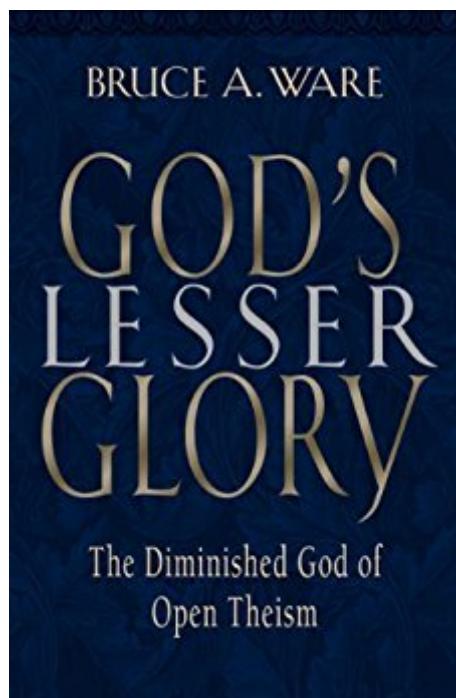


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# God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God Of Open Theism



## Synopsis

Christians throughout history have been strengthened by their confidence that God knows everything about the future. But consider this: What if it simply is not true? What if God can only rely on His best guess about tomorrow--just as you and I do? Would it not affect your trust in Him, your confidence in facing the future, your worship, and your motivation to leave everything in His hands? And yet this is the consequence that has to be faced if you trust what a number of leading voices in evangelicalism are proposing under the doctrine of open theism. In its redefinition of the nature of divine providence, open theism adjusts the entire picture of God's sovereignty and involvement in our lives. Bruce Ware carefully summarizes and critiques this dangerous doctrine from a thoroughly biblical perspective, providing an excellent treatment of both the classical and openness views. He explores their implications and faithfully pinpoints the subtle ways that open theism undermines our trust in God and lessens His glory in our lives. Open theism offers a God who, like us, does not know the future. Its sponsors see this humanizing of God as logical and devotional gain. Bruce Ware sees it as a way of misreading Scripture and impoverishing the life of faith, and he makes a compelling case for his view. I heartily commend this thorough and insightful book. --J.I. Packer, Professor of Theology, Regent College

Open theism, which denies that God can foreknow free human choices, dishonors God, distorts Scripture, damages faith, and would, if left unchecked, destroy churches and lives. Its errors are not peripheral but central. Therefore, I thank God for Bruce Ware's loving, informed, penetrating, devastating critique of this profoundly injurious teaching. I pray that God would use this book to sharpen the discernment of leaders and prepare the people of God to recognize toxic teaching when they taste it. O how precious is the truth of God's all-knowing, all-wise, all-powerful care over our fragile lives. For your name's sake, O Lord, and for the good of the suffering church who rest in your all-knowing providence, prosper the message of this beautiful book and shorten the ruinous life of open theism. --John Piper, Senior Pastor, Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis

Evangelical theology faces a crisis of unprecedented magnitude. The denial and redefinition of God's perfections will lead evangelical theology into disintegration and doctrinal catastrophe. The very identity and reality of the God of the Bible is at stake. The real question comes down to this--does God really know all things, past, present, and future? Or, is God often surprised like all the rest of us? The Bible reveals that God is all-knowing and all-powerful. Bruce Ware sets out the issues carefully in God's Lesser Glory. This book is a much-needed antidote to contemporary confusion, and it is a powerful testimony to the truth of God set forth in Scripture. I can only hope that Christians will read it and rejoice in the knowledge of the true and living God. --R. Albert Mohler, Jr., President, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

At once businesslike and

practical, Bruce Ware's restatement of classical Christianity in the face of contemporary challenges to it within evangelicalism is bold and bracing. Driven by the pastoral and practical importance of God's greatness, Ware's approach keeps his defense from bogging down in pedantic rhetoric. This book clearly demonstrates that the historic Christian view, against centuries of antecedents to "open theism," has been favored for so long for one reason: It is so evidently biblical. --Michael Horton, Associate Professor of Historical Theology, Westminster Theological Seminary in California

