Open Theism
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Introduction

Suppose that you had a friend from college, we'll call her Suzanne, who was raised in a wonderful Christian home and from her youth had passionate aspirations to be a missionary somewhere in Asia. Suppose Suzanne also wanted to marry a man with a similar vision—a man who longed to raise a family in the midst of following the onerous call of missions life. In this scenario you have prayed with your friend Suzanne for many years both about her "calling" and about a particular young man that she began dating her freshman year. After several years both you and her and him and many others felt a "yes" that they should move ahead in marriage and, shortly after college, they did marry. Following their call, after college they went to missionary training school to prepare for their career in Southeast Asia.

All was going well until, in one horrifying moment, Suzanne discovered that her husband was involved in an adulterous relationship with another woman at the school. After being discovered, he repents. But alas, in a few short months he's unfaithful again, and then again, and then again, and this state of "affairs" continues on for the next three years. During those years Suzanne's husband becomes hostile to Suzanne to the point of being verbally and physically abusive. In one fit of rage he strikes her face and actually breaks her cheek bone. He then leaves her, three months pregnant, divorces her, and moves in with his lover.

Suzanne is emotionally crushed, dejected, and terribly lonely. She is also angry—angry with her former husband, angry with herself, and especially angry with God. How
could God have set her up with such a man? In her depression, she turns to her pastor for answers, and he comforts her with these words: "Don't be mad at God, Suzanne. It wasn't his fault. He gave you the best and wisest advice he could. He just didn't realize what kind of a monster your husband would become. If he would have known, he would have told you so. Take comfort in the fact that God is looking out for you, and that he did his best with what he knew at the time."

This scenario, now famously known as the "Suzanne Story" in theological circles, is presented in Gregory Boyd's book *God of the Possible.*\(^1\) It is based on a true story, one in which Boyd suggests that his response—of God not knowing the future actions of Suzanne's husband—was a very helpful way to resolve this terrible tragedy in the life of a woman in his church. It is a view about God and the future typically referred to as the "Openness of God" view, or "Open Theism," and it is one that is rapidly growing in many circles in the United States and Europe.\(^2\) It is not merely an ethereal theological position held by a few high and lofty theologians in seminaries and graduate schools, but now a number of pastors and lay people in multiple denominations hold to some form of Open Theism.

In this chapter I intend to provide a fair and balanced overview and analysis of this view. I should mention at the outset that I realize my own epistemological limitations. That is to say, I realize that I am fallible and that most likely not everything I believe to be true is in fact true. I could be mistaken. I have been mistaken before, and in the future I'll probably discover that some of my current beliefs are false.

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\(^1\) Gregory Boyd, *God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 103-06.

Be that as it may, as I reflect on this issue and search the scriptures and the thoughtful work of others, it seems to me that there are multiple problems and concerns with the Openness view. As you examine the arguments and evidences presented here, judge for yourself what is true and right and good.

**Brief Overview of Openness Doctrine**

To begin, then, it is important to first describe what Open Theists espouse. There are differing points of view among the various Openness theologians and philosophers, and so I'd like to hone in on a central issue that unifies them all. *All Open Theists allege that God does not know which future contingent events will occur.* Now we need to clarify several issues at this point. Openness proponents are not claiming that God knows no future events. He does know several kinds of things regarding the future. He knows how he will respond to certain human actions such as sin and love. He knows future events that are *causally determined* from previous ones (e.g., future earthquakes based on his infallible knowledge of plate tectonics and other factors); he knows his own future actions (e.g., "I will rescue my people Israel in 400 years", etc.); and since he has infallible knowledge of all present and past events, he knows everything that can be known about the future which can be *inferred* from the past and present (e.g., he knows that Sadam Hussein will not be president of the United States in 2010; that Madonna will not be Czar of Russia after a surprise marriage to Vladimir Putin); and he knows many other things which can be inferred from his infallible present knowledge.

