



God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God

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Examining God's foreknowledge of our future decisions, this survey of Scripture's teaching affirms what has been termed as the open view of God.

God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God Details

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Carl Jenkins says

This book asks a lot of good questions about the nature or depth of God's foreknowledge. Boyd's position is that God is indeed all knowing, but that, for the most part, God leaves the future "open" or "unsettled." That is to say that the future isn't eternally settled, and God doesn't know all of the exact decisions you will make. That leaves God also open to be able to change his mind on issues, such as giving Hezekiah 15 more years to live. The position of "Open Theism" puts much more responsibility in our hands though, as it gives us the ability to work with God to create the future.

One thing that I didn't really see as a strong argument was Boyd's questions about why God makes people who won't be saved. I'm not a believer that God personally creates everyone that exists. It might have been a stronger argument if he were to ask why God didn't providentially intervene so those who were going to be lost eternally never made it to an age where they would be accountable for their sins, but he didn't.

Like always, Boyd is a little bit outside of the box, but it really does well to read his material. This book will challenge you to think about how you view God. What the understanding of God that you have leads to in your actions. It will make you question how active of a roll you believe you have in future events, and challenge you regardless to actually be more active in prayer and works.

Alan says

While I'm sure Greg Boyd is a very nice man, I feel his understanding and explanation of divine sovereignty and foreknowledge is theologically shallow and wrong-headed. Bruce Ware has written multiple books that address the exegetical shortcomings of open theism that I would highly recommend if you are looking for a solid response to Boyd's articulation of open theism. Personally, I was borderline annoyed at his constant accusations towards classical theists of misinterpreting 'straight forward' scripture ONLY when it suited their cause BUT completely avoided or creatively reinterpreted 'straight forward' scripture that didn't portray open theism in a positive light. In my opinion, I didn't feel it was a fair and honest approach to the matter of open theism.

Daphne Tan says

Thankful for a work that common folk like me can read. Greg is candid that people should not be divided over this issue in the unity Christ has set up with his own flesh and blood, nor should they pretend to be ignorant about differences people have towards such issues. To paraphrase John Stott, not using our mind to think for ourselves on this issue (Calvinism/Arminianism/Open Theism/Molinism etc) is an insult to our Creator who designed us to use our minds to think.

Great introduction, Bible-based and compelling. Opened my eyes to interpret the second motif of openness about the future in a rigorous and non-escapist light. Also helped me unearth some of the inconsistencies I had in my vague beliefs about God in this aspect..

Thomas Kinsfather says

I loved Boyd's approach to the future and God's sovereignty in Scripture. Boyd voiced a philosophy I have held for years, but never been able to put in words. That is, that the future hasn't happened, that it is partially settled and partially open. Well written with an overload of Scriptural support.

Scott Heaton says

God of the Possible by Dr. Gregory Boyd was a difficult read for me. It is a theological book that challenges the traditional view of God (mostly my ideas) and argues for the 'open view of the future.' It was difficult for me, not because the writing was poor or that the logic was faulty, but the exact opposite. This was an easy-to-understand book that took me awhile because I had to put it down so frequently to think about the ideas that were being presented. (Mainly because he launched an arsenal of WMD's on my theology).

Boyd received his Ph. D. from Princeton Theological Seminary, his M.Div. from Yale Divinity School, and taught theology for 16 years at Bethel University in Minnesota. He is undoubtedly a smart dude. If I was being gut-level-honest, prior to reading this book I would have just assumed you called it, 'an introduction to what bad theologians think.' Pretty arrogant huh? But, lately the idea of the 'open view of God' or the 'open view of the future' has gained some traction with close friends. I wanted to investigate for myself what the theology was all about, honestly expecting to better refute the ideas once I learned them.

In a nutshell, the open view argues that the future is partly open – that means it includes BOTH possibilities and certainties. An open theist, in their opinion, is NOT arguing against God's omniscience (this was my primary misunderstanding). They instead will argue about the nature of reality and the future, which is why the theology is also called 'the open view of the future.' This view says that God knows 'all things that can be known' but the nature of reality prohibits God from knowing the future exhaustively.

