

## MY GOD AND THEIR GOD

A new movement has recently appeared on the horizon. Some scholars within evangelicalism contend that God does not know most of what will happen in the future. Such a view is defended in a book edited by Clark Pinnock titled *The Openness of God* which is published by InterVarsity, and Victor Books has published a more popular book by Greg Boyd titled *Letters to a Skeptic*. These scholars insist that the doctrine of God's omniscience is not threatened because God knows everything that can possibly be known, but future free choices of human agents cannot be known because they are not yet "real." Proponents of this new view say that if God knew the future choices of human beings, then these choices would be determined, and if these choices were determined, then human beings would not be genuinely free. Thus, most of the future is "open" even to God since human freedom would be eliminated if he knew infallibly what we would choose to do in the future.

Openness advocates compare their novel understanding of God's omniscience with the traditional view of God's omnipotence. Can God make a creature which is stronger than he? If he cannot, then he cannot do everything. If he can, then he would no longer be God. The traditional response to this is to say that God cannot do anything that is logically impossible, or better, God cannot do anything which would deny his own deity. So too, those who defend the idea that God does not know the future choices of human beings say that God cannot know anything which is logically impossible. And, they say, it is logically impossible for human freedom to be maintained and for God at the same time to know infallibly what free human beings will do in the future.

What should be our response to this novel teaching? We should recognize first of all that it is truly novel. No confessional group has ever espoused such a doctrine. Roman Catholics,

Orthodox Groups, and Protestants have consistently taught that God knows everything that will happen in the future. Such agreement does not prove the traditional view is correct, but we should be highly suspicious of any new teaching which departs from what all Christians have confessed throughout all of church history. Indeed, the only proponents of this view I have found in history are the pagan Cicero and the heretical Socinians.

The most serious problem with the new "openness" teaching is that it contradicts the scripture. Their God does not hold the whole world in his hands. My God holds the whole world in his hands, and he so rules and superintends over the world that not even a sparrow falls apart from his will (Matt. 10:29-30). My God knows all that will happen in the future. Their God merely makes good guesses about what will happen. My God ordains all my days since they were written in his book before I even existed (Ps. 139:16). Their God does not know for sure whether I will be alive tomorrow, for some deranged person may suddenly decide that he wants to kill me. Their God would be genuinely sorry to see me die, but he cannot prevent bad things from happening to me, and he certainly does not "know" what will happen.

I pray to my God, knowing that he intervenes in the lives of people. I ask my God to save people and to grant them repentance because I know that salvation is a gift of God (2 Tim. 2:25). Their God cannot violate another person's free will, and thus there is no reason to ask him to save other people. Their God wants people to be saved, but he does not and cannot do much to see that anyone enters the kingdom. I pray because I believe my God rules over the world. If I believed in their God, I suppose prayer would help me feel better about things, but I would never expect God to intervene in the lives of other people.

I know my God is in control of history, that he will destroy evil in the end, and bring in his kingdom. I know this because he declared the end at the beginning (Isa. 46:10) and will

accomplish all things according to his will (Eph. 1:11). Their God does not know the end from the beginning, and not even God can guarantee when and how history will end. My God prescribed the life of Christ before the foundation of the world and fulfilled his prophecies about Christ's life, ministry, death, and resurrection. They say that their God prophesied these things too. But how did he do this if their God does not know the future free decisions of human beings? How could God be sure that Judas and Pilate would not change their minds at the last minute? And if the openness advocates say that the death of Christ is an exception in which God predetermined what Judas and Pilate would do, then why would God hold them guilty since, according to openness proponents, they would no longer be acting freely?

The new God which does not know most of the future is not the God of historic orthodoxy or the Bible. Nor is he a God whom we can worship. I believe Roger Nicole is correct when he warns that the doctrine of original sin will be the next target for openness advocates. Readers, "remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, 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. 46:9-10 RSV).

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