Not even God knows whether you will decide to buy this book or read it, at least according to "open theism." But Bruce Ware shows that this position, which is seeping into evangelical churches, is contrary to Scripture, intentionally contradictory, and destructive to our Christian lives. This is a clear, fair, well-reasoned, and Bible-centered critique of a doctrinal error so far-reaching that it ultimately portrays a different God than the God of the Bible. --Wayne Grudem, Chairman, Department of Biblical and Systematic Theology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

The movement known as open theism claims to be a more biblical and more practical alternative to the traditional view. Bruce Ware systematically refutes both of these claims, showing that the traditional view better handles the biblical evidence and the issues of Christian living while better preserving the glory of God. His examination of the biblical material is especially strong. --Millard J. Erickson, Distinguished Professor of Theology, George W. Truett Theological Seminary, Baylor University

While I (basically a traditional Arminian) do not agree with all of Ware's answers, I applaud his keen discernment of the questions and issues raised by openness theology. He clearly sets forth the key differences between this view and traditional views of God, both Arminian and Calvinist; and he perceptively identifies its major weaknesses. I benefited especially from Ware's treatment of the biblical teaching on God's foreknowledge. --Jack W. Cottrell, Professor of Theology, Cincinnati Bible Seminary

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Summary of Content Author Bruce Ware sets about in no uncertain terms on a course to make sure readers know the debate about open theism is not a peripheral issue but is central to Theology (9). The book is a summary critique of a leading contemporary reconstruction of the doctrine of divine providence often called "Open Theism" (26). Ware lays out this critique in a threefold division 1) Open Theism's arguments and perceived benefits (31-62), 2) Open Theism's fallacious view of God (65-160), 3) Examining how these theological differences manifest themselves in the believer's life (163-216). Author's Exegetical and Theological Strengths and Weaknesses Ware is exceptionally detailed and careful to work to represent Open Theism properly. The author takes great care in avoiding building a "straw man" of the opposing view point by taking nearly a third of the book to fairly review their theology. Ware's strength here makes the book worth reading because one believes and hopes that while an Open Theist advocate may not agree with his arguments, they would feel accurately represented by them. He writes, "Practically, open theists argue, if God knows in advance all our thoughts, feelings, and actions, then our real relationship with him is called into question. How can our ideas, prayers, or decisions make a difference to God if he knows all of those things from eternity (19)? When Ware pulls the curtain back on open theism and uses classic texts that they use to argue for God's limited involvement in actually bringing circumstances to pass, he puts forth some texts forward without much comment or exegesis that one could almost be sympathetic to their view. However, Ware circles back around with theological and exegetical exactness to help understand those text in their proper place. Another of Ware's strengths is his ability to write with both piercing theological accuracy and biblical charity. This can be seen when he writes, "While claiming to offer meaningfulness to Christian living, open theism strips the believer of

