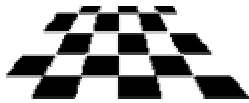


By Winkey Pratney

Imagine a gigantic game of chess. Each player has a purpose--to win as many men as possible from the other side, and to ultimately dethrone the other King. This factor is the determining motive behind every move they make. Based on this purpose, each player creates a plan. It may be far-reaching as in the case of the chess genius, but it is a plan based on certain probabilities, not absolute certainties. As one opposing player makes his moves, he creates new possibilities and probabilities. His opponent makes choices according to his knowledge and vision of the other player's personality, behavior under certain conditions and probable replies to his attack. Notice that the PLAN changes constantly, as swiftly and as often as the opponent creates new threats to the king's safety.

Suppose God works like this! Add the variation of over five billion "chess men" that constantly increase in number on the "board" of Earth- grant the additional difficulty of giving to each "chessman" a certain limited number of moves he or she is able to make all by himself or herself-pit the wisdom of ages against each other in the "combat" experience of the two "players" and you have an idea of the most exciting combat of all time...the battle between God and Satan for the minds and destinies of men!



This chess analogy is a helpful one. The power of a chess piece is determined in two ways: (1) the number of moves it is able to make on the board, and the extent of its ability to be moved around the board; (2) The relative place it occupies in the battle-field of the chess-board. For example, a Queen is powerful because of her deployment and freedom; but a lowly pawn in the right place can be just as effective, if not more so. Even the most powerful piece is useless unless it can be placed in the right area at the right time. And even the lowliest pawn can become any other piece on the board if it makes it to the other side of the board. There are many difficult questions of faith that can be answered by such an analogy, tied in with the following theory of the Divine foreknowledge of God.

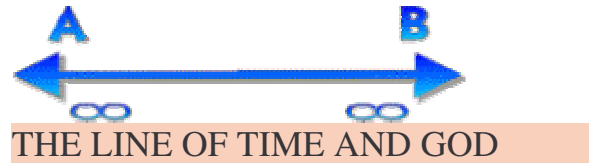
As with any theoretical examination in theology, this is subject to three essential tests of its validity, should it not meet with these it does not deserve a place in the thoughts of lovers of Holy Scripture and the loving God they declare. These tests for reality are:

Is it expressed, specifically taught or at least implied RIGHT THROUGH Scripture?

Is it practical, internally consistent with other truths, reasonable and spiritually exciting?

Does it bring me closer to the Lord Jesus and challenge me to love Him more, appreciate more fully His power, wisdom, goodness, justice, mercy and love, and serve Him better?

It is taken as a first truth for any serious and honest Bible student that Scripture is given by God, divinely inspired and the final objective authority in all matters of faith and Christian doctrine; also that prayerful, candid consideration of revealed facts will lead us, heart and mind, into an understanding of God's will and purpose so far as it concerns our lives. We are Divinely commanded: "PROVE all things; hold fast to that which is good" (Thess. 5:21)



Consider--a line representing eternity, stretching into infinity on both ends. If we assume God's infinity, we must also assume that time has no meaning on this line as far as God is concerned. Since God is the Author of all things outside of His own self-existence, all things He created are now known to Him anywhere on this line. We label the "ends" of this line respectively "A" and "B".



To give meaning to the word "Time" we place on this line the mark "X".

Now we can say that anything behind "X" (A-X) is PAST (relative to X), anything on "X" is PRESENT, anything ahead of "X" (X-B) is FUTURE. We shall think of time only as it relates here to man in limited existence. Assuming God knows everything on our limited "time-line" (because He must know all things He created on it, giving us "time") and He therefore now knows all that has, is and will occur, logic gives us these conclusions:

God can have no new thoughts, because this would imply new facts He did not know before;

God can have no new feelings, because this implies new experiences He has not had before;

God can make no new decisions, because this implies new choices not made before; (?!)

God makes no single decision after or before any other; i.e. there is no succession of thought, experience or choice in the Being of God, (??!)

God has never really created or begun anything! If everything conceivable existed with Him from all eternity, His own will is not free, and He has not originated anything! (???)