What God does not know for sure, according to Openness proponents, are future contingent events. But what are they? Future contingent events are future events that are not causally determined by present events. Future human actions would be prime
examples of future contingent events. For example, God does not know for sure what I will have for dinner tonight, or what Hilary Clinton will decide to do about inflation if elected president, or which terrorists will attempt to bomb a major U.S. city in 2012 (if at all), and so on.

God not only does not know for sure what \textit{will} happen in such situations as these, but he also does not know for sure what \textit{would} happen given other conditions in such situations. This latter kind of knowledge is referred to as "conditional future contingent events." An example of this would be that not only does God not know for sure who will win the next presidential election, he does not know what that person would do about various situations in the Middle East if he or she were to win, but doesn't. At best God knows what he or she \textit{could} do in future situations, but not what that person \textit{would} do if faced with them.

As a result of what God does and does not know, he is ignorant of virtually all of humanity's future. He knows future possibilities but not future realities; he knows what could happen but not what will happen. He is a very good guesser, to be sure, and his guesses or predictions are based on infallible present knowledge, but he sometimes gets things wrong. Thus, he can make assessments about our future actions based on our present character, but sometimes he is mistaken and surprised (as in the Suzanne story). Now God's being surprised is taken by Openness proponents as an asset, not a liability. For since God does not know the future, he must take risks, and on their view a risk-taking God is better than a non-risk-taking God.
The Case for Divine Foreknowledge

There are three types of evidence that will be evaluated in order to determine the plausibility of the Openness position in contrast to the traditional or classical view of God's foreknowledge: biblical, historical, and philosophical. The order of these three is not random. For evangelicals, biblical evidence, it seems to me, should be given more weight than the other two. After all, evangelicals maintain that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God, and while our interpretations of it are fallible, it is the basis of our theological knowledge.

Evangelicals also maintain that God has been working through his Church from its inception—he is leading her and his guiding hand has been directing her all along. He led the councils and discussions that agreed upon the canon, and he raised up men and women to protest theological corruption—Christian giants such as Justin Martyr, Athanasius, Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, John Calvin, John Wesley, Teresa of Avila, and many more. That doesn't mean that they were right about everything, but they were generally unified about the central issues regarding the nature and work of God. If we are to veer from views that they agreed upon, it should be done with tremendous caution, trepidation, and substantial rationale.

Finally, we'll examine the question of which view of foreknowledge is most philosophically plausible. Openness proponents typically maintain that there is a dichotomy here such that if God foreknows our future actions, then they cannot be free actions. But, since we do have free will, on their account, God must not know what those future actions/decision will be. So the philosophical evidence for the Openness position will also be evaluated. Let's begin, though, with the biblical evidence.
Biblical Evidence

God’s foreknowledge, as mentioned in the Bible, can be divided into two kinds: his knowledge of what will happen and his knowledge of what would happen. First, we shall examine several passages dealing with God’s foreknowledge of the former kind, and we will begin in the Old Testament. Consider the first four verses of Daniel 11:

And in the first year of Darius the Mede, I arose to be an encouragement and a protection for him. And now I will tell you the truth. Behold, three more kings are going to arise in Persia. Then a fourth will gain far more riches than all of them; as soon as he becomes strong through his riches, he will arouse the whole empire against the realm of Greece. And a mighty king will arise, and he will rule with great authority, and do so as he pleases. But as soon as he has arisen, his kingdom will be broken up and parceled out toward the four points of the compass, though not to his own descendants, nor according to his authority which he wielded; for his sovereignty will be uprooted and given to others besides them.

Notice the variety of free will activity in this prophetic passage. There are many examples in the Old Testament of God foreknowing the future actions of human beings—actions which were freely accomplished and yet were prophesied to happen.

The prophet Isaiah uses this kind of knowledge as a demonstration that God is, in fact, the true God. For example, in Isaiah 44:6-8, it says this:

Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: "I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides me. And who is like me? Let him proclaim and declare it. Yes, let him recount it to Me in order, from the time that I established the ancient nation. And let them declare to them the things that are coming and the events that are going to take place. Have I not long since announced it to you and declared it? And you are my witnesses.

