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The Openness of God – Predestination or Free Will?

By Aleck Cartwright

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The Openness writers have also failed to take into consideration the profound implications of the difference between the created and the uncreated. That is, a word must mean for God, the exact same thing as it does for a human, forgetting that human words are subject to God and not God being subject to human words. That is, we must not think that we can impose our creaturely limitations onto God who made us as though we had made Him. This is otherwise known as creating God in your own image. The fact that we still do not understand the mysteries of the Godhead, does not mean that we can just impose our own reason and understanding onto God thinking that He will adjust to our thoughts of Him. Instead we are called to have the mind of Christ and adjust our thinking to God, not Him to us. What a pathetic God He would be if He was restrained by our measly reasoning. We cannot limit God by what we are able to understand. In this way the writers deny one aspect of God (His sovereignty) in favour of another (our human responsibility). One without the other is God in our own image, for God by nature is both. Sadly not much can be taken seriously in their writing for this very reason.

We need to affirm God's infinite power and his sovereign love. In openness theology, prophecy is reduced to divine wishful thinking without any real guarantee that what God says is not a divine mistake in his calculations of future probabilities! It is also then an "oops theory" as it means that if plan A doesn't work God needs to turn to plan B and thus this leaves them no grounds to deal with eschatology that good will win over in the end. But the "open God" can never guarantee that it will!

This view of God is very far off the awesome, holy, unsurprised and yet always surprising God that I know and love. I applaud the authors of this book in their endeavour to make God more accessible to us in this day and age, but it seems they have devised a rather user-friendly God instead of just letting God be God.

It seems to place God in a box of time, in which He is limited to the past and knows nothing of the future or even in fact the present where future decisions are constantly being made. If God does not

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know the future how are we to understand Romans 8:28, how can God possibly work out all things for our good if he cannot know the future or the present and can only make calculated guesses of the future? The answer is that He can't.

The reasoning goes like this, within the limits set by God, an individual may choose to do things that are totally opposite of God's will and purpose. Thus when one person hurts or kills another, we cannot look for the purposes of God in that event. That person is morally responsible for the killing or hurting of the other, but how can God work it out for our good if he decided to act outside of God's intended purpose. Foreknowledge is needed, in fact required for the working out for our good.

Hebrews 12:3–11, the teaching of this passage seems to be that the persecution of Christians is a necessary discipline that God turns around for our good, teaching us and training us in Christ for a

purpose. Nothing we go through is meaningless or unredeemed of God unless you disregard foreknowledge and accept death and pain as a result of the erroneous exercising of another's will. Instead (Hebrews 12:5 says of hostility by sinners) "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every Son whom He receives. It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons." And for what purpose? (vs.10–11) "[God] disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."

God is so supremely in charge of this world that all that happens to Christians are ordered in such a way that they serve our good. Tribulation and distress and persecution and famine and nakedness and peril and sword all work together for the good of those who love God. So the hope of the believer is not that we will escape these things but that God will be faithful within them. "You meant it for evil," Joseph said to his brothers who had sold him into slavery, "But God meant it for good." In openness theology, God's knowledge is "dependant upon the creature." So God cannot possibly know the good or bad decisions of the people He creates until He creates these people and they in turn create their decisions. This does not seem all that open when compared with the mainstream Christian belief that "In God's sight all things are open and manifest, his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent of the creature, so as nothing is to Him contingent, or uncertain."

The first statement limits God and makes a more "open" reality for man. The second statement makes God limitless and yet still leaves man with a free will with a moral obligation to God and to his fellow man. The first is primarily about us, the second is primarily about God.

It seems that the openness of God is an attempt to humanise God and deify man. The idea that man can ever be free of God and His will at work in the world is an idea that is not supported by either history or scripture. Yes man has a free-will, but it is not free of ultimate accountability to God. Nothing can separate us or give us autonomy from the love of God which is expressed in Christ Jesus, not even an idea that God is guessing at the future as much as we are.

God's foreknowledge of the future is an intrinsic part of his glory. We seek guidance from God precisely because we believe He has a firm grasp on the future. We don't pray to change God's mind, we pray to gain His mind. Prayer and meditation is being attuned to God not trying to help Him see

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things our way!

In Isaiah 41:22–23 God challenges the other false idols of the age by saying, "Announce to us what is coming; declare the things that are going to come afterward, that we may know that you are gods." In this verse God is equating His ability to know the future with His divinity and the difference between false idols and demons and Himself. Satan is a created being as we are and knows neither the future nor the present decisions being made. Why would we want to bring God down to Satan's level unless it was to edify ourselves?

Isaiah 46:9–10 "Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, "My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure."

Now the argument could be made that God knows His purposes but does not know the purposes of man or demons. But this assumes that there are two classes of future events, those that God predestines and foreknows and those that He cannot know are coming, those that arise from human

and demonic choice. But if this were true then why does Isaiah not separate what God is planning to do and what man or demon will choose to do. Virtually all of God's judgements and deliverance's involve choices that humans would make as instruments of God's plan, see the examples above regarding Peter and Judas.