I know what you're thinking, and believe me, I'm thinking it too: But God knows ALL THINGS past, present, and future!

Gregory Boyd argues that the ideas of God knowing all things exhaustively, God functioning outside of time, and being COMPLETELY unchanging, are ideas that have transferred over from classical Greek philosophy, namely Plato. Boyd refutes classical theological notions of God foreknowing all things and predetermining every outcome by pointing to the overwhelming amount of times that God relents, repents, changes His mind, and reacts to human behavior. These examples in the classical/traditional motif are described as 'anthropomorphisms' or the attribution of human characteristics to God. And for some reason that explanation has never quite jived with me... maybe in a couple of examples I can understand – but dozens and dozens of times seem too much to write it off as a human way of understanding what God is doing.

I'm not at all saying I'm buying into these ideas but it has certainly launched a search for me to investigate why I believe what I believe... are my beliefs rooted in scripture, or are they derivatives of teachings and hand-me-down notions of God that have been around for hundreds of years? Our view of God should always be drawn from the conclusions that we extract from the Word of God, as opposed to blindly believing what is said by people we respect (that is not to say these traditions are wrong). My opinion of people who adhere

to the Open View has dramatically changed... It is not a dumb theology that ignores logic and scripture, nor is it based solely on emotional arguments. It really does raise a great deal of questions for me that I need to answer. And if anything, it helped me to see again that our disagreements with our brothers & sisters over doctrines and dogmas do nothing to either of our positions in the body of Christ. We are still family.

God of the Possible is a great read that utilizes powerful rhetoric. And despite what conclusions I may come to, it made me think about the nature of God all week, and then some – something I believe a 5 point Calvinist or an intense Open Theist would agree is a good thing (I hope). And for that reason, I would put it on the 4th bookshelf out 5.

check out my book review site: <https://mephibosheth311.wordpress.com/>

Brian Jones says

Excellent overview of the "Openness of God." A much needed corrective to the Reformed fad sweeping through evangelical circles.

Calvary Church says

Controversial! The future is partially open to God. Boyd places an emphasis on the Biblical texts that speak of God changing his mind, or being grieved, or giving people options – and constructs a new theology of God – referred to as Open Theism or Neothism. In all fairness, Boyd does not give up God's sovereignty, but redefines it. His views have created a flurry of evangelical scholarship defending the traditional/classical view of God, even suggesting that Boyd's views fall outside of the pale of orthodoxy. While I remain unconvinced by Boyd's arguments, I find his emphasis on a God who seriously "interacts" (or "dances," to use one of his terms) stimulating.

Joshua Duffy says

There is not a lot not to love about this book, unless you are a determinist. It is well written, concise, effective, and what is likely the best introduction to the idea of 'Open Theism' that I can imagine. It remains quite disconcerting that there are aspects of the future that God possibly does not know, but Boyd fills in the blanks quite nicely. Whether or not you accept Open Theism after reading this one, you most likely will have to admit it makes way more sense than Determinism.

Kate Austin says

The book and the content brought up great questions. However I think his arguments missed addressing issues that needed to be addressed and I didn't enjoy his structure for constructing his argument in several places.

JJ Vancil says

Greg Boyd is one of my favorite authors and this book helps the reader understand the driving principles of his theology. I happen to understand God through the open lens and see it lining up with the whole counsel of Scripture. I appreciate Boyd's heart and the depth in which he uses Scripture. People are free to disagree with him, but they can't accuse him of not teaching the Word. I believe that the open view, as espoused in this book, paints the most accurate picture of God and after reading this book, I want to know God more. I love him more, trust him more and want to follow him more. That, to me, makes a good theology book. The book is 'heady' and, at times, very philosophical. I was able to track with his arguments and found myself nodding agreement. If you are interested in being challenged and exposed to a new (and very accurate) way of looking at God, this is a must read.