In another passage, the prophet notes that idols are not real gods, for they can do nothing, neither good nor evil, let alone tell what future events are to come. That ability falls to Yahweh alone; he’s the one true God (Isaiah 41:21-24).

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4 All scriptural references are taken from the New American Standard translation. Of course, some critical scholars won’t be happy with reference to Daniel as being literally prophetic.
The future isn't moving along here haphazardly based merely on the mere whims of free creatures with God unawares. Rather, God establishes nations and rulers and he knows the future in such a way that he is both involved in it and can declare what is to come.

But God's knowledge of the future is not limited to only what will happen. It isn't merely what is referred to as “simple foreknowledge.” He also knows what would happen given different future scenarios. For example, in I Samuel 23: 6-13, the prophet describes a scenario in which Saul was intending attack David and his men at a city called Keilah. David then inquires of God, through Abiathar the priest, whether the people of the city will surrender David into Saul's hand if, and when, Saul attacks. God informs him that they will indeed do this if he remains in the city. So, we see here that God knew that if David were to remain in Keilah, then Saul and his men would come after him, and if Saul were to come after him, then the men of Keilah would hand David over to Saul. These events did not happen, for David fled Keilah. So it was not that God foreknew merely what was going to happen, but what would happen given the various future possibilities. This kind of foreknowledge is incredible, to say the least.

In the New Testament we also see the notion of God's foreknowledge mentioned and described on a number of occasions. For example, Peter notes that the Old Testament prophets foretold the sufferings and glory of Christ in I Peter 1:11. Peter also refers to groups of believers in Asia, Galatia, and elsewhere as being "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (I Peter 1:1-2). Likewise, Paul states in Romans 8:29 that those "whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son." Jesus himself has foreknowledge of future events that entail human

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5 For more on simple foreknowledge, see David Hunt, "The Simple-Foreknowledge View" in James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, eds., Divine Foreknowledge, 65-118.

6 See also Jeremiah 38: 17-18.
freedom. For example, in his Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:1-25:46) he tells his disciples about the times and signs of the destruction of the temple. During the Passover meal, he also foretells his betrayal—a free and sinful future action by Judas.⁷

There are many other examples of God’s foreknowledge of both future contingent events and conditional future contingent events scattered throughout the Old and New Testaments, but this is ample evidence to demonstrate that the Bible does teach that God has such knowledge.⁸

**Historical Evidence**

While the biblical evidence should be the primary focus of theological issues such as this one, the views of the Church Fathers, as they are often called, should also be taken into consideration and included as providing either evidential support or detriment. Regarding the issue of divine foreknowledge, the early church was not silent. For example, Justin Martyr (c. 100-165)⁹, in reference to prophecy, refers to "God foreknowing all that shall be done by all men"¹⁰ (italics added). Irenaeus (c. 120-202), in his *Against Heresies*, emphasizes that God foreknows all things, including those people who would not believe.¹¹ Tertullian (c. 150-212) proclaims that God foreknows all events, and that this foreknowledge "has for its witness as many prophets as it inspired".

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⁸ For more on this, see Millard J. Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It: The Current Controversy Over Divine Foreknowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), chapter two. See also William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God*.

⁹ All dates are AD.


¹¹ 4.29.2.
(Against Marcion 2.5). He's right, for we could include Cyprian, Clement of Alexandria, Athanasius, Origen, Hippolytus, and many others from the first several centuries of the church.

