

How Biblical is the Open Theism View of God?

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The Christian faith has been under immense attack from foes within and without the faith. These calculated attacks have taken various forms, expressions, methods and designs.

To some extent, those from the outside the faith are obvious and easier to detect, avoid or refute. The ones that clandestinely creep in among the unsuspecting believers are far more subtle and difficult to detect or refute. There is need for a refined, highly trained discerning eye to catch, contain and ward them off. To some extent, the heretical views can be far more easily defused because their tenets are easier and more detectable as they are a fundamental departure from the “*things most surely believed among us*”. Their degree of departure is so definite, distinct or marked and thus easily fished out, isolated and treated as “toxic” material. Any well-meaning evangelical worth their salt will avoid that path for their own souls’ good. However, if they come wearing the evangelical garb, in every sense appearing authentically sound and appearing on the side of truth, it takes a very well trained eye to discern their errors or deceit. In many cases, these imposters are not detectable until much later when their error has spread like gangrene. If and when such a scenario occurs, it then takes more energy and concerted effort to uproot the wrong teaching. A similar situation happened to the Galatian Christians where the Judaizers probably masqueraded as saints when in fact their teaching was not in line with the liberty we have in the gospel of Christ. Paul took a hard uncompromising stance against these fellows which, we have reason to believe, saved the Christian church much heart aches down the road. Our times require such a stance because if a stand is not taken early, later Christians will begin to debate the obvious things (time settled agreed matters) and in some cases, advocate for tolerance as well as acceptance of what they perceive a “*minor*” deviation or clever view.

Such a teaching demanding a radical stance is that propagated by the Open Theistic group whose champions include the likes of Gregory A Boyd, William Hasker, Clark Pinnock and to some extent, John Sanders. These men have for a long time probably mingled among sound evangelicals but now teach counter scripture views though cleverly hidden in the details of the word of God. They are so clever to the extent that their writings have even been published by some of the historically strict publishers of exclusively sound books. Ware demonstrates

where the dicey nature of Open Theism can be confusing in the following quote from his pen:

Let's be clear about this: some of open theism's most basic and fundamental theological commitments are held in common with the entirety of the classical tradition. For example, openness proponents could not be clearer in rejecting the process model of a co-eternal and interdependent God-world relationship in favor of a strong commitment to the classical doctrines of God's aseity, the divine self-sufficiency, and creatio ex nihilo.

Their (i.e. Open Theism pundits) central argument is that the *Open Theism teaching is not really damaging but just another view to the same truth*. But what could be further from the truth! Pinnock (2001) has argued that Open Theism is as much legitimately orthodox as any other when he braggingly states:

some rule of theological discourse and placed ourselves outside the pale of orthodoxy. Why can an evangelical not propose a different view of this matter? What church council has declared it to be impossible? Since when has this become the criterion of being orthodox or unorthodox, evangelical or not evangelical?

But what exactly do the Open Theism teachers propagate, we may ask? We simply state some of their teachings and make some brisk comments relating to the implications of their teachings.

First, they teach that God does not exhaustively know the future and his decisions are dependent on our decisions (Ware 2001). He merely reacts to what we decide and makes plans accordingly to fit our desires. He is not a God who intrudes or forces his will, so they teach.

Second, they teach that God does not know what events will happen in future and therefore is exonerated from any evil that takes place in people's lives. In short his plans are contingency plans and subject to change depending on what happen in the world.

Third, they imply in their teaching that God looks helplessly when things happen that are contrary to his desire and thus after the occasion, God is said to "repent" or change his mind as well as craft another plan.

Fourth, they teach that God empathises with people in whatever they do. If they are grieved or sad, God is affected even much more and wishes things could change. Thus, when the flood engulfed the world in Genesis 6, God was more grieved and promised never to allow flooding again as a means of punishing.

Fifth, God is a God of love and thus cannot allow certain things to happen from him. They are said to originate from outside God's control and he only comes in to correct the situation and do what people want or desire.

Sixth, God is said not to have any plan whatsoever for the world. All he does is to sit by the fences and watch the turn of events hoping things will work his way if not man's way! Thus, the teaching that all things work for the good of those that love God does not hold in all cases, for what good can come out of bad situations?

Seventh, they teach that since God is not in control, it cannot be guaranteed that everything will work well and according to our or God's plan.

When these thoughts are seriously analysed, do they match up to scripture? Well, according to Boyd and his allies, this kind of teaching is more consistent with scripture and more easily explainable than the traditional way of explaining the scriptures. To verify these claims, we must subject them to the touchstone of scripture as well as draw out some implications from their teaching.

Weighed against scripture

1. They teach that God's knowledge of the future and events is limited. This is really a misunderstanding of scripture because the Bible in several places states clearly that God knows ALL things from the minutest to the greatest detail thus nothing ever catches him by surprise. His knowledge extends to the period before Genesis 1:1 to beyond Revelations 22:21, yea he knows the past, the present and the future perfectly well as though they were one. For instance, in Romans 8:28-30, we see the golden chain of salvation displayed but what is even more striking is the tense and language used.
2. Since God does not know the future, he thus cannot be charged with being the author of sin or evil. While I appreciate that God is always righteous and therefore not the author of sin. The problem I have with the Open Theism view is that they limit God's knowledge and things take him by surprise. This is not true because God knows ALL things, the end from the beginning. He is the sovereign ruler of the skies who is above sin and yet nothing ever catches him by surprise.
3. God helplessly looks by as evil or events takes place. The God of the Bible is pictured as the ALL sufficient God who governs all events from the smallest detail to the greatest in His divine providence.
4. God is more hurt when we hurt and therefore empathises. To some extent that is true but the picture created is exaggerated and God is viewed and

treated as a human being reacts. This is not the God of the Bible. He is the God of providence and yet above all things.

5. In as much as God is a God of love, he also has other attributes which include holiness, righteousness among many. The notion that he cannot say no or discipline is children is myopic and unbiblical. God allows things to happen for our good.
6. God has a plan and Isaiah 46 clearly states. Daniel 4:35 is another classic case of God's sovereignty and executing his plan. No one can stay the hand of God.
7. Lastly, God is in control of all things. Isaiah 46 once again shows that He is God and does all things as he pleases. The God of the Bible is a mighty sovereign God who is all powerful and does things as he pleases.

Implications

As we can see, the God of the Open Theism advocates serve a very small, tiny, feeble and frail god that cannot be trusted. Not the God of the Bible who knows all things and does things according to his plan and will.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we may safely conclude that the Open Theism theology is a false teaching which cannot be trusted. It must thus be dismissed with the contempt it deserves lest it poisons naive Christians.

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