



Two of the most debated questions in the history of the Church have been, “What does God’s sovereignty over us and the future look like?” and, “How does that control affect His promises and prophecies?” This series has exposed the error of the two most popular theories in the Church today (the Evangelical views of Theistic Determinism and Open Theism) and will now present the correct view. This view is called, “God the Great Shepherd” since (in the author’s opinion) this biblical metaphor best captures the truths it espouses.

1. God reacts, responds - and at times, changes His intentions or plans based on the actions or responses of people which means that we are (at least in part) free¹.

(Gen 6:7, 11:1-9, 22:12; Exo 32:7-14; Num 14:1-23, 16:20-26; Jug 2:18, 10:16; 2Chr 7:13-14 Psa 106:21-23 Jon 3:1-10; Jer 15:1 & 18:20; Jer 18:7-10; Jon 3:1-10; Amo 7:1-6; e.g. The length/quality of our lives – Pro 3:1-2, 9:10-11; 1Pe 4:9-12 w/Psa 34:12-16; Jesus’ death by betrayal – Mat 23:37 and Luk 22:42 w/Act 2:23, 4:23-28 = God’s “definite plan” and “foreknowledge” after the Jews’ rejection²).

2. God doesn’t always know what we will do in the future which means the future is also (at least in part) unknown.

2.1. The fact that God is responding (or reacting) to our actions or decisions strongly implies that He doesn’t always know what we are going to do (again Jer 18:7-10; Luk 22:42).

2.2. This however is confirmed by passages such as (Exo 13:17; Isa 63:7-10; Jer 3:6-7, 19-20, 26:1-6, 36:1-3; Eze 12:3; Consider also Mat 8:10).

2.3. It should be noted that if God does know everything about the future then the future is fixed according to what He knows. Which means the same is true for our decisions or actions in the present (they too are fixed rather than free) since it is the present that determines the future. This (once more) is not what the Bible teaches but instead Greek mythology (Fatalism).

2.4. If this were true, it would also mean that we are not responsible for our actions. We are instead victims. Such thinking makes a mockery of Scripture which establishes our responsibility (and therefore free will) through God’s commands, the conditions and consequences of those commands and the pleading of God and His prophets to keep those commands. Why plead for something we have no control over fulfilling? This kind of thinking also impinges on God’s most important attribute, His justice (Gen 18:19; Deu 16:20, 32:4).

3. God’s justice dictates that the majority of our actions and the events that make up the future be free and unknown.

3.1. If God is to be just in His judgment of us at the end of time, then it requires that the majority of our wills and the future be free and unknown since, “How can God commend/condemn us if the majority of what we did/did not do was out of our control because the future was pre-determined or fixed?”

3.2. The only time things could/would ever be fixed (rather than free) is if they have a direct bearing on God’s promises or prophecies. Scripture records certain occasions where God’s direct intervention in the actions or decisions of free-will creatures such as ourselves seems to have been necessary to the accomplishment of His purposes (e.g. Joh 11:47-53 = Seeing the rejection of the Jews, God now moves Caiaphas to prophesy what will cause the Sanhedrin to seek His death).

3.3. What about God’s omniscience? How can God be said to be omniscient (all knowing and all wise) if the majority of the future is free and unknown? God’s omniscience does not require God to know all of the future - only those aspects related to His future promises and prophecies.

4. God’s knowledge of the future is only in respect to His promises and prophecies and therefore a reflection of His omnipotence not His omniscience.

4.1. Isaiah 40-48, that portion of Scripture dealing w/God’s knowledge of the future as proof that He is true God is not about His omniscience, but rather His omnipotence – i.e. that He has the power to declare what will be in the future and see that it comes to pass exactly as He declared (e.g. Isa 46:8-11).

4.2. The above understanding of knowing the future (i.e. you know only what you have determined will happen – which means you are stating what power/control you have to guarantee what has yet to exist) is the only way to speak about the future that is correct since the term (“the future”) does not refer to something already realized or currently being realized as do the constructs we refer to as past and present. IOW: it is not about what is real (or realized) but what may (or will be). Which once more points not to omniscience, but again omnipotence: what God by His power will bring into existence/make real when that time becomes present (e.g. Rom 4:17; Isa 42:8-9, 48:3 “then suddenly [meaning in the present] I did them, and they came to pass” = God’s knowledge of the future is the knowledge of His omnipotence to do those things.).

5. God’s lack of knowledge regarding the future will never keep Him from perfectly accomplishing His promises and prophecies since He has planned for every possible outcome and knows our hearts (our thoughts, inclinations and intentions), the source of our every action in the present.

5.1. God is (again) omniscient and omnipotent means that He already put all the necessary contingency plans in place based on what possibilities/choices/scenarios could exist (again Exo 13:17).

5.2. And He knows our hearts (our thoughts, inclinations and intentions), the source of our every action in the present. Which means He is always one step/move ahead of us (Gen 6:5; 2Ch 16:9; Mat 12:34b; 1Co 4:5; Deu 31:16 w/21; Gen 25:23 w/Isa 48:8 and Pro 5:21; Isa 65:24).

5.3. Like a great shepherd, God is using whatever elements or influence He needs in the present to move His flock (all of Creation) in the direction He desires in order to guarantee His outcome be achieved in the future. And this once more He does, while rarely ever having to violate our free-wills (e.g. Isa 10:5-15; Gen 50:20; Pro 21:1 w/2Ch 36:22-23w/Ezr 1:1-2w/ Isa 44:24-28).

5.4. How difficult is this for God? Though not even close to the disparity that exists between His wisdom and power and our own, imagine a 200 q-bit quantum computer (scientists claim that if we are able to build one this size, it will possess more information than exists in the universe) playing chess w/a three year old (the age at which the basics of chess can be grasped). Is there a move that baby could make that would catch the computer off guard and mess it up? Could not a computer like that also anticipate (and therefore plan) w/great accuracy, the baby’s every move? And (going back to the fact that God already knows [in the present] what move we will make based on our thoughts/intentions in the present, means it is impossible for that baby to ever win (as if that was a question to begin w/!)).

5.5. In summary, God doesn’t need to know the future to control the future - only the present, since as already mentioned, it is the actions of the present which determine the future.

¹ We have unimpeded control over what we do and the choices we make. They are not the result of coercion or causation - including God’s decree or pre-determination.

² One must be careful not to view those passages which employ the words “predestined” or “foreknowledge” as always referring to the fulfillment of something planned in the distant past. The same can be said about those references to OT passages in the NT that seem to indicate the fulfillment of former prophecy. In many cases, they did not exist (as prophetic) until they were realized (or used for such purposes) in their present or given context. As such, their main function is more confirmation that a person’s actions are consistent (or congruent) w/God’s established principles, prior workings or history than the realization of ancient predictions (Mat 2:17, 4:14-16, 13:13-15, 27:9; Joh 12:37-38 w/Isa 53:1 w/Mat 23:37; e.g. Psa 41:4 w/9 w/Joh 13:18-19; e.g. Excerpt from my wife’s biography, “So that the Scripture would be fulfilled, my wife submitted to me in all things”. Is this not how Jam 2:21-23 views God’s prophetic words regarding Abraham?).