Interestingly, God's foreknowledge, as described by many of these seminal figures of early church history, does not imply divine determinism. Rather, it is based on knowing what his free creatures will choose to do, and what they would choose to do given different circumstances (cf. Justin Martyr, First Apology XLV-LIII; Athanasius, Four Discourses Against the Arians III.30; Irenaeus, Against Heresies XXXVII, 4.29).12

The later medieval theologians and apologists were also united in holding that God knows all past, present, and future events. Augustine (354-430), often referred to as the greatest and most influential theologian after the Apostle Paul, wrote prolifically about the nature and knowledge of God. Regarding God's foreknowledge he states that "His vision is utterly unchangeable. Thus, He comprehends all that takes place in time—the not-yet existing future, the existing present, and the no-longer-existing past..."13

Augustine also argues that God's knowledge of the future "cannot be deceived" and yet that human beings have freedom of will to act sinfully.14 Similarly, Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033-1109) defended both God's absolute foreknowledge of all future events and maintained that many of these future events occur through the free will of human agents.15 And ol' Aquinas (1224-1274) should not be forgot. He argued that not

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12 In their excellent work, God's Strategy in Human History (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000), Paul Marston and Roger Forster Forster note that the pre-Augustinian theological tradition was united in holding to freedom of the will, and they quote numerous theologians from the first several centuries of the church to support their claim.
13 City of God (and edition), 11.21.
14 Ibid., 5.10.
only does God know what will happen, but what would happen given different scenarios.\footnote{16 Summa Theologica (any edition), I Q14.}

This view of God's infallible foreknowledge continued on through the Reformation era as well. Both Luther (1483-1546) and Calvin (1509-1564), for example, were in full agreement with the earlier theologians that God foreknows all events, as were Jacob Arminius (1560-1609) and Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758).\footnote{17 See Martin Luther's Bondage of the Will (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell Co, Reprint edition, April 1990), 80-81; John Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.21-22; Jacobus Arminius's The Works of Arminius (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, Reprint edition, 1986), 2.28; and Jonathan Edwards' The Works of Jonathan Edwards, T. Edwards, ed. (New York: Garland, 1987), 11.4.111.} The list goes on and on. Detractors are rare, and are usually described as unorthodox, if not something worse. Thus, within the historic Christian Church, until recent times, there has basically been universal agreement among theologians and philosophers on the idea that God's absolute and infallible knowledge covers all past, present, and future events. Again, the unanimity on this issue does not guarantee its truthfulness. But it should at least cause us to be wary of its denial.

\textit{Philosophical Evidence}

Having considered biblical evidence for God's foreknowledge as well as noting the widespread agreement of the Church Fathers on the topic, we will next explore philosophical reasons for believing in divine foreknowledge. It has been held by most all Christian theologians from the beginning of the church that God is omniscient, meaning that he knows all things that are proper objects of knowledge—that is to say, he knows all truths. No doubt, to maintain that God is ignorant of some truth or set of truths seems oxymoronic, if not downright blasphemous. And, since there are truths about future
contingent events (e.g., truths about future free human actions), God must know those truths. An argument for God’s knowing future free human actions, then, can be put succinctly in the following steps:

1. God is omniscient.
2. An omniscient being knows all truths.
3. Therefore God knows all truths.
4. There are truths about future contingent events (e.g., future free human actions).
5. Therefore, God knows all truths about future contingent events (e.g., future free human actions).  

This argument is valid, which means that if steps 1-4 are true, then the conclusion must also be true.

Openness proponents deny the conclusion that God knows all truths about future free human actions. But to deny this, one must deny one of the four steps. Typically those in the Openness camp will not deny God’s omniscience; they will not deny, that is, steps 1-3. So, this leaves step 4 that there are truths about future free human actions, and in fact this is the step most frequently challenged. The argument takes a number of forms, but the most persuasive of them goes something like this. "God is omniscient, which means that God knows all truths. But future free human actions are not truths. Since the future does not yet exist, there are no truths about the future. So, while God does not know future free human actions, that does not mean that he isn’t omniscient. He is omniscient, for he knows everything that can be known. Since the future doesn’t exist, it cannot be known even by an omniscient being."