But these assumptions are not only ridiculous but totally UN-SCRIPTURAL. The Bible plainly states that God DOES have new thoughts, feelings, experiences and decisions to make in regard to His dealings with men. Consider the following passage in contrast:

"And God SAW that the wickedness of men was great...and it REPENTED (nacham--to be penitent, receive comfort from hurt by a change of mind) the Lord that He had made man on the earth and it GRIEVED (atsab--to grieve self) Him at His heart" (Gen. 6:5-6).

The question that naturally arises is this: if God foreknew men's wickedness and knew for sure that they would do this, and AS FAR AS HE IS CONCERNED, THEY HAD already done it, why this verse? Let us proceed, however, before developing a possible answer.

"And the LORD said I WILL DESTROY man whom I have created, both man and beast [from man to beast] and the creeping thing and the fowls of the air for it REPENTETH Me that I have made them." Notice the choice here: man "will" be destroyed! Yet here you are, reading this paper that another man has written! The second question asked is:

If God had foreknown man's evil as a certainty, why does He say, "I WILL destroy them FOR it repenteth Me that I have made them"? Either He did not MEAN what He said when He said it (and that has blasphemous implications--that God in the very least puts on a "show" for the benefit of man, by saying He is grieved or glad when He is actually neither, but simply saying it so that man will think He is)--or somehow, some way, God changed His mind!! And not only did He change it once, but if this is true, He changed it again after vs.71

A Theological Super-Puzzle

Go back to the time-line. Check the logic for flaws. Granted the assumptions made, all should follow--and yet the conclusions reached do not fit with the facts of either reason or revelation! A complete, condensed summary of all relevant Scriptures is given at the end of this tract; overwhelming evidence contravening these conclusions concerning God's inability to change His mind, feel new feelings and have new thoughts is obvious. Yet, from the very assumptions made, these conclusions must follow: if God created all things, then He already knows about them; nothing He creates is new to Him, and therefore He CANNOT have what Scripture says He has-- new thoughts, new feelings, new choices--UNLESS--something happens on that time-line that God did NOT create!

Is it possible for something to exist that God did not create? Can any other being in the Universe create anything outside of the direct, ultimate creation of God? If it is true that God must necessarily be the Author of everything that exists in the Universe. then we are faced with an even more embarrassing question: "Then who created SIN?"

The following questions are just a sample of the highly embarrassing problems that follow the assumption that God is the direct Author of all in the Universe, and ultimately he is the One responsible for everything that has, is or will happen:

Did God foreknow the Devil would sin? If so, why did He make him?

If God knew the Devil would sin, why was no atonement made for Satan?

If God knows what men will choose, why does He "strive" and plead with them?

If past, present and future are the same to God, how can He "forget" our sin?

If the future of man is already certain, why isn't it fixed? How can we change it?

If man's future destiny is already certain, why should we bother to witness at all?

If God already knows what I am going to do, why does He give me a choice at all?

If God already knows what I want and am going to say, why should I "ask" in prayer?

If God created everything, why isn't He responsible for all moral and physical evil?

When faced with such questions, it will do no good for us to evade them, or show intellectual dishonesty by saying glibly, "That is something we cannot know; it is beyond our understanding." If it relates to life, and God's own character, the Bible must have something to say about it. There are many things beyond our wisdom, but they are not things which are necessary for coming to grips with the problems of life and the questions of sinners. God is certainly not unreasonable in His approach to man; He challenges, "Come let us REASON together" to the sinner, and if His salvation and rulership are not reasonable this verse and others mean nothing more than a play on words. Let us face this issue honestly and openly, asking God for the light of the Holy Spirit to "give a reason for the hope that is within us in meekness and fear" (I Pet. 3:15). And the vast majority of such questions can be resolved without linguistic subterfuge if one simple assumption is made: that the CHOICE any free moral-agent makes is a truly CREATIVE act. Before it is made it does not exist at all; the moment it is made, it comes into existence as a brand-new factor in the Universe. This covers the choices of all moral beings--those of the devil and his dark angels, the angels which did not sin, man, both saint and sinner--and of course God Himself. This allows the possibility of growth and freedom to make or create without coercion or limitation other than that imposed by the natural or moral attributes of being and character.

