

## OPENNESS OF GOD

### “the Lord repented”

#### Key question

How much of the future is known and fixed by God?

#### Key text

### I Samuel 15:11,29,35

“**11 I repent** that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments. And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the Lord all night. **29** And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor **repent**. For He is not a man, that He **should repent**. **35** And Samuel went no more to see Saul until the day of his death. Nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul, and **the Lord repented** that He had made Saul king over Israel.”

#### Key Definition

### Openness of God

God has a partly open posture with respect to his creation whereby he is in dynamic and free relationship with his subjects.

#### Introduction

1. Does God know the future in exhaustive detail, or does His omniscience pertain only to the past and present? In what sense does God know the future?
2. The traditional Calvinistic view of predestination raises questions that are difficult to answer.
  - a. Ethical responsibility requires a measure of freedom on the part of God and man. If human actions are predestined by God, how can humans be held responsible.
  - b. Authentic human relational experience suggests that a measure of genuine openness and dynamic freedom are necessary. If not, we are just reading from a script.
  - c. The nature of “good and evil” demand authentic freedom. If all is determined by God then evil is no longer evil.
  - d. In what sense does prayer really influence anything if all is fixed and unchangeable before it happens?
3. Four evangelical approaches:

<b>Open or Free will – theism view</b>	<b>Simple Fore-knowledge view</b>	<b>Middle- Knowledge view</b>	<b>Augustinian- Calvinist view</b>
God knows the past and the present but has limited knowledge of the future.	God knows the future in detail but we do not know how He knows it nor do we sense that such knowledge is the origin of a decreed action.	God knows all options and consequences but does not decree all actions.	All is determined and foreknown from eternity.
People are relatively free	People act with enough freedom to be responsible.	People are fully free to act as they choose.	People are fully free to act according to their nature.

There is considerable Biblical evidence that suggests that predestination must be understood to be compatible with a dynamic view of God’s dealing with his creation. This view is held as “open theism” or “relational theism.”

A. **The arguments for Free Will Theism.**

1. Genuine human moral responsibility demands it.
2. Genuine relationships with God demand it.
3. Separating evil from a holy, loving God demands it.
4. The spiritual conflict motif in Scripture demands it.
5. A straightforward literal rendering of Scripture demands it.
6. Some misconceptions about open theism.
  - a. Open theism does not deny that God has fixed some future events. The question, “Are all events in the future fixed?”
  - b. Open theism does not deny that much of our personal choices are restricted by the nature of who we are and the context in which we live. The question, “Are all of my actions contingent on external forces?”

B. **The Biblical evidence for a partly open view of God’s knowledge of the events that are, to us, future.**

1. **A partly open future is revealed early in scripture**

To start with, God is shown to know the future as existing in part as possibilities *extremely* early on in scripture. The first passage that affirms God’s knowledge of the future as partly open is Gen 2:19.

- **Genesis 2:19** Out of the ground **the LORD God** formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and **brought [them] to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that [was] its name.**

The only way to deny that this passage means what it says is to come to the text with the belief that God knows the future as *completely settled* (instead of *partly settled* as the passage affirms). I have yet to be given one good reason why we should approach the earliest chapters of scripture with the belief that God knows the future as completely settled. We should derive our theology from scripture and within the first 2 chapters of scripture we find an affirmation that God knows the future in part as possibilities.

If God knows the future as completely settled then we have to read all of the passages that reveal God's knowledge of the future as partly open as though they were not true depictions of God's knowledge. If God has exhaustive definite foreknowledge (EDF) then the Bible is filled with misrepresentations of God's knowledge from beginning (Gen 2:19) to end (Rev 22:18) that we need to "correct".

## 2. God repents or changes His mind.

A God who knows the future as completely settled is incapable of repenting or changing His mind. The God of the Bible, however, is shown to do just that as the following passages reveal.

- **Genesis 6:4-9** "4 There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown. 5 Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 And the Lord **repented [it repented the LORD]** that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. 7 So the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for **I repent** that I have made them. 8 But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. 9 This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God.
- **Exodus 32:9-14** "9 And the Lord said to Moses, I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! 10 Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation. 11 Then Moses pleaded with the Lord his God, and said: Lord, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? 12 Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, `He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and **repent** from this harm to Your people. 13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever. 14 So **the Lord repented** from the harm which He said He would do to His people."
- **Judges 2:18-21** "18 And when the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for **the Lord repented** because of their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them. 19 And it came to pass when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way. 20 Then the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel; and He said, Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and has not heeded My voice, 21 I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died,"
- **I Samuel 15:11,29,35** "11 **I repent** that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments. And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the Lord all night. 29 And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor **repent**. For He is not a man, that He **should repent**. 35 And Samuel went

no more to see Saul until the day of his death. Nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul, and **the Lord repented** that He had made Saul king over Israel.”