The response to this challenge to the traditional view of God's omniscience quickly leads into a philosophical jungle that one should enter into slowly and with the machetes of an unwearied mind and a wary eye. In entering this jungle, it will be helpful

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18 A variation of this argument is offered by William Lane Craig in his What Does God Know (Norcross, GA: RZIM, 2002), 18-19.
to first probe into the meaning of the word "true." We can begin with a familiar example. The statement that "George W. Bush is President of the United States on March 10th, 2006" is true. But what does it mean to say that this statement is true? It means that the statement (more precisely, the proposition represented by the statement) corresponds to the fact that George W. Bush is President on this day. Truth is thus a correspondence between a statement (proposition) and a fact.¹⁹

Further, statements are either true or false, and they are either past-tense, present-tense, or future-tense. So, it is either true or false that George W. Bush is President of the United States on March 10th, 2006. And, of course, we know that it's true. So far so good. But what is interesting is that facts—those things that make statements (propositions) true—can refer to issues of the past, the present, or the future. Consider this statement: "John Kerry did lose the Presidential election in 2004." Is this statement true? Of course it is (to the glee of some and the chagrin of others). But notice that it is a past fact that makes it true. It is true that John Kerry did lose the Presidential election in 2004. Thus, it is an event in the past, a past fact, that makes the statement true.

Similarly, consider this statement: "Iraq will have a communist government in 2025." This statement, too, must be either true or false. Obviously we don't know whether it's true or false, but that is beside the point. It is one or the other. And what makes it either true or false is what form the future government of Iraq turns out to be—a future fact.

Openness proponents have challenged, in different ways, this view that future-tense contingent statements are either true or false. What I take to be the most reasonable challenge is the view that they are neither true nor false, but indeterminate. So, on this

¹⁹ This is referred to as the "correspondence theory" of truth. For an advanced treatment of truth theories, see Richard Kirkham, Theories of Truth (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1992).
view, it is neither true nor false that Iraq will have a communist government in 2025; rather, it is indeterminate. But this view leads to a number of difficulties. First, if future-tense statements are neither true nor false, then past-tense statements cannot be true or false either, for what makes the one true (or false) is the same thing that makes the other true (or false); namely, a fact referring to the past or a fact referring to the future. The past no longer exists, and the future is yet to exit. To give up on the one is to give up on the other. But surely no one wants to claim that it is neither true nor false that John Kerry lost the election in 2004. Consider another example:

1. "It will rain tomorrow" (asserted on April 12th).
2. "It did rain yesterday" (asserted on April 14th).

Notice that both 1 and 2 make the same claim about the facts—rain on April 13th. Philosopher William Lane Craig comments: "Think about it for a moment. If ‘It is raining today is now true,’ how could ‘It will rain tomorrow’ not have been true yesterday? The same facts make a future-tense statement asserted earlier, a present-tense statement asserted simultaneously, and a past-tense statement asserted later all true" (italics mine).

Further, to deny that future-tense truths are either true or false leads to other problematic consequences. Consider the following example: "Hilary Clinton either will or will not run for the Presidency in the 2012 election." Does it make sense to maintain that this statement is neither true nor false since it is a future-tense statement? Clearly not. It is true. But what makes it true? That Hilary either will or will not run for the Presidency.

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20 This example is taken from Nicholas Rescher, Many-Valued Logic (New York: McGraw Hill, 1969), 2-3, as quoted in William Lane Craig, The Only Wise God, 58.
21 Ibid.
So what have we gained here? We've demonstrated that it is more plausible than not to believe that there are truths about future contingent events, which again is step 4 in our argument. Given, then, that we agree with steps 1-4, the conclusion 5—that God knows all truths about future contingent events (such as future free human actions)—must also be true.22

Practical and Theological Concerns

Having sketched out Open Theism and examined reasons for affirming God's foreknowledge, we shall now look briefly at several concerns that arise from Openness Theology. The concerns focused on here fall into four categories, the first two having to do with practical issues and the latter two having to do with theological ones.