the one thing needed most for a meaningful and vibrant life of faith: absolute confidence in God's character, wisdom, word, promise, and the sure fulfillment of his will (21). Ware even notes his desire to be accurate, but acknowledges limitations when he notes about section one of the book, "Fairness and accuracy will be sought in this description, though its brevity will require that some aspects of the openness model be neglected (26). Ware quotes directly from Greg Boyd, Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, and others who use witty and sometimes brash language to describe God's limitations and lack of omniscience. In doing this Ware exposes the irreverence and lack of logical and biblical arguments in their writings. For example, in writing about Sanders' comments of God's promise to Noah Ware says, "Here, then, God second-guesses his prior decision. 'Perhaps this is not after all the best way to deal with despicable human evil,' God apparently reasons. God must have felt very badly about what he had done (54). He exposes the fallacies this thinking for Christian living when he writes, "What confidence can we have in a God who must second-guess his own actions? ... If God is not sure that what he does is best, can we be sure that he really knows what he is doing (159)? Ware does not disguise his intentions in any part of his work and writes early on, "I will endeavor to demonstrate that, in the end, open theism suffers from serious and fatal problems (26). In my opinion he accomplishes that goal and in the process shows that, contrary to the openness agenda, The God of ages past possesses comprehensive knowledge of the future. The use of Ephesians 1:11 and the idea that God is a risk taker is shown to be inadequate and the consequences of pursuing those ideas are shown to be dangerous. Ware also notes Open Theism's inability to account for certain texts like Joseph's statement in Genesis 50:20. He says, "The openness insistence that God is not involved in evil, and its firm rejection of the notion that God ordains and then uses evil to accomplish his good purposes, are both flatly denied by the story of Joseph (199). To further advance the theology of pain and suffering and God's involvement in it Ware quotes Ecclesiastes 7:13-14, Isaiah 45:5-7, and Ephesians 1:9-11. Ware does not always deal in great detail with texts when he puts them forward, but he does sufficiently deal with the grammar and historical context when the occasion shows need. In dealing with Jesus' role in God's glory Ware uses John 3:16, Acts 2:23, and Isaiah 53:10 to demonstrate again that God's foreknowledge is exhaustive and nothing can be done to thwart it. His use of these texts is helpful in showing that God uses human instruments to bring about His eternal purposes. He uses Acts 4:27-28 correctly to note that God works through evil people and uses evil decisions and actions, "but God never, never, never himself does evil (212). Ware's writing has few if any weaknesses. It is possible he does at times rely on

anecdotal evidence and speculation of the impacts of open theism rather than hard evidence from Scripture. For example he writes, "Fear of the future will grow as people begin to realize that God may be just as taken aback by the unexpected as we are. In short, then, both the undiminished glory of God and the unqualified good of Christians are at stake in this new and deeply flawed vision of God and the Christian life known as open theism (26)." On the other hand, Ware could be relying on evidence from Christian he has seen go down this road since he is publishing in a time when openness writing and theology is near its climax, but if he is he does not mention it and his concerns come off, at times, as speculation. Another potential weakness is appealing to the readers desires by setting up a scenario by asking the readers, "would you rather?" This Ware does when he says, "What it comes down to is this: Would you rather see your life as being at the mercy of the God of all knowledge, wisdom, righteousness, goodness, and love, who is in control of all that occurs? Or would you rather see your life as being at the mercy of Satan, demons, wicked people, and natural forces who have control over much of your life, bringing disaster and suffering upon you, some of which is entirely pointless in the great scheme of things, while God watches, unable to intervene? (213) When declaring theological truths in polemic fashion the question of "would you rather" seems to have little place. What God has declared is always best whether the Christian would prefer it or not. Ware other places makes this know, as in his discussions of Romans 9:14, 18, 19 but may fail to avoid the same trap that open theist make when they make God according to their own image and desires instead of deriving his character solely from the pages of Scripture. Ware also sites a number of "spectrum texts" that he says, "Make clear that darkness as well as light, death as well as life, calamity as well as prosperity, sickness as well as healing, are all under the sovereign and providential regulative control of God." His use of these spectrum texts is apt and being lucid as they are he does very little exegesis on them (213). Conclusion A glance at the Scriptural index at the end of the book will reveal that Ware did not avoid difficult texts such as the "divine repentance texts of Jonah but sought to deal with the whole weight of Scripture on the subject. I agree with explanation of relational mutability and his understanding of God interacting with His creatures in time and his example of this with Isaac is well founded. His exegesis and theology throughout are comprehensive, readable and most importantly biblical.

When attempting to refute a disagreeable position, many seek to do so at the expense of offering a positive response. This leaves many with a similar attitude that Peter had when challenged by the Lord Jesus, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" (John 6:68) Bruce Ware, in his book, "God's Lesser

