

THEISM: OPEN OR NOT?

I. A Description of Open Theism

The future exists partly as certainties (God determines) and partly as possibilities (humans bring about). The future is partly settled and partly open.

John Sanders, Huntington College, Indiana. Clark Pinnock, McMaster Divinity School, Ontario. Greg Boyd, Bethel College, Minnesota.

II. Scriptures Cited to Support Open Theism

A. O.T.

1. God changing His mind, Exod. 32:14 - *golden calf*
2. God surprised, Isa. 54
3. God testing His people, Exod. 16:4 *mannna*
4. Jonah

B. N.T.

1. Matt. 25:41; 26:39 - *cup pass*
2. Acts 15:7; 21:10-12 - *P to Jam.*
3. 2 Pet 3:9-12 - *not willing period*
4. Rev. 3:5; 22:18 - *add words*
erase book.

III. The Open View and Foreknowledge, Predestination and Sovereignty

pred. to adapt A. Open theism acknowledges that passages like Acts 2:23, 1 Peter 1:2, Romans 8:29, Ephesians 1:5, Revelation 17:8 concern things predetermined. But they don't extend to other parts of God's plan. What is the meaning of "foreknowledge?" The Open answer is that it expresses affection for those who join the community of God. God's foreknowledge does not mean certainty, but He foreknows the possibilities and waits on our choosing before He is certain. *predestined plan* *all to foreknow* *glorified*

B. Corporate election teaches God chose a group (the church) and that individuals are elect when and because they join the group. But notice Acts 13:48, Galatians 1:15, 2 Thessalonians 2:13 and 2 John 1. *appt to et life* *from work* *chosen from before* *chosen by (ch or vid)*

C. Open affirms belief in sovereignty of God :only if sovereignty does not involve "meticulous control." It includes "dynamic qualities" such as flexibility, spontaneity and creativity.

IV. Some Observations

- A. Is this Arminianism?
- B. What does Ephians 1:11 mean?
- C. What are the precise meanings of foreknow, predestine, and sovereign?
- D. Is there really free will in the closed view?

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to elect. Obviously the very idea of election has to include the idea of the greater number out of which they were chosen, and those who were not chosen were certainly passed by.

This in no sense implies that God delights in the destiny of the wicked, or that they are driven against their wills, or that the doctrine of election nullifies a whosoever Gospel, or that any individual can know he is not elect and thereby try to excuse himself for rejecting Christ. All are accountable to God for their attitude toward Christ.

III. THE DOCTRINE SUMMARIZED

A. God's Election Is Grounded in His Own Being

Therefore, the act of electing a people has to be compatible with all of His attributes. It is based on His omniscience, so that we may be assured that when He elected He did so knowing full well all of the alternative possibilities. It is related to the exercise of His sovereign will, so that He was in no way forced to do what He did. It was done by the God who is love, so that predestination was done in love (Eph. 1:4-5). It expressed His mercy; otherwise how could God have loved Jacob? (Rom. 9:15) It demonstrates His matchless grace (Eph. 2:7-8). And the ultimate purpose of election is to display His glory (1:6, 12, 14). Usually we put the emphasis on the fact that God *elects*. We need to remember that it is *God* who elects, and He can do nothing unloving or unjust.

B. God's Election Was of Individuals

This has already been discussed. He chose individuals who then together make up the people of God.

C. God's Election Was Not Based on Foreknowledge (Meaning Foresight)

To foreknow is not a neutral concept but involves some sort of relationship.

D. God's Election Was before the Foundation of the World

He did not choose us only after we chose Him (Eph. 1:4).

E. Election Alone Does Not Result in the Salvation of People

To be sure, election assures that those chosen will be saved, but it alone does not save them. People are saved through faith in the substitutionary death of Christ. And, of course, they must learn about the death of Christ somehow in order to have content to their faith. Thus election, the death of Christ, testimony of His death, and personal faith are all necessary in the salvation of an individual. Election alone does not save.

F. Election Is Purposeful, Not Capricious

Its purpose for us is service and good works (John 15:16; Gal. 1:15-16; Eph. 2:10; 1 Thes. 1:4-10).

Its purpose for God is to manifest His glory (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14).

Therefore, the doctrine of election is highly motivating and should never be deadening to one's spiritual life (Col. 3:12).