Why Assume Absolute Foreknowledge?

If we assume that choices are creative and cannot be foreknown with certainty, although they can be predicted with high probability (based on already-known factors and choices made previously by moral beings) a great amount of conflict is removed from theology. This offers an explanation that is both sensible and scriptural that does not need complex argumentation to substantiate. Truth may be profound, but it is always simple. Therefore, absolute foreknowledge may be questioned because:

It is unnecessary for God's rule over free moral agents;

Its assumptions bring direct contradiction in Scriptures and facts of life;

It is needless to assume it in establishing a true and consistent theology;

Trying to defend its resultant absurdities brings needless waste of time and talents;

Every pulpit in Christendom assumes the future is not fixed in the nature of life, in the plans of the Universe and in the mind of God, for all practical purposes in preaching;

Every witnessing Christian must necessarily assume that his witness is needed, because the destiny of the sinner he is talking to is not fixed and certain (*Ezek. 3:17-21; 18:23-32*).

The church in her every effort, whether missionary, intercessory, evangelistic, didactic or social enterprises and outreaches, assumes there are no fixed certainties for human future other than those of prophecy or promise, warning or judgment that God has set forth in His Word, based on intentions of the Godhead or man's responses to His conditions.

It is certainly unreasonable to ask a thinking man to believe in absolute foreknowledge without giving a single direct text of scripture to teach it, a single proof of its reality, an argument for its necessity, a reason for it suggested in the operation of necessary thought, or even a single principle of faith that requires its admission! It is time we devoted careful, open-minded study to the assumed premise of God's absolute foreknowledge, including man's moral choices.

Possible Objections

Although no direct teachings against this theory have been found in Scripture, and no serious objections have been raised, a number may possibly occur to the reader who applies himself to a study of these considerations. Should this line of study suggest an even better theory to the reader, or modifications that may far better explain some questions this theory may raise in the inquirer's mind, correspondence is invited, that further revision or even replacement can be initiated. True Christian consistency does not mean stubborn adherence to limited Bible light, but the willingness to revise our ideas and attitudes and practices as fast as we learn more from the hand of God. Finite minds,

unless asleep or drugged by prejudice, must advance in knowledge; the fear of revision of views in conformity to increasing light would at best keep the world at a perpetual standstill in all areas of discovery. We should hold ourselves sacredly bound to subject all our respective positions to thorough and most intensive discussion, and hold and treat them as the opinions of anyone else; with no cause to change, to hold them fast; but if flawed, to amend or reject any one.

Should the reader discover any such objections, it is to be hoped that he will seriously and candidly weigh these against the appalling difficulties of the position this theory controverts. In the study of this line of thought, ideas may be met that tax our scholarship and worry our powers of comprehension; but we shall meet many more, and those of a most embarrassing and indefensible character, with the other. Glib answers based on rote memorization and parroted quotation will not satisfy an incisively questioning generation of young skeptics without a Savior. Since the Bible is our authority, a digested list of pertinent Passages on both sides of the controverted question is given here. This is only a skeleton list of all the most important passages; a complete study covering all Bible passages may be later made available for the benefit of the serious student who wishes to pursue the subject further.

(A) Passages of Scripture requiring a DENIAL of the supposed fact that all future choices of God and man are now known to God and have been so known from all eternity:

Gen. 2:17(1:5; 5:5), 6:5-7; (1:31);18:20-21, 22-33; 22:1, 12; Ex. 16:4; 32:7-14, 30-35; 33:5; Num. 11:1;14:11-24;14:27-35; 16:2-33; 16:44-48; Deut. 8:2; 9:13-14; 18:19; 20:25-29; (10:10)13:1-3; Judges 2:18, 20-22 (3:4); 10:13-16; 1 Sam. 2:30 (5:12-14); 13:1-3; 13:14-15 15:11,23; 15:26, 35 (28:18, 8:4-9, 22; 12:13-19); 2 Sam. 7:10-11;12:22 (14); 24:12--16, (1,25); 1 Kings 9:3, 4-9; 11:11-13; 21:27, 29; (21-22); 2 Kings 20:1-7; 23:26-27, (1 Kings 9:3) 1 Chron. 17:9-10;1 Chron. 21:7-14, 15 (1) (2 Sam. 24:1); 2 Chron. 7:16; 12:5-8; 32:31; Job 2:3; Ps. 14:2; (53:2) Ps. 78:21-22; 58:61; 106:23; 106:44-45; Isaiah 5:3-7; Is. 5:1-8; Is. 38:1-5, (2 Kings 20:1-7); Jer. 3:6-8; 18:7-10; 26:2-3; Jer. 4-6, 12-13, 18-19; Ezek. 12:1-3; 20:8-9; 13-14, 15-17; Ezek. 21-22; 22:30; 24:14, Hosea 8:5; Joel 2:12-14; Amos. 5:14-15; 7:1-3, 4-6; Jonah 1:2; 3:2, 4-10; 4:2; Zech. 8:14-15; Matt. 10:2-4; (Mk. 3:13-19) (cf. Lk. 6:12-16) 19:28; Mark 13:32; (Matt. 24:36 Acts 1:7:1; Cor. 11:3); 3 14-15, 19- 6:7, 11-12; 14:10, 43; 15:34; Luke 6:12, 13, 16 (7:39); 8:1; 9:1-2, 5-6 (10:20); 18:31; 22:3-6, 48; Jn. 6:70; 12:4-6; 13:2,15:16; Rev. 3:5; 17-8 (13:8; 20:12,15,21,27)21:18-19; Acts 15:7).

(B) Passages of Scripture that can be found to SUPPORT the idea of God's absolute foreknowledge, in the greater part prophecies of what God has determined to bring to pass in His guidance of world affairs. (see discussion of prediction in questions section.)

Gen. 15:13-15; 16:12; 17:20- 25:23; Num. 23:19; Deut. 31:16-21, 29 (21, 27); 1 Sam. 15:29; 1 Kings 13:2 (2 Kings 22:1,23, 15--16); Ps. 22:16, 18; 69:21; Is. 44:28-45; 46:9-11; 52:13-15; 53:1-12; Jer. 1:5; 25:11, 12; 29:1-14; Zech. 12:10; Mal. 3:6; Matt. 16:21; 20:17-19; 21:1-5; 24:1-25,46; 26:31-34; 27:9; Mark 9:31; 14:13-16; Luke 24:25-27; 44:47; John 6:64; 70-71; 12:32-34; 13:11, 18-19, 21, 26; 17:12; 19:24, 28, 36, 37;

21:18-19; Acts 2:23; 13:29; Rom. 8:28-30; 11:2, 5-11; 2 Thess. 2:3-4,13; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 1:9-10; 1 Pet. 1:1-2, 20; Rev. 1:1, 7; 2:10; 4:1; 6:11- 7:4-8, 9,14; 9:20-21 (16:9, 11); 11:2, 12-13; 12:6, 7-9; 13:1-7, 8, 11-18; 14:20; 17:7, 8, 12, 19:19-21, 20:7-8, 9-10 (22:B).

Questions Regarding This Theory

Various objections have occurred in the initial discussions concerning this theory. The four most common are as follows; further discussion is invited concerning this:

It is objected that if God does not foreknow choices He cannot be said to be omniscient.

Omniscience (All-knowledge) is not a Bible term. It is theological and its definition must be founded on Bible statements and objective evidence, not human assumption. If defined as "knowing everything" without qualification we run into some indefensible questions like-- "If God has all power and knows everything why can't He think up a problem so big He can't solve it?" The answer lies in defining Scripturally "all-power" and "all-knowledge", just as omniscience does NOT mean that God can do things which are inherently contradictory (such as make black the direct opposite of and exact duplicate of white at the same time) or things which are morally unwise, so omniscience may be defined as knowing all that is knowable, or knowing all things which are objects of knowledge. If a future choice does not actually exist until it is made, it in no way limits God's omniscience for this not to be known, it is not really "there" yet to be known! God's all-knowledge can be defined to cover all existing objects of knowledge and all probabilities where moral choices are concerned; this is not at all limiting.

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