Glory," does no such thing. Not only does he offer a solid refutation of the open theist position; he explains why the classical theism position is better. Many Christians are unaware of the open theist position and how it is seeping into the very fabric of what we call, "conservative evangelicalism." They find it rather odd to hear things like, "God isn't sovereign," or, "God isn't in control." Sure, open theists might use such phraseology, but mean something completely different. The problem is, many Christians have already come to embrace a form of libertarian freedom that seeks to "get God off the hook" when it comes to theodicy (i.e., the "problem" of evil). They reason that because God is all-loving, He cannot be "responsible" for evil. Thus, God "allows" evil, but doesn't "cause" it. The only thing that the Christian can do without being an open theist is to still affirm God's exhaustive knowledge of future events. This keeps God in the realm of being in control. As long as God knows the future (though He didn't actually decree it), we can still attribute "control" to Him since He knows the outcome and knows what's best for His children. However slippery this slope may be for the Arminian who still affirms God's exhaustive knowledge of future events, Bruce Ware argues in such a way (for the most part) that the Arminian will be able to refute the open theist position. But why should the follower of Jesus Christ be concerned with such an argument? Because the manner in which we conduct our Christian lives are at stake. If God does not know the future, does this not have the most profound implications on how you live your life? As Bruce Ware points out, the future becomes a guessing game that depends solely on the free actions of men. God may desire and do the best he can to preserve the greatest good, but in the end we just can't know for sure what is best; not even God. Throughout much of the book, Bruce Ware spends a great deal of time explaining the open view of God. I confess to never having read a book by an open theist, but Ware explains their position in such a way that it seems the open theist spends a lot of time explaining the benefits of their position. I have no reason to doubt that the author was accurate in his portrayal of the open view, so I can say that their position was explained in detail and well documented. The two proponents that Ware seemed to focus on the most was John Sanders and Gregory Boyd. If anything can be said about this book, it would be that it is very "meaty." That is, most of the book was devoted to lengthy exegesis of the key passages; in particular, those which are used by the open proponents to defend their view. Ware's explanation of these texts couldn't have been better. Rather than divert from the texts with responses like, "This text might seem to support your position, but it can't mean that because of this text over here..." the author faces the text head on and offers sound exegesis. One of these texts included Genesis 22:12. In this text, God says that he learns the state of Abraham's heart. If you are unaware of the open view, keep in mind that they believe that God doesn't actually know everything; he is in a constant state of learning. The author rightly points

out the implications if the open position is correct. Ware argues, "First, if God must test Abraham to find out what is in his heart (recall that the text says, "for now I know that you fear God"), then it calls into question God's present knowledge of Abraham's inner spiritual, psychological, mental, and emotional state." (p. 67) Next, Ware points out the irony in whether or not God really needed this text to prove whether Abraham fears God. "That is, while it is significant that the openness interpretation implicitly denies God's present knowledge (the first point), even more telling here is the implicit denial of the specific content of this present knowledge, that is, knowledge that Abraham fears God." (p. 68) Thus, the author refutes the open position by their own standards. After spending more than enough pages in refuting the open position through their key texts, the author goes into the exegesis of the texts which establish God's exhaustive knowledge of the future. For those of us who have read Pink's, "The sovereignty of God," and other standard works within Reformed theology, Ware was only stating the obvious. That is, it is difficult to imagine how one can read through Isaiah and miss the fact that God not only knows all things, but is in control of all things. Unfortunately, the open theist abandons the clear teaching of Scripture in favor of the freedom of man. This turns God into the divine reactor rather than the divine initiator. The last section of Ware's book is perhaps what I appreciated most, for he offered the benefits of the classical theistic position in light of the weaknesses of the openness position. One of these benefits that I found to be noteworthy is that of prayer. For me, this is where the rubber meets the road in refuting the so-called "benefits" within open theism. Ware rightly summarizes the issue with, "Your will be done," rather than, "Your will be formed." In conclusion, I cannot recommend Ware's book enough. Even if open theism is not on the rise in your area, you will find Ware's book to be a refreshing breath of fresh air as he establishes a sound case for God's sovereignty. If you are an Arminian, I would recommend this book to you as well, as you will see that the Reformed position offers the strongest refutation of the open view available.

Ware's dissection of the false and heretical view of God in "open theism" is biblical, fair, and thorough. He clearly shows this view is unbiblical, and also shows the terrible implications for such things as suffering and loss. Great job!

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