This is also where the first chapter of Matthew comes into play. The genealogy of Christ is proof that God has foreordained the birth of Christ and is directly involved in every aspect of it throughout all the world and every generation. One wrong choice in any of these generations and Jesus could never have fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament. Even the prophecies of the Old Testament show God's knowledge and foresight to be conclusive.

Within God's plan there is still free–will and moral accountability. Jesus' absolute knowledge that Peter would deny Him, how often he would do it, where he would do it and that he would repent never removes Peter's moral responsibility in the least, which is made plain by the fact that Peter weeps bitterly WHEN he remembers the words of Jesus' prediction. Peter didn't say, "Well you predicted this sin, so it had to take place, and so it can't have been an act of my free will, so I am not responsible for it!!" Instead he wept bitterly. He was guilty and he knew it. Jesus was glorious in the prediction, and Peter was guilty. This is why Jesus said before in John 13:19, "I am telling you before it comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am." This was His glory, and therefore a denial of Christ's foreknowledge would also be a denial of His deity.

The other belief held in the openness of God is that God did not foreknow the fall of man, or of angels and so could not know the great things which would coincide as a result of these events, such as His sending His son to die for the sins of the world. Neither did God know that Jesus' incarnation, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, nevermind the meticulous four thousand years before Christ came in which the world's stage was arranged in preparation for His coming. Neither would God foreknow Christ's second coming and the end of the age to be able to allow John to write down the

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Revelation for God's chosen people.

This cannot be chance, God knew it all along. God must have foreknown the fall of Adam and its terrible moral effect on mankind. Paul says, "[God] has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity." When you add this to the teaching of Paul in Ephesians 1:4–6, we can see that God's glory is linked to His foreknowledge and His deity. "[God] chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace."

It is of course ironic that the desire of openness theology is to have a God who can relate to us in time and space and have the same limitations as we do. Indeed, if all we knew about God was what he had revealed of himself to Moses and the prophets, we would be astonished by the very suggestion that the transcendent God that could not be looked upon had somehow taken human form and begun to live among us. According to the traditional Christian understanding of God, it is precisely in the person of Christ that the impassible, immutable, eternal God becomes passable, mutable, and temporal. We do not need to invent an 'open' conception of the divine nature in order to marvel at the "folly" of a risk taking, passible God; all we need to do is to contemplate Christ crucified.

So if God does not know our future, or our present (for that is where we actively bring our unknown choices from conceptualisation into the past) or what decisions we or demons make, He is actually

very limited indeed. He is in effect confined to the past, His own plans and musings and calculation of the probability of future events. This leaves God in a somewhat dire state. I would almost feel sorry for a God like that. Would He inspire awe and entice me to worship Him? I doubt it.

So how much does that leave to God? What percentage of the world and the future does God really know. If we were to talk of percentages, how much does that leave to God, 30%? This is the problem for any person who believes that God is limited to time. So the problem, then, is that God is cut out of the future entirely and only has what is old to work with, as one man said, all He has is fossils. It would be as foolish as us studying dinosaur bones to try and discover the future of our world. So He is confined to possibilities and probabilities, but He doesn't know actualities nor future certainties.

I do not think that that is a God I would like to love and serve. To do that would be to love only 30% of Him!.

"Prayer does not change God, but changes him who prays." Kierkegaard

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Aleck is a missionary and Christian, find out more about his work and ministry at www.god-life.com

Predestination

By Joyce C. Lock

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Predestination: some believe in it, some don't. Most enjoy the debate of it and are left straddling the fence because, at first glance, scripture seems to support both sides of the issue (being almost contradictory).

Since we know all God's Holy Word must be truth, if any of it is at all, perhaps the question that stems from the issues of predestination is a result of one's difficulty in interpretation and Satan getting pleasure in dividing us (as the author of confusion).

For those who have no idea what I'm writing about, the question is, "Do we have a choice in our salvation and every decision in our life, or are we puppets completing a play God has predestined us to fulfill? Scripture bares no contradiction once understood.

From the beginning of time, God (in His omnipotent powers) had the ability to foresee, foreknow, and look into the future. Every human was created by Him and He would love every one. Thus, even all the earth would cry out there is a God, extending the universal call to all that would receive. It was God's desire that no one would perish.

Knowing who'd carry the name "Christian", God had also seen their hearts and could choose whom He'd call for special areas of service into the future.

Being made in the image of God, we can relate to God's heart in that we were created first and foremost for the purpose of someone to love Him.

Without love being a choice, there would have been no purpose in our creation, no purpose in the cross of Calvary, as He already had a company of angels.

Once you've grown spiritually, had fellowship with God, and stood in His almighty presence, you'll never again doubt but what it was your choice. God knew what He was doing all along and there never was any confusion.

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In addition to being a published author and poet, Joyce C. Lock created the religion column, "Christianity Made Simple" for Peru Daily Tribune, continues to write inspirational articles for area newspapers, and shares further in online and e-mail ministries.



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