- **Psalms 106:45** “And for their sake He remembered His covenant and **repented** according to the multitude of His mercies.”
- **Jeremiah 4:28** “For this shall the earth mourn and the heavens above be black because I have spoken. I have purposed and **will not repent**, nor will I turn back from it.”
- **Jeremiah 15:6** “You have forsaken Me, says the Lord, You have gone backward. Therefore I will stretch out My hand against you and destroy you; **I am weary of repenting!**”
- **Jeremiah 18:7-12** “<sup>7</sup> The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, <sup>8</sup> if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, **I will repent** of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. <sup>9</sup> And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, <sup>10</sup> if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then **I will repent** concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it. <sup>11</sup> Now therefore, speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus says the Lord: Behold, I am fashioning a disaster and devising a plan against you. Return now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good. <sup>12</sup> And they said, That is hopeless! So we will walk according to our own plans, and we will every one obey the dictates of his evil heart.”
- **Jeremiah 20:16** “And let that man be like the cities Which the Lord overthrew, and **did not repent**; Let him hear the cry in the morning And the shouting at noon,”
- **Jeremiah 26:2,3,13,18** “<sup>2</sup> Thus says the Lord: Stand in the court of the Lord’s house, and speak to all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the Lords house, all the words that I command you to speak to them. Do not diminish a word. <sup>3</sup> Perhaps everyone will listen and turn from his evil way, that **I may repent** concerning the calamity which I purpose to bring on them because of the evil of their doings. <sup>13</sup> Now therefore, amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God; then **the Lord will repent** concerning the doom that He has pronounced against you. <sup>18</sup> Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and spoke to all the people of Judah, saying, Thus says the Lord of hosts: Zion shall be plowed like a field, Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins, and the mountain of the temple like the bare hills of the forest. <sup>19</sup> Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah ever put him to death? Did he not fear the Lord and seek the Lords favor? And **the Lord repented** concerning the doom which He had pronounced against them. But we are doing great evil against ourselves.”
- **Jeremiah 42:10** “If you will still remain in this land, then I will build you and not pull you down, and I will plant you and not pluck you up. For **I repent** concerning the disaster that I have brought upon you.”
- **Ezekiel 24:14** “I, the Lord, have spoken it; It shall come to pass and I will do it; I will not hold back, Nor will I spare, **Nor will I repent**; According to your ways And according to your deeds They will judge you, Says the Lord God.”
- **Joel 2:11-14** “<sup>11</sup> The Lord gives voice before His army, For His camp is very great; For strong is the One who executes His word. For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; Who can endure it? <sup>12</sup> Now, therefore, says the Lord, Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. <sup>13</sup> So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the Lord your God, For He is gracious and merciful,

- Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And **He repents** from doing harm. 14 Who knows if He will turn and **repent**, And leave a blessing behind Him – A grain offering and a drink offering For the Lord your God?”
- **Amos 7:1-6** “1 Thus the Lord God showed me: Behold, He formed locust swarms at the beginning of the late crop; indeed it was the late crop after the king’s mowings. 2 And so it was, when they had finished eating the grass of the land, that I said: O Lord God, forgive, I pray! Oh, that Jacob may stand, For he is small! 3 So **the Lord repented** concerning this. It shall not be, said the Lord. 4 Thus the Lord God showed me: Behold, the Lord God called for conflict by fire, and it consumed the great deep and devoured the territory. 5 Then I said: O Lord God, cease, I pray! Oh, that Jacob may stand, For he is small! 6 So **the Lord repented** concerning this. This also shall not be, said the Lord God.”
  - **Jonah 3:6-4:2** “6 Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. 7 And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. 8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. 9 Who can tell if God will turn and **repent**, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish? 10 Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and **God repented** from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it. 4:1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. 2 So he prayed to the Lord, and said, Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness, One who **repents** from doing harm.”

These passages affirm that God knows the future as partly open. If the future was settled then there could be no changing of God's mind. An alternate interpretation of these passages that does not strip them of all meaning has yet to be given. You're welcome to try though

### 3. God tests men so He can know

These passages are some of the strongest evidence that the future for God is partly open.