Lack of Confidence in Divine Guidance

On the Openness view, God does not know our future. Not only does he not know where you will have dinner tonight, for example, he does not know for sure where you’ll be next week, or what your life and career will look like in the next five, ten, or twenty years. On such a view of God, how can we be assured that he will give us the right advice about any future matter of significance? Just like he was wrong about Suzanne's husband, we cannot be assured that he will be right about any particular future situation which involves human beings (as most of them do!).

Suppose, then, that you are in the midst of making a life-changing decision. Perhaps it has to do with your job, or your family, or a friendship. You’re wondering what the best direction is in a given scenario; which of two jobs you should choose, for example. As you consider your decision, you ask God for help. But he doesn’t know

22 Craig insightfully addresses these issues in his The Only Wise God, 58-65.
how things are going to turn out either. Perhaps in a year your boss, at job #1, is going to
dislike you for whatever reason and fire you without warning, even though God doesn't
want this to happen. Suppose he's also going to make up wicked and shameful lies about
you—lies which will seriously damage your character and career, and even create stress
and difficulty in your marriage. As a result, your effectiveness significantly decreases. If
job take job #2, however, in one year your boss is going to promote you to another level,
express kindness toward you and your family, and your effectiveness at work and
elsewhere will continue to increase.

Now, of course God, being God, could force the boss at job #1 to like you against
his free will, and to not fire you. On the Openness view God could start overriding
people's free will to accomplish his purposes in your life. But now we're back to
denying free will, which is something that Openness defenders have been attempting to
avoid (and for good reason). On this view of God, for him to accomplish many (if not
most) things he may want to accomplish, he is going to have to ride roughshod over
people's choices and decisions. He would have to do this, that is, unless he's like the
God of the Deists in which he sits back and watches the world unfold. But how could we
trust a God who either doesn't know the future or who merely watches our lives from a
distance?

One leading Open theist responds to the problem this way: "Accordingly we must
acknowledge that divine guidance, from our perspective, cannot be considered a means of
discovering exactly what will be best in the long run..."23 Imagine a God that could not
be trusted about giving us sure guidance for the future; a God who is doing the best he

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23 David Basinger, "Practical Implications," in Clark Pinnock, et al., The Openness of God,
can but simply makes mistakes when it comes to future judgments. 24 This is, I think, a
view of God that is less than the one portrayed in the Bible. 25

Loss of Divine Comfort

Not only does such a view of God's foreknowledge seem to be a diminishing of
what he truly knows, but it also tends to create an uneasiness and loss of comfort in an
individual when he or she views God in this way. Rather than comforting Suzanne, for
example, it seems that it would create even more discomfort in her to think that God
makes mistakes. I can imagine her thinking to herself, "I thought I could pray to God for
guidance about the man I should marry, but even he gets things wrong!"

After giving a brief overview of Open Theism to the faculty and staff of the
college where I teach, one of the campus counselors came up to talk with me about this
issue. She has been counseling for a long time, and here are her words to me: "I've met
with people for many years who have very deep wounds and hurts, and the last thing they
need is a lesser God!" She told me to make sure that I inform as many people as I can
that this Openness view of God's not knowing our future, from a practical counseling
perspective, is extremely unhelpful and potentially dangerous.

Contrary to Open Theism, we needn't worry when we seek guidance from our
great and glorious God that he might be mistaken. He simply doesn't make mistakes.

Denial of Certain Biblical Prophecies

24 John Sanders, in his The God Who Risks, 205, writes, "Is it possible for God to have mistaken beliefs
about the future? The traditional theological answer is that God cannot, but there are several biblical texts
that seem to affirm that what God thought would happen did not come about (for example, Jeremiah 3:7,
19-20)." Boyd makes a similar inference in his God of the Possible, 60.
25 For more on this issue, see Bruce A. Ware, God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism
One of the most difficult issues for Openness proponents is the long list of biblical prophecies that appear to clearly entail that God knows the future. A few were mentioned earlier, but I’d like to focus on one that is problematic on the Openness account for several reasons. In Luke 22:34 Jesus prophecies to Peter: "I say to you, Peter, the cock will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know me." This prophecy poses an interesting dilemma for the Openness adherent, for how did Jesus know this information? One response could be that God knew Peter’s inner character so well that he simply inferred how Peter would respond. But this answer is problematic for several reasons. First, how did God predict that there would be three temptations before the rooster crowed? How did he know that the people who did tempt Peter would tempt him, and tempt him at the very times in which they did tempt him? One could say that God caused them to tempt Peter those three times, but the Bible says that God tempts no one (James 1:13). Since the free will of the tempters is also involved, on the Openness view God could not have known where they would be at those very times and precisely how they would respond to Peter as he approached them (or even whether Peter would approach them).