Bryan Neuschwander says

Boyd argues clearly and fairly. Not everyone will find him convincing, but his astute reflections and calm analysis may serve to shift certain deterministic presuppositions and to combat a kind of folk Christian fatalism that simply accepts whatever happens with the bland "God is in control" cliché.

Carl says

I read this after reading "Letters..." because I had questions about Boyd's Open View as presented to his father. Never having been completely comfortable with the classical arguments presented by Calvin or Arminius, I am intrigued by Boyd's presentation and by the evidence he brings from Scripture. Those who want to label him a blasphemer or heretic go too far.

Donovan Richards says

When Bible Study Becomes Scary

When I was young, my parents hosted a couples' Bible study on Sunday nights. While my parents studied in the community of believers, I listened to music and played video games in the office.

One Sunday evening, I remember my mother visibly shaken after a study. During the Bible study, one member shared with the group his personal study on the actions God cannot perform. The very thought, to my mother, seemed heretical. God is God right? God can do anything!

But the personal study held certain amounts of truth. God promised that he would never destroy the earth by flood again; the Bible tells us that God cannot lie. In both instances, God intentionally limits himself.

Despite general agreement amongst the Evangelical church about God's limits, many Christians believe that the all-powerful God knows the future comprehensively. But does Scripture point to this theological belief?

In *God of the Possible*, theologian and pastor Gregory Boyd argues for the open view of God: a perspective that suggests God does not conclusively know the future.

The Classical View of Foreknowledge

Classically, Christianity echoes platonic sentiments which espouse a philosophy of an unchanging and limitless God. From these principles, Christians argue that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omni-present. But Boyd questions,

“If the future is indeed exhaustively settled in God’s mind, as the classical view holds, why does the Bible repeatedly describe God changing his mind? Why does the Bible say that God frequently alters his plans, cancels prophecies in the light of changing circumstances, and speaks about the future as a ‘maybe,’ a ‘perhaps,’ or a ‘possibility’? Why does it describe God as expressing uncertainty about the future, being disappointed in the way things turn out, and even occasionally regretting the outcome of his own decisions? If the Bible is always true—and I, for one, assume that it is—how can we reconcile this way of talking about God with the notion that the future is exhaustively settled in his mind” (11)?

The Open View of God

Given these questions, Boyd proposes the open view of God: the idea that God, as illustrated in Scripture, is capable of changing his mind regarding future events. Instead of a God so set in determined actions as a micromanager, Boyd argues that God is personable, capable of being swayed, and a kind ruler. Yet despite a belief in an open future, Boyd points toward a God who remains all-powerful. He argues,

“Open theists, rather, maintain that God can and does predetermine and foreknow whatever he wants to about the future. Indeed, God is so confident in his sovereignty, we hold, he does not need to micromanage everything. He could if he wanted to, but this would demean his sovereignty. So he chooses to leave some of the future open to possibilities, allowing them to be resolved by the decisions of free agents. It takes a greater God to steer a world populated with free agents than it does to steer a world of pre-programmed automatons” (31).

In other words, Boyd maintains that God manages a world of choices within parameters that God has set in his infinite power. As an analogy, if I plan to travel to New York City, I must make choices regarding my travel plans in order to ensure successful transportation. Yet, my decisions only make sense given the assumption that New York City exists.

At its core, *God of the Possible* contends that Christians must rethink the way they interpret the Bible. Currently, the seemingly contradictory passages about free will and determinism are often interpreted in such a way that one set is read literally and the other figuratively. Boyd believes, however, that an open theism allows for a literal reading of both free will and deterministic passages.

A Mischaracterization of the Classical View

Although Boyd offers compelling arguments, I believe he misunderstands the central reasons for belief in an all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-present God. While many critics believe that such a God limits free will and arbitrarily chooses those who are saved and those who are condemned, Christians who believe in determinism possess such ideas because they do not feel like humanity is capable of understanding spiritual truths by their own power.

Put differently, deterministic Christians ask, “Who are we to choose salvation? If we have the power to make this decision, are we not more powerful than God?” God must reveal himself to a Christian before a response. Wouldn’t this God know those who choose him and those who do not?