D. In the future Christ will:

... He is preparing a place for us (John 14:1-3)

... 1 Thes. 4:13-18

2 Tim 2:10

OPEN VIEW THEISM

DESCRIPTION OF THE VIEW

Believes that the future exists partly as certainties (future events which God sovereignly determines to bring about) and partly as possibilities (aspects of the future, which God sovereignly allows his creatures to bring about). Boyd: I unequivocally affirm that God possesses every divine perfection, including the attributes of omnipotence and omniscience the issue is not about the infallibility or fallibility of God's foreknowledge, but rather about the nature of the future, which God infallibly foreknows. Is it exclusively foreknown and predetermined by God, or does God determine some aspects of the future and sovereignly allow other aspects to remain open? "

Supporting Script. Lord changing his mind, Exod 32:14 (after golden calf); God surprised how things turned out (Isa. 5:4); God testing His people (Exod 16:4, manna); Jonah; Matt 25:41; 26:39; Acts 15:7; 21:10-12; 2 Peter 3:9-12; Rev. 3:5; 22:18. These are all of NT ref cited. He claims that classical theol interpret such passages as merely figurative (!) Boyd says he interprets them literally and so the future is partly open and partly settled. God plans and God responds and God changes. Future is exclusively settled (classic) or exclusively open (process theol).

Boyd and Prophecies

"Many aspects of the future are settled bec God has decided to settle them." Open view OK with this, but "asserts that not everything about the future is settled, and thus some of the future is perfectly known by God's possibilities (as "this" or "that") not actualities. Classic says these are anthropomorphisms. "some things are left up to free creatures to decide."

Boyd and foreknown and predestined plan of God

Acknowledges that verses like Acts 2:23, 1 Pet 1:1-2; Rom 8:29; Eph 1:5; Rev. 17:8 say things mentioned in these verses are predetermined. But Boyd says only those things are and doesn't extend to other items in plan of God. These vs don't say the future is exhaustively settled, only partially closed and partially open. Supports corporate election, not individual. Eph 1 says not that individuals are predestined to be saved but what happens to individuals after they bel. See Acts 13:48; Gal 1:15; 2 Thess 2:13; 2 Jn 1. To foreknow is to express affection for those who join the community of bel.

The Open View and the Sovereignty of God.

Doesn't open view deny the sovereignty of God? Boyd says "only if sovereignty is equated with "meticulous control." Open view believes that "God's sov consists of much more than mere control and includes dynamic qualities such as flexibility, spontaneity and creativity. These aspects of God's sov are meaningless if the future is exhaustively settled." Open view allows for ans prayer, transforming relationships. Then shifts o commonalties in open and closed view. To say opens deny God's foreknowledge of future is to misrepresent view, rather than acknowledging common sharing of incarnation, death, authority of Scrip, trinity.

What is the History of Open View?

More research needs to be done. Cites as teaching this 7 from 4th C on, but only one is in Oxford Dict and that is Adam Clarke, a Methodist who rejected Calvin's view of predest and who said Judas repented and was saved!

Can we really trust the God of the Open View?

"It's true that acc to Open view things can happen in our lives which God didn't plan or even foreknow with certainty(though he always foreknew they were possible). ... How does believing that every aggravated assault was ordained by God help you cope with this feat? ...If God doesn't control all things, however, then there is something you can do about it." Open view says that the future is in part not settled. God's omniscience means that God perfectly known possibilities as well as certainties. "As with all Arminians, I also hold that God limits the exercise of his own power by giving free will to whose whom he has created in his own image."

Some Observations

1. Arminian theology. Stresses man's free will and choices as things not settled in plans of God. Acknowledge man has choice (1 Cor 10:27), but what we choose is included in plan.
2. No mention in what I have read of Eph. 1:11. All included but in varying degrees of God's relationship to specific items. Direct, Acts 5; almost always man is subject to laws of nature Phil 2:30); hands off (Rom 1:24,26,28). But all included in plan and He chose which plan.
3. Sloppy use of predes. Rom 8:29. Sloppy meaning of foreknowledge. Includes some kind of relationship with ones foreknown. Not merely foreseeing.

IV. OBJECTIONS TO THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION

Of course election is only a part of the broader consideration of the entire decree or plan or sovereignty of God. These objections are the ones usually raised against that doctrine.

A. It Equals Fatalism

Popularly, this objection is expressed like this: "What's going to be is going to be anyway, and I cannot do anything about it." There are two very important differences between the biblical doctrine of the decree of God and the false teaching of fatalism. (1) Behind the decree is an intelligent, loving Being. Behind fatalism lies only impersonal blind chance. (2) Fatalism has no place for the importance of means. It only emphasizes ends. The decree of God includes all the means essential to arriving at the ends. And those means are as essential as the ends. Thus the biblical doctrine gives proper place to human responsibility. What's going to be is going to be through certain means and procedures and responsible human actions. Ephesians 1:11 spotlights all things, not solely ends.