Second, how did God know that Peter would deny Jesus rather than simply run away from his tempters? After all, Peter had just run away that very night when the mob came and took Jesus to the chief priests and elders. One could hold that a person’s character is so determinative of how he or she will act that since God knows our present

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26 This is, in fact, Boyd’s view. See his God of the Possible, 35-37. Sanders, in his The God Who Risks, 135-36, holds that this prophecy of Jesus is conditional; that is, Peter could have chosen not to betray Jesus those three times even given Jesus’ claim that he would. Sanders here also mentions as a possibility for Openness proponents the view that God foreordained the temptations to occur. This concession is quite surprising given the arguments frequently leveled against Calvinists, by Open Theists, for holding such a position.
character he can predict infallibly our future actions. And so with Peter, God simply predicted infallibly what he would do based on Peter’s character. But this leads to two further problems.

First, such a view of character is deterministic, and determinism is a position that Openness defenders want to avoid. One of the central elements of Openness theology is a strong view of the freedom of the human will, what's referred to as "libertarian freedom." But the view that our actions are determined by our character is contrary to a libertarian view of free will. A second problem here is that this view of the determinative power of one's character causes difficulties for Openness theologians in another passage in the Bible. In Genesis 22:12, after Abraham had lifted the knife to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice on the altar in obedience to God, it says this: "And [God] said, 'Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me'" (italics added). Openness theologians frequently use this passage as an example of God not knowing the future.

But how can they say, on the one hand, that God knows our character so well that he can predict our actions (like in the Peter case), and yet maintain that God needs to see us act before he knows our character and before he knows what we will do (like in the Abraham case)? You cannot have it both ways. Either (1) our character determines our actions and God knows our character so well that he can infallibly predict our actions based on our character; or (2) God knows our character very well but since we have free will we can freely choose to act contrary to our character. If the Openness proponent chooses answer (1), then he can explain Peter's denials of Jesus, but he will have to give up libertarian free will and will have to give up the argument from Genesis 22 that God
did not know Abraham's inner character or how he was going to act with his son Isaac until he actually raised the knife to kill him.

On the other hand, if the Openness proponent chooses answer (2), then he can explain how God did not know whether Abraham was faithful until he actually took the knife in his hand and lifted it up to kill his son. But he cannot then explain how God knew for sure that Peter was going to deny Jesus, and deny him three times, until he was actually in the process of denying Him.\(^{27}\)

It seems very clear. Either we have free will or we don't. If we do, then we are not deterministically bound by our character; we can act contrary to our character if we so choose. If this is true, then God can know our future actions only through divine foreknowledge, not through an inference or deduction based on our current character states. It seems that the most plausible explanation for Jesus knowing that Peter would freely deny him three times is that he had foreknowledge of what Peter was going to do.

At this point, a question is likely looming in your mind: "What about the passage just cited in Genesis 22 about God 'now' knowing that Abraham fears Him after he raised the knife to kill his son?" Does this mean that God really did not know what Abraham was going to do? This leads to the last concern that I'd like to raise regarding Open Theism.

**Faulty Hermeneutic**

It is recognized by virtually all theologians that the Bible, on occasion at least, uses what's called anthropomorphic language. Anthropomorphic language is language

\(^{27}\) This appears to be Boyd's view, since he argues vociferously that God tests people in order to know what is in their heart. See his chapter "The Open Theism View" in James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, eds., *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 31-33.
that describes God as having human characteristics, but the language is not meant to be
taken literally in such cases. Rather, God is using human-like terms which are often
contextually relative to the culture of those with whom he is communicating, and he is
doing this for the purpose of communicating in ways people can understand.

