plan for or expect

Redefining the Terms

Proponents of open theism redefine the traditional attributes of God to suit their needs...

- Redefine **omniscience** this to mean knowing all this is *knowable (to man)*... since free decisions of free creatures have not yet happened, they are not 'knowable' to God
- Redefine **omnipotence** from One who is "all-powerful and all-able to effectually ordain all things for His glory, and for the good of His own people" to a God who needs multiple 'plan Bs' in order to (hopefully) fulfill His purposes

Proponents & Purpose of Open Theism

- Proponents of open theism have included:
 - Richard Rice & Clark Pinnock, “The Openness of God”, 1994 (among other works)
 - Gregory Boyd, “God of the Possible”, 2004
- Main purposes were two fold:
 1. To justify (on man’s terms) the presence of suffering if God is an ‘all-loving’ God
 2. ‘Reconcile’ Divine sovereignty and human responsibility, where Scripture has never raised as a problem

“Nothing new under the sun...”

- Open theism really a rehash of an old heresy from the Reformation period – Socinianism:
 - Splinter group from after the Reformation, influential in Poland and England
 - Denied deity of Christ
 - Denied need for substitutionary atonement by Christ
 - Denied foreordination and foreknowledge of God of human actions
- Reformation fathers (e.g. Calvin, Melanchthon) firmly rejected the teachings of Lelio Socinus

Open Theism – A Question of Authority

- Ultimately, who has ultimate authority to dictate who God is: the Bible, or the man's wisdom?
- Frances Schaeffer:

Word of God

All other things

How open theism is 'justified'...

Proponents of open theism typically use 'proof texts' in the Bible to support their claim, taking them out of context or disregarding basic rules of Biblical interpretation, e.g.

1. That God 'changes His mind'

"I have seen these people," the Lord said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation... Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened." (Ex 32:9-10, 14)

How open theism is 'justified'...

1. That God 'changes His mind' (cont'd)

- Who is this account written for, to show that God can be persuaded, or for our benefit?
- Moses interceded for Israel, though it was clear that God was justified in punishing them... a foreshadowing of Christ's intercession for us (John 5:39)
- God knew the condition of the hearts of Israel, even before their act of idolatry (open theists would agree to this), thus could have enacted punishment even before
- Demonstration of God's mercy

How open theism is 'justified'...

1. That God 'changes His mind' (cont'd)

- Clear elsewhere in Scripture that God does not change His mind:

“He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man, that He should change His mind.” – 1 Sam 15:29

How open theism is 'justified'...

2. That God can be 'surprised'

"Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard.

What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?" – Isaiah 5:3-7

- Example of God speaking in human terms (anthropomorphism)
- This passage is a parable in the form of a song → meant to illustrate a point, not expound doctrine
- God is not bound by time, but chooses to speak to us in our time frame, and uses human emotions and conditions

How open theism is 'justified'...

3. That God tests people to see what they will do...

"Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."
– Gen 22:12

How open theism is 'justified'...

3. That God tests people to see what they will do (cont'd)

- Open theists would say that God did not know Abraham's heart (that he feared God) until He saw Abraham's raised knife about to sacrifice Isaac
- 1 Chronicle 28:9a says:

"And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts."

How open theism is 'justified'...

3. That God tests people to see what they will do (cont'd)

- God, who understands every motive behind thoughts, would have already known the intent of Abraham's heart during the three days' journey to Moriah
- A test was unnecessary to establish this fact

Rather:

- God is here revealing the gospel in hidden form
- God is speaking for Abraham's benefit, to confirm for him that God acknowledged his fear for Him

Consequences of Open Theism

1. God's glory is dethroned by man's convenience or comfort → All things happen for God's glory
2. God is made in man's image – the ultimate idolatry
 - Authority of Scripture is usurped by man's wisdom in defining the very nature and character of God
3. No assurance of saving faith, of God's immutability, or of anything at all...
 - God is not free to sovereignly and effectually call and regenerate a sinner
 - According to open theism, God must wait for the sinner to do what the Bible says the sinner is precisely unable to do (John 6:44, Rom 8:7)

What does Scripture say?

There are literally hundreds of Biblical references that speak of God's omniscience... a few examples:

1. God transcends time, and ordains and knows all things from beginning to end

“I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.” – Isaiah 46:10

“But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him” – Luke 22:21-22

What does Scripture say?

1. God transcends time, and ordains and knows all things from beginning to end (cont'd)

“Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.” – Acts 2:22-23

What does Scripture say?

2. God knows all things regarding man before they happen

“O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain... My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” - Psalm 139:1-6, 15-16

What does Scripture say?

3. Throughout eternity, God is unchanging

“He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man, that He should change His mind.” – 1 Sam 15:29

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.” – James 1:17

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” – Hebrews 13:8

Sources

- Chapter: “What does God know”, *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, J.H. Armstrong (Ed.)
- Various articles from www.albertmohler.com
- Various articles from www.carm.org (Christian Apologetics Research Ministry)