- a. God tested Abraham so that God could know that Abraham feared Him.

**Genesis 22:1-2,10-12** “1 Now it came to pass after these things that **God tested Abraham**, and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” 2 Then He said, “Take now your son, your only [son] Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” 10 And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” So he said, “Here I am.” 12 And He said, “Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; **for NOW I KNOW that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only [son,] from Me.**”

- b. God tests Israel with the sweet waters

**Exodus 15:25** “So he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree. When he cast [it] into the waters, the waters were made sweet. There He made a statute and an ordinance for them. **And there HE TESTED THEM**”

- c. God tests Israel by commanding that they gather only so much manna a day.  
**Exodus 16:4** “Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, **THAT I MAY TEST THEM, WHETHER they will walk in My law or not.**”
- d. God tests Israel in the wilderness to know what was in the people's hearts  
**Deuteronomy 8:2** “And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you [and] **TEST YOU, TO KNOW what [was] in your heart, WHETHER you would keep His commandments or not.**”
- e. God tests Israel with prophets to know if they love Him  
**Deuteronomy 13:3** “you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, **for the LORD your God IS TESTING YOU TO KNOW WHETHER you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.**”
- f. God tests Israel with the pagan nations in the land  
**Judges 2:20-22** “<sup>20</sup> Then the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and He said, “Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and has not heeded My voice, <sup>21</sup> I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, <sup>22</sup> **so that through them I MAY TEST Israel, WHETHER they will keep the ways of the LORD, to walk in them as their fathers kept [them,] or not.**” (Recommend reading Jud 2:1-3 and Jud 3:1-4 also).
- g. God tests men to know which ones should go with Gideon  
**Judges 7:4** “But the LORD said to Gideon, “The people [are] still [too] many; bring them down to the water, **and I WILL TEST THEM for you there.** Then it will be, [that] of whom I say to you, ‘This one shall go with you,’ the same shall go with you; and of whomever I say to you, ‘This one shall not go with you,’ the same shall not go.”
- h. God’s testing recognized in prayer  
**I Chronicles 29:17** “**I know also, my God, THAT YOU TEST THE HEART and have pleasure in uprightness.** As for me, in the uprightness of my heart I have willingly offered all these [things;] and now with joy I have seen Your people, who are present here to offer willingly to You.”
- i. God tests that He might know ALL that is in a person's heart  
**II Chronicles 32:31** “However, [regarding] the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, whom they sent to him to inquire about the wonder that was [done] in the land, **God withdrew from him, IN ORDER TO TEST HIM, THAT HE MIGHT KNOW ALL [that was] in his heart.**”  
 An intelligible alternate interpretation to what these passages seem to be clearly saying (that God tests people so He can know) has yet to be given.

#### 4. God says “perhaps”

If God knew the future as completely settled there would be no “perhaps” about it. But, that’s what he Himself tells us. God tells us that the future is partly open when He says perhaps.

- **Exodus 13:17** “Then it came to pass when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for **God said, “Lest perhaps** the people change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt.”

- **Jeremiah 26:1-3** “<sup>1</sup> In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came from the LORD, saying, <sup>2</sup> “Thus says the LORD: ‘Stand in the court of the Lord’s house, and speak to all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the Lord’s house, all the words that I command you to speak to them. Do not diminish a word. <sup>3</sup> **Perhaps** everyone will listen and turn from his evil way, that I may repent concerning the calamity which I purpose to bring on them because of the evil of their doings.’”
- **Jeremiah 36:1-3** “<sup>1</sup> Now it came to pass in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, that this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying: <sup>2</sup> “Take a scroll of a book and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel, against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah even to this day. <sup>3</sup> **Perhaps** that the house of Judah will hear all the adversities which I purpose to bring upon them, that everyone may turn from his evil way, that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin.”
- **Ezekiel 12:1-3** “<sup>1</sup> Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying: <sup>2</sup> “Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, which has eyes to see but does not see, and ears to hear but does not hear; for they are a rebellious house. <sup>3</sup> Therefore, son of man, prepare your belongings for captivity, and go into captivity by day in their sight. You shall go from your place into captivity to another place in their sight. **Perhaps** they will consider, though they are a rebellious house.”

#### 5. God tells us that He’s sometime surprised at the way things turned out

God expects good fruit or Israel to return to Him, but He is disappointed at the results.