B. It Is Inconsistent with Human Freedom

This is the same objection raised in Romans 9:18: why can God fault anyone since no one really resists His will if everything is part of His plan? Though it is true that God has the right to do anything consistent with His nature, it is equally true that He has chosen to exercise His rights by including the responsible and relatively free actions of people. I say relatively free simply because no one has absolute freedom if for no other reason than the limitations of being fallen human creatures. He has made us responsible, and when we fail to act responsibly we are justly blamed.

An illustration: does God know the day you are going to die? The answer is yes, He does. Question: could you die a day sooner? The answer is no. Question: then why do you eat? Answer: to live. The means of eating is essential to the end of living to the preordained day of death. From this point on the illustration can easily and uselessly get into the realm of the hypothetical. Suppose I do not eat? Then I will die. Would that be the day God planned that I should die? These are questions that do not need to be asked or answered. Just eat.

Or to change the illustration. Has God planned the answers to my prayers? Yes. Then why pray? Because those answers come when I pray.

Or again. Does God know who are elect? Of course, He elected them. Can any of them be lost? No. Then why pray and witness? Because that is how they will be saved. Will any of them fail to believe? No. Then why do they have to believe? Because that is the only way they can be saved, and unless they do believe they will not be saved. Do not let your mind ask the theoretical and useless questions. Let your mind and your life concentrate on doing what is God's will and making sure you act responsibly.

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Rom 1:24, 6, 8
Acts 5

C. It Makes God the Author of Sin

I think we must acknowledge that God did construct a plan which included sin, and did not include it as a surprise. Yet we must guard the clear teaching of Scripture that God hates sin (Ps. 5:5), that He is never responsible for our committing sin (James 1:13), and that including sin in His plan does not make it somehow less sinful and us less culpable.

All that the Bible says about the concrete appearance of sin in creatures is that it was found in Satan (Ezek. 28:15). Isaiah 45:7 may refer to God's including evil in His plan, or some understand the verse to refer to the results of sin like calamity. Proverbs 16:4 teaches also that all things are included in God's plan. We must seek a balance in this truth and live with the unresolved tensions.

Finally, face the ramification of all things not being included in one way or another in God's plan. This would mean that there were things outside of His control, and that is a frightening idea.

Listen to these words of Calvin.

47 221

"Herein appears the immeasurable felicity of the godly mind. Innumerable are the evils that beset human life; innumerable too the deaths that threaten it. We need not go beyond ourselves; since our body is the receptacle of a thousand diseases—in fact holds within itself and fosters the causes of diseases—a man cannot go about unburdened by many forms of his own destruction, and without drawing out a life enveloped, as it were, with death. For what else would you call it, when he neither freezes nor sweats without danger? Now, wherever you turn, all things around you not only are hardly to be trusted but almost openly menace, and seem to threaten immediate death. Embark on a ship; you are one step away from death. Mount a horse; if one foot slips, your life is imperiled. Go through the city streets; you are subject to as many dangers as there are tiles on the roofs. If there is a weapon in your hand or a friend's, harm awaits. All the fierce animals you see are armed for your destruction. But if you try to shut yourself up in a walled garden, seemingly delightful, there a serpent sometimes lies hidden. Your house, continually in danger of fire, threatens in the daytime to impoverish you, at night even to collapse upon you. Your field, since it is exposed to hail, frost, drought, and other calamities, threatens you with barrenness, and hence, famine. I pass over poisonings, ambushes, robberies, open violence, which in part besiege us at home, in part dog us abroad. Amid these tribulations must not man be most miserable, since, but half alive in life, he weakly draws his anxious and languid breath, as if he had a sword perpetually hanging over his neck?

"You will say: these events rarely happen, or at least not all the time, nor to all men, and never all at once. I agree; but since we are warned by the examples of others that these can also happen to ourselves, and that our life ought not to be excepted any more than theirs, we cannot but be frightened and terrified as if such events were about to happen to us.

What, therefore, more calamitous can you imagine than such trepidation? Besides, it is an insult to God to say that He has exposed man, the noblest of His creatures, to the blindness and temerity of fortune" (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I, XVII, 10).

Then join with Paul in his magnificent doxology which comes at the conclusion of his lengthy and detailed section on election when he wrote: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:33-36).

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