Mormon theologians, however, often take such passages literally in order to make
their case that God the Father is an exalted man. They use, for example, passages such as
Exodus 7:5 where the Lord says he will “stretch out my hand on Egypt,” Numbers 6:24
which states that “the Lord make his face shine upon you,” Psalm 34:15 which proclaims
that “the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous,” and 1 Kings 5:3, where the Lord put
his enemies under his feet. Given these passages, and others like them, Mormons argue
that it is evident that God has a face, hands, eyes, and feet. God is an exalted man! But
interestingly, they don’t use Psalm 57:1 where the psalmist pleads “Be gracious to me, O
God, be gracious to me, for my soul takes refuge in Thee; and in the shadow of Thy
wings I will take refuge...” Now God becomes a chicken. Of course God doesn’t have
wings, and neither does he have hands, eyes, and feet. He is not a physical being; he is
spirit (John 4:24). But he uses language that we understand to communicate to use. The
references to his having eyes are, of course, to let us know that he is aware of our
actions—he is watching us, and watching out for us. Similarly, as noted earlier, the Bible
uses many anthropomorphisms in describing God and his actions. But we must use the
greatest care in ascribing to him literal characteristics that weren’t meant to be taken
literally. Sometimes this is no easy task, but I see no reason why the traditional view of
God’s foreknowledge and providence must be jettisoned once we take into consideration
the purpose of such anthropomorphic language.
It seems that Openness theologians make a hermeneutical mistake similar to the Mormon error when they take as literalisms passages in the Bible that were meant to be anthropomorphisms. God doesn't literally need to test people to see what they will do before he knows it. The passage in Genesis 22 in which God says "now I know that you fear God" after Abraham raises the knife, may well be just such an example of anthropomorphism. It's not that God was unaware of Abraham's faithfulness before he raised the knife. God knows our very thoughts before we speak them or act on them (Psalm 139:1-6). So, this may be anthropomorphic language in which God is telling Abraham that he knows quite well that Abraham is faithful. Abraham has demonstrated his faithfulness to God by his readiness to take the life of his son.

There is also another possibility of interpretation here. To "know" something in the Hebrew culture typically meant to have experiential awareness of the thing. Thus in Genesis 4:1 it literally says that Adam "knew" his wife, meaning that he had intimate experience with her. Similarly, after Abraham raised the knife to offer his son, God, at that point, had experiential awareness of Abraham's faithfulness to him. God now "knows"—has experiential awareness of—Abraham's faithfulness. Whether anthropomorphic language or merely the language of the Hebrews, it is clear that God was aware of what Abraham would do, and that he would be faithful to God, for much earlier in Genesis 12:2-3 God states that through Abraham he will make a great nation, and that God will bless that nation. So he was already aware of what Abraham was going to do long before his actions with Isaac.

Openness theologians maintain that the model of God in which he doesn’t know future free actions, and thus one in which he takes risks, better meshes with the biblical
texts that refer to God in these anthropomorphic ways. But once it is noted that there are, in fact, anthropomorphisms throughout the Bible, and that they are there for the purpose of communicating to human beings in human language, the traditional view emerges as the most reasonable and sensible view of God taking the Bible as a whole.

To their credit, Openness proponents have significantly brought to light the view (which a number of Arminians and Calvinists have also held), that there is a relational aspect of God with his human (and nonhuman) creatures. God isn’t the great cosmic stare, standing eternally frozen and unmoved toward the world, as some theologies tend to intimate. He is a loving Father who, in cooperation with his children, is advancing his kingdom throughout the earth. Contrary to Openness claims, though, he can truly interact with us while at the same time be eternally aware of what we will do and what we would do. That is part of what it means to be God, and such a view is both biblical and reasonable.