- **Isaiah 5:1-4** “<sup>1</sup> Now let me sing to my Well-beloved A song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard: My Well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. <sup>2</sup> He dug it up and cleared out its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, And also made a winepress in it; **So He expected [it] to bring forth [good] grapes, But it brought forth wild grapes.** <sup>3</sup> And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge, please, between Me and My vineyard. <sup>4</sup> What more could have been done to My vineyard That I have not done in it? **Why then, when I expected [it] to bring forth [good] grapes, Did it bring forth wild grapes?”**
- **Jeremiah 3:6-7,19-20** “<sup>6</sup> Then the LORD said to me in the days of Josiah the king, ‘Have you seen what faithless Israel did? She went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and she was a harlot there. <sup>7</sup> I thought, ‘After she has done all these things **she will return to Me**’; **but she did not return**, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it. <sup>19</sup> Then I said, ‘How I would set you among My sons And give you a pleasant land, The most beautiful inheritance of the nations!’ And I said, ‘**You shall call Me, My Father, And not turn away from following Me.**’ <sup>20</sup> **Surely, as a woman treacherously departs from her lover, So you have dealt treacherously with Me,** O house of Israel,” declares the LORD.”

#### 6. Counterfactual knowledge – Knowing the consequences of behavior that has not occurred.

*“God perfectly knows from all time what will be, what would be, and what may be. And he sovereignly sets the parameters for all three categories. Moreover, because God possesses infinite intelligence, his knowledge of what might be leaves him no less prepared for the future than his knowledge of determinate aspects of creation. . . . Because he is infinitely intelligent, he does not need to “thin out” his attention over numerous possibilities as we do. He is able to attend to each one of a trillion billion*

*possibilities, whether they be logical possibilities, what would be, or what might be, as though it was the only possibility he had to consider. He is infinitely attentive to each and every one. Hence, whatever possibility ends up coming to pass, we may say that from all eternity God was preparing for just this possibility, as though it were the only possibility that could ever possibly occur. Even when possibilities occur that are objectively improbable – and to this extent surprise or disappoint God – it is not at all the case that he is caught off guard. He is as perfectly prepared for the improbable as he is for the probable.”* Gregory Boyd, “Satan and the Problem of Evil” pp.128-129

**I Sam.23:6-10** David uses a divining device (an ephod) to inquire of the Lord whether Saul would attack Keilah, where David was ensconced, and whether the men of Keilah would deliver David over to Saul. In both cases, the device registered an affirmative answer, whereupon David fled the city, so that the predictions did not in fact come true. What the device had mediated to David was not, therefore, simple foreknowledge but counterfactual knowledge.

**Jer.38:17-18** “If you will ... if you do not”

**Jn.15:22,24** “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin . . . If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not have sin.”

<p><b>Dominican Catholic theologians</b></p> <p>Strong Foreordination advocates</p> <p>Counterfactual knowledge follows God’s decree</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>God decrees one course of action.</i></li> <li>2. <i>God knows all possible choices and their results</i></li> <li>3. <i>Man chooses in keeping with God’s decree.</i></li> </ol>	<p><b>Jesuit Catholic theologians (Molinists)</b> (middle knowledge)</p> <p>Freewill advocates</p> <p>Counterfactual knowledge precedes God’s decree</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>God knows all possible choices and their results</i></li> <li>2. <i>Man chooses.</i></li> <li>3. <i>God decrees the result.</i></li> </ol>
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**7. Other evidences of a partly open future are:**

- \* God’s **adding** 15 years to Hezekiah’s life in response to his prayer when God had told him that he would soon die (Isa.38:1-8).
- \* A destruction that was **not** called off (Ezek.22:29-31).
- \* The possibility of **hastening** the day of God (II Pet.3:12).

**C. The critique of Free Will Theism.**

1. Historically this position was never adopted by the orthodox church and is therefore suspect. Passages like **Isa.41:21-29** clearly distinguish the God of Israel from false gods in that He alone knows the future. Look at theology file #704 for Scriptural support for the traditional view of God’s predestination of events.

