

# Freewill, Foreknowledge, and Open Theism

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | November 14, 2008



In the aftermath of my blog two weeks ago on the question of open theism I received another request to explore the idea of free will and foreknowledge.

For those not familiar with these concepts let me give a brief overview. Open theism posits that God does not actually know which choices freewill beings will make before they make them. He knows all the possible choices and all the subsequent outcomes, but doesn't actually know the choice until it is made by the created being. The concern of the questioner is if God knows our specific choices before we make them, then wouldn't that undermine freewill? Wouldn't God's specific foreknowledge limit our options, our freedom if He already knows the choice we will make? Some conclude this would mean there is no freedom, that God pre-determined all of our choices.

To the credit of the open theism camp they are rejecting the picture of a God who restricts liberty, who programs beings, who is ultimately nothing more than a sadistic puppet-master. The idea of God not knowing our choices until we make them is thought to prevent a construct of God who is manipulative, controlling, and deterministic and ensure a God of love who genuinely values our freedom.

But, the problem as I see it, is mistaking foreknowledge with causality, misconstruing foresight with determining the outcome. Imagine we have a time machine and together we travel into the future and

watch the next Super Bowl. We see every play and after enjoying the game return to our present time. We now “know” the outcome, we know who will score, what plays will be called, what mistakes will be made by the officials, who fumbles, what field goals are blocked. We now possess knowledge of hundreds of individual decisions, but does that ‘foreknowledge’ mean we are causing the events to occur as they will? Will the freedom of the players be undermined because we now possess knowledge of what will transpire? Foreknowledge does not undermine freedom!

Therefore, the real question is not does God know the future, including our choices, before it happens, but what kind of being do we believe God to be? Do we believe God is just like Jesus, a being willing to let His creatures kill Him rather than use His knowledge and power to restrict their freedoms? Or do we believe God is something other than this, a God who would manipulate and control with such knowledge?

I believe the Father is exactly as Jesus revealed Him to be – a being of complete trustworthiness who does know our future and our choices, but whose character is so pure, holy, and loving that our individual freedom is never undermined!