Foreknowledge: Having Your Cake and Eating It Too

Additionally, I think *God of the Possible* rejects determinism in order to side with free will. Despite the attempt to accept both conflicting ideas, Boyd leans toward free will. I suggest, however, that both free will and determinism can exist with an all-powerful God.

Imagine you must make a choice between two options. Supposing God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-present, God would know the causal chain behind either of the choices you could make. Thus, God not only knows how the future will unfold given the choice you make, he also know the course of events from the choice you didn’t make. Expanding this principle to every choice from every person, and you have a God who knows everything that everyone will ever do while we at the same time maintain free will.

While complicated, I suggest that such an idea better describes the seemingly contradictory statements as seen in the Bible. Are there things God can’t do? Perhaps. Scripture certainly hints at ways in which God limits himself. Nevertheless, self-limitation does not mean that God is not all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-present. With *God of the Possible*, Gregory Boyd asks some interesting questions. Yet, I find his arguments inconclusive. *God of the Possible* is worth a read, but do so with a critical eye.

Originally published at <http://wherepenmeetspaper.blogspot.com>

Adam Ross says

After reading an interesting interview with Greg Boyd online, I picked up this book and enjoyed it a lot. I'm not fully convinced of his case, but the book certainly convinced me that Open Theism is no heresy. It is, instead, a means of trying to reconcile God's sovereignty and man's free will in a satisfactory way. Having remained unconvinced by the attempts of Calvinism to deal with free will and the Arminian attempt to explain God's sovereignty, I found this to be an interesting suggestion for a third way that avoids the problems of both.

I've read most of the anti-Open Theist texts available, but I never bothered to read the other side, and this is usually a key problem. Most of these "refutations" never even got to the heart of Open Theism's question.

Open Theism's central question is, "Why do we take the texts talking about God's sovereignty as representing God as He is in Himself, but take passages that speak of God's emotions or of His changing His mind as figurative?" A number of these other books have talked about the doctrine of impassibility, but none of them ever really answered why it is they believe this. Scripturally speaking, using exegesis rather than philosophy, they have not done.

So anyway. You learn all kinds of nifty things here, for example, that Boyd doesn't deny God's providence or that God will ultimately accomplish His purposes. They don't deny God any knowledge, either, they simply argue that classical theism has actually limited God to the actual, rather than the plurality of possibilities. That is, God knows all possible options and ends for every possible choice every single atom in the universe can make, and so like a GPS, no matter what turn is taken, He can reroute everything so that every single

aspect of His will and purposes are accomplished in the world. Boyd uses the example of a master chess player, who knows the consequences of every move his opponent can make and is ready to respond to anything they can do.

The book challenged me and forced me to wrestle with Scripture again. I don't begrudge any book that, in fact, that's the best thing any book can really do. As I say, I am not fully convinced their thesis works, but I found aspects of it compelling, for example, the idea of the vulnerable God, and their criticism of a theology of God that begins and ends with authority, power, control, and will, rather than love, which is how Scripture defines God in His being.

Tom says

Does God know in advance all of history, including the future, down to the last detail? Or does God experience the future as we do: as an array of possibilities that are not yet decided?

My cousin and her husband gave this book to me while I was visiting them. I told them I wanted some good theology and they literally pressed it into my hands. I had no idea what it was about.

It turns out to be a very thorough theological argument for what is known as the 'Open View' of God. In the 'Classical View' of God, he 'knows the future exhaustively'. Since God is unchanging and outside of time, the Classical View reasons, he knows everything that will happen ever. He knows the outcomes to all events (so these events cannot be changed) and he knows every decision human agents will make in advance (so these decisions cannot be changed).

You can probably see the troubling implications of the Classical View already: if God has predetermined history, isn't he responsible for all the evil in it? If he has predestined everyone, doesn't that mean he is intentionally condemning people to Hell?

Personally, this view of God has never sat well with me. I never really articulated it, but it seemed to me that if God really made humans as agents with free will that he would have to be to some degree limited by our decisions. Most people who believe in God don't like the idea of limits on him. Isn't he supposed to be all powerful? Wouldn't any limit on God diminish his sovereignty?