2. Free Will Theism makes three concessions that cripple its own thesis, which demands that “meaningful love” be free.
  - a. It is assumed that love characterizes the relationship within the Godhead between the Father, Son, and Spirit. Is this love meaningless given it is impossible for God to not love?
  - b. It is acknowledged that God controls some aspects of the future including human choices. If one person’s freedom is compromised or coerced by God’s sovereign power, why cannot all people’s freedom be compromised?
  - c. It is recognized that there are many “natural” constraints on our freedom. In what sense are we meaningfully free if our freedom is at all compromised?
3. A Soteriological dilemma.
  - a. Tension between five truths.
    1. God is striving for the salvation of all persons.
    2. Salvation is available only through Christ.
    3. Salvation in Christ must be received through conscious faith in response to the preaching of the gospel.
    4. God foreknows the future including who will believe and who will not.
    5. Not all persons in human history have come into contact with the gospel.
  - b. Different solutions.
    - Pluralists reject #2. Salvation can come through many channels (not Jesus only),
    - Inclusivists reject #3. Salvation can come apart from the gospel message.
    - Augustinians reject #1. Salvation is available only to the elect (all of whom will believe).
    - Free will theists reject #4. People are free to chose or reject the revelation of God.
    - Postmortem conversionists reject #5. All will be exposed to the gospel (some after death).
4. Biblical examples of both predestination and responsible choice.
  - **The crucifixion of Jesus. Acts 2:23** “this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to the cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.”
  - **The betrayal of Jesus by Judas. Mk.14:21** “For the Son of Man is to go, just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed!” It is said that Judas’ actions were Satanically motivated (Lk.22:3; Jn.13:2,27)
5. There are many texts that seem to clearly teach predestination. (see theology notes on Predestination #704)
6. Human freedom suffers under conscious and subconscious constraints – temperament, culture, personal history, physical ability, etc. This is acknowledged by everyone. The issue is to what degree are these constraints absolutely deterministic of choices made?
7. **Deut.29:29** ‘The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.’
  - a. **There are some things we are not expected to understand.** Rom.9:19-20 “19 You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?’ 20 On the contrary,

who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this.' Will it?"

- b. It is significant that Job cries out in the end, not "I understand!" but "I repent."
  - c. We are limited to human experience framed in time. The notion of timeless or eternal perspective is beyond us and always will be in this life. God's knowledge might best be understood as without tense even though He has chosen to work out His plan in time. We might say that God knows the future without foreknowing it. This would be the case if God (and his knowledge) exists outside of time. On this conception of God he could still know everything that is yet future relative to us; but since he is not himself in time, these things would not be future relative to him, and so he would not know them as future. This was in fact Augustine's view of God.
  - d. What is clear and set before us to obey?
    1. God knows and has determined in His plan much of what happens in history.
    2. We are left to struggle with decisions from a posture of being influenced by some conscious forces and many subconscious forces.
8. I may know that you will do something but this does not encroach upon your free choice unless I decree it to happen in advance. The addition or deletion of the factor of God's simple knowledge of some act in advance does not affect the freedom of that act.
  9. Thomas Oden, an Arminian theologian who has encouraged free discussion of openness ideas while showing no sympathy for them, has said that those given to the fantasy of divine ignorance of the future should be resisted with charity. Charitable resistance is all too rare among evangelicals.
10. **An illustration:**
- I could play a one-on-one basketball game with Michael Jordan where he would give me complete freedom to do anything I wanted yet he would never be threatened by my choices with respect to the outcome of the game. **How could this be?***
- I have limited ability and thus limited freedom. My circumstances, nature, character, and environment each place limits on my freedom.
  - He has much greater ability and thus freedom to do many things I cannot do. Realize that God has infinite ability and full knowledge of all possible scenarios of what I might do.
  - God does not decree as certain every move I make but He knows me perfectly and the many constraints on my decision making process enable Him to know what I will do in almost every situation.
  - We assume that love requires some real freedom to not love and freedom involves risk with respect to our choices.
  - This freedom does not in any way prevent God from having His way in history even though our actions can frustrate, disappoint, or please Him.
  - A God who is in control of history in this "dynamic power" way is more powerful than a God who has to determine every detail of what will take place before He can claim to be sovereign.

### **The Point**

God's will for us is in part dynamic and subject to our response.

## **Response**

### **Head**

#### **I am to understand that:**

There is a real dynamic element in our relationship with God.

### **Heart**

#### **I am to believe that:**

God's dealing with us has genuine integrity in that we have a measure of freedom.

### **Hands**

#### **I am to behave by:**

Praying with the expectation that God hears and responds to prayer.

## **Pastoral advice**

1. Do not relate to God in a passive way. Expect Him to meet you with integrity.
2. Be careful how you speak of the sovereignty of God. It is not as mechanical and simplistic as some suggest.
3. Take your decisions and actions seriously. You are not a robot.