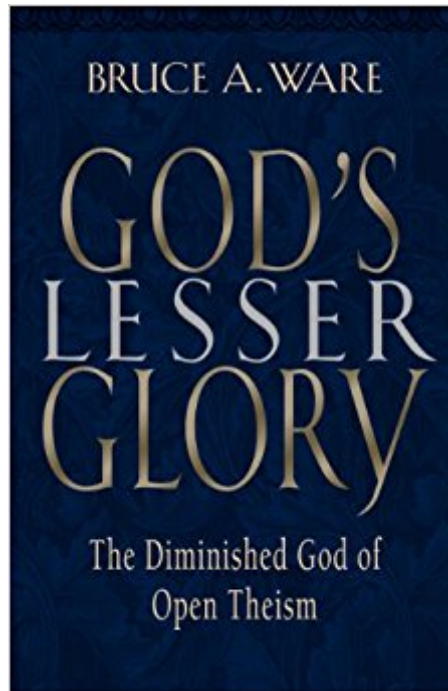




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God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God Of Open Theism



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

Book Information

Paperback: 240 pages

Publisher: Crossway (November 7, 2000)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1581342292

ISBN-13: 978-1581342291

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.6 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviews Â (35 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #615,781 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #32 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Other Religions, Practices & Sacred Texts > Theism #520 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Theology > Systematic #13627 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Religious Studies > Theology

Customer Reviews

This is a thought provoking book, although I was not always satisfied with Ware's answer and arguments presented. Ware did a fine job in explaining what Open Theism is and why people are attracted to it. His critique of Open Theism was quite detailed and it shows that he knows his opponents well and is familiar with the materials. However, there are a few major shortcomings in his arguments: i) Ware's position would have a hard time dealing with the "Problem of Evil" due to its God-will-always-succeed approach. Ware admitted this in the book. He said he would deal with it in his forthcoming book but I doubt a satisfactory answer would be given. Let's wait and see. ii) Ware has to have faith in God's benevolence given his position and the problem of evil, while Boyd has to have faith in God's power to be in control even if he does not completely foreknow the future. I do not see any obvious advantage in adopting Ware's position. iii) Ware did not really address the problem of interpreting some passages in the Bible which portray a God who is vulnerable, say, for example, the book of Hosea. Boyd's position would be simpler and more consistent than Ware's in explaining this. To me, a vulnerable and suffering God, who is not only loving but is also Love, is a more accurate portrayal than a sovereign king who controls everything. iv) Ware did not really solve the problem on prayer. Does prayer make any difference after all? How could God truly "respond" to my prayer if the future is already, so to speak, fixed? Again, I could not see any obvious advantage in adopting his position. I have to say some of Ware's arguments were well put and the overall presentation was clear. I enjoy reading the book.

Ware is excellent in his presentation of Classical Theism. The problem I run into is his lack of hermeneutical theory. He says that you cannot always interpret Scripture in a straightforward manner. On this point, he is correct. But then he turns around and wants the reader to believe the classical view, which is based upon the reading of Scripture in a straightforward manner. The problem with these types of classical theistic works is that they tell us that open theism is using metaphor incorrectly. Metaphors don't really tell us a whole lot about God, but then classical theists don't tell us what these passages are supposed to mean. They simply dismiss open texts as metaphorical deviance and never tell us how open texts fit in to the classical model. In other words,

they ignore open texts. My other major problem with Ware's book comes on page 145 when he tells us that we should not use the life of Christ as the foundation for telling us what God is like. If we use Christ's life as a road-map to understand God, then "we conceive of God wrongly as being subject to experiencing those aspects of human weakness and limitations which Jesus underwent for the purpose of his mission." It seems to me that the more you try to make razor-thin distinctions between Jesus and God, the more you drift into polytheism. In other words, what characteristics or features would make Jesus God if you deny some of the aspects of humanity? In my opinion there are serious trinitarian issues in Ware's approach. Here is the question that Ware raises in my mind, does our concept of God come from the Old Testament or the New? Ware thinks Old Testament. This is shown by his concentrated look at God from the OT. Is the OT authoritative and overrides the NT in our conception of God? I don't think so.

Ware quibbles with Pinnock, Boyd, Sanderson, and Hasker throughout. Ware's world is the classical view of God, with exception of his introduction of "relational mutability" of God. Essentially he says that God has exhaustive foreknowledge with a new twist. Even though God acted, created, and planned instantly one time trillions of years ago (the Super Big Bang), that when time rolls around to events in our lives, God steps into it takes special notice and gets in the fray emotionally. This makes no sense. It would appear that a God that has exhaustive foreknowledge could have no future. He couldn't plan. There are no such concepts as "plan", "look ahead", "tomorrow", or "the future" or a "now" to such a God. It seems to be his effort to try to soften the stoic, impassible God of Calvin and Augustine. Ware offers us the same classical portrayal of God as microscopically controlling the world and through direct or indirect cause bringing about every act in the human drama. This would include all rape, murder, wars, holocaust, or whatever. He concludes the last few pages by going back to the example Sanders used of the death of Sanders brother. Ware tells us the only way to view events like this is that God "took him." The answer to his death is, as Ware writes, "Yes, the God of all wisdom, goodness, and power has ordained to take these lives." It was all brought about by God personally for reasons we cannot know. This is tantamount to saying God loaded the boxcars personally of those going into Hitler's ovens, or placing select individuals in the WTC when the buildings collapsed. Or, that he takes every sparrow by divine decree. He advises us as we have been advised for centuries by "classical" theologians that all evil, even gratuitous evil, is designed and brought about by God.

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