Maybe. It never bothered me that God might allow limits to be placed on himself for a specific purpose (like creating beings with free will). But again, I didn't really articulate that or follow the argument any further.

In *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God*, Gregory Boyd does just that.

The Open View of God states that the future is only partially known by God. Actually, that's not accurate. In the Open View of God, God knows all of the future that there is to know, but some parts of the future simply do not exist yet. They are undecided. God does not know them because they are not facts that can be known as yet.

This probably seems counter-intuitive, but in fact we live with a 'partially known' future every day. There are certain things that you can count on when you are making plans for tomorrow, like the fact that the sun will rise or the fact that the grocery store will be still be where it was yesterday. But you can't count on whether the clerk at the grocery store will be nice to you, or if your boss will give them the raise you asked

for.

Another analogy comes from quantum physics and statistics: while at the sub-atomic level particles are unpredictable and their motions indeterminate, over trillions of particles this unpredictability averages out to the point where you can, say, throw a ball and know that it will predictably obey Newton's laws of motion and not go shooting up into space or curving around you.

In the Open View of God, he knows certain things that will definitely happen and he can, in his vast knowledge, see the broad strokes of history. But he doesn't necessarily know every individual event or decision that will occur.

It would be difficult to summarize all of Boyd's points and keep this review concise, but there are three main thrusts to his argument that God has an 'open view' of the future:

1. Scriptural support.

There are many, *many* passages in scripture that speak of God changing his mind, speaking in conditional terms, getting frustrated and even regretting things he has done because they turned out badly. If God knows the future exhaustively, none of this makes any sense. You could call it a metaphor, but if it is it's one God uses a lot throughout scripture, and with no hints that he is not speaking literally. Particularly telling is Jeremiah 18 in which God literally asks the people of Israel to pray and try to change his mind.

2. A God who takes risks is greater than a God who does not.

To those who feel that the Open View of God challenges God's sovereignty, Boyd points out that we're looking at God's sovereignty from a human perspective. In our perspective, to be totally sovereign is to have absolute control over everything. But is that really true? Is a God who controls his creation like puppets on a string more impressive than a God who takes risks and allows people to go their own way, even knowing they might not do what he wants them to do? A God who is flexible, adaptive and able to take into account the myriad possibilities of the future certainly seems more impressive to me than an unchanging puppeteer who risks nothing.

3. Free will requires an open future.

If God knows all our decisions in advance we can have only the illusion of free will, not free will itself. If God knows our decisions in advance he is also responsible for those decisions, because he created the conditions necessary for us to make them. Our free will is meaningless.

One of Gregory Boyd's most compelling arguments is that the Classical View of God is not really Biblical at all - it comes from Plato's philosophy, in which ideals were perfect and unchanging. But to apply this view to God, you have to take hundreds of verses across all of scripture as metaphors.

In fact, you have to believe that God is being downright misleading in places. God states outright in scripture that he changes his mind, that he is surprised by things that happen, and even that he does not know a person's character until he tests them. If God wanted to tell us that the future is open, not set and unchangeable, how much clearer could he get?

Of course there are objections: God prophesies about the end times, says that he is unchanging and that he 'knows the beginning from the end'. But Boyd has ready answers for all these arguments. For example, it's

easy for God to know the end times without knowing the future exhaustively, since he clearly plans to step in and take control of things at that point! God knows his own mind, and his character is unchanging.

And he knows everything about the future that there *is* to know. But because of his grace in giving us free will, he genuinely does not know in advance what decisions individual persons will make. Rather, he is so sovereign and powerful that he is able to adapt his perfect plans to our failings.

That, in a nutshell, is Gregory Boyd's argument in *The God of the Possible*.

I think he may possibly be right.

I have *greatly* compressed and simplified many of Boyd's arguments in this review. If you disagree or are intrigued, I urge you to read the entire book. It's not too long and Boyd lays out in terms a layman can